

Sexual Morals and Sexual Behavior in Vietnam

*Vietnamese Socialism in Transition after Doi Moi: Changing Sexual
Morals and Sexual Behavior*

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Introduction

Socialism has been the main political form in Vietnam¹ for many years. Allowing no other parties or opposition movements in this Southeast Asian country, the Communist Party of Vietnam rules since the reunion of the Northern part and the Southern part of Vietnam in 1976, although it ruled in North Vietnam since its independence in 1954. In 1986 the Vietnamese government decided to renovate (Doi Moi) the economy into a socialist-orientated market economy; a market economy in which socialism can still be recognized. Nowadays, Vietnam is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a fast-growing economy. How did the life of the Vietnamese change since Doi Moi (renovation) made its introduction in the country?

In search of the contemporary meaning of socialism in Vietnam questions such as ‘How can the Vietnamese concept of socialism be defined?’ and ‘In what ways did policies in Vietnam change throughout the years?’ are interesting to focus on. It is impossible to make changes in everyday life clear without knowing the ‘original’ concept of Vietnamese socialism nor without giving a brief explanation of policy changes which occurred throughout the ruling years of the Communist Party of Vietnam. Thus, in exploring the contemporary situation, I have to focus on the ‘original’ situation before gaining insight into the possible changes in everyday life that have been caused by the economic transition.

Doi Moi has resulted in more personal (economic) freedom for people in Vietnam, as well as resulting in a more international economical focus. Not only has Doi Moi changed people’s lives economically, it has also made a great social impact. As Vietnam develops a more international position, its people are increasingly exposed to international thoughts and believes, for instance through media such as internet. The changing economic situation, greater international focus and new media have changed everyday life in Vietnam. In this thesis I will focus on the impact of Doi Moi on sexual behavior and sexual morals in Vietnam. Is it possible that Doi Moi and Vietnam’s consequently greater international focus have also changed sexual morals and sexual behavior of young people in contemporary Vietnam? By focusing on the phenomena of HIV/AIDs, premarital sexual behavior and abortion in Vietnam I aim to answer the following question:

¹ (officially: *the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>

In what ways do sexual morals and sexual behavior of young people in Vietnam change in times of transition from a (domestic) socialist plan economy towards a (international) socialist-orientated market economy?

In the first part I will focus on the concept of socialism. The questions I will address are: ‘What is socialism?’, ‘How is socialism defined in Vietnam?’ and ‘What were the most important policy changes throughout the years in socialist Vietnam?’. The main goal of this chapter is to explain how socialism is implemented in contemporary Vietnam. Socialism is not a homogenous concept. It is interpreted differently throughout the world, dependent on time and space. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the Vietnamese interpretation of socialism before we can understand how Vietnamese socialism has changed as a result of Doi Moi.

The second chapter will focus on the changes that have occurred as a result of important policy changes in Vietnam. Firstly, I will discuss how the transition towards a socialist-orientated market economy has influenced the economic position of the Vietnamese people. Secondly, the social impact of Doi Moi will be discussed. Finally, I will zoom in on sexual morals and sexual behavior, to see whether Doi Moi, apart from its economic and social impacts, has also had an impact in this important area of social life. In other words, my question is whether a (more international) market economy has led to a change in sexual behavior and sexual morals of young people in Vietnam.

I will focus on three subjects within sexuality: HIV/AIDS, premarital sexual behavior and abortion. I will compare the contemporary situation with the situation before the introduction of Doi Moi, to see whether the sexual behavior and sexual morals of young people in Vietnam have changed. Additionally, I will compare the Vietnamese situation with the current situation in former Soviet Union countries such as Russia and other former communist countries such as the Czech Republic. These countries have already made a complete transition from socialism towards capitalism. Although their situation is different in many ways, they serve to illustrate the ways in which greater economic freedom may influence sexual morals and sexual behavior.

This literature-based Bachelor Thesis is important for several reasons. First of all I advocate that it is important to clarify the term ‘socialism’. Socialism has many focuses and forms, dependent on multiple factors, such as time and place. Unfortunately, the term is often used as a fixed concept, without regard for the aforementioned differences. More specific to this thesis, is that it illustrates how political decisions can have a major impact on multiple

aspects of social life in societies in transition. This thesis shows how political decision making on national scale can influence everyday life, expected and unexpected; from the visibility of wealth in the streets of Hanoi to the sexual behavior of unmarried couples in their bedrooms.

Part 1 | Theorizing Vietnamese Socialism

1.1 | Introduction

For the intelligibility of this thesis it is important to understand a number of relevant theories and concepts, before focusing on the main question of this thesis. For that matter, I will explain the concept of socialism, as stated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century, before focusing on the Vietnamese approach of the concept of socialism.

Although Marx's contributions were intended as a means to provide a vision for interpreting the world, Marx is often seen as the founding father of the concept of communism (Holmes 2009: 2). Marx wrote a number of his contributions, such as the well-known Communist Manifesto (1848), in collaboration with Friedrich Engels. For that reason I will briefly describe the concept of communism, as stated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their collective works.

The main focus of Karl Marx' and Friedrich Engels' collective works was the road to communism. In this thesis, when I refer to communism, it is important to realize that I make a distinction between the concepts of communism and socialism, as there are important differences between the two. Despite their differences, the concepts of communism and socialism are nevertheless closely related. This is illustrated by the fact that, on the road to communism, socialism is one of the important steps towards it (Huberman & Sweezy 1968). After discussing Marx' and Engels' views regarding communism and socialism, I will explain the Vietnamese concept of socialism, as it was in the rising years of the socialist regime in Vietnam. This will illustrate how socialism in Vietnam has derived from the concept of socialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

1.2 | Socialism as a Concept

In order to discuss socialism in Vietnam, we need to have a clear understanding of the concepts of socialism and communism. Socialism is often seen as the primary step towards communism, as illustrated by the fact that Vietnam is led by a Communist Party while the current ideology is one of socialism on the road to communism. In this paragraph I will focus on the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to make the concepts of socialism and communism more understandable.

An important contribution of Marx and Engels has been *The Communist Manifesto*² (1848)³. At that time both Marx and Engels lived in England, a country in the process of industrialization. This inspired Marx and Engels to write about the phenomenon of class struggle. According to Holmes (2009), Marx and Engels believed, there were two major classes; the bourgeoisie – the true capitalists, primarily consisting of factory owners - and the proletariat – the people who worked for the factory owners. In the eyes of Marx and Engels, the bourgeoisie was the class who received all the profit that was made within, for example, factories. The proletariat (literally: without property) did not benefit from these profits, therefore class differences continually increased. According to Marx and Engels, the differences between these classes resulted in a class struggle (Holmes 2009: 4). Marx and Engels even stated that the history of society could be explained by class struggle throughout time. They predicted that, eventually, the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would result in a revolution (Marx & Engels 1848).

Still, Marx and Engels believed that this class struggle was different in two ways from social conflicts (like the French revolutions) in the past. Firstly, because the struggle resulting from capitalism only involved two classes, as opposed to a more complex struggle between multiple social groups. Secondly, the struggle involved a ruling class and a non-ruling class, in which the ruling class did not have potential to become the new ruling class, contrary to previous class struggles. Therefore, the situation after the predicted revolution, would be a socialist system and thereby different from the previous outcomes of social revolutions. In the socialist system, the majority of the population would rule, instead of a minority (Holmes 2009: 4-5) (Marx & Engels 1848) (Marx 2002)⁴.

After the revolution, the initial political system would be socialist. For Marx and Engels, however, the ultimate goal consisted of eventually implementing communism. This communist system would consist of a political system in which the majority ruled, and result in a working ethic in which people would work because they wanted to, instead of because they had to (Huberman & Sweezy 1968). Ultimately, in the new society, there would be no ruling class or a ruling state machinery, because this would not be necessary. However, in the transitional socialist state the state would be ruled by the proletariat (Holmes 2009: 5-6).

² <http://art-bin.com/art/omanif.html>

³ (originally: Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei)

⁴ Translation by Hans G. Ehrbar, *University of Utah*

Vietnam has adapted the idea of the ultimate goal: communism. This is illustrated in works of Lê Duẩn⁵, an important policy maker and figure within the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) (Le Duan 1970: 21):

In the light of Marxism-Leninism, our Party, as soon as it came into existence, had a clear and complete conception of the necessary path of development of the Vietnamese revolution. In its Political Theses of 1930, it pointed out that the Vietnamese revolution must go through two stages: first, the national democratic revolution, then a direct passage to socialist revolution, bypassing the stage of capitalist development, the ultimate aim of the Party being the realization of communism.

Le Duan refers to *Marxism-Leninism*. As we can see hereafter, the Vietnamese concept of socialism has been influenced by the ideals of Vladimir Lenin. The ideas of Lenin were derived from the ideology of Marx and Engels. One of the ways in which Lenin adapted Marxism was by introducing the role of a so-called *revolutionary vanguard party*. The revolution of the working class had to be led by a proletariat-dictatorship, in the form of a Communist Party (Albert & Hanhel 1981: 24-25). Both Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party of Vietnam were influenced by the ideas of Lenin. Ho and the CPV eventually adapted *Marxism-Leninism* to their own situation in Vietnam.

1.3 | The Vietnamese Socialist Ideology

1.3.1 | Introduction

Socialism is executed differently throughout the world. Despite the differences, these interpretations are all referred to as ‘socialism’. According to Hayton (2010) socialism in Vietnam is not the grey and depressive concept (due to associations with socialism in the Soviet Union) which is often referred to; socialism in Vietnam is dynamical and exciting (Hayton 2010: 2). Even though this statement is based on subjectivity, it does illustrate that the definition of socialism is wider than it may seem, since it is dependent on specific factors, such as time and place.

To clarify, I will now discuss the Vietnamese road to socialism and the resultant Vietnamese socialist ideal. The importance of this focus on the social-historical context specifically lies in time and space. In contrast to many other socialist countries, Vietnam has

⁵ From now on referred to as *Le Duan*

been colonized (Marr 1971) (Brocheux & Hemery 2010). Even after the struggle towards independence, the Western influence in Vietnam maintained of great importance, as Vietnam became an important location of the Cold War. In the period between 1955 and 1975, the rise of communism in Vietnam was an important reason for the United States and fellow anti-communist countries to fight for implementation of capitalism in Vietnam (Lawrence 2008). After this war and the long colonial influence in Vietnam, the Communist Party of Vietnam⁶ reunited in 1976 and thereby had the difficult task of rebuilding the country. Although their rule was re-established in 1976, the roots of the Party originate further back in time. In 1925, *Nguyen the Patriot*⁷ - who nowadays is best known as *Hồ Chí Minh*⁸ - founded the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth Association⁹. This association eventually became closely connected to the establishment of the Communist Party of Vietnam¹⁰ (Kháhn 1982: 63-64). The CPV eventually arose with major influence of Ho Chi Minh.

1.3.2 | Ho Chi Minh: Founder of the CPV Ideology?

Although Ho Chi Minh died (1969) before the CPV was re-established, they claim that their ideology was derived from the ideas of Ho Chi Minh. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh's ideology and his contribution in the struggle towards a communist society are now discussed.

As Duiker (2000) states, Ho Chi Minh, who was referred to as 'Uncle Ho' in North-Vietnam, gained popularity as a result of his dedication for the struggle towards independence. The city Saigon was named Ho Chi Minh City in 1975, in honor of Ho himself. Contrary to his wish (Ho Chi Minh wanted a cremation), his body is buried in a mausoleum on Ba Dinh Square in Hanoi (Duiker 2000: 565).

Ho Chi Minh is mostly seen as a Marxist-Leninist. Marxism-Leninism is a socialist ideology which was introduced by Vladimir Lenin during the Russian revolution. It is based on Karl Marx' *Marxism*. The most important addition to the Marxist ideology is the role of a revolutionary party (Holmes 2009: 7). Because the Marxist-Leninist ideas were applied in a

⁶ For the intelligibility of this thesis I will only refer to *Communist Party of Vietnam*, although this may be not correct due to time and space. The Party for example officially existed as the *Communist Party of Indochina* during the Indochina era. I thus am aware that my references to the Communist Party of Vietnam may not always be correct in a historical perspective.

⁷ For the intelligibility of this thesis, from now on, I will be referring to Ho Chi Minh only as Ho Chi Minh. I am aware that Ho Chi Minh, born as *Nguyen Sinh Cung*, changed his name several times during his life. I thus am aware that my references to Ho Chi Minh may not always be correct in a historical perspective. I find the anthropological focus to this subject more important than the historical one.

⁸ From now on referred to as *Ho Chi Minh*

⁹ In Vietnamese: *Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mệnh Hội*

¹⁰ From now on referred to as *CPV*

different part of the world as well as in a different period, the ideology of Ho Chi Minh is not identical to the original Marxism-Leninism ideology. The specific ideas of Ho Chi Minh within the framework of Marxism-Leninism would later be called '*Ho Chi Minh Thought*' (Brocheux 2007: xiv).

I believe that the main difference between the ideals of Lenin and Ho Chi Minh is the final goal. For Ho, national independence (the anti-colonialism) seemed to be a goal in itself, rather than a stepping stone on the road towards socialism (Duiker 2000). When looking at the work of Duiker (2000) the goal of independence seemed to rule Ho's entire life. At a certain point, he even tried to cooperate with the United States in search for Vietnamese independence. He wrote several letters to President Truman, without any success. Truman decided that the French goal, colonial power, was supported rather than the Vietnamese one: national independence. This is one of the reasons why some people state that Ho Chi Minh was not necessarily a socialist, but only used socialism as a means towards Vietnamese independence (Duiker 2000). Ho thus seemed to have Vietnamese independence as a goal, by any means. This is different from Lenin, who had strong anti-imperialist thoughts.

Not only has Ho Chi Minh contributed to the ideology of the CPV, he has also been of major influence to the foundation of the *Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (North Vietnam). This Republic was founded in 1945 and existed when there was still a distinction between North Vietnam¹¹ and South Vietnam¹². Ho Chi Minh was the founder of the military organization *League for the Independence of Vietnam*¹³, which is commonly known as *Viet Minh* (Kolko 1982: 30). In 1945 the revolutionary actions of the Viet Minh lead to the declaration of independence by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. North Vietnam was officially no longer under French rule due to efforts of Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh. In the declaration of independence of Vietnam¹⁴, Ho Chi Minh referred to the French Declaration of Independence. He stated that all men should have equal rights. He added that the French rule had failed to obey this right towards the Vietnamese population for over eighty years and therefore abused their own ideology of liberty, equality and fraternity (Ho Chi Minh 1971: 17-19).

The ideology of Ho Chi Minh was based on a socialist-state planned economy (Andrain 1994: 140). In this socialist system, private property was tolerated, unless it enlarged oppression instead of enjoyment (Huberman & Sweezy 1968). Equality, freedom and

¹¹ In Vietnamese: *Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa*

¹² In Vietnamese: *Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*

¹³ In Vietnamese: *Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội*

¹⁴ In Vietnamese: *Tuyên ngôn độc lập Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa*

fraternity were fundamental rights. The growth of universal social welfare, such as public healthcare was of major importance (Pons & Service 2010: 722-723). Any person should be able to have the same amount of access to social welfare as another person, reflecting the notion of equality as stated in Ho Chi Minh's declaration of independence.

When Ho Chi Minh died in 1969 the major focus of the Communist Party remained Marxist-Leninist. Important members of the Party, such as Le Duan, who was part of the CPV from 1960 until his death in 1986, held on to the ideals of Marxism-Leninism (Le Duan 1970). Besides upholding the Marxist-Leninist ideals, another major focus of the CPV was anti-colonialism. This was the result of dealing with foreign (French and American) power in Vietnam for a long period. Vietnam ended all international affairs with Western nations that held on to capitalism. However, international ties with communist countries were important for the rise of communist power in Vietnam. As Le Duan states, an important achievement of Ho Chi Minh has been to link the Vietnamese revolution to the international workers movement (Le Duan 1970: 17). Thus, it is a misunderstanding that Vietnam gave up on all international affairs.

The anti-colonialist or anti-imperialist point of view of Ho Chi Minh is of major importance. Throughout his life he struggled with colonialism. For instance, when Ho was in France he joined the French Socialist Party (FSP). Soon, Ho Chi Minh became dissatisfied with the little attention the FSP gave to the colonial question (Brocheux 2007: 16). When Ho Chi Minh returned to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, he went to great lengths to reunite the Northern and the Southern part of Vietnam. Both in works of Ho Chi Minh and in works of other major figures within the CPV, anti-colonialism as well as Marxism-Leninism remained important issues in the years following the independence of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh 1971) (Le Duan 1970). It is therefore interesting to question whether the anti-colonialist attitude that followed the independence of Vietnam was fueled by Ho Chi Minh or by the CPV (Duiker 2000). Some argue that the main goal of Ho Chi Minh was to form an independent nation, rather than form a socialist state. On the other hand, Ho Chi Minh was interested in socialism from a young age and kept relations with communist countries such as the USSR even after reaching his goal of Vietnamese independence and re-uniting North and South Vietnam. Regardless of his intentions, Ho Chi Minh has been of vital importance to the contemporary ideology of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

1.4 | Doi Moi and Further Policy Changes

As Stuarts, Turner and Tuden (2002) state, political processes are a public process rather than a private one. A political activity or, in this case, change of policy, affects a neighborhood, a whole community or even a whole society (Stuarts, Tuner, Tuden 2002: 105). In other words, the choices made in politics influence the economy and the society as a whole. The changes in society cannot be understood without taking politics and economies into account. Similarly, the changes in economies cannot be understood without taking politics and society into account. In order to answer the main question of this thesis, it is thus important to focus on policy changes throughout the ruling years of the CPV, to understand more about the everyday social life in contemporary Vietnam.

In the 1990s the CPV decided to focus more on the so called *Ho Chi Minh Thought* instead of the Marxist-Leninist focus. This focus became less popular since, as Pierre Brocheux states (2007: xiv):

‘communist ideology has now become “localized” or has simply given way to a pragmatism in search of a new doctrinal point’.

I believe this interpretation is accurate. The Vietnamese concepts of socialism and communism differ from, for instance, the Russian concepts of socialism and communism, due to local developments or circumstances that differ in different countries. Although the difference between the communist ideology and the Ho Chi Minh Thought may be small, these slight differences may be the differences that make the concept more pragmatic to the Vietnamese context and therefore more relatable to the Vietnamese population. Ho Chi Minh, again, is used as a means of popularity. One may argue that technically, the move away from Marxism-Leninism towards Ho Chi Minh Thought was minimal. In practice, though, it was a mental change. The Vietnamese people might feel a bigger connection to the thoughts of Ho Chi Minh than to those of Marx or Lenin. This can be clarified by looking at the role of Ho in contemporary Vietnam. Nowadays, ‘Uncle Ho’ is the symbol of Vietnamese socialism (Duiker 2000). My research did not identify a clear difference between the Marxist-Leninist ideology the CPV used previously and the Ho Chi Minh Thought ideology that is utilized nowadays. Therefore, I believe, the decision of the CPV to change their policy from Marxism-Leninism towards Ho Chi Minh Thought is a means for the CPV to govern Vietnam according to their own views, and not necessarily in line with the believes of Ho Chi Minh.

This is facilitated, however, by having the population believe that the CPV policy is in line with what Ho Chi Minh would have wanted. It provides a means for the CPV to enlarge the borders of the socialist ideal. This was impossible when governing the country in a Marxist-Leninist way, since this is a set concept. Thus, I believe that the transition from Marxism-Leninism to Ho Chi Minh Thought was not a significant transition in practice. However, it illustrates that the ideals of Ho Chi Minh remain important in contemporary Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh Thought has officially been taught at schools since 1997 (Brocheux 2007: xiv). However, it illustrates that the ideals of Ho Chi Minh remain important in contemporary Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh Thought has officially been taught at schools since 1997 (Brocheux 2007: xiv).

Another policy change, which is commonly associated with China, concerns family planning. In the 1970's women in Vietnam were allowed to have a maximum of two children. This policy, the National Family Planning Program (NFPP) was discontinued during the 1980's. However, the policy was again implemented from 1988 until 2003 and reconsidered in 2008 (Goodkind 1995: 85)¹⁵. Couples who had more than two children were imposed (financial) penalties. Additionally, members of the CPV were automatically expelled from the party. This policy was in line with Doi Moi, which I will discuss later, and was intended as a means to stimulate economic growth¹⁶. It was thought that too many children would limit economic development and would put too much pressure on social and educational services¹⁷. Although the policy is not applied anymore, the policy has been of great importance in the development of Vietnam after the introduction of Doi Moi. As we can see in Figure 1, the great majority of people in Vietnam is aged under 35 years¹⁸. Without abovementioned policies it is likely that this number would be even larger.

¹⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/21/vietnam-population-baby-boom>

¹⁶ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1011799.stm>

¹⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/nov/21/vietnam-population-baby-boom>

¹⁸ https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/population/populationtemplate_VM.html

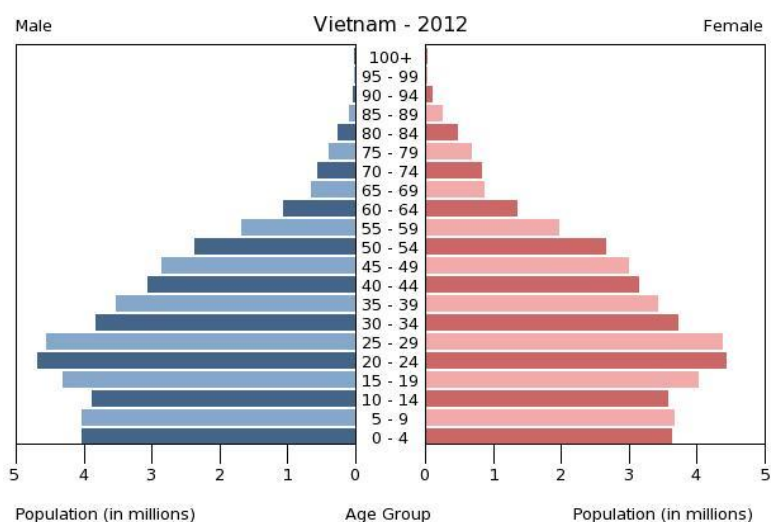


Figure 1 - Population Pyramid Vietnam 2012, CIA World Factbook

Other major policy changes throughout the years were mainly economical. As Han and Dickie (2006) state the Socialist Republic of Vietnam did not have great economic growth throughout the 1980's, for the country had been in war with the Khmer regime in the neighboring country of Cambodia and was still recovering from the previous war (Vietnam War) as well as from the ruling years of the French in Vietnam. Wolff (1999) states that Vietnam was unlucky in having the CPV in place to lead the country with a socialist planned economy. This resulted in limited development, making Vietnam one of the poorest countries in the world (Wolff 1999: 13). Because of the enduring poor economic growth, the policy makers finally decided to change economic policies in 1986 (Vuong, Dam, Van Houte & Tran 2011) (Han & Dickie 2006) (Wolff 1999) (Brocheux 2007) (Kleinen 2001). According to Kleinen (2001) peasant households were the driving force behind the resulting new economic system. They tried to abandon the collectivized socialist planned economy system by developing their own private grass-roots system, which led to growth of their rice production (Kleinen 2001: x). This inspired the CPV to experiment with a new economic system, using China as an example (Wolff 1999: 14). Nguyen Van Linh was the main actor within the resultant change of economic policy, which is now known as *Đổi Mới*¹⁹ (renovation). The renovation of the economy gave entrepreneurs the opportunity to start their own small businesses, which lead into a more market lead economical system in Vietnam. Besides family firms, which did not employ wage laborers, there was no existence of private companies in Vietnam until 1988 (Wolff 1999: 75). However, the CPV does not speak of a

¹⁹ From now on referred to as Doi Moi

market economy, but speaks of a so called *socialist-oriented market economy*²⁰, a Vietnamese form of market economy which is needed during times of transition of the political system - first towards socialism and ultimately towards communism.

Beside the possibility for local entrepreneurs to start their own business and compete with other local businesses in a socialist-oriented market economy, another new possibility for Vietnamese entrepreneurs and companies as a result of Doi Moi is the possibility to exchange, sell and buy goods and products from foreign entrepreneurs and companies (Han & Dickie 2006: 7). However, it remained impossible for Vietnamese companies and entrepreneurs to do business with companies and entrepreneurs from the United States of America. In 2001 this changed, after 15 years of Doi Moi policy. For many years the CPV as well as the United States government declined to trade, obviously for historical reasons and ideological differences. Nevertheless, 26 years after ending the Vietnam War, the United States of America and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam agreed to what is known as a *Bilateral Trade Agreement*²¹.

The Bilateral Trade Agreement as well as the acceptance of Vietnam into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007 have given the socialist-oriented market economy a more international character. The participation in the WTO is a huge advantage, according to experts²²: it opens up international markets for Vietnam, which makes the influence of Vietnam in the international economy bigger, as well as making Vietnam a more interesting location for foreign investment. However, it also provides challenges for Vietnam. In order to be part of WTO, the country had to agree to the terms of the WTO²³. As a result, Vietnam was not allowed to determine all economic policies by itself. This has led to a number of disadvantages. For instance, the sudden competition between companies in Vietnam and those from abroad has led a great number of Vietnamese companies to bankruptcy.

1.5 | Conclusion

Concluding, these policy changes have changed Vietnam not only economically, but have also resulted in changes in the politics of the CPV and Vietnamese social life. The transition

²⁰ <http://www.vietnamembassy-usa.org/news/2003/11/socialist-oriented-market-economy-concept-and-development-soluti>

²¹ <http://vietnam.usembassy.gov/uploads/images/LyF8aTkwwk2Jr3-pvrFMKA/bta-crsrpt020909.pdf>

²² <http://www.asialaw.com/Article/1971156/Search/Results/Vietnams-WTO-Membership-Impact-on-Business.html?Keywords=Ho+Chi+Minh+City>

²³ <http://wto.org>

from Marxism-Leninism to Ho Chi Minh Thought, in my opinion, was not a transition, but either a means for the CPV to expand the borders of the socialist ideal. I believe that the CPV wished to provide more sympathy for the Party, using “Uncle Ho”, the symbol of Vietnamese socialism, as guidance in times of transition. The growing international importance of Vietnamese socialist-oriented market economy has resulted in social changes. To enhance economic growth the Vietnamese government repeatedly decided to restrict Vietnamese couples to raising a maximum of two children, both in the 1960’s and from 1988 until 2003. Nowadays, Vietnamese are gaining more economical freedom in a country that is of increasing international importance.

Part 2 | Changes in Everyday Life

2.1 | Introduction

As we have seen in Part 1, the political decisions of the CPV not only influenced Vietnam politically, but also economically and socially. Doi Moi created economic growth, which in its turn results in changing circumstances in everyday life in contemporary Vietnam. In this part I will focus on the changes in everyday life of the Vietnamese, both economically and socially, in order to show that political policy changes result in both expected and unexpected transitions in everyday life. I will first describe the major economic and social changes which came into existence by the political decisions of the CPV. Afterwards, I will focus on the sexual morals and the sexual behavior of young people in Vietnam. I will do so by describing how Doi Moi influenced acceptance of premarital sexual behavior, abortion rates and son preference and HIV/AIDS epidemic in contemporary Vietnam.

2.2 | Changes in Everyday Economical Life

Vietnam still sees itself as a socialist country. This is already apparent from the official name of Vietnam: *the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, but is also reflected in the ideology which is adapted by the CPV: Ho Chi Minh Thought. According to Hayton (2010), Vietnam is still a socialist country, but not in the way that the West associates with socialism. The question for Hayton however, is not whether the country is heading towards a liberal democracy, but if the CPV can keep holding on to the role it has had for over 70 years. The CPV is currently changing policies in such ways that it can maintain power in the country (Hayton 2010: 226-228). However, policies such as Doi Moi and the Bilateral Trade Agreement, as well as the entry to the WTO, provide questions when looking at the concept of Vietnamese socialism. Is the ideology of the CPV visible in everyday life in Vietnam? Here, I will focus on different factors in everyday life that have been affected, especially by the Doi Moi policy. Eventually I will focus on the (changed) sexual morals and the (changed) sexual behavior of young people in Vietnam.

Doi Moi changed the economic status of Vietnam. After being in war and under colonial rule for several years, Vietnam could not establish economic growth, until Doi Moi and its resulting socialist-oriented market economy were introduced. Even though the country

still faces challenges, other effects were great.

Undernourishment decreased during the period of economic growth in the country. Within the ten years between 1993 and 2002, the percentage of people who had to survive on fewer than 2100 calories a day, decreased with 50% (from 58% to 29%) (Adams 2005: 3). Other sources say the percentage of undernourishment in Vietnam was even lower in 2002. According to *Trading Economics*²⁴ and *World Bank*²⁵ undernourishment was not as high as Adams stated, both in 1993 and 2002. Figure 2 shows us that, according to *Trading Economics*, the percentage of undernourishment in 1993 was 28%, in 2008 it was 11% and will be estimated on 6% in 2016. Even though the results are published by different sources, what is most important is that all sources have shown that the percentage of undernourishment in Vietnam has decreased throughout the years after Doi Moi.

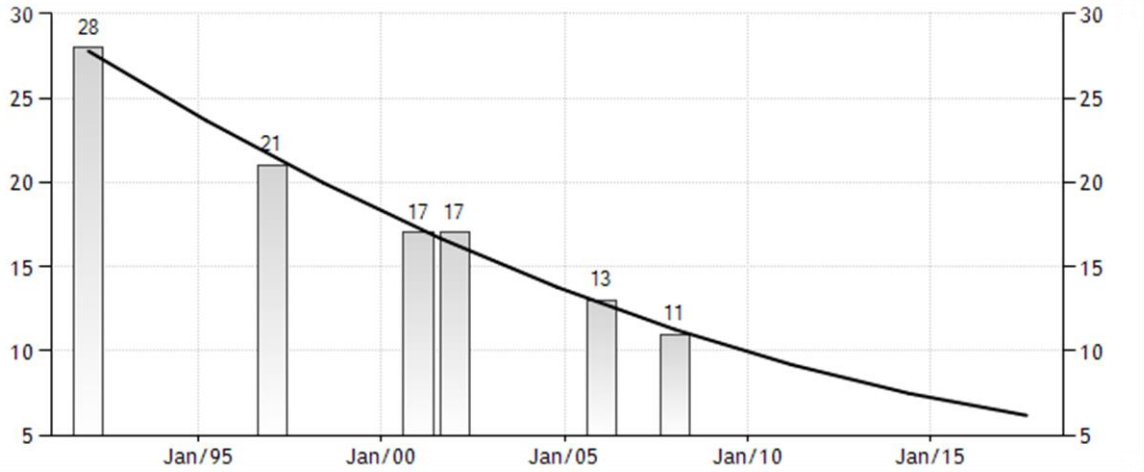


Figure 2 – (Estimated) Percentage of undernourishment in Vietnam, *Trading Economics*

Additionally, Adams (2005) states that the economic growth, which came into existence by the socialist-oriented market economy, created more empathy to the market economy. He says that not only the economy has gained empathy; social welfare services have also gained empathy with the Vietnamese population. In other words, people are more satisfied with social welfare services than they were before the introduction of Doi Moi. Furthermore, an effect of Doi Moi, according to Adams, is that the infrastructure in Vietnam has been developed (Adams 2005: 3).

Doi Moi offers local entrepreneurs and companies possibilities to start a private business, as well as allowing competition with other entrepreneurs or companies. This is in

²⁴ <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/vietnam/prevalence-of-undernourishment-percent-of-population-wb-data.html>
²⁵ *ibid*

contrast with the concept of socialism, as we have seen it in Part 1. We concluded that the class struggle that led towards communism (with socialism as a steppingstone) was a result of unequally divided profits. A revolution would occur, after which the majority of people (the proletariat) would gain power in a socialist society, ruled by one party representing all people. A market economy however, instigates competition between different parties. This eventually enlarges the gap between the wealthy and non-wealthy people within society and thus provides different classes. This makes the situation in Vietnam complex. There has been a rise of private companies over the last couple of years. However, these companies seem to be entangled in the CPV-government policies. In a way, many of these companies are state-owned, but are acting privately (Hayton 2010).

Doi Moi offered Vietnamese the possibility to increase their personal income and wealth. In an article in Time Magazine (2007)²⁶ Kay Johnson states that this has become more visible in the streets of Hanoi. He notices that a couple of years ago, the visibility of wealth was limited. The 'elite' would gather in places that were not recognized as 'elite-bars' and they would go to their work on a common motorcycle; the visibility of wealthy Vietnamese was low. Nowadays, instead of driving a motorcycle, wealthy Vietnamese drive to work in BMW and Mercedes cars. Not only Adams describes the growing visibility of a new elite, Hayton does this as well (2010: 226). Media have contributed to the increased visibility of wealth. The magazine *VNExpress* published a list of the 100 wealthiest people in Vietnam and their assets. These assets were obtained through private businesses (Johnson 2007). As wealth becomes more visible in Vietnam, so does the growing gap between wealthy and non-wealthy Vietnamese.

However, the CPV still seems to have an important role within the economy. The Party has several important monopolies and has so called *joint ventures* with different foreign investors and companies. Additionally, they maintain networks with the Vietnamese elite. In this way, the CPV connects itself to the private sector, which came into existence as a result of Doi Moi (Hayton 2010: 6). This seems to be in contrast with the socialist ideologies of the CPV, but by being connected to these companies and businesses, the influence of the CPV on the economy is greater than it may seem at first glance. Hayton does not believe that the CPV is heading towards a 'managed' or even 'liberal' economy. He illustrates this by describing the lack of sovereignty of Vietnamese. Hayton believes that the CPV is not intent on reducing their influence. The CPV believes that the power should lie with the CPV itself, and therefore

²⁶ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1592581,00.htm>

the sovereignty of the Vietnamese people is still poor (Hayton 2010 226-228). For example, there is limited freedom of press. *Press Freedom Index*²⁷ ranks Vietnam 172nd when looking at freedom of press worldwide. This leaves only seven countries that are ranked lower than Vietnam.

Overall, Vietnam has made a transition from one of the poorest countries in the world towards a so called *lower middle-income country*, according to World Bank. The overall ratio of population in poverty decreased with almost 45% in 15 years (1993-2008)²⁸. However, the rapid economic growth in Vietnam also provides problems for the country. For instance, the environment of Vietnam is in danger due to agricultural pressure resulting from Doi Moi policy changes (Hayton 2010: 226). This is in line with the theory described as *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). Garrett Hardin (1968) described a situation in which, in order to obtain short-term profit, farmers destroyed their lands by using them too intensely. This eventually leads to a smaller overall profit, because the farmers will not be able to use their lands anymore. Although the Vietnamese situation is much more complex, the pressure on the environment may cause serious problems on a long term basis, both economically and socially.

2.3 | Changes in Everyday Social Life

The growing agricultural businesses in Vietnam may lead towards the destruction of lands, which in its turn may lead toward the reduction of jobs in rural areas. This may change the social lives of farmers in Vietnam. As stated before, the relation between politics, economics and society is sensitive. Whenever one changes, it is possible that the others change as well. Doi Moi created more personal freedom, which in its turn changed the morals and ideals of Vietnamese, to more ‘modern’ ones, but also to more ‘traditional’ ones. In order to understand how Doi Moi has changed everyday social life in Vietnam, I will give a few examples.

Hayton (2010) sees major successes in everyday Vietnamese life. In his work, he describes the Vietnamese population as ambitious. He refers to the many young children that are crammed up in after-school English classes, because of their motivation to learn English. Also, he describes the ambition of the Vietnamese policy makers, who are intent on keeping

²⁷ <http://en.rsfo.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html>

²⁸ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview>

up with the Asian Tigers²⁹. Although Hayton is aware of the subjectivity of his argument, he does believe that contemporary Vietnam possesses a successful formula for the future: optimism, wide-spread education, a young population and plenty of foreign investments (Hayton 2010: 226-228).

Thuan and Thomas (2004) have stated that not only economic goods have changed since the introduction of Doi Moi, but that there also is a change in leisure activities and public space. They state that a rapidly developing consumer culture came into existence. This resulted in the rise of internet cafes, bars and live music venues (Thuan & Thomas 2004: 135). Along with these public spheres and popular culture, media have changed as well. Young people currently seem to reject the state-controlled media, which had the role of providing propaganda until Doi Moi in 1986. Instead, they prefer new popular media, facilitated by the rise of internet as well as the change of the public spheres (Thuan & Thomas 2004: 136). It seems that nowadays people have more possibilities and freedom to consume, instead of just working. Thuan and Thomas speak of *postsocialist Vietnam*, because in their view, Vietnam has left the socialist era already. I find this conclusion questionable, but agree that the introduction of Doi Moi has had a significant influence on everyday social life in Vietnam.

2.4 | Changes in Gender Roles

For this study, it is important to understand that the role of women, as well as sexuality, in socialist states such as Vietnam differ from the role of women and sexuality in capitalist countries. As True (2003) states the role of women in socialist countries lies solely in labor, whereas women in capitalist countries also have the option to consume. Ideally, gender differences are denied in socialist countries, since both men and women have to work (True 2003: 106). This can also be seen in the speech of Ha Thi Khiet (chairperson of Vietnam) during the UN General Assembly's 23rd special session on 'Women in 2000: Gender equality, development and peace', where she emphasized that women's participation was one of the major objectives of the Vietnamese revolution³⁰.

In Vietnam, gender roles are originally known by the 'Three Submissions' (Tran *et al.* 1999) (Santillan *et al.* 2002). Women first have to be submissive to the father, then to the husband and then to the oldest son, which made the man more prominent in everyday life³¹.

²⁹ Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore

³⁰ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5stat/statments/vietnam6.htm>

³¹ <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/vietnam.html>

This Confucian idea was also implemented in Vietnamese socialism. However, women also have a role in Vietnamese socialism. For instance, during the Vietnam War the Communist Party encouraged women to participate. The revolution needed to be a priority for all citizens, making the role of women in it of great importance³². Women thus had to participate in the war; sexuality would come later, both for men and women.

Sexuality is less visible in socialist countries than it is in capitalist countries. For instance, commercials are absent, both on television and on the streets, in form of billboards. Additionally, citizens have limited access to information (for instance through the internet) and less opportunities to consume in forms of leisure time. Profit is divided equally. As a result, there is no competition between different companies and thus advertisements are not needed. Another reason for the smaller visibility of sexuality in everyday life in socialist countries lies in the ideals of the socialist states. This can be illustrated by the brochure *Revolution and Youth*, which appeared in 1924 in Russia³³. In this brochure, twelve sexual commandments were written. The Russian revolutionary proletarians were deemed to live by these rules. Sexual intercourse should be the last step between two lovers and it should not develop too early. Although it was written in 1924, socialist Russia as well as the Soviet Union tended to suppress sexuality as much as possible. An example for this was made in 1986 when (although interpreted incorrectly) Lyudmila Ivanova stated that there was no sex in the USSR. For some, only the word sex was indecent towards the socialist ideology³⁴. The approach towards sexuality in Vietnam was comparable. For instance, during the Vietnam War, the CPV encouraged women to stop their biological needs in the forms of sexuality and marriage until the end of the war. Their duty to serve the country had to come in first place³⁵. Another way in which the socialist approach towards sexuality in Vietnam is implemented, is through religion. The Confucian ideal is not to have any sexual relationships before marriage. The chastity of a woman is one of the ways through which this has to be guaranteed (Heckert 2009: 8).

According to Anh & Hung (2000), the role of women within Vietnamese society has changed. Before Doi Moi, the role of women lied in labor. Nowadays, women seem to have less access to education, good jobs and health services (Anh & Hung 2000). Gender inequality appears to be growing. Women are less literate than men, are less frequently

³² http://www.iias.asia/files/IAS_NL48_010405.pdf

³³ <http://www.freemediaproductions.info/Editorials/2009/11/20/twelve-sexual-commandments-of-revolutionary-proletariat/>

³⁴ <http://russiapedia.rt.com/on-this-day/july-17/>

³⁵ http://www.iias.asia/files/IAS_NL48_010405.pdf

elected to be part of people's councils and the rate of women working in the state sector has slightly decreased in the years after Doi Moi (Anh & Hung 2000: 117, 147, 175).

Although this thesis does not focus on the question whether a transition from socialism toward capitalism provides more gender equality, this question provides insight into the role of men and women, both in socialist and capitalist countries. As we have seen in the previous part, the role of women in socialist countries was an important part of the ideology. A transition from socialism towards capitalism may change the role of women and thus the inequality between men and women. Several sources, as previously referred to, show us that the role of women since Doi Moi has decreased, whereas others conclude that it has increased. For instance, media such as the internet increase the access to information about other cultures and countries where gender inequality is limited. This, in turn, may lead to less gender inequality in Vietnam itself. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) of the UNDP shows us that the inequality between men and women has decreased since 1995³⁶. This is in contrast with the conclusion of Anh & Hung (2000). We should question which variables are taken into account when gender inequality is quantified. These may explain why the aforementioned outcomes are different.

2.5 | Conclusion

As we have seen in this part, the entanglement of politics, economics and everyday social life is reflected in everyday economic and everyday social life. I will now describe how Doi Moi has also changed sexual morals and sexual behavior of young people in Vietnam. By focusing on the morals of young Vietnamese regarding premarital sexual behavior, abortion and the increasing prevalence of HIV in Vietnam I provide insights on the influence of Doi Moi on these aspects

Although Vietnam has a high contraceptive prevalence (79 percent), abortion rates are high. Usually, low rates of contraceptive prevalence are associated with a high abortion rate. In Vietnam this is not the case (Hanh 2009: 160). Furthermore, studies have shown that there is a growing acceptance of premarital intimate behavior in Vietnam since the late 1980's (Ghuman 2005: 95). Beside the rising rate of abortion and the growing acceptance concerning premarital sexual behavior, HIV-rates have also grown since the introduction of Doi Moi (Phinney 2008: 651). According to Ngo *et al.* (2009: 251) the rapid socioeconomic

³⁶ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/gii/>

transformation in Vietnam has been followed by growing sexual expression and representation of sexual identity among young people. Due to growing personal freedom, Vietnamese have more possibilities to adopt 'modern', but also 'traditional' sexual morals, or even the possibility of combining both. In the next part I will show how Doi Moi has changed the sexual morals of young people in the contemporary Vietnamese society.

Part 3 | Changes in Sexual Morals and Sexual Behavior

3.1 | Introduction

In the previous part I stated that Doi Moi resulted in changes in everyday life, both economically and socially. The growing international focus of Vietnam exposes people to new ‘modern’ morals and ideals. However, I believe another development is occurring simultaneously. The growing personal freedom also offers Vietnamese to adopt ‘traditional’ morals and ideas, which were suppressed or transformed by the CPV. This development results in changes in sexual morals and sexual behavior of Vietnamese. I will illustrate this paradoxical phenomenon by describing how Doi Moi influenced premarital sexual behavior, abortion and gender roles in family planning and HIV/AIDS epidemic in Vietnam.

3.2 | Premarital Sexual Behavior

After the introduction of Doi Moi, studies of sexual behavior have primarily focused on young couples. These can provide insight into the changing sexual morals of young people in Vietnam. Besides major social changes, Nguyen (2007) states that the period following Doi Moi is characterized by more space for (young) people to express, experiment and live out their ideals, also in a sexual way (Nguyen 2007: 310). These expressions are in more ‘modern’ ways, but also in more ‘traditional’ ones. People increasingly have the option to adopt ‘modern’ ideals, but also to renew ‘traditional’ believes.

Ghuman (2005) states that there is a growing acceptance of sexual behavior without marital commitment. This especially holds true for couples married after the 1980’s, people in urban areas and people who are well-educated (Ghuman 2005: 95). The growing acceptance of premarital sexual contact in the group of people married after the 1980’s is especially interesting when investigating the influence of Doi Moi. The other two groups can be studied to provide different insights, such as the influence of education or geographical background on premarital sexual behavior.

However, what is most important is that the overall acceptance is growing. Ghuman notes that the acceptance started growing in the 1990’s, shortly after the introduction of Doi Moi. Some people therefore believe that the greater acceptance of premarital sexual behavior is caused by Doi Moi (Ghuman 2005: 95) (Efroyman 1996) (Haub & Hong 2003) (Khuat 2003) (Mensch *et al.* 2003).

Another explanation for this greater acceptance of sexual expression may lie in the

new possibilities provided by popular media. For instance, more people have access to the internet. The rise of internet cafes has contributed to this phenomenon. Young people now have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with foreign phenomena. This new form of spending leisure time seems to have had an influence on the way in which young people find a life partner. For instance, there has been an increase in the number of young girls who, as a result of online dating, marry outside their 'traditional' environment, both within Vietnam and abroad (Thuan & Thomas 2004: 137).

A similar change occurred in former European communist states when the regimes fell and the borders to the 'West' were opened. Prostitution and markets for pornographic materials started growing after the fall of communism in Eastern European countries (True 2003: 94). Nowadays, the Czech Republic allows prostitution, as long as it is not in an organized form such as in brothels. 'Pimping' is considered illegal³⁷. True believes that the growth of the sex industry in the Czech Republic is related to an increased accessibility to the West. The people who were previously oppressed, could now also use sexuality as a means to express their freedom. Borneman & Fowler (1997) refer to this phenomenon as 'Europeanization', a term they also use to describe other forms of reorganization of the former parted European regions (Borneman & Fowler 1997)(True 2003: 93-94).

I am aware that the situation a country such as the Czech Republic is different from the situation in Vietnam for several reasons. The Czech Republic made a full transition from socialism toward capitalism, over a very short period of time. Moreover, the Czech Republic is situated in Europe and made its transition during a turbulent period for both socialism and capitalism. It is, however, interesting to compare the Vietnamese situation with the situation of the European former communist countries. Especially the term 'Europeanization' is interesting, because this phenomenon of reorganization does not seem to be unique for the European situation since it appears to be ongoing in Vietnam as well.

Nowadays, the growing international economical focus and the rise of new media, such as the internet, increasingly expose Vietnamese people to foreign morals and ideas. Thuan and Thomas (2004) notice that young Vietnamese women are becoming increasingly active in dating and marrying outside of their own class and region. Some even date and marry persons from abroad (Thuan & Thomas 2004: 137). Thuan and Thomas (2004) primarily relate this transition in sexual behavior to the use of new popular media. I, however, believe that the increasing international economical focus of Vietnam, which resulted from

³⁷ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100555.htm>

Doi Moi, is another major factor that has influenced the sexual behavior of the Vietnamese youth. Without this type of exposure, I believe it would not be likely that the Vietnamese would have displayed such a rapid change in their sexual behavior and their sexual morals. As I have said, I see similarities between Vietnam and European former communist countries. When these countries were exposed to ‘Western’ morals and ideas, their own (sexual) morals changed. A process which Borneman and Fowler (1997) named *Europeanization*, which is in line the more common concept of globalization. Even though the number of studies on this subject is small, it is interesting that many of these studies show that the sexual morals of young people changed after Doi Moi (Ghuman 2005: 95) (Efroyman 1996) (Haub & Hong 2003) (Khuat 2003) (Mensch *et al.* 2003). I believe that the rise of new media has also changed premarital sexual behavior. The combination of Doi Moi and new media forms have given Vietnam a more international focus, increasingly exposing Vietnamese to foreign (sexual) morals, which may be partially adopted by the Vietnamese.

3.3 | Abortion, Son Preference and Gender Roles in Family Planning

As I have stated above, Vietnam has a high contraceptive prevalence. Still, the abortion rate in Vietnam is one of the highest in the world (Hanh 2009: 160). Bélanger (2002) concludes that there are several explanations for this phenomenon. The high rates of abortion are a result of Doi Moi. Vietnamese want to live by a new ‘modern’ standard of having a small family. On the other hand, they fear modern contraceptive methods and they keep holding on to ‘traditional’ ideals. In order to understand this paradox, a description of gender roles in family planning is needed.

The dominant perception of gender roles in the Vietnamese society is based on Confucianism. The so called *Three Submissions* (*tam tong*) have been important in establishing the role of women in Vietnam (Tran *et al.* 1999) (Santillan *et al.* 2002). The Three Submissions describe three stages of submission. First a woman has to show her submissiveness to her father, then to her husband and last to her oldest son. The influence of socialism is seen in the fact that women in Vietnam are furthermore expected to serve the country, create happiness in their family and perform domestic work (Gammeltoft 1999). A slogan that represented the socialist women in the 1960’s and 1970’s was ‘Good at national tasks, good at household tasks (Gammeltoft 1999: 176-177). Men, however, ideally are the providers of the family: a good career is important (Gammeltoft 1999). In order to be masculine, sexual capacity and virility have to be proved by making their wife pregnant

(Hanh 2009: 166).

When sexual relations are concerned, ideally, premarital and extramarital sexual behavior does not exist. Before Doi Moi such behavior was considered criminal and immoral (Khuat 1998: 23). However, a great difference existed between men and women with regard to the consequences of premarital or extramarital sexual behavior. Men would still be able to find a wife. For women, social morals made it very difficult to find a husband (Khuat 1998). The inequality between men and women is further reflected in the responsibility for preventing pregnancy. Both men and women consider this a female task (Khuat 1998).

As we have seen in Part 1, Vietnam introduced a policy in 1988 which forbade people to have more than two children. Family planning, therefore, has become an even more important issue in the lives of married couples. The prohibition of having three or more children may be a solid explanation for the high abortion rate in Vietnam. Bélanger (2002), however, sees different explanations as well. One alternative explanation suggested by Bélanger, is the desire to have fewer children (2002: 331). She concludes that not only the state wishes fewer children, families do as well. Another conclusion of her work is the phenomenon of son-preference (Bélanger 2002: 321). Due to the rapid socio-economic transition, caused by Doi Moi in 1986, families appear to prefer sons over daughters (Belangér 2002: 331-332):

The many social and economic changes brought about by the transition to a market economy in the mid-1980's appear to have strengthened son preference.

According to Bélanger sons are desired for their social, symbolic and economic value (2002: 321). Another explanation for son preference is that having a son, for some men, is associated with masculinity (Hanh 2009: 172). Important to notice is that some believe that having a small family is the new standard. Even though fertility is associated with masculinity and having a family remains an important Vietnamese social norm, Hanh, believes that Doi Moi motivated couples to have a small family instead of a large one (2009: 166). A small family, with at least one son, thus may be the reason for the high abortion rate in Vietnam. The prevention of pregnancy remains a female task. Therefore the legalization of abortion in Vietnam in 1994 was seen as a huge step in the rights of Vietnamese women (Hanh 2009: 162).

One question, however, remains unanswered. There are many other ways to prevent pregnancy. Even though these methods exist, the abortion rate in Vietnam remains one of the

highest in the world. Abortions are mainly performed on married women. Why do married couples not use different methods of pregnancy control? According to Hanh (2009), the answer to this question lies in the role of men in family planning. Although family planning is considered a feminine task, the role of men is important. Even though men are willing to have less than three children, they are reluctant to prevent pregnancy (Hanh 2009: 162).

Fertility is considered to be a sign of masculinity. For that reason, sterilization is feared amongst men (Hanh 2009: 169). Condoms are not frequently used. Condoms are primarily used as a way to protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Since most men believe that their wives are free of STIs, they do not see the need of using a condom. Furthermore, men do not like using condoms (Hanh 2009: 169).

Apart from using a condom, many Vietnamese men prevent their wives from using modern contraceptives, for fear of their health. They prefer traditional ways, since they believe that modern methods cause side effects (Hanh 2009: 168). The fear of losing masculinity, as well as the fear of side effects of modern contraceptive methods, are reasons for men to eventually decide to abort.

A new situation came into existence after the introduction of Doi Moi. Confucian norms, such as fertility and having a son, remain important. Meanwhile, a small family is becoming the new Vietnamese standard. The fear of men to lose their masculinity, as well as the anxiety of side effects of modern contraceptive methods has implications: more married women are confronted with an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy. The 'modern' desire to have a small family results in the decision to abort the pregnancy. Even after the abolishment of the National Family Planning Program in 2003, the abortion rate remains high. I believe that the new standard of having a small family, in combination with the continuance of Confucian norms and the reluctant role men play in prevention of pregnancy, have caused the high abortion rate in Vietnam.

3.4 | HIV/AIDS

The number of people suffering from HIV and AIDS in Vietnam is growing rapidly. The first case of an HIV infection in Vietnam was reported in 1990. In 2006, the number of HIV cases was estimated to be 280.000 (Phinney 2008: 651). This implies that the HIV/AIDS epidemic developed over the last 20 years, the years after the introduction of Doi Moi.

In this case, it is again interesting to compare the Vietnamese situation with that of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe. Studies report that the number of HIV/AIDS

patients in this region increased rapidly, starting in the early 1990's. Nowadays, the estimation of the number of HIV/AIDS cases in Eastern Europe is 1.4 million³⁸. It is striking that both in Vietnam and in the former communist countries of Eastern Europe the HIV/AIDS epidemic started after a major political change. In Eastern Europe, this encompassed the fall of communism and the opening of the borders to the West. In Vietnam, the change involved the transition from a socialist plan economy to a socialist-oriented market economy. However, we have to be careful with the interpretation of these numbers in relation to sexuality. Other variables can be involved, since HIV/AIDS do not necessarily have to be caused by sexual intercourse. For instance, the percentage of HIV/AIDS cases infected by sharing contaminated needles for heroin use in Russia is 70-80% (Hann 2010: 115). Intravenous drug use may also contribute to the number of HIV/AIDS cases in Vietnam.

Phinney (2009) reports that in the late 1990's, the majority of HIV/AIDS cases (80%) in Vietnam were caused by contamination as a result of intravenous drug use. However, Phinney believes that nowadays, the growing number of HIV/AIDS infections in Vietnam is a result of the introduction of *Doi Moi*. She states that Vietnam's decision to become an international player in the global economy has given the Vietnamese the opportunity to incorporate international morals and ideas into their daily life. Access to new international media, including the internet, has made this process of integration possible (Phinney 2009: 652). According to Phinney (2009:652):

We found that *Doi Moi* has instigated an iterative process among a global market economy that produces men's desire for women outside the home (and supplies these women), facilitates a notion of masculinity tied to commercialized and sexualized leisure (ensuring the demand for sex workers), and generates the means to purchase these sexual "commodities".

Phinney states that the transition from a national economy to an international economy strengthens the desire of men to participate in extramarital sexual relationships. Ngo *et al.* (2009) also believe that the rapid socio-economic change caused greater sexual expression and a greater representation of sexual identity amongst young people (Ngo *et al.* 2009: 251). This appears to have affected the dynamics of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Nowadays, the number of HIV/AIDS infections from sexual transmission is bigger than the number of cases caused by contaminated needles used for intravenous drug administration (Phinney 2009: 651).

³⁸ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/communicable-diseases/hiv-aids/facts-and-figures>

According to Ngo *et al.* (2009), greater sexual expression has resulted in an increase in the number of (overt) homosexual men. Simultaneous to the start of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the reported number of homosexual men has increased (Ngo *et al.* 2009: 251). Some believe that the internet has increased interaction between homosexual men, thereby resulting in greater homosexual practices (Colby, Ton & Truong 2007) (Khuat: 2005). Ngo *et al.* (2009) also identify a group of men, married to women, who have extramarital sexual relationships with men. Together with the overt homosexual men, this group is referred to as MSM: men who have sex with men. MSM is one of the biggest groups affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Ngo *et al.* 2009:252). Within the MSM group, those who identify themselves as being overtly homosexual are more likely to use preventive measures during sex (Ngo *et al.* 2009: 252-253). The MSM who display unprotected homosexual behavior as part of their extramarital sexual escapades, put their wives at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. As we have seen earlier, men are not so willing to wear condoms when they have sex with their wives (Hanh 2009: 169). As a result, (married) women are also a group with a great risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, whenever they have unprotected sexual intercourse (Phinney 2009: 650).

The increased sexual expression in Vietnam is apparent from the increasing number of extramarital sexual relations of men, both heterosexually and homosexually (Ngo *et al.* 2009) (Phinney 2009). Another way in which the changes in sexual expression amongst Vietnamese become apparent are the changed morals regarding premarital sexual behavior. As we have seen before, premarital sexual behavior is more accepted amongst young Vietnamese (Ghuman 2005: 95).

The greater sexual expression of young Vietnamese, with regard to premarital, marital and extramarital sexual behavior, increases the chance of spreading HIV/AIDS. Even though HIV/AIDS infections can also be caused by needle contamination, studies show that nowadays, the majority of HIV/AIDS cases in Vietnam are the result of transmission through sexual intercourse. I believe that the growing number of HIV/AIDS infections is a result of the change in sexual morals, that has come about following the Doi Moi policy change. In this regard, the growing international importance of the Vietnamese economy brought Vietnamese in contact with foreign (sexual) morals and ideas through new and foreign media forms. This, in turn, facilitated greater sexual expression and experimentation, increasing the risk of HIV/AIDS transmission.

3.5 | Conclusion

The introduction of Doi Moi resulted in a greater ‘modern’ international focus. However, I believe that another development occurred simultaneously. Doi Moi generated more personal freedom for the Vietnamese, both economically and socially. Paradoxically, this resulted in a renewed focus on ‘traditional’ practices, which were suppressed before.

One example is the role of women in everyday family life. The Confucian ideal of the ‘Three Submissions’ played an important role in the practice of family roles. The CPV transformed this ideal to be in line with the socialist principle, with submissions to the state, work and family. This became clear during the Vietnam War, when women were expected to contribute to the state, instead of taking care of their families (Heckert 2009: 8). This changed after Doi Moi. Instead, a renewed adherence to the ‘traditional’ three submissions was observed. Although nowadays the acceptance of premarital sexual behavior is growing, most women still favor to secure chastity before marriage, partly in order to be submissive to their future husband (Tran *et al.* 1999) (Santillan *et al.* 2002).

An example of ‘modernity’ is the desire of Vietnamese couples to have a small family. However, ‘traditional’ Confucian ideals such as masculinity and fertility remain important. Moreover, men do not want their wives to use modern contraceptives, for they are afraid of side effects of these methods. This combination of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ ideals results in a high incidence of unwanted pregnancies, many of which are terminated by abortion.

The introduction of Doi Moi has resulted in a significant change in sexual morals and sexual behavior. There is more sexual expression, illustrated by the (seemingly) growing homosexual community. Additionally, premarital sexual behavior is becoming increasingly accepted among young Vietnamese people. An unfortunate effect of this behavioral change is that the number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS has rapidly increased since the introduction of Doi Moi.

Since the introduction of Doi Moi, Vietnamese people have more freedom to decide in which ways they wish to sexually express themselves. Some choose for new ‘modern’ ideals, some adhere to the ‘traditional’ ideals stemming from before the communist era, and many find their own way to combine the ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ ideals to shape their sexual morals and behavior.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the entanglement of politics, economics and social life can influence daily life, with expected and unexpected consequences. This is illustrated by how the Vietnamese Doi Moi policy change in 1986 has not only resulted in an economical change, but has also had major implications on sexual behavior and sexual morals in everyday life.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a country with a unique form of socialism, which came into existence under influence of the specific historical context of Vietnam. Nowadays, the country is governed using the socialist ideal Ho Chi Minh Thought. The CPV uses ‘Uncle Ho’, the symbol of Vietnamese socialism, as a means to control the country, justifying their political measures by continually stating that these measures are performed in line with the ideals of Ho Chi Minh himself.

In 1986 the country decided to abolish the socialist plan economy for a so called socialist-oriented market economy. The renovation known by the name of Doi Moi, was necessary in order to generate more economic growth. It has given Vietnam a greater international character and a more important role in the global economy. This transition changed everyday life in contemporary Vietnam. Vietnamese people have gained more personal freedom and exposed them to new media forms, such as the internet. This provided Vietnamese with the possibility to adopt new ‘modern’ morals, as well as to renew ‘traditional’ ones.

The increase in personal freedom has led to more sexual expression and a growing overall acceptance of premarital sexual behavior. Especially men are more tolerant towards premarital and even extramarital behavior. Many women, however, uphold the ‘traditional’ Confucian ideal of chastity as an expression of submissiveness to the (future) husband. ‘Modern’ ideals have created a greater desire for smaller families. However, men do not want to expose their wives to ‘modern’ contraceptives. This, in combination with ‘traditional’ Confucian norms as fertility and having a son, makes Vietnam a country with one of the highest abortion rates in the world. The increasing tolerance of premarital and extramarital sexual behavior, including the growing number of MSM, has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

This thesis has demonstrated several ways in which sexual morals and sexual behavior have changed as a result of a transition from a (domestic) socialist plan economy to a (international) socialist-oriented market economy. However, future fieldwork is important in

order to understand the differences that exist within Vietnam: between the North and the South of Vietnam, between rural areas and urban areas and between highly educated people and lower educated people. This study has focused on Vietnam as a whole, without regard for regional differences or specific groups within the Vietnamese society. Future fieldwork is thus of great importance to further explore the phenomenon of sexuality in Vietnam.

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Figures

Figure 1 - Population Pyramid Vietnam 2012, *CIA World Factbook*

Figure 2 – (Estimated) Percentage of undernourishment in Vietnam, *Trading Economics*