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OF SEXUALITY

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· THE ·

CONTINUUM *Complete*
International
ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF SEXUALITY

Updated, with More Countries

2004

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Vietnam

(*Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ
Nghĩa Việt Nam*)
(Socialist Republic of Vietnam)

Jakob Pastoetter, Ph.D.*
Updates by J. Pastoetter

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Demographics and a Brief Historical Perspective

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

A. Demographics

Vietnam is the second largest country in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. With 127,240 square miles (329,560 km²), it is twice the size of the state of Arizona, slightly larger than Malaysia (including East Malaysia), and about 15% smaller than Japan. Vietnam is bordered on the north by China, on the east by the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea, and on the west by Cambodia, Laos, and the Gulf of Thailand. The country extends some 1,000 miles (1,600 km) from north to south. Its widest east-to-west point is 370 miles (600 km), whereas in some places it is only 30 miles (50 km) wide. The capital, Hanoi (2.194 million), is situated in the northern region, while the largest city, Ho Chi Minh City (4.392 million), the former Saigon, is in the south.

In July 2002, Vietnam had an estimated population of 81 million, up from only 47 million in 1975. (All data are from *The World Factbook 2002* (CIA 2002) unless otherwise stated.)

Age Distribution and Sex Ratios: 0-14 years: 31.6% with 1.07 male(s) per female (sex ratio); 15-64 years: 62.9% with 0.96 male(s) per female; 65 years and over: 5.5% with 0.65 male(s) per female; *Total population sex ratio:* 0.97 male(s) to 1 female. Almost 80% of Vietnamese are under age 40.

Life Expectancy at Birth: *Total Population:* 69.86 years; *male:* 67.4 years; *female:* 72.5 years

Urban/Rural Distribution: 19% to 81%. The rural population is concentrated in the two main rice-growing deltas: the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the



(CIA 2002)

south. In the Red River Delta (excluding Hanoi), population density averages 1,170 per square kilometer (0.4 mi²), and in Thai Binh it rises to 1,230 per square kilometer (0.4 mi²), among the highest rural densities in the world. The Mekong Delta, which is over twice as large as the Red River Delta, has a far lower population density at 400 per square kilometer (0.4 mi²) and is the source of the rice surpluses that Vietnam exports.

Ethnic Distribution: Vietnamese: 85% to 90%; Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Chm and mountain group minorities.

Religious Distribution: Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christian (predominantly Roman Catholic and some Protestant), indigenous beliefs, and Muslim

Birth Rate: 20.89 births per 1,000 population

Death Rate: 6.14 per 1,000 population

Infant Mortality Rate: 29.34 deaths per 1,000 live births

Net Migration Rate: -0.47 migrant(s) per 1,000 population

Total Fertility Rate: 2.44 children born per woman

Population Growth Rate: 1.43%

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HIV/AIDS (1999 est.): *Adult prevalence*: 0.24%; *Persons living with HIV/AIDS*: 100,000; *Deaths*: 2,500. (For additional details from www.UNAIDS.org, see end of Section 10B.)

Literacy Rate (*defined as those age 15 and over who can read and write*): 93.7% (*male*: 96.5%, *female*: 91.2%) (1995 est.); education is free and compulsory from age 6 to 11

Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (*purchasing power parity*): \$2,100 (2001 est.); *Inflation*: -0.3%; *Unemployment*: 25% (1995 est.); *Living below the poverty line*: 37% (1998 est.)

Traditionally, education has been of great importance to the Vietnamese, and the State has always set aside a significant portion of its budget for education. Although access to higher levels of education has been limited, the introduction of near-universal primary education has produced a high literacy rate. According to the 1999 World Bank figures, 83% of the population over 15 years old was literate. [*Comment 2001*: The meaning of "literate" is not specified, whether this means able to write one's name, or able to read a newspaper. (*End of comment by R. T. Francoeur*)] In rural areas, the education system has been nearly as well developed as in urban areas, particularly in the north: 87% of the rural population was literate in 1989 compared with 95% of the urban population.

Vietnam has a good record in providing healthcare, as measured by such indicators as life expectancy, infant mortality, and the number of doctors per citizen. After 1954, the government set up a public-health infrastructure, which reached down to hamlet level. This system was extended to the south after reunification in 1976. In the late 1980s, a combination of reform factors, budgetary constraints, the decision to shift more responsibility for healthcare financing to the provinces, the reduced social role of agricultural cooperatives in 1988, and the introduction of fees in 1989, began to affect the quality of healthcare. By 1996, the government was devoting only 1% of the gross domestic product to health spending, and 85% of all spending on health services came from private sources.

Vietnam has one of the most complex ethnolinguistic patterns in Asia. About 50 different ethnic minorities make up more than 10% of the population, while approximately 87% of the population is ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh). The Vietnamese were significantly Sinicized during a millennium of Chinese rule. Vietnamese, one of the Mon-Khmer languages of the Austro-Asiatic language family, exhibits strong Chinese influence. Diverse cultural traditions, geographic variations, and historical events have created distinct traditional regions within the country. The general topographic dichotomy of highland and lowland regions also has ethnolinguistic significance: The lowlands generally have been occupied by ethnic Vietnamese, while the highlands have been home to numerous smaller ethnic groups that differ culturally and linguistically from the Vietnamese. The highland peoples can be divided into the northern ethnic groups, with affinities to peoples in southern China, and the southern highland populations, with ties to the Mon-Khmer and Austronesian peoples of Cambodia, Indonesia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia (see Section 13, Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors among Ethnic Minorities).

A north-south variation also evolved among the ethnic Vietnamese as they expanded southward from the Red River Delta along the coastal plain and into the Mekong River Delta. The Vietnamese themselves have long made a distinction between the northern region, with Hanoi as its cultural center, the central region, with the traditional royal capital of Hue, and the southern region, with Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) as its urban center. The French also divided

Vietnam into three parts: the northern Tonkin, the central Annam, and Cochinchina in the south. Official efforts to move families from the densely populated areas to the "new economic zones" in the Central Highlands have tended to marginalize the minority groups living there, in addition to causing ecological stress.

The once sizeable overseas Chinese community, which was largely concentrated in the south, was depleted after many decided to leave the country as "boat people" when the government closed down private businesses in 1978. The 1989 census counted 962,000 Chinese, barely changed from the 949,000 recorded in the 1979 census. But as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, the Chinese minority wields great influence in the economy. Ho Chi Minh City alone is estimated to have about half a million Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese residents.

Vietnamese is the official language. Although the Vietnamese language is distinct, it nevertheless can be described as a fusion of Mon-Khmer, Tai, and Chinese elements. The minorities have languages of their own, and the Constitution guarantees their right to use these languages before the courts. English is gaining popularity as a second language, whereas many people still speak French, Russian, and German. In the early 17th century, Catholic missionaries introduced *chu quốc ngữ* ("national written language") using an adapted form of the Western alphabet. The four letters, *f, j, w,* and *z,* are omitted, and accents are added. The resultant *chu quốc ngữ* was made popular by the French and has been used officially since 1918. In Vietnamese, quite a few words are spelled in the same way. Differences in meaning result through pronunciation: e.g., *ca* (to sing), *cà* (eggplant), and *cá* (fish).

The names of the authors, researchers, institutions, titles of books, and locations occurring in this chapter are written in the form in which they were used in the international research literature. In order to facilitate literature searches, Vietnamese authors are referred to in exactly the writing of their names in the quoted articles and books. To avoid confusion for the non-Vietnamese users of the *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*, who might not know what the family, middle, and first names are, we also did not alter the order of the three parts of the names, but used the form we found.

B. A Brief Historical Perspective

The two most characteristic features of Vietnam's history are the country's struggle against foreign occupation and intervention, which has been going on for a good part of the last 2,000 years, and the ability of the Vietnamese people to learn from their occupants and finally overcome the foreign rule. The invaders were mostly, but not exclusively the Han Chinese, who ruled Vietnam for over 1,000 years from 111 B.C.E. to the 15th century. The Chinese were also in power during the wars between the Monguls and the Cham state, from 1428 to 1672, when Le Loi expelled the Chinese and was crowned emperor. In the middle of the 19th century, the French began intervening in the country's affairs on a large scale. Within ten years of seizing Saigon, they had taken control of the whole country, which they governed as a colony and incorporated into French Indochina in spite of resistance from the Vietnamese.

After 1940, when France surrendered to Germany in World War II, the Vichy government had to accept the presence of Japanese troops in Vietnam, although the Vichy government continued to govern the colony. During this period, Ho Chi Minh founded the Viet Minh, a nationalist liberation movement inspired by communist ideals, whose aim was to free Vietnam from foreign rule. A few months before the Japanese were defeated and finally surrendered to the Allied

forces in September 1945, the Viet Minh took direct control from the French, and Ho Chi Minh declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam independent on 2 September 1945.

After the end of World War II, the French deployed a substantial number of troops and fought the Viet Minh, led again by Ho Chi Minh, in order to regain control over Vietnam. The French were defeated decisively in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu and were forced to withdraw after they had dominated Vietnam for almost 100 years. However, the Viet Minh controlled only the northern part of Vietnam. The establishment of a second government, led by Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon, led to the separation of the country into North and South Vietnam along the 17th parallel, the latter backed by the United States. Under the influence of the Korean War and the so-called domino theory, the United States gave South Vietnam political and military support against North Vietnamese attempts to take over the south. The United States' involvement gradually grew from a few advisers to hundreds of thousands of ground troops to fight the National Liberation Front, otherwise known as Viet Cong. Nevertheless, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese prevailed. In 1973, the United States signed a treaty with North Vietnam that provided for withdrawal of all American ground troops and aimed at restoring peace. After the American withdrawal, the government of South Vietnam crumbled rapidly and the North took control in 1975, ending a war that had lasted nearly 30 years. In July 1976, the nation was reunited, and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established.

Important events since the reunification of the country include a border war with China in 1979 and Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia the year before. Vietnam finally withdrew its troops from Cambodia in 1989. Perhaps the key feature, though, was the country's economic deterioration and its dire position by the mid 1980s. The breakthrough came at the end of 1986 with the introduction of the *doi moi*, or renovation policy. The aim was to move from a centrally planned to a market economy while still retaining the socialist political structure. The introduction of the new foreign investment law in December 1987, allowing and encouraging foreign investment, was a major step from which all the current excitement in the international business community has stemmed. Parallels have been drawn to China's experience. Such has been the rapidity and the strength of the process, that the near-total withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1991 and the collapse of the COMECON trading bloc, which should in theory have cut away the great majority of Vietnam's trade, had little effect.

There is now far greater openness towards foreign countries in general, and improved relations with other Southeast Asian and Western nations in particular. Vietnam became a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) at the meeting in Brunei in July 1995. Full diplomatic relations with the United States were reestablished in July 1995, some 20 years after the fall of Saigon.

Nevertheless, Vietnam is in desperate need of foreign investors. Over the last six years, the inflow of foreign capital dwindled from US\$3 billion to little more than US\$500 million since Vietnam lost its privileged position as favorite of Western investors because of the multiple domestic and external trading restrictions and widespread corruption. Many foreign investors have left the country in frustration, according to the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* (7/14/2000). The situation might change as a result of normalization of trade relations between the U.S. and Vietnam in 2000, which opened the Vietnamese market for American investors in such important key sectors as telecommunications and financial services. Still, Vietnam is one of the world's poorest countries. Its average per capita gross domestic product is esti-

mated to be about US\$150 per year; the statutory minimum wage is US\$35 per month in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi and US\$30 elsewhere for local employees employed by foreign invested enterprises. The economic reforms during the last few years have permitted some people to fare better in the private sector, but overall living standards still remain low. Viewed in this light, it is evident that, even with an inflation rate decreased from almost 400% in 1988 to 17% in 1995, it will be many years before Vietnam comes close to reaching the financial strength attributed to some of its Asian neighbors—especially since the growth rate for 1999 dwindled to 3% from an official estimate of 5.8% in 1998.

Real household income per head rose by 5% in 1995 and 4.2% in 1996. The percentage of people living in poverty (as defined by the World Bank) has fallen from almost 55% in 1992 to less than 30% by 1998. The poorest quintile of the population does not appear to have fared so well. Between 1994 and 1996, its income per head rose by just 0.5% annually, far less than the annual growth of 6.8% experienced by the top quintile.

Official figures obtained by Reuters show less than 600,000 foreign tourists visited Vietnam in 1998, down from 690,000 the previous year, a drop the government blamed on Asia's economic crisis. Hanoi lumps tourist figures with total arrivals, including business and official visitors, ending up with a figure of 1.5 million in 1998, down from 1.7 million in 1997. Its goal in 2000 was two million total visitors, compared with nearby Thailand, which expected to attract 8.2 million tourists during the same period.

1. Basic Sexological Premises

Author's Note: Because of the specific difficulties of doing sex research in a communist and Neo-Confucian country like Vietnam, we could not do field research on our own, and instead had to rely on the published papers and books about Vietnam. The challenge we faced in preparing this chapter was confirmed early on by Professor Frank Proschan, an expert on Vietnamese culture at the Folklore Institute at Indiana University (Bloomington), who told us that no Vietnamese scholar would be able to write such a chapter, because the Vietnamese have just started walking the path of independent science after many years of Confucian and communist censorship. The Vietnamese resources we subsequently found and incorporated into this chapter supported this thesis. Because the resources came from many different fields of research—history, medicine, ethnology, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, sexology, and sociology—we thought it best to leave them as much unchanged as possible to prevent misinterpretation (compare Gammeltoft 1999). At the same time, we also tried to make the text as readable as possible, without too many direct quotations or heavy use of indirect speech. Nevertheless, the chapter should be transparent enough to track all the sources down to find more in-depth information if necessary.

What information we have on contemporary sexuality in Vietnam had to be gleaned on the one hand from the Vietnamese and international anthropological and ethnological literature, as well as AIDS, STD, and family planning research (compare Sections 9, Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning, and 10, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS). On the other hand, there exists the domestic social science research, which is focused mainly on "gender and development," and more recently on the nature of the Vietnamese family. For the French period, the late 1800s and the first half of the 20th century, we used mainly the works of Jacobus X. (1898, writing as "A French

Army-Surgeon”) and Annick Guénel (1997). For the Vietnam War period, a major resource was *Saigon After Dark* by Philip Marnais (1967). We emphasize that neither Jacobus X. nor Philip Marnais are acknowledged anthropologists or ethnologists. Although their writings are quite sensationalistic and written from the point of view of a so-called ethnoerotologist and an American journalist, respectively, the facts they provide are regarded as reliable, even if they reveal more about the colonial fantasies and fears connected with “alien” sexuality, than they do about the perception and feelings of the native Vietnamese. Last but not least, Professor Frank Proschan of Indiana University, an expert on Vietnamese culture at the Folklore Institute, provided us not only with his own findings, but also books and articles about other subjects only available in Vietnam. We cannot stress the fact enough that without him we would not have been able to include reliable information about the Vietnamese homosexual culture. Additional information, as well as confirmation, was acquired by interviewing Vietnamese students at Indiana University and the Kinsey Institute and author Robert Taylor (1997), who served as an officer in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War.

A. Character of Gender Roles

Reality and Fantasy

The character of Vietnamese gender roles reflects the over 2,000-year influence of Confucianism, which is still the most important single influence on gender roles. Vietnamese women were comparably less degraded by the “three submissions” (to father, husband, and eldest son) and the four virtues (skill with her hands, an agreeable appearance, prudence in speech, and exemplary conduct) than women in China (see Section 2, Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality). Gender roles in Vietnam are changing rapidly, though with different speeds in different social layers. Although men are still more visible in society, it is not necessarily a sign of their also having more power. Far from a clear picture, the one sure statement is that Vietnamese gender roles are loaded with contradictions.

There is still a continuity of Vietnamese ideas of the power of women within the household (“the general of the interior”), and the way in which state socialism splits men and women. For example, the Peasant Union represents men and the Women’s Union only women, thereby encouraging a popular public view that women are not farmers and need not be directly involved in economic change, although up to 80% of the field work is done by them. Also, the psychological dimensions of male-female relationships within the family and community are unrepresented and unidentified in the State bureaucracy, and new contradictions begin to emerge between the power of women in the family and culture and their empowerment by the state. As Wazir Jahan Karim observed in 1995, “This seems to be a repeat of a typical Southeast Asian model of change and development: that women continue to experience contradictory statements of their usefulness and power, and that the public view usually contradicts the popular.”

Unlike the prevalence of male domination in neighboring cultures, the earliest legend about the founding of Vietnam claims equality among the spouses. The mythic founders of Vietnam were a couple, Au Co, the wife, and Lac Long Quan, the husband. The husband was a dragon, suited to live on the coastal plains; the wife was a fairy who wanted to live in the mountains. As they agreed to part, 50 sons followed their mother and governed the northern part of Vietnam, while 50 sons followed their father and reigned over the kingdom bordering the South China Sea. Before separating, they pledged mutual respect and aid in time of crisis.

Vietnamese folklore, female Buddhas, goddesses, and proverbs seem to show that Vietnamese women have some influence in society. Goddesses commonly presided over the cultivation of rice and other food crops. Streets and districts are named after female cult heroes, such as the Trung sisters (40 C.E.), who led a revolt of independence, and Trieu Thi Trinh, who took up a similar warrior role in the 3rd century. She is described as nine feet tall, with three-foot-long breasts and a voice like a temple bell, able to eat a bushel of rice and walk 1,500 miles (2,400 km) in a single day. Vietnamese nationalists have also resurrected the poetry of Ho Xuan Huong, a female poet who was critical of gender inequality more than 50 years before French colonization.

[*Update 2003*: In a recent analysis of “Romantic Love and Gender Hegemony in Vietnam,” Alexander Soucy (2000) argues that the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has not been very successful in its effort to achieve gender equality. While the government has rejected the patriarchal Confucian dictates of the three submissions and four virtues of women, young Vietnamese women continue to be subservient to men. In Soucy’s view, the ideal of romantic love, as disseminated through the popular mass media, is a new form reinforcing old structures of gender hegemony (Soucy 2000). (*End of update by J. Pastoetter*)]

Gender and Economic Control

Nearly all the country’s market stalls today are run by women. Though they are more often small merchants, it is interesting that the richest private capitalist in Vietnam today is also a woman. Not only do women form the overwhelming majority of all active merchants in the country, they constitute the majority of the customers as well. As O’Harrow (1995) points out, in spite of the male role of provider, which is implicit in the Confucian paradigm, Vietnamese mothers raise their daughters to understand, if not explicitly, then by example, that they should always have their own money and cannot depend on men.

The most commonly acquired commodity for this kind of female protective investment is jewelry, preferably in unalloyed gold or with recognizable gems. Young girls quietly watch their mother’s elaborate systems of boxes, jars, purses, hidden floor boards, and furtive containers of every kind and dimension, never opened in the father’s presence. They observe and learn. The extraordinary interest Vietnamese women appear to take in jewelry is commonly misunderstood by outsiders as simple vanity. But in fact, the precious contents are considered the mother’s property and will stay with her should she leave.

Relationships Between (Married) Women and Men

According to O’Harrow (1995), the polite term for a wife is *noi tro* (“interior helper”), the common, not-so-polite epithet is *Noi Ttoug* or “general of the interior.” The women of Ha Dong, in particular, have a reputation for being fierce spouses that has gained them the nickname of *Su Tu Ha Dong* or “Ha Dong Lionesses.” It is said about their husbands that they belong to a very ancient club, the *Hoi So Vo* or “Society of Men Who Fear Their Wives.” Folk humor aside, it is a strategy to survive that motivates women to gain control of the family finances. Because the wife is, in fact, the backbone of the family, many families get into deep trouble or even break up when the wife/mother dies. The social system in Southeast Asia is based on a system of moral debts and balances. The relationship between (married) women and men is not one between two individuals, but between two life projects which depend on one another. Break one side away and the whole system crumbles.

Contrary to Western notions, where feelings of guilt support freedom before marriage but faithfulness afterwards, in societies where shame and the notion of virgin marriage is operative, extramarital affairs outnumber premarital ones. If a Vietnamese woman takes a lover and can keep the fact secret and so avoid shame, she can maintain an upper hand. The man, on the other hand, while much less bound by problems of public shame for having a girlfriend, is more likely to be worried about surrendering self-control and so losing his face. As O'Harrow (1995) points out, Vietnamese women seldom have male friends, *per se*, because they have very few social mechanisms for dealing with men on an equal footing. Men are always patrons or clients, fathers, sons, husbands, or lovers. A wife deals with her husband with the same mechanisms that a mother uses to deal with her son, and a lover is usually treated as a daughter treats her father. So one can understand why tales of female sexual insatiability also attach to the Ha Dong lioness myth: It is the woman who controls the man, and he is the one who loses face.

Relationships Between (Unmarried) Women and Men

It seems that at least in the urban centers of Vietnam, women are behaving in quite the same way as in the Western world: They have boyfriends and have sexual intercourse with them, but they are still anxious to pretend that the current boyfriend is the first and only one. Over 95% of the 279 unmarried women in the Hanoi sample of Bélanger and Hong (1998) had a boyfriend at the time of the survey, and they defined a boyfriend as a male friend with whom they had a committed relationship, and in most cases, a person with whom they had sexual intercourse. Once dating was initiated, one third of the women had had their first sexual experience in less than a year. After a year, two thirds had had sexual intercourse. The average duration between the two events was about 15 months. Most of the women did not engage in sex unless they knew their boyfriend for some time. Nevertheless, all the women but one said that their boyfriend took the initiative to engage in sexual relations. It was also not possible for them to introduce the subject of birth control, or to reveal that they had boyfriends before him. The women were afraid that, if they revealed their previous experiences to their current boyfriends, they might lose his respect and thus damage the relationship. They may obtain an abortion if they do not want to marry him (at least at the moment).

Proper Work for Women

According to the Confucian cultural norms, women in pre-revolutionary Vietnam were supposed to have little or no authority in any sphere—political, economic, educational, or familial. There were no women in the “council of notables” that governed the village, nor were they part of the village political community that met in the communal hall. Because a woman was always incorporated within a family and subject to male authority within the family, a woman's economic management and enterprise was always subject to male control and therefore not “real” authority.

Under Communist rule a new social role for women in the countryside has opened up: *co giao*, “Miss Teacher,” who teaches her pupils norms and behaviors, which may conflict with those of the parents. Vietnamese studies cite with approval cases where rural students admonish their parents on the grounds that “Miss Teacher would not like it,” “it” being, for example, not boiling water before drinking, or quarreling. However, women's present leading role in primary-level education, as well as in health, is conceptualized as an extension of women's traditional role in the family: teaching children and caring for the sick.

As Pelzer White (1987) further points out, women are seen as making good cooperative accountants only as an extension of their traditional role as the keeper of the household budget. On the other hand, young men would never be allowed to train for careers as caretakers of very young children and infants. Only during the war was there a policy, expressed in a 1967 law, to promote women to leading positions in the countryside. The percentage of women acting as cooperative chairmen and other management posts shot up. After demobilization, however, the roles changed again. Even today, women face hostility from their husbands, and especially from their mother-in-laws, if they have higher status jobs.

The “New” Vietnamese Middle-Class Woman

As Fahey (1998) observed, over the past ten years, Vietnam has witnessed a dramatic change in the images of women. The globalization process has drawn many urban women into the commercial sphere, as consumers of products as well as models with which to advertise products.

Nevertheless, the images of the women visible in the streets remain contradictory. The communist ideal for women was equality with men, to be achieved through the demise of private property and women's domestic role. Interestingly, women were also highly praised by the Communist Party as freedom fighters and war heroes; however, they are underrepresented in the political hierarchy. Female members of the National Assembly and of the Vietnamese Communist Central Committee do exist, but they represent an infinitesimal portion of the whole, and exercise almost no real decision-making power. The Politburo has never had a female member, and the female representation in the National Assembly began to decline immediately after the war, from 27% in 1976, to 22% in 1981, and to 18% in 1987 (Fahey 1998). By 1992, the proportion had increased only marginally, but it was expected to decline as the quota that required proportional female representation of 18% was eliminated before the last election. Such data suggest that the recent changes in women's position may have less to do with economic renovation as such, and more to do with restoration of certain aspects of pre-war gender practices. However, as Vietnamese women told Fahey (1998), they regard the decline in representation as irrelevant, because the National Assembly is losing authority and ambitious women can use their time more productively in private enterprise.

On the other hand, Vietnamese women are flooded with more and more Western images of how up-to-date women live. Beauty contests, fashion clubs, and magazines exert the strongest influence. Fahey (1998) reported that fashion clubs appeared in the early 1990s, with members including fashion designers, models, and companies eager to establish a fashion industry. The first modeling agency, CATD, begun by a young overseas Vietnamese woman, was licensed in Vietnam in 1995. Vietnam now has two locally produced fashion magazines: one for women in general (*Thoi Trang*) and the other for younger women (*Thoi Trang Tre*). Another magazine called *Thoi Trang Dien Anh* [*Movie Fashion*] reproduces sections from international fashion magazines, including French and American fashions, and appears to be more popular in the South. These magazines also have small sections for men, perhaps indicating that the commercialization of beauty is not entirely limited to women. Most newspapers now have a women's section that covers topics from how to pluck eyebrows to Japanese-sponsored parades.

A popular activity for middle-class women, especially those with substantial independent incomes, is attending the gym before work. The membership fee is about US\$10 per month or 5 to 10% of these women's monthly income.

Interviews with these women reveal that they attend them both for social interaction and to improve their body shape. Although they are conscious of maintaining a shapely body, and coyly admit this, they inevitably refer to both inner and outer beauty when asked open-ended questions about the definition of a beautiful woman.

The Male Gender Image

Proschan (1998) observed that traditional Vietnamese society was strongly shaped by Neo-Confucian conceptions and practices of ancestral veneration and filial responsibility (*hieu*):

A man's most important duty is to reproduce a male child to carry on the ancestral line: "The Annamite* loathes dying without being assured of male dependants. One can say that there exists a veritable obligation, of the religious or at least mystical order, to give birth as early as possible to the cult's heir" (Khèrian 1937, 29). Ethnologist Nguyen Van Huyen noted in 1939 that "male celibacy is always in complete disfavor. It continues to be considered as an act of filial impiety," with bachelors prohibited from participating in certain family and village rituals (Nguyen Van Huyen 1944/1939, 41). The tenacity of this traditional stricture is evident from current census data: of Vietnamese males over the age of 40, barely 1% has never married (Vietnam Population Census 1989).

That Vietnamese men are as imbued with the work ethic as are the women can be attested to by any observer of the economic activity of the Vietnamese refugee communities in the West, where Vietnamese men commonly hold two or sometimes three jobs at a time to support their families. But the popular notion persists, commonly abetted by male authors, such as the 19th-century libertine and poet, Tran Te Xuong (1890), that the height of machismo is not some Mediterranean predilection to physical abuse of women, but rather a gentlemanly idleness at their expense: "Drink and gamble 'til you're in over your head, but even if you are out of money, your kid's mother is still out there selling her wares."

It is interesting to note that during the Vietnam War, men envied the American soldiers. Vietnamese men have little or no body hair, but hairiness is regarded as a strong symbol of masculinity. It seems to have put men into a state of constant humiliation to watch hairy GIs being admired by Vietnamese women. The body image of men was changing a lot in the 1990s. The bodybuilding industry began to boom. Today, street posters of bodybuilders, often with Western faces, advertise gymnasiums; national competitions are held; and magazines are available for those who wish to know more. The body shape acquired by bodybuilders is significantly different from that of the majority of Vietnamese men, and there appears to be no precedent for such a practice. As to how Vietnamese men will be able to deal with this strong influence, and how it will change their attitudes toward their bodies are important questions.

B. Sociolegal Status of Males and Females

Children and Adolescents

Over 100 years ago, Jacobus X. (1898), whose observations as "A French Army-Surgeon" are regarded as quite reliable "although embed with racist and colonialist attitudes of superiority" (Proschan letter 2000), observed that children were breastfed until they were 3 or 4 years old if a boy; and even longer if it was a girl. When the Vietnamese child could

walk alone, he was allowed to run free, almost or quite naked, or roll in the dust, or wallow in the mire. After he was 12, he wore a ragged pair of pants and an old coat, the cast-off garments of his father, and then went to work, minding the buffaloes, helping his parents cultivate the rice field, or steering the sampan or junk. Children born to concubines had the same rights as the children of the legitimate wife. There was no distinction between "natural" and "adulterine" children in Cochin China. Girls and boys mingled promiscuously, "with the result that might be expected. That is why it is rare to find an Annamite girl, of more than ten years of age, a virgin." But that was 100 years ago.

Adults

Although the Vietnamese adopted the Confucian principle of male superiority, they still granted women some rights. Except for some restrictions concerning properties reserved for ancestor worship, daughters shared in the inheritance of parental properties on the same basis as their brothers. Divorced women and widows who remarried after their husband's death remained the owners of properties acquired during their marriage (*Le Code*, Codex Juris, Articles 388, 374, 375, 376; Nguyen & Ta 1987).

The full and complete equality of Vietnamese women was enshrined in the first Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam of 1946: "Women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres." The 1980 Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women in all respects, although a resolution passed by the Council of Ministers in December 1984 highlighted problems involved in promoting female status. Women are still a minority at the executive level. On the other hand, Vietnam has an official matriarchal heritage.

C. General Concepts of Sexuality and Love

Grammar makes clear how important marriage is in Vietnamese society. Proschan (1998) provides this example: "When Vietnamese ask one another about their marital status they do not ask 'Are you married?' but 'Have you married yet?' A proper response is not a yes-or-no answer but the answer 'Already' or 'Not yet'." Although the minimum legal age at marriage is 18 years for women, postponing marriage until age 22 is strongly recommended. Up to and through the French Colonial period, Vietnamese women were not regarded as nubile until about their 16th or 17th year. However, according to the *Ly-Ky* [*The Book of Rites*], girls might marry after 14 years and men at 16. Any marriages prior to those ages were not accepted.

According to Proschan (1998), if men feared that marriage might complicate their lives, they tried to find a girl who did not see in them as the focus of her desires and demands. In fact, many Vietnamese men believed that women were perfectly satisfied with something like a companionate marriage, which involved sufficient ardor to produce offspring, but was not complicated by passionate desire. A hundred years earlier, Jacobus X. (1898) confirmed this rather unromantic view of marriage:

Marriage is for the Annamite a question of business and the procreation of descendants, rather than of sentimental love. On her side, the woman has not generally a very great affection for her husband, but concentrates all her love on her children.

Proschan (1998) writes that before colonial and revolutionary legal reforms made monogamy the only acceptable form of marriage, polygamy (specifically, polygyny) had been equally legitimate. When polygyny lost its legal sanction, it nevertheless continued outside the law, and women in polygynous relationships lost the protections

*Annamite(s) is the term used for the Vietnamese during the periods of the Kingdom and French Protectorate.

and rights that the older legal codes had afforded their predecessors—i.e., those of second wives or concubines. Indications are that extramarital heterosexual relations were frequent enough among married men that most people—male or female—assumed that they were the norm. There were numerous available partners—female or male—for men whose wives “fail[ed] to provide proper attention and stimulation” (Khuat Thu Hong 1998), as one researcher characterized the common rationale.

2. Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality

A. Source and Character of Religious Values

Religious and Social Factors Present in Vietnam

The traditional Vietnamese religion includes elements of Hinduism and all three Chinese religions: Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Although Confucianism (i.e., Neo-Confucianism in its rather value-conservative form) is without doubt the most influential and deeply rooted of these influences, to say that the Vietnamese are “Confucian” is to oversimplify their social and personal realities. The most widespread feature of Vietnamese Confucianism is the cult of ancestors, practiced in individual households and clan temples. As such, it is strongly tied to folk religion.

There is also a wide variety of Buddhist sects, sects belonging to the “new” religions of Cadoism and Hoa Hao, and the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. The number of Christian adherents in 1991 constituted an estimated 7% of the total population: 180,000 Protestants and five million Roman Catholics. The Catholic Church has been active in Vietnam since the 17th century, and since 1933 has been led mainly by Vietnamese priests. The number of Muslims is estimated at 50,000.

While the Vietnamese government guarantees freedom of religion, other factors influencing (and changing) the character of social values can be observed in communist ideology and Western ideas. The latter, first introduced during the French occupation followed by the Vietnam War, has been given fresh impetus since 1986 through *doi moi* economic reforms.

Ancestor Worship

Ancestor worship, which originated with Confucianism, holds that the soul of the dead person does disappear from sight but stays around to look after the family. Emperors and kings built imperial temples where they worshipped the late emperors whose achievements and exploits were recorded on ancestral tablets and steles. Wealthy people have their family temples for the whole family to worship their ancestors. Poor people, who have no temple of their own, set up an altar in the best part of their home to show gratitude and respect for their ancestors. Because of the war, which produced a serious shortage of dwelling places, most houses are now too small, and very few family temples or permanent ancestors' altars can be set up.

It is the responsibility of the eldest son to take care of the various anniversaries during the year. For this, he receives income from a number of rice fields or land as a hereditary state. The eldest son records the ancestor's date of death in a family register.

On the day of the anniversary, the chief of the family, properly attired, stands solemnly before the altar, with three sticks of incense in his hands, held to the level of his forehead, and says the pseudonym, the real name, and the date of death, and invites the ancestor to the feast. At the same time, he will pray to the dead to protect the members of his

family. Various dishes have to be prepared for display before the altar on each ancestor's anniversary.

Nowadays, probably 70% of the Vietnamese are followers of ancestor worship.

Buddhism

The origins of Buddhism in Vietnam can be traced to the 2nd century. For the Buddhist, life is seen as a vast sea of suffering. Wisdom lies in the suppression of desires: desires for life, happiness, riches, power, and so on, which are believed to be the roots of human suffering. The very essence of Buddhism is the Law of Karma, which states that man is reincarnated and rewarded in the next life for his good deeds in this life, and punished for his bad ones. The present existence is conditioned by earlier existence and will condition those to follow. Desire must first be overcome; a pure heart is necessary to break the chains binding man to his earthly existence.

In 1920, an organized movement for the restoration of Buddhism began throughout the country. Starting in 1931, Associations of Buddhist Studies were established in the South, the Center, and North Vietnam. Many translations of both Greater and Lesser Vehicle Buddhist Texts were distributed. Finally, after many assemblies of monks and National Delegate Congresses, the Buddhist Institute for the Propagation of the Faith, the *Viean Houa Naio*, was established.

The most important Buddhist sect is Cadoism. Formally inaugurated in 1926, this syncretic religion is based on spiritualist séances with a predominantly ethical content, but sometimes with political overtones. Several other sects exist, like the Tien Thien and the Tay Ninh. It is estimated that these Buddhist sects have two million adherents. Another influential sect is Hoa Hao. Founded in 1939, it has one and a half million adherents.

Through Buddhist-nun monasteries, Buddhism exerted a strong influence for the equality of men and women. Although the monasteries were skeptically regarded by the Confucianist elite—one of the common defamations being that the nuns were involved in lesbian sexual practices—Buddhism gave women another role model besides that of wife and mother. This was especially true for elderly widows who were entering Buddhist orders. On the other hand, their influence on the priesthood seems to be difficult to detect.

Daoism

Vietnamese Daoism, derived from the doctrine of Lao Tzu, is based essentially on the participation of man in the universal order. This order depends on the equilibrium of the two elements Yin and Yang, which represent the constant duality of nature: rest and motion, liquid and solid, light and darkness, concentration and expansion, and material and spiritual. The material world being imbued with these two principles, the Daoist believes that whoever is able to act according to these principles could become the master of the world. This belief, in turn, has promoted a kind of mysticism, reflected in the magical practices of certain sorcerers who claim to possess the secret of the universe.

The Daoist refrains from troubling the natural order of things; on the contrary, he conforms to it in every circumstance. He considers the taking of initiatives to be a waste of time and energy. In respecting the basic Daoist doctrines of passivity and absence of care, he avoids the active life. These doctrines, which were adopted by many Confucian scholars as well, are summed up in the Daoist maxim: “Do nothing and everything will be accomplished simultaneously.” The supreme divinity of Daoism is the Emperor of Jade. With his ministers of Death and Birth, he controls the destiny of men. The cult is replete with incantations, charms, and amulets,

which once were made for prosperous trade, with the sorcerers intervening in every possible occasion in life.

In the context of sexuality, *yang* is identified with semen or seminal essence (*jing, yin*), which is why Daoists are encouraged to have intercourse often, but without ejaculating. The aim is to build up *jing* but retain *yang* through not ejaculating, but at the same time enabling the woman to reach orgasm and give off her *yin* essence, which additionally strengthens the man. Another Daoist practice is to get a young man and woman together and to gather up their sexual secretions and swallow them—a practice that is believed to prolong life for the Daoist. Jacobus X. (1898) reported that it was still very common at the end of the 1800s, although he did put it strongly as a “strange freak of eroticism”:

The old Celadon is accompanied by a servant or strong coolie, who copulates with a woman in his presence, and then retires . . . When once the agent is retired, well and duly paid, the old debauchee is left alone with the woman, who is still resting upon the field of battle. Then the man approaches, and eagerly receives in *bucca sua*, the liquid which runs *ex vulva feminae*.

Confucianism

Confucianism, a generic Western term, is a *Weltanschauung*, i.e., a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life, but it is not an organized religion. Chinese governors introduced Confucianism to Vietnam from 939 to 1407. The doctrine of Confucius is set forth in four classical texts and in five canonical books. By rigid rules, it determines the attitude that every man in society should adopt to guide his relationships as an individual with his superiors, with his wife and friends, and with his inferiors. The philosophy suggests a moral code, which advocates the Middle Way for the worthy man's behavior. According to Mencius, the most distinguished disciple of Confucius, man is inherently good. To preserve his goodness, he needs to check his passions. The wise man improves himself through study; he knows himself and is the master of his passions.

There are four rules for a man to achieve self-perfection: to cultivate himself, to run his family, to rule the country, and pacify the world. The three important sets of social interaction are between king and citizen, between father and son (*hieu*—filial piety or responsibility), and between husband and wife. Five cardinal virtues have to be achieved in order to become a man of virtue: humanity, equity, urbanity, intelligence, and honesty. As for the woman, Confucius teaches four virtues: skill with her hands, agreeable appearance, prudence in speech, and exemplary conduct, and three submissions or obediences: to the father until she is married, to the husband after she leaves her parents' house, and to the eldest son when her husband dies. Interestingly, the real order as seen by most Vietnamese, and also by the French, is a different one: the Vietnamese woman was inferior to her father but just about equal to her husband, provisionally superior to her minor brothers, and always superior to her sons.

In sexual matters, Confucianism is quite “puritanic.” A “good” young girl is not only expected to keep her virginity until she gets married and to get married only once in her life, she is not supposed to make herself attractive, even to her own husband. Confucianism does not consider sexual activity as wrong, but love and tenderness are treated with mistrust, and physical displays of them are considered at least questionable. This rule applies not only to showing affection in public, but also to its display in the privacy of the home. As early as in the 17th century, male and female poets protested against it.

“Popular Religion”

As Thien Do (1997) showed, there exists also a very specific Vietnamese “popular religion” characterized by the propitiation of spirits and deities of a certain typology:

1. The tutelary or guardian spirits, either originally worshipped by the villagers or historically instituted by Vietnamese or Chinese rulers. They include the nation-founding patriarch, past male and female heroes, and able ministers;
2. The nature spirits of the grottos, rocks, and trees, and rivers and oceans;
3. Immortals (*tien*) and holy sages (*thanh*), in the Daoist tradition, together with Lady Lieu Hanh and her affiliates, including the Mandarin Snakes and the Five Tigers (Agents), forming the *chu vi* (divine ensemble) in the belief systems of sorcerers and mediums;
4. Deities of Cham and Khmer origin, such as Po Yan Inu Nagar, the Whale Spirit, and the Neak Ta (Ong Ta); and
5. Consecrated to a lesser extent are founding patriarchs of the arts and crafts (including the martial arts), the domestic deities, marginal demonic spirits, and lonely ghosts.

The places of veneration and features of spiritual practices are divided between the village communal house or *dinh*, where local participants emulate the court elite in Daoist-Confucian formats, the private Buddhist-Daoist temple or *chua*, where a three-religion pattern of Chinese origin has been practiced and modified to suit Vietnamese adherents, the trance mediumship, with the special importance of the Earth God and of female deities, and finally the practice of self-cultivation, mainly practiced by Daoists (*ong dao*).

Of importance for gender images is the fact that many of the Vietnamese deities were thought of as female and sometimes even worshipped exclusively by women. This behavior has not stopped with communism or *doi moi*. Since the late 1980s, village pagodas have undergone a frenzy of refurbishment. As Stephanie Fahey (1998) reports, in a pagoda in a village near Hanoi, a local woman pharmacist of 200 years ago is revered for the birth of the prosperous traditional craft of pharmaceutical production, and a temple on West Lake features Ba Chua Lieu, supposedly a princess who developed a prosperous silk industry. The young, as well as the prosperous, patronize these pagodas to implore the appropriate female deities with such different petitions as economic success and the birth of a son. It seems that with the demise of the Communist moral code, the Vietnamese are searching their past for more-traditional values.

Among the religions in Vietnam, the “Popular Religion” seems to be the most liberal in sexual aspects. Khuat Thu Hong (1998) presents dozens of examples that show this liberal attitude from ancient times to the present. Lingam and yoni worship is the most obvious. But there is also the worship of the god No Nuong (*No* meaning a bamboo phallus, and *Nuong*, a vulva, made of a spathe from an areca tree). This worship centers on the ritual striking together of these genital symbols by the village head and deputy village head, while the young boys and girls called out, *tung tung, dap* (onomatopoeia of a drumbeat in Vietnamese) according to the beat. There is also the game of grabbing eels from a jar: In this game, each team of a young man and a woman observed the following rule: While trying to catch the eel in the jar, neither the young man nor the woman could look into the jar, and the young man had to keep one hand on the young woman's breast. At the same time, a committee of judges closely watched, along with fellow villagers who called out and teased them.

Communism

Communist ideology expects all men to behave according to the principles of a “new society” founded on a Marxist-Leninist base. Regarding gender issues, it implies equality of men and women. Because Engels depicted traditional childrearing practices as the main impediment for achieving gender equality, communist societies tended to socialize childcare and education to enable women to work for the society as men do. The institutions of marriage and the family were considered to be the key to the reproduction of social inequality, because the practices that evolve within these institutions obviously preserved the underlying system of private property and its inheritance. Thus, communist thought was suspicious of devotion to family and treated this as “unsocialist” in a man, especially a Party member. In its first two decades, the Communist government in Vietnam made specific efforts to destroy all Confucian traces in Vietnamese society. To break the strong ties binding members of Vietnamese families that had been molded by Confucian principles, the Communists even encouraged betrayal among family members. Over the years, the anti-Confucian policy has changed Vietnamese family structure considerably. The government has acquired most of the authority and influence attributed to Confucian scholars, especially regarding questions of sexual morality and behavior.

Interestingly, communist gender ideas changed dramatically during the war with the South and after the reunification. The typical functionary now clearly resembled the ideal authoritarian Confucian gentlemen. Women are supposed to care for the family and especially the husband. The few state-honored female revolutionists and freedom fighters fell into oblivion.

At the same time, it was the Communist government that set up the Central Committee for Mother and Infant Welfare in 1971. The committee’s responsibility was to guide and unify the organization of *crèches* (day nurseries). About one third of all children were raised in such facilities. Further support was given to women to separate themselves from domestic duties according to the 1980 State Constitution, Article 63, requiring the state and society to ensure the development of maternity homes, *crèches*, kindergartens, community dining halls, and other social amenities to create favorable conditions for women to work, study, and rest. Even men were asked to share household tasks. But these efforts remained rather at cultural and ideological levels. Vietnamese Communists were keen to maintain the family as a social, but not necessarily an economic unit. For that reason, they argued that it was necessary for women to handle both employment and domestic duties.

Communism brought improvement for women by reducing early forced marriages, publicly condemning wife-beating, providing free childcare, and recognizing the economic value of housework. Legislation, together with women’s prolonged contribution to the war effort, assisted in dismantling the absolute authority of the Confucian “three submissions.” But with *doi moi*, it seems that the Communist Party has withdrawn from social engineering. Membership figures indicate that the Party is losing women’s support, with a drop in membership from 34% women in 1960 to only 16% today. Most women enjoy the rediscovered freedom of wearing nice and individual clothes and putting on makeup. In the heydays of Communist rule, these fashions were badly received, as this newspaper excerpt shows:

You young people, I know you need make-up to be beautiful . . . but you should also keep the Vietnamese manner; simplicity, purity and wholesomeness are beauty. It is advisable not to imitate the alien “styles” imported from the

European capitalist countries, and you see, these styles could really reflect only the lowly liking and crazy, care-free and pessimistic moods. A girl living in such a wholesome social situation as you are in now is advised not to wear such a queer and carefree hairstyle. And such thin, tight and revealing clothes as you are wearing now, in our North, all the decent, cultured women have never cared to wear. (*Vietnamese Woman* No. 293, May 1972, 6)

War and the Influence of Western Civilization

In the northern areas controlled by the non-Communist side prior to 1975, the authorities did not carry out a policy systematically hostile to Confucianism. But disruption of the old social framework because of war, which forced people to abandon their villages for urban areas, as well as the impact of new living conditions and broader contact with Western civilization, also loosened traditional family ties. Children became more independent from their parents and the former strict obedience to the elders diminished.

Since 1986, the same changes were occurring in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam because of the influence of the official policy of a free-market economy. The ideals of consuming and having fun through buying goods are especially attractive to the younger generation, which is also the vast majority of the Vietnamese, 80% of whom are under 40 years of age. Pelzer White (1993) concluded that the beauty contests and calendars now sanctioned by the Communist state as a signal to the international business community that Vietnam is open for business, also convey a visual message supporting social change.

B. Character of Ethnic Values

The Concept of “Phuc Duc”

The single most specific Vietnamese concept that exerts influence on the gender roles of men and women seems to be the concept of *phuc duc* or “merit-virtue,” a kind of karma concept. It refers to the merit that, in a former life, oneself and/or an ancestor acquired through virtuous deeds that is then passed on to succeeding generations, and the merit that a member of the present generation passes to future generations as yet unborn. It is “quantifiable,” as in “a lot of *phuc duc*.”

Based on the manner in which one lives one’s life, it can be an evil force (*vo phuc*) as well as a benevolent one. It is considered influential over a span of five generations. Thus, the nature of one’s *phuc duc*, together with the horoscope and geomancy, which reads the composition of *am* (*yin*) and *dong* (*yang*) in the earth, determines the course of life. The individual can exert only a limited personal influence. The definition of what is regarded as a virtuous life follows the Buddhist-Confucian code. The specific Vietnamese interpretation goes back at least to the 15th century and can be found in the poem, *Gia Huan Ca*. It is interesting to note that the primary determinant is not the act itself, but the motivation beneath the act.

Slote (1998) presented an example of how *phuc duc* works with *Kieu*, the hero in the epic poem, *Kim Van Kieu*:

She is a girl of particular charm, beauty, accomplishment, and morality, who sells herself as a minor wife to an unscrupulous scholar in order to redeem her father who has been beset by ill fortune. The scholar, a man devoid of virtue, turns out to be the husband of the madame of a brothel and Kieu is forced into prostitution. Under these circumstances, Kieu’s sacrificial act brings much *phuc duc*. On the other hand, were she to have become a prostitute for profit alone, she would have been condemned, her family would have suffered, and future generations would have borne the penalties. In a parallel sense Kieu’s misfortune

inasmuch as her life had been thoroughly virtuous, could be ascribed to bad *phuc duc* visited upon her because of transgressions of some ancestor.

Coupled with the nature of the motivation that serves to precipitate the act is the issue of sacrifice. An act that is performed easily brings far less reward than an equivalent action that is difficult and involves suffering. Since it was very difficult to bear the life in a brothel for Kieu, she was finally reunited with the man she loved, to whom she had originally been betrothed.

Based on the belief that “merit virtue is caused by the maternal,” women can create destiny. Deserving women of good conduct bring felicity to their descendants, just as tragedy, poverty, and other incidents of bad fortune can be blamed on one’s wife, mother, or grandmother. So important was (and still is) this concept, that although the wealth and status of a bride’s family matters, it is secondary to her *phuc duc*. A poor but virtuous woman of good heritage and blessed at birth by the heavens, who would increase the family’s fortune and ultimate destiny, would be a most desirable bride. And when a marriage is arranged between a poor but virtuous girl and the son of a wealthy family, the girl’s family also usually benefits. To a great extent, *phuc duc* has been influential in making the class system less stringent than in other cultures.

With the responsibility of acquiring *phuc duc*, a double standard has been created: Men, if they chose, were relatively free to act in ways that are scarcely designed to build *phuc duc*. Examples are gambling, cheating, and whoring. On the other hand, there were also the elderly men referred to as living saints, a position that carried great esteem because it contributes to the building of *phuc duc* for the family. As Slote (1998) observed, the very concept of *phuc duc* may lead to manipulation, because it can be used as a metaphor in the service of many emotions: hostility, competitiveness, defiance, self-sacrifice, guilt, and control. It is also a justification when all else fails, when the children misbehave, or when one is beset by misfortune.

Astrology and the Influence of the “Thay Boi”

Another very strong influence on sexual behavior is the belief that the specific constellation of stars at the time of one’s birth can reveal one’s destiny. The *thay boi* (the mostly female fortune teller) is the first resource to consult if something goes wrong. A good example of *thay boi* influence is the following statement of a 30-year-old transvestite (Bao, Long, & Taylor 1998, 20):

In my childhood when my father was alive, he forced me to wear shorts, but I did not and he fought me. My mother resorted to the fortune teller and knew that was my fate. It means that she must have such a child, no one expected that. My father who was a government officer felt shy and did not agree and said “the male should be male and the female should be female.” My mother could not stand it and said to my father you could not fight me any more. If you fight him I will leave. She said to my father you can not prevent him from that and finally he accepted me. I have always been like this when I was growing up. All my relatives did not accept me. I think that is my fate. What problems I suffer because I can’t wear male clothes. I only wanted to be a girl.

One might suggest that the astrologer seems to be as important for Vietnamese society as sex therapists, psychologists, and marriage counselors are for Western societies. Even today, nearly two thirds of the couples in the south and (because of the stronger influence of communism in the north) a smaller part in the north have their horoscopes

matched before marriage (Goodkind 1996). Since geomancy is believed to reveal if the location of one’s house is the reason for quarreling in the family or even for sterility, asking a geomancer is also regarded as helpful. According to Young (1998), the third precise way to measure the energy believed to cause change in the fortune of any individual is to study the shape of the person’s face. Although it cannot be changed by reading the face of others, one gains intimate knowledge about them.

Alteration of the Genitals

Khuat Thu Hong (1998) mentions that some men, especially male prostitutes, are undergoing the surgery of “putting pellets” (small, metal balls—usually two or three at a time, but some men have as many as nine or ten) or “swords” (the sword-like plastic pieces are punched through the penis) into their penis. The men argue that the altered penis creates special pleasure for women.

3. Knowledge and Education about Sexuality

Although Vietnam can be regarded as a fairly liberal society when it comes to sexual behavior, talking or writing about sexuality is a totally different matter. Vietnam never produced sex education books like the Indian *Kama Sutra* or the Chinese and Japanese pillow books. Most young people get married without the least elementary knowledge, as a collection of interviews in Khuat Thu Hong’s (1998) book shows:

On our wedding night, neither of us knew anything—meaning that we slept together as friends. We even tried to do something, but we didn’t know what we were doing (born 1959).

On my wedding day, I didn’t understand why when we slept with another, one person laid atop another. . . . I thought we were only supposed to lie side by side (born 1957).

After 1950, a few books on sexuality and sex education were published. Most prominent was Dr. Nguyen Manh Bong’s book, *What Lovers Should Know*, published by Huong Son Publishers in Hanoi in 1949. Similar publications appeared in the south of Vietnam during the succeeding years. In 1970, one Saigon newspaper ran a column called “Replying to Your Questions on Sexuality,” which was written by two psychologists. In the North, prior to *doi moi*, there were almost no publications on sexuality. In the 1970s, the sole publication on sex education was *Girl’s Hygiene*, which included quite sketchy information on female sexual organs, menstruation, and how to maintain personal hygiene. In 1988, David Reuben’s book, *Answering Those Questions You Don’t Dare Ask*, was translated from English and attracted much attention, but was banned from official circulation until 1989. Other books were translated from German, including Rudolf Neubert’s *Marital Relations*, published in 1989. In 1991, David Elia and Genevieve Doucet’s book, *1000 Questions and Answers About Women and Their Bodies*, was translated from French and published in Vietnam.

In recent years, many books by Vietnamese on sex and sexuality have begun to appear in bookstores. Ho Ngoc Dai’s 1991 book, *Chuyen Ay [That Conversation]*, which talked about sexuality within a philosophical and psychological framework, drew much attention. Books based on scientific knowledge are more common and include Doan Van Thong’s book, *Nhung Thac Mac Tham kin Cua Ban Tre [The Secret Questions of Young Friends]* published by Tien

Giang Publishers in 1991, and Minh Phuong's book, *Hoi Dap ve Gioi Tinh va Tinh Duc* [*Questions and Answers about Sex and Sexuality*], edited by Dr. Le Van Tri, published by Medical Publishers in 1995. Psychologist Dr. Pham Con Son has also written about love, sexuality, marriage, and family in books such as *Nhung Thu Dich Cua Hanh Phuc Lua Doi* [*The Foes of a Couple's Happiness*], published by Dong Thap Publishers in 1996. The Research Center for Gender, Family, and Environmental Development is the first social science research institute to begin writing books on sex and sexuality, including Dr. Dao Xuan Dung's book, *Gia Duc Tinh Duc* [*Sex Education*], published in 1996 by Youth Publishing House. In addition, there are series of other books written by local and foreign authors mainly from Russia, the Czech Republic, and Poland (Khuat Thu Hong 1998).

As Gammeltoft (1999) points out, many aspects of everyday life in Vietnam are politicized through governmental mass education and mass mobilization campaigns. In fields as diverse as diet, marriage, religion, and pregnancy, there are politically right and wrong answers to any question, and everyone knows precisely what is politically correct and socially desirable and what is not. This is particularly true for family planning issues, which have been given a very high priority on the government agenda since the late 1980s. There are efforts to educate people about sexual issues, as may be exemplified by this report:

One morning at the shrimp factory I watched as 700 women in identical white smocks cleaned the shrimp. Suddenly their work was interrupted—all had to stand and watch a video on AIDS prevention. Some cases had appeared in town, a manager told me. That night the scenes were the same in boomtown Nam Can. AIDS is just another risk of frontier living. (*National Geographic* February 1993, 35)

Sex education has been limited because of Vietnam's traditional bias against the public mention of anything sexual. Although this situation may seem similar to other countries, in Vietnam much of the opposition to "sex education" comes from administrators and teachers, of whom many are reportedly too embarrassed to discuss intimate sexual matters with the students. Faced with an increasing HIV-infection rate and an abortion rate thought to be among the highest in the world, Hanoi health officials opened the city's first sex education café in November 1999. The café fills a void in sex education, as the subject is not taught in schools, and many parents admit they are too embarrassed to raise the issue with teenage children who are becoming increasingly sexually active. The idea for the Hanoi café stemmed from a study that detailed how young people spend their time. It is also modeled on a similar initiative in Ho Chi Minh City. The café offers a place where young people can spend time talking with their friends and freely ask for information about sex and AIDS. Although the café will not distribute condoms, a female physician specializing in reproductive health, and an HIV/AIDS counselor are on hand to answer questions. On average, about 50 customers, ages 16 to 24, have visited the café on a daily basis (Watkin, *South China Morning Post* December 20, 1999).

In 2000, a pilot project sponsored by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities was started that allows high schools in eight of Vietnam's 61 provinces to offer advice on obtaining contraceptives at government clinics and pharmacies. Three thousand pharmacists in five provinces are being trained to provide customers with better information on contraceptives, and state-run radio airs a weekly show answering youths' sex-related queries (Cohen, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 6/29).

As far as homosexuality is concerned, only in the last three years has a grassroots group emerged with the aim of reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS among gay and bisexual men in Ho Chi Minh City. The Nguyen Friendship Society consists of about 50 volunteers who prepare and print leaflets about sex education to be handed out to patrons in bars and clubs.

4. Autoerotic Behaviors and Patterns

No information about autoerotic practices exists except for the French period. According to Jacobus X. (1898), masturbation occurred very often: "Nearly all the boys practice masturbation from the age of fourteen or fifteen years," but it seemed to him that it was practiced only by males:

This, no doubt, results from the ease with which the girl or woman can satisfy her natural desires; moreover, the great frequency of the "flowers" [an STD, probably gonorrhea] must help to limit this special form of vice. I never met but two cases, and both of these were the mistresses of Europeans (Jacobus X. 1898).

5. Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors

A. Talking About Sexuality

The Vietnamese prefer a flowery, euphemistic vocabulary when they speak about sexuality. For example, a man having sexual desires might say, "I am going to buy a tree." Food is also heavily connected with sexual activity. Words like "crisp, sticky, spicy" are used to describe food as well as women and are frequent in erotic fantasies. Many dishes are identified with female figures or organs: The white rice flour cake is the image of a virgin; the pulpy interior of a breadfruit with its sticky juice is associated with the vagina; the eating of a rice flour pancake is similar to the defloration rite; the sucking of the honey flambéed banana and the scooping of water in the rice field are symbols of having sex. As in many Asian countries, this type of language helps people to speak about sexual matters without using the terms that would embarrass them.

B. Sexual Behaviors

Kissing and Sex Positions

In traditional Vietnam, kissing in the "Western" sense was forbidden. Instead, nose sniffing or rubbing, comparable with Inuit customs, was practiced. The preferred position for sexual intercourse among the Vietnamese was both partners lying face-to-face, side-by-side, or the rear-entry position. The reason for these preferences, Jacobus X. (1898) suggests, is the structure of the Vietnamese bed, which is made of bamboo slats. In the missionary position, which he calls *la position de l'amour classique*, a man would scrape the skin off his knees.

Premarital Relations, Courtship, and Dating

The information one can gather about the beliefs and practices of young people regarding premarital relations and the role of sexuality are quite contradictory and are evidence that sex research is still underdeveloped in Vietnam. For example, the Departments of Psychology and Sociology of Hanoi University conducted research in 1992 on the sexual relations of university and high school students in Hanoi (Hoang Ba Thinh 1992). About 72.4% of female students in their fourth year of university had sexual relations, with only 17.6% having had one (usually their first) partner, whereas the others had between two and four partners. Yet, after graduating, only 8.2% of respondents had married one of these partners. Among those female students who had boyfriends, it was quite common for them to live together in the

dormitories. An early 1990s survey by CARE (Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere) found that just over half of Vietnamese men had had two or more sexual partners in the previous two weeks (Franklin 1993).

In a recent survey, only 34% of students in Ho Chi Minh City responded that they found premarital sex "acceptable." Although not considered high by international standards, the statistic was shocking to most Vietnamese. A socially more acceptable figure was that only 10.3% of men and 1.4% of women had had sexual intercourse before their marriage, and 57.5% said they did not plan to have sex before marriage, whereas only 14.7% replied that they did plan to have sex before marriage (Chittick 1997).

O'Harrow (1995) reports that premarital intercourse is quite common in Vietnamese villages, but also that there is still an obligation on the man's part to marry the girl he has deflowered, and she reminds him of this fact in the strongest possible terms. Young couples in Hanoi, even married couples, face great difficulty in finding a place for private encounters. The evening stroller through the city's lakeside public parks must step carefully to avoid interrupting lovers hard at work.

Marriage and Family

In the past, Vietnamese marriages were arranged through matrimonial agents (*mai-dongs*) who brought the two families together and arranged the question of the wedding portion (brideprice). Interestingly, the woman did not bring any marriage portion, and it was the groom who paid for the wedding presents, brought to the common lot his fortune of rice fields and cattle, and often had to pay money to the wife's family. In return, his compensation was comparatively small: a tobacco jar, for example, a box for betel nuts, or a cigarette case. The wedding ceremony was quite simple: The future husband and wife met, mutually offered themselves to each other, and chewed betel nut together. Though Confucian tradition permits the husband to take lesser wives (theoretically to be chosen for him by the first wife), economic realities (and relatively innocuous modern laws) would force him to be content with one at a time. O'Harrow (1995) reports also that to give a woman a piece of fine jewelry in the Vietnamese tradition is to help confirm her independence as a human being, and for a mother to hand over a piece of her jewelry to her daughter is a universally understood gesture, for which the subtext is "may this protect you from misery." Nowadays, divorce is increasingly easy to obtain.

Adultery

A quite questionable story found in different sources dating back to the 19th century is that a woman found guilty of adultery would be thrown to a specially trained elephant, which in turn threw her into the air with his trunk and trampled her to death when she landed. Quite telling is the gusto with which this story was spread by European authors.

The early *Annamite Code* contained the following article: "An adulteress shall receive ninety blows of the rattan upon her buttocks, and her husband may afterwards marry her to another, or sell her if he pleases, or keep her in his house." Jacobus X. (1898) quotes *Le Code*: "Shop men who commit adultery with the wife of their master shall be treated as servants or slaves, and punished by strangulation."

As O'Harrow (1995) shows, moral values in Vietnamese society are enforced by constraints of shame rather than guilt. A Vietnamese woman can cheat (in the Western sense) on her husband without regret, as long as it is not known. The following saying illustrates the point: "Flirtations with desire, I wore a wedding ring for protection; I lost my wedding

ring, but my desire remains." Vietnamese men, in their turn, know the "rules of the game" and have less of a tendency than women to brag publicly about their conquests.

It seems that the younger generation in particular, which grew up during *doi moi*, tends to excuse adultery. Unhappiness in marriage, being sexually unfulfilled, or just being attracted by another person are now regarded as legitimate reasons to have sexual contact with another person other than one's partner (Khuat Thu Hong 1998).

According to Fahey (1998), middle-class urban women often confide during informal interviews that their husbands have a mistress or entertain several girlfriends. Because women are still responsible for family finances and the welfare of children, it is common for them to have secret savings as a buffer against their husband's indiscretions with other women.

Incidence of Oral and Anal Sex

Jacobus X. (1898) described oral sex as a way to avoid infection with a venereal disease. Apparently, it is not a very successful method, as he later writes: "I have found eruptions, ulcerations, and the scars of chancres, on the lips and tongue of the unhappy victims of this form of debauchery. When once they are affected, they in turn help to spread the syphilitic virus, by a law of reciprocity which it would be very difficult to repress." This was confirmed by the French surgeon Joyeux (1930).

Anal sex seems to have been far more common as a homosexual practice than among heterosexual couples. Jacobus X. (1898) suggests that it was a phenomenon that only occurred between prostitutes and their customers: "The woman is old when she takes to sodomy, which she does rather from economic motives, on account of the money it brings, than from natural taste."

6. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors

A. Contemporary Practices

In Vietnam, there has historically been relatively little male homosexuality, although a few of the emperors of the 16th and 17th centuries did maintain male concubines. In present-day Vietnam, homosexuality is still regarded as being a foreign problem, and, as in other socialist countries, there is a lack of official research on homosexual behavior. In fact, homosexuality is quite a common sexual behavior. It may well be that the Communist state is reluctant to recognize its existence. As long as it is not practiced "openly," state officials will not interfere. This is evident in the 1998 case of a lesbian couple who married in public. Because of the public ceremony, Vietnamese authorities were forced to act, even though they did not know how to deal with the couple:

Two women were wed in Vinh Long province (about 70 kilometers from Ho Chi Minh City). Hundreds of people, including friends, family members and a number of curious onlookers attended the ceremony on Saturday to celebrate the marriage of a 30-year-old woman to another woman aged about 20. Local authorities did not know how to react to the marriage (*Lao Dong* [Newspaper] March 8, 1998).

Two months later, the government reacted:

Government officials have broken up the country's first known lesbian marriage and extracted a promise from the lovers they will never live together. Twenty officials from various Communist Party groups met the couple for three hours at their home in the Mekong Delta town of Vinh

Long. They were acting on instructions of the Justice Ministry in Hanoi "to put an end to the marriage," the *Thanh Nien* newspaper reported. It is unclear what kind of persuasion was used to get the couple's agreement or what punishment they could face if they change their minds, but they signed a document promising not to live together, the justice official said. "They would have had no trouble with their relationship if they had not chosen to have a public wedding," a member of the provincial justice department said. The issue was raised at the most recent session of the National Assembly during debate on amendments to the law. There were many other homosexual women living together in the province but Hong Kim Huong, 30, and Cao Tien Duyen, 23, were the only ones who were married publicly, he said. He said the wedding was an unwelcome challenge to traditional sensibilities and public morality but added: "As long as they don't wed publicly they are left in peace." (Reuters May 23, 1998).

In 1997, the same newspaper launched a virulent critique of a marriage between two men in Ho Chi Minh City. The apparently lavish ceremony held in a big Saigon hotel provoked an avalanche of protests from residents. Other homosexual marriages have taken place in Vietnam in discrete ceremonies, but homosexuality remains taboo in the country, although it is not officially illegal.

Vietnam's first gay wedding took place in Ho Chi Minh City. The two men celebrated their union at a local restaurant with over one hundred guests. Some authorities, however, were not in the mood to congratulate the grooms. "It should be publicly condemned," said Nguyen Thi Thuong, vice-director of the city's state-run Consulting Center for Love, Marriage and Families. "Public opinion does not support this." The police are reported as saying that no laws exist which would enable them to punish the happy couple. The honeymooners could not be reached for comment (Reuters April 7, 1997).

Sexual encounters between male adolescents may be facilitated by socially sanctioned close physical contacts considered "normal" between males, such as holding hands and resting or sleeping close together in the same bed. As far as the prevailing sexual activities, mutual masturbation and fellatio, are concerned, there does not appear to be any strongly developed sense of playing a masculine or feminine sexual role of the kind as is often found in other societies where anal intercourse is more prevalent and the ultimate objective of homosexual encounters.

Proschan (1998) has reported that although "gay" might be the only English word some of his informants had known, they had embraced it as their own and imbued it with meanings that diverge from those of English-speakers elsewhere:

Vietnamese men today are fashioning diverse ways of living as men-who-love-men, drawing variously on endogenous traditions and identities as well as exogenous concepts and practices, combining and recombining them, and at the same time contesting both cultural conventions that would condemn homosexuality as incompatible with filial piety and metropolitan notions that would insist there is only one way to be authentically gay.

B. Homosexuality Under French Rule

Jacobus X. (1898) interpreted homosexuality as a questionable behavior resulting from the Chinese cultural influence, and a sign of decadence that disappeared after the French influence gained influence. If it was practiced by the French, he claimed, it was only to escape the dangers of

syphilitic female prostitutes. Interestingly, he does not discuss the interdependency between male prostitution and homosexuality. According to him, the customers in this era were Chinese and French, and the prostitutes Annamite boys:

It is only the nays and the boys who come in direct and permanent contact with the Europeans. Nay signifies "basket." The nays are children of from seven to fifteen years, who are provided with round baskets. They are found on the quays, in the market, and in front of the shops, waiting for a customer to make a purchase of any kind. . . . It is from these baskets that the class of boys is recruited. These latter are from fifteen to twenty-five years of age [acting as valet]. . . . When once he [the nay with his basket in which he carries the goods] gets to your house, if he should suspect that you have depraved tastes, he will soon offer you his services: "Captain" (everybody was a captain in 1860) "me much know chewchew banana," and if the client appeared to hesitate, "Me know ablic." That is *sabir* (patois). The nay and the boy are generally, to use the Tardieu's expression, "suckers of the dart." . . . Whilst the European lies at full length on a long chair, or on his bed, the boy—kneeling or stooping—*inguina osculatur, sugit, emissumque semen in bucca recipit, usque ad ultimam guttam* [a kiss between the thighs, rise, ejaculate in the mouth of recipient, even to the ultimate].

Although by preference a "sucker of the dart," the nay, or the boy, will not refuse sodomy, but he is not enthusiastic about it. It is not any moral reason which stops him, for he is above prejudices of that sort. It is simply the disproportion, which exists between the anus of a lad of ten or twelve years, and the penis of an adult European, for two nays have no objection to committing the act with one another. (Jacobus X. 1898)

C. Homosexuality During the Vietnam War *Lesbianism*

According to Marnais (1967), who describes in detail male and female homosexuality, lesbianism could be found at all levels of society during the Vietnam War. There were three bars catering exclusively to lesbians, and lesbian marriages were also not uncommon in Saigon, obviously tolerated by a society that referred to such couples as "friends." He interpreted lesbianism in Saigon as particularly rife among the city's prostitutes. The so-called "bull dyke" lesbian did not exist, but there was a role division between the "Sugar Mommy" and the young girl who lived at her expense. In the late 1960s, the *Saigon Daily* news reported a case about a major lesbian "call-girl" operation catering mainly to wealthy female tourists from the West and to jaded Saigon society women. The organization was disbanded when there was proof of the involvement of girls under 15.

Male Homosexuality

During the Vietnam War, much of Saigon's organized homosexual activity revolved around the city's "gay" bars. According to Marnais (1967), there were a total of 18 such establishments in existence during the late 1960s. Many of the customers could be found among middle-aged Saigon businessmen and teenage students. Only a small minority displayed the slightest effeminate trait. There were also homosexual steambaths, nightclubs, and coffee shops, and young boys, impoverished and orphaned by the war, sold themselves openly on street corners to passersby. There were at least four "call-boy" operations, catering mainly to wealthy Chinese businessmen and foreign (primarily French) residents. For American soldiers, it was risky to be involved in homosexual activity, because the army did not

tolerate it, and suspected homosexuals were immediately given a dishonorable discharge (Taylor 1997).

The only hint that the long years of living in the jungle and tunnels of the Ho Chi Minh Trail left traces in the specific sexual preferences of the Viet Cong can be found in the reports of journalists. According to Scholl-Latour (2000), most of the Viet Cong were so uninterested in women when Saigon finally fell that the female prostitutes did not appeal to them. But it seems far more probable that it was the strict discipline of the Viet Cong that prevented them from “fraternizing” with prostitutes.

D. Homosexuality and Vietnamese Law

Proschan (Aronson 1999; “Frank” 2000) writes that neither homosexual identity nor behaviors had ever been explicitly illegal in Vietnam. The ancient legal codes of the Le Dynasty (1428-1787) and the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) detailed the penalties for crimes such as heterosexual rape, assault, adultery, and incest, but left homosexuality unmentioned. The only provisions in the codes that might refer to deviant sexuality were the prohibition against “men who wear weird or sorceress garments” (*Le Code*, Article 640; Nguyen & Ta 1987), and a prohibition of castration and self-castration (*Le Code*, Article 305; *Nguyen Code*, Article 344). Both provisions were not found in earlier Chinese codes. On the few occasions when homosexual activities seem to have been punished, they had been treated as rape or as adultery (disregarding the fact that both partners were the same sex, and concentrating instead on the fact that one or both were married to other partners). Vietnamese legal codes had always been strongly influenced by the Chinese codes of the same eras. In 1740, when the Ching Dynasty in China elaborated for the first time in Chinese history punishment for sodomy between consenting adults, the Vietnamese did not follow suit, once again omitting any such prohibitions in the *Nguyen Code* that was promulgated soon after. Nor did the French colonials institute explicit prohibitions against sodomy or pederasty in their colonies, because under the *Code Napoléon*, these acts did not fall under the purview of the legal system.

Although homosexuality or sodomy was not specifically referred to anywhere in modern Vietnamese criminal law, “sex buying and selling in any form” was prohibited, as were more-general and vague crimes such as “undermining public morality.” In the latest Law on Marriage and Family (1986), no article mentioned the State attitude or any guidelines for public opinion about homosexual behavior. The Penal Code did not mention homosexuality either in its articles on incest, rape, prostitution, sexual assault, or child marriage. But Vietnamese authorities could find legal basis for punishing homosexual behavior if they chose, because crimes such as “undermining public morality” could be used (as similar crimes of “public indecency” or “soliciting” are in the U.S.) to prosecute homosexuality.

E. Language and Homosexuality

The Vietnamese use more than one expression for the Western neologism *homosexuality*, although all have the same underlying meaning of “half man and half woman.” For example, *Dong Tinh Luyen Ai* is a literal translation via Chinese of “homosexuality,” which dates back to 1869. Its entry date into the Vietnamese language is not very clear. It did not appear in Dao Duy Anh’s *Han Viet Tu Dien* of 1931, but it did appear in his *Phap Viet Tu Dien* of 1936, and might have had limited currency in the journalistic vocabulary of the 1930s.

The concept of homosexuality only came into greater use with the introduction of Western psychology and sexology in

so-called hygiene manuals in the 1950s and 1960s. *Ai Nam Ai Nu* is the closest descriptive approximation to what is meant ontologically and behaviorally by the Western term *homosexuality*, though, if one takes *Ai* as a verb, the term comes closer to “bisexual” behavior. It did not come into use before the 1940s. Another variation on this term, which is more common in the biological and medical vocabulary, is *Ban Nam Ban Nu*. *Pe De*, for the French *pederaste*, is probably the most common byword for a gay person in Vietnam. It is urban in origin and can be dated to the French usage of the word. From the Chinese is borrowed *Ke Gian*, which is mostly used to depict anal intercourse, being thus is not limited to same-sex practice (“Vinh N.” 1999).

F. Sex Tourism

As publications like *The Men of Viet Nam: A Travel Guide to Gay Viet Nam* and websites like www.utopia-asia.com suggest, foreign homosexual sex tourism is on the rise. Many Western visitors, who are called “Rice Queens,” leave behind everything they know about safe sex practices when they come to Vietnam. According to an estimate of the Nguyen Friendship Society, one third of Vietnamese men who have sex with foreigners do not use a condom, and may have never used a condom before.

7. Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues

Bao, Long, & Taylor (1998) report that a transgendered person in Vietnam is mainly a “man” who wears female clothes and presents himself as a female. *Bong cai* is the common term in the south and is translated literally as “female shadow,” whereas *dong co* is the common term in the north and is translated as “woman goes into a trance,” revealing its origin from the shamanistic tradition: The male *ong dong* or the female *ba dong* are shamanic mediums who incarnate a pantheon of spirits, both male and female, during the course of a *len dong* performance in one of the fortuneteller’s temples. They take on, in succession, the costume and comportment of the numerous spirits invoked, in what can be a daylong show of elaborate costumery. It seems that Vietnamese transgendered males only have sex with men, never with women or with other transgendered persons. Transgendered males refer to one another as “sisters” (*chi em*).

There are quite a few transvestites in Saigon who are trying to earn a living through prostitution. They look for customers in certain nightclubs and bars, as well as on the streets. Being a transvestite seems not to be something that is displayed in public, and the search for customers is done in an aggressive though feminine way.

Jacobus X. (1898) mentions transvestitism in connection with prostitution during the French period of Vietnam:

I cannot, however, pass over in silence, one eccentric form of the *lusus amoris*. The Chinese actors who play the women’s parts, come in their costumes [to the brothel], and assume the character of a modest virgin, afraid of losing her virginity, a refinement of vice which is much appreciated. In the presence of a number of old men, not very particular, the scenes of the first night of wedded life are represented without any shame.

Commenting on transvestite singers and transvestite striptease in the homosexual nightclubs of Saigon catering to male homosexual transvestites during the Vietnamese-American War, Marnais (1967) reported that transvestite prostitutes would congregate daily on the terrace of the Continental Hotel in Saigon. They were reported to have disappeared from view after the Communist takeover of

South Vietnam in 1975, but recent reports from the informants of Carrier, Nguyen, and Su (1997) returning from Saigon show that male transvestites can be seen on the streets once again, and some are again earning their income as prostitutes.

They may also make a living by joining a lottery team (*lo to*), often during adolescence, as singers. "Lottery team" refers to a mobile lottery team, who sell tickets and then spin for a prize at that establishment. The teams use singing to advertise (Bao, Long, & Taylor 1998).

8. Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors

A. Coercive Sex

Coercive sex is prohibited in Vietnam. Article 112 of the Vietnamese Penal Code says:

1. Any person who uses force or any other means to have sexual intercourse with another person against his will shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 1 to 5 years. Any person who commits rape of a minor aged from 13 upward or a girl to whom he has the responsibility to give care and education or to provide medical treatment shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 2 to 7 years.
2. Any person who commits a crime in one of the following cases shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 5 to 15 years:
 - a. Organized rape or rape that does serious harm to the victim's health
 - b. Rape of many persons or creation of serious harms to the victim's health
 - c. Relapse into former crime with more severity.
3. Any person who commits a crime which causes the death or the suicide of the victim or commits a crime in a specially serious circumstance shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 12 to 20 years, to life imprisonment or to death penalty.
4. Any cases of having sex with a child aged under 13 shall be regarded as committing a rape and the person in question shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 7 to 15 years. Any person who commits a crime belonging to one of the cases stipulated in items 2 and 3 of this article shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 12 to 20 years, to life imprisonment or to death penalty.

Child Sexual Abuse and Pedophilia

Incestuous relations and child marriages, as well as early marriages, are prohibited by the Penal Code in Articles 112, 146, and 145. Although reliable statistical data are not available, it seems quite certain that the number of juvenile prostitutes has increased rather quickly in recent years. Based on the ratio of age range of prostitutes provided by the Nam Ha province, it is known that among 164 prostitutes, 17.6% of them are in the 13-to-16-year age group and 19.5% are in the 16-to-18-year age group. Together, there are 37.4% in the 13-to-19-year age group. Another research document on prostitution in Ho Chi Minh City shows that in 1989, juvenile prostitutes accounted for 2.1% of the total number of prostitutes; in 1990, the rate was 5.2%, and in 1995, it was as high as 15% (Hoang Ba & Pham Kim Ngoc 1996). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had a 1995 estimate that there were 40,000 child sex workers throughout Vietnam.

Jacobus X. (1898) records a variety of proverbial sayings common in French-dominated Vietnam of the 19th century: "For a girl to be still a virgin at ten years old, she must have neither brothers nor fathers." The same author reports on pedophilia:

... whilst he is a *nay* [a boy who is carrying a "basket" for a customer], he has not usually reached the age of puberty. As may easily be imagined, these poor little wretches fall into the hands of "active" pederasts, who are not remarkable for gentleness and kindness, and who brutally assuage their lewd passions without caring what may be the result. I have often found, in these unfortunate *nays*, marks of attempts that have been committed almost by violence, the fact being that a lad not yet arrived at puberty, and frail and weak, is incapable of making any serious resistance to brutal attempts at sodomy on the part of an adult European or Asiatic. (Jacobus X. 1898)

During the Vietnam War, sex with children and incestuous sex was frequently connected with prostitution. Marnais (1967) reported that it was possible to watch live sex shows with teenage twins and also hire them for sex. In a Saigon brothel called the "Doll House," over 50 girls, none older than 12, served the clients for sadomasochistic games. In the "House of Pain," very young girls got injections of heroin to make them physically and psychologically dependent.

Rape

There exist few statistics about sexual abuse, and they are not very reliable. It is, for instance, quite questionable when Hoang Ba and Pham Kim Ngoc (1996) state that before the 1990s, only 400 cases of rape of women and children had occurred in the whole country in one year:

From January 1993 to July 1995, 1,685 cases of rape (324 cases being of children) occurred. Compared with the years prior to 1990, cases of child raping only accounted for 4 to 6% of the total, but in the past three years, this rate has increased. Concretely speaking, in 1993 rapes of children accounted for 14.6%, in 1994 16.6% and in the first months of 1995, the rate reached as high as 30%. The victims were young girls in the age group 10-13 but there were also cases of raping little girls aged only 4-5. In Ho Chi Minh City in 1994, 55 rapes of children occurred out of a total of 107 cases. 43 of them were under 13 (Hoang Ba & Pham Kim Ngoc 1996).

Incest

As O'Harrow (1995) remarked, the vocative system of the Vietnamese language is largely devoid of pronouns and uses, relying instead on static kinship terms. Thus, in Vietnamese, a husband and wife enjoy a fictive incest. The husband speaks to his wife using the same terms he has always used towards his real younger sisters, referring to himself as "older brother" (*anh*) and calling his wife "little sister" (*em*). Also, a very peculiar incest taboo is found in Vietnam: It is forbidden for a Buddhist student to marry the widow of his teacher (Gregersen 1996). The traditional punishment for incest was strangulation of the offender.

B. Prostitution

Prostitution in the Pre-Colonial Era

Jacobus X. (1898) reported that prostitution was very common during the 19th century. He distinguished between the Annamite "Bamboo," the Chinese brothel, and the "Flower Boats," the Annamite "Daylight Whore" and the Annamite "Mistress of the European." These girls were either sold by their poor parents or even kidnapped by professional girl traders. It seems that the Annamite "Bamboo" was the brothel for the natives and the lower social layers of the French colonials. The prostitutes were Vietnamese girls who had to wait for customers in bamboo huts, hence the name. The infection rate with STDs was high, and the standard of hygiene quite low. Jacobus X. (1898) mentioned black lacquered teeth (a Chinese fashion) and hairless

pubes as ethnic peculiarities. The girls had to sell themselves for very little money, and most of the money went to the pimp.

He also described the style of living of Chinese prostitutes, who first came from Singapore. They resided in big houses and waited on the verandas for clients. An elder woman acted as "mama." On the first floor were a lot of Chinese beds with dark-colored mosquito curtains to conceal the couples. For waiting opium-smokers, there would be a pipe. Although few of the girls smoked, they were instructed in preparing the pipes. The owners of the brothels and flower boats, which are houseboats in the channels, worked without license, and were free to carry on their trade. However, they had to put up with the extortion of the Mandarins. Under the most trivial presumption of harboring criminals, their inhabitants might be mercilessly driven out. Interestingly, the Chinese prostitutes had a chance to become a concubine of a man of reputation, and then rise to a more honored position. The houses of prostitution of Cholon were almost exclusively reserved for the Chinese and resembled the "society houses" in Europe. They were quite luxurious, with salons, divans, sofas, mirrors, and pictures.

Besides these brothels, there also existed the so-called "Daylight Whore" and the system of the mistress. Apparently, the first was formerly in the bamboo but left because of her age. She also had a *souteneur*, who protected her from the police officers. They lingered in the streets and around restaurants, waiting to contact some possible client. After the initial contact was made, they followed the client to his house, ready to suggest sodomy and the kneeling instead of the horizontal position.

The mistress of the European was often bought directly from the parents "for some 20 piasters," a young girl of 15 or 16, selected from those whose fate it would ultimately be to be sent to the "bamboo." It was quite common, though, to take the mistress of some friend or colleague who was leaving the colony, and thus get a woman "who has had some training, requires no outfit, and understands a little French." To prevent the mistress from "going wrong," Jacobus X. (1898) suggested setting his own Annamite boy over her as bodyguard.

Official French Policy Towards Prostitution

According to Troung (1990) who quoted the report of the Commission of Enquiry of the League of Nations (1933), French colonial policy adhered to the International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic of 1910, but did not accede to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children of 1921. The general policy pursued by the French government in Indochina was regulation, i.e., control through registration and supervision of brothels and women who were already prostitutes, and safeguarding women and girls from being induced by force or deceit into prostitution. The control of prostitution was entrusted to municipal and provincial authorities. The age of consent for registered prostitution was established at 18 years for Asians and 21 years for Europeans. The police registered a prostitute if she was found soliciting in the streets or if a person complained of having been "contaminated" by her. In 1926, about 24 licensed brothels paid taxes every month to the Hanoi city administration in addition to the hotels and lodging houses that secretly harbored prostitution. In 1935, H. Virgitti, mayor of Hanoi, disclosed that there were about 4,000 people working in the sex industry, not including geishas and dancers (Khuat Thu Hong 1998).

It is interesting to note that traffic in women was considered by the French colonial administration a problem solely

connected with Asian traditions and customs. The 1929 report of the police prosecutor at the Court of Appeal in Saigon cited the following example of this quite hypocritical attitude towards the Vietnamese and the belief in the colonial authorities' own superiority:

It may be that the supervision exercised, the severe sentences by the courts and the administrative measures taken against foreign Asiatics sentenced for offences of this nature, have warned delinquent people against the consequences of this shameful commerce; it may be that the mental attitude modified through French influence and through contact with our civilization, so respectful of the rights of women and children, has brought about an almost complete change of the native customs (Commission of Enquiry of the League of Nations 1933, 218).

The French believed that licensed brothels were a far more humane and civilized treatment of prostitutes who were assumed to have entered the profession deliberately, even though the conditions were quite unbearable because of extreme exploitation. Medical officers sometimes sent girls to hospital not because of venereal diseases, but because they were in a state of "very great exhaustion, having been obliged by the keepers of the house to receive an excessive number of customers" (Commission of Enquiry of the League of Nations 1933, 217).

As in other colonies, Vietnam had a double standard. The few white prostitutes possessed certain rights; they could, for example, institute legal procedures against *souteneurs* of French nationality, and the men were invariably punished and expelled (Commission of Enquiry of the League of Nations 1933, 215-217). Because of the ideas of the Social Purity movement, prostitution was regarded as evil. Because the aim was not to analyze the social and economic reasons for prostitution, prostitutes became criminalized, in contrast to their customers.

The French also used *Bordels Mobile de Campagne*, huge trailer trucks converted into mobile field brothels with ten women to each truck. The *Bordels Mobile* traveled to every fighting front. When on leave in Hanoi or Saigon, the French soldiers preferred non-military-organized establishments.

Vietnam War Period

According to Khuat Thu Hong (1998), archive materials indicate that in 1954 in Hanoi alone, there were around 12,000 professional prostitutes working in 45 brothels and 55 cabaret houses of whom over 6,000 were licensed. After 1954, in northern Vietnam, prostitution was theoretically eliminated. Article 202 of the Criminal Code states that any sheltering, enticement, or inducement of prostitutes is an illegal act, and punishment will vary by degree of violation. Yet, every year, about 300 to 400 persons were discovered working in this trade.

Between 1959 and 1962, organized prostitution in the South was almost totally crushed by Madame Nhu, who closed down every brothel and heavily fined the owners. This changed after the Ngo Dinh Diem regime was overthrown in 1963. During the late 1960s, about 32 establishments in Saigon were houses of prostitution, ranging from modest apartments to elegant three-story establishments. A good deal of the sex business was in the hands of the Vietnamese underworld, like the "Yellow Pang Society." In the French as well as in the American period, the "Flower Boats" or sampans plied their trade. They were frequently family operations, with the daughter(s) working as prostitute(s) while the brothers pimped on dry land. Some of the larger junks, however, were professionally run, often by the Saigon underworld. Prior to 1975, statistics from the Minis-

try of Society of the Saigon government reported about 200,000 professional prostitutes. In Saigon alone in 1968, there were about 10,000 professional prostitutes. By 1974, the figure had reached 100,000.

During the Vietnam War, one million soldiers from the United States were stationed throughout Southeast Asia. Most of these host countries signed agreements to provide their services as "Rest and Recreation" centers for United States military and aid personnel. Their presence contributed to the proliferation of commercial sexual intercourse. Although the U.S. Army was not officially involved in providing sex workers to cover itself against congressional reaction at home, it is known that some of the brothels kept by the Vietnamese Government and the ARVIN (Army of Vietnam) were exclusively reserved for GIs. The first military brothel opened in Pleiku in the central highlands. According to Marnais (1967), it was to be the model for other "recreation centers," including several within the Saigon area:

The Pleiku brothel has twenty rooms, whitewashed and pleasantly furnished. The girls are all carefully selected on the basis of good looks, personality and knowledge of English. (U.S. Army Intelligence also runs a security check on each girl to make sure she is not a Viet Cong agent out to pick up useful information from her trusting bedmates.) The girls are closely supervised by a matron under contract to the Pleiku Administrative Council. An American GI pays 300 piastres (\$2.50) for a ticket, allowing him up to three hours with any given girl. (Twosomes and other exotic sexual ménages are out.) Between 100 and 300 GIs visit the house each day, passing through a sandbagged guard post where they are required to show their ticket and have it stamped by a Vietnamese soldier. Fifteen percent of the girl's earnings are deducted to pay for expenses at the center, but a hard-working and a popular prostitute can earn between 8000 to 15,000 piastres (\$66 to \$125) a month, a good salary in today's Vietnam.

The main reason for the U.S. Army to provide those establishments was the alarmingly high venereal disease rate among U.S. enlisted men. However, most of the soldiers preferred to look for prostitutes themselves in bars catering to GIs.

A prostitute earned as much as \$180 per month. The average government civil servant earned roughly \$30 a month, and even cabinet ministers and Assembly members had fixed salaries of \$120. A special form of prostitution was the "mistress," i.e., a paid steady girlfriend. GIs considered this a "safer" alternative to the brothels and bar girls. There existed rumors about an incurable strain of syphilis, called "Black Clap," and Viet Cong girls who were able to put razor blades into their vaginas to castrate or even kill clients (Gulzow & Mitchell 1980). The latter rumor is without doubt a reflection of the ability of some trained girls to use their vaginas to smoke cigarettes, shoot arrows, or to put razor blades or other sharp materials in them without getting hurt.

While under French rule, marriages of French soldiers and Vietnamese women were prohibited. American soldiers, on the other hand, could marry. A U.S. Army study of 64 GIs who had filed applications to marry Vietnamese girls between June 1964 and November 1966 concluded that a high proportion of GIs who married Vietnamese women were divorced, sexually inhibited, fearful of American women, or disenchanting with some aspects of American life (Marnais 1967).

The Present

After the Viet Cong occupation of Saigon, the new government tried to eliminate prostitution by closing brothels

and sending prostitutes to work or to so-called reeducation centers. Between 1975 and 1985, 14,304 prostitutes in Ho Chi Minh City were sent to those centers. The Government claimed that prostitution was eradicated in the South by 1985. But as Stephanie Fahey (1998) remarked: "In a country where the Communist Party attempted to eradicate prostitution and pornography, prostitutes are now found in almost every bar, restaurant and hotel whether private or state-owned." According to statistics from the Department of Criminal Police, Ministry of the Interior, in the first six months of 1990, Vietnam had 40,000 prostitutes and 1,000 brothels. By the first six months of 1993, there were 200,000 prostitutes and 2,000 brothels. A report prepared by SCF (Save the Children Fund) in 1995 estimated that there were 149 brothels in Ho Chi Minh City alone. Many of the establishments are, officially, bars selling beer to Vietnamese clients. According to one recent unofficial estimate (Khuat Thu Hong 1998), there may be half a million sex workers in all of Vietnam, not including the increasing number of male prostitutes in the southern provinces and the big northern cities. Government Resolutions 53, 87, and 88, passed in 1994 and 1995, strengthen management over cultural activities and monitor the struggle against the so-called social evils, including prostitution, gambling, and drug use.

The reasons for women to become sex workers remain the same as during the Vietnam War and in other developing countries where there are few opportunities in rural areas and low wages in the jobs open for uneducated girls. Poverty is not the sole reason pushing women into prostitution. Family conflicts and their feeling of hopelessness about their husbands or boyfriends are also important reasons. The women interviewed by Cooper and Hanson (1998) stated that they were much better off now than in their villages. Although prostitution is illegal in Vietnam, because of economic problems, it is again becoming the booming business it was during the Vietnam War. But tourists report that because of corruption, the interpretation of the law is quite broad. Some of the girls who are looking for customers and are talking to tourists are agent provocateurs for corrupt policemen who force the foreigner to pay large sums to "avoid an incident." On the other hand, there are also police actions to clean up streets and districts with known prostitution, as Cooper and Hanson (1998) were told by a madam.

Prostitutes can be found on the street, sometimes with a pimp in the background, in massage parlors, and nightclubs. Two types of social networks are most common in the sex workers: peer and friend relations. They often work together in groups of two to five at a site, and this site remains fixed for a number of prostitutes for an extended period of time, from several months to a year or two. Many prostitutes are organized in groups for protection, or they may become friends. As a result of these social groupings, newcomers may be bullied by older prostitutes. They often make friends with a man who is referred to as their "boyfriend" (*bo ruot*). He may be a familiar client or a man who lives with the prostitute in a hired room and can protect her during work. Prostitutes have sexual relations with clients, boyfriends, and husbands. The average number of sexual contacts of the ten prostitutes interviewed by Bao, Long, and Taylor (1998) was 23 per month, some having 40 or 50.

Clients of Prostitutes

Clients of sex workers are called *Khach lang choi* in Vietnamese. According to the study by Bao, Long, and Taylor (1998), all social classes, with the exception of farmers, can be found among them: workers, truck drivers, students, engineers, married, and unmarried men. The clients often start off going to a *beer hug bar* or restaurant to drink beer

where they end up negotiating sex with one of the beer hug girls. Or they drink beer or alcohol first at one place and then go to another place to seek sex.

As in other developing countries, sex tourism is a growing business. Although reliable statistics are not available, such indicators as websites with advice for international tourists show a tremendous increase of travelers interested in sex, especially because Vietnam wrongly has the reputation of being "safer" with regard to STDs and AIDS than other countries in Southeast Asia. Because by law, Vietnamese citizens are prohibited from going into a hotel room of a tourist unless they are registered guests, prostitutes and customers meet at small Vietnamese-owned mini-hotels that cater to the locals and tolerate prostitution.

Healthcare

Since the early 1990s, the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective has worked together with the Save the Children Fund in providing peer-training workshops for sex workers. According to the SCF official report of 1995:

Peer educators and peer counselors serve as credible and impactful disseminators of preventive/protective knowledge and behavior skills, and as positively reinforcing role models and change agents in the referent target populations (including sex workers). (p. 4)

On the street, an outreach worker reported to Cooper and Hanson (1998) that there is at the start always some mistrust when they try to bring women for an STD checkup, but with developing relationships, the women are glad that someone looks after them.

Sexual Slavery

According to Article 115 of the Penal Code, any person who buys and sells women shall be sentenced to imprisonment from 5 to 7 years. Any person who engages in this kind of behavior with an organization, takes the woman abroad, buys or sells many women, or relapses into this crime shall be sentenced to 5 to 20 years in prison.

According to news in the *South China Morning Post* (July 29, 1999), domestic sexual slavery is increasing, with an estimated 20% of Vietnam's commercial sex workers held in brothels against their will. In Vietnam, women can be sold to brothels for two million dong (HK\$1,120), but according to the Ministry of Labor, brothels in Taiwan and China pay up to US\$7,000 (HK\$54,250) for young Vietnamese women. Therefore, it is no wonder that Vietnam is becoming an important source of women destined for sexual slavery in Hong Kong, Macao, and Southeast Asia. Many victims are lured into marriages with foreigners and migrate with their new husbands before being sold to brothels.

C. Pornography and Erotica

Jacobus X. (1898) reported that in the second half of the 19th century, Chinese merchants were famous for selling Chinese and Japanese phalli (dildos) and the colored albums of Chinese erotica. At first, the merchants had quite a bad reputation, but this changed gradually, with the merchants becoming esteemed for their business.

During the Vietnam War, the main sources for pornographic photographs were the black market moneychangers who always had some pictures to sell to GIs. The Tu Do Street was the main center to purchase pornographic material, according to Marnais (1967). During the early 1960s, the only pornographic pictures and books available in the city were imports from Hong Kong and Bangkok, where little cartoon folios, pornographic poems, and photographs were turned out by the hundreds of thousands. By 1967, with the influx of GIs, the market had grown, and a group of

domestic entrepreneurs has sprung up to take advantage of it. Pornographic paperbacks, featuring young Vietnamese girls and boys sold along the "Rue Cat," were printed on Saigon's presses.

The "blue" movie houses were located on the same street in little rooms above shops or bars, and the locations fluctuated frequently to keep the authorities away. The windows were painted black or covered with heavy curtains. The movies usually showed a young woman waking up in her small room, taking off her few clothes, starting to masturbate with some kind of dildo or fruit, and ending with a male or female visitor to her room having intercourse with her. As in the 1960s, they were usually short 16-mm films, mostly in black and white and without sound; some were more expensively produced in color, some with threesomes or bestiality. In the background of the rooms were prostitutes waiting for potential customers, most of whom were Westerners. Prostitutes also used pornographic pictures and movies to get their clients "in the mood." European pornographic films existed for homosexuals. Although pornography is forbidden today, according to Stephanie Fahey (1998), government research institutes are known to import pornographic magazines for resale.

9. Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning

A. Vietnam's Family Planning Policy

The Vietnamese family planning program has its roots in the early 1960s, when some contraceptive methods became available in both the southern and northern regions on a limited basis. Beginning in 1962 in the northern province, the government planning policy was directed to reducing the rate of population growth, and the use of certain relatively permanent contraceptive methods, such as the IUD, was promoted. Until the 1970s, however, a governmental policy was not formally implemented. The family planning program in the southern province began in the late 1960s, largely in response to concern over maternal and infant mortality and the increasing number of illegal abortions. In the mid-1970s, the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam stated that family planning had been adopted as an official policy, but inadequate medical facilities made it impossible to implement an effective family planning program.

The Committee for Population and Family Planning (CPFP) was established during the early 1980s, and a one- or two-child policy was formally initiated in late 1988. At about the same time, Vietnam introduced comprehensive free-market reforms, which increased the effectiveness of the population program. The program included an extensive media campaign, free provision of contraceptive services and devices, and the creation of incentives and disincentives to encourage compliance. With a government target to reduce the total fertility rate to 3.0 births per woman by the year 2000, the fertility rate had already fallen to 3.1 by 1994. The sharp drop in Vietnam's fertility over the past several years, which has attracted global attention, can be linked to the general context of how family planning is delivered—including penalties for family planning violation, and to the widespread use of modern contraceptive methods and abortion. The intrauterine device (IUD) is by far the most popular contraceptive method, followed by traditional methods (withdrawal, "rhythm," and breastfeeding), increasing use of the condom, and the pill a distant last place.

B. Increasing Condom Use

The condom was rarely used in Vietnam until recently, but both knowledge and use of the condom have increased significantly over the past ten years. Among married women

aged 15 to 49, knowledge of the condom rose from 45% in 1988 to 76% in 1994, and the use of the condom more than tripled from 1% in 1988 to 4% in 1994. The predominant contraceptive method, however, has been the IUD: In 1988, 33% of the respondents relied on the IUD (with neither a decrease nor increase in 1994). But the IUD is nevertheless known and feared for its side effects: heavy bleeding, infection of the ovaries, and severe abdominal pains, as well as very likely infection of the cervix, ectopic pregnancies, and a low effectiveness rate in general (Goodkind & Anh 1997). As Gammeltoft (1999) was told by a woman: "You know, in the old days, heaven decided how many children one would have. Today we have the IUD, so heaven still decides." One reason for failure and health problems may be that for a long time, the only IUDs available were used IUDs from Communist East Block countries. Some health providers also complain that the IUDs, which today are imported from the U.S., are too large for the uteruses of Vietnamese women. Most improbable seems to be the opinion of Women's Union cadres that "it is a disease of the mind," and that women simply blame all their troubles in life on the IUD.

According to Goodkind (1997), primary reliance on the IUD and abortion is typical of former Marxist states, which have tended to discourage supply-based methods, thus reflecting an indifference to consumer choice and an inability to afford these methods, or to keep tight reins on their distribution and use. Within Asia, Vietnam is distinguished by having the highest levels of IUD and abortion use in the region, perhaps partly because policymakers see this strategy as the most effective way to meet current fertility targets.

One reason for the rise in condom use is the increased availability of the product because of free-market reforms introduced in the mid-1980s. In combination with family planning promotion in the late 1980s, these reforms allowed for two channels of condom distribution: through the public health sector and sales through private pharmacies and family-owned roadside stalls. There are drawbacks, however, to obtaining condoms through public-sector centers, namely, the necessity to travel some distance to reach a center, the need to register one's name to receive supplies, and the necessity to use whatever brand of condom is being offered. But because condoms are offered free of charge, a growing number of condom users seems to prefer going through the private sector. In recent years, the growth of social marketing programs has increased the number of brands available and also competition, which has kept prices low.

The condom is more popular than the pill, both for spacing births and for preventing them. One reason for the greater popularity of the condom may be its greater compatibility with traditional methods, such as withdrawal. Data from the 1994 national Vietnam Inter-Censal Demographic Survey (VICDS), being both an inter-census demographic survey and a family planning survey, indicated that 31% of married women of reproductive age who switched from the condom to another method did prefer one or both traditional methods, rhythm or withdrawal, compared with only 24% of those women who switched from the pill. Given the high prevalence of traditional-method use in Vietnam—22% in 1994—these attitudinal dynamics seem to favor use of the condom over the pill. As Goodkind (1997) pointed out, the preference for condoms cannot be fully accounted for only by conventional explanations like the lesser compatibility of the pill with traditional methods, monetary concerns, or problems in pill supplies. In addition to these reasons, one might speculate that the national family planning leaders discouraged pill use, because they were skeptical that rural women could use it effectively. Also, the IUD and sterilization, even abortion, are being looked at much more favorably, because they re-

flect the socialist legacy of de-emphasizing consumer choice and ensuring compliance with the one- or two-child policy. Goodkind argued that enduring cultural factors, including its Confucian heritage, may also contribute to a preference for condoms over the pill. Vietnam exhibits the same family-formation characteristics as many other Confucian societies in East Asia: patrilineal family organization, son preference, lunar birth timing, and high rates of abortion. Preference of the condom may stem from traditional Chinese medical beliefs, which are intertwined with Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist religious philosophies. These beliefs often emphasize the importance of maintaining a balance of natural body rhythms. The pill may thus be perceived as interfering with the menstrual cycle and disturbing the proper balance between "hot and cold" food intake.

C. Socioeconomic Characteristics and Contraceptive Methods

The condom is the only method with a higher preference among urban users and among those with higher levels of educational and occupational status. In 1994, 10% of urban residents used condoms, compared with 4% of rural residents. However, women of all occupational statuses and educational levels overwhelmingly prefer the IUD and traditional methods, with the pill coming in a distant last place.

Goodkind (1997) suggested that because Vietnam is currently developing very rapidly, its population is becoming better educated, more affluent, and more urbanized. Economic reforms have contributed to a rising standard of living as well as to a growing disparity between rich and poor. These conditions have also increased the numbers of commercial sex workers and their patrons. Because of these social and demographic developments, one can expect the use of condoms to increase both for pregnancy and STD prevention outside marriage.

According to a recent but undated United Nations study, 40% of Vietnamese married men have had extramarital sex. Another survey conducted in 1993 showed that 69% of homosexual men and 38% of urban heterosexual men used condoms during their sexual encounters. Half of sex workers had not used a condom during their most recent sexual encounters (Goodkind 1997).

The decision to use condoms is partly a question of government efforts to improve knowledge and awareness of HIV and other STDs and how to prevent them. There are influential political groups, however, who assume that condoms encourage people to engage in premarital or extramarital sex; these groups object to the discussion and distribution of condoms. Others, like the Vietnam Women's Union, hold a more pragmatic view. They have recently prepared a publication about AIDS prevention that is targeted to young people.

Condom use will very likely continue to increase because:

- Family-size desires are still declining;
- Economic reforms and increased personal income have made condoms more accessible;
- Condoms are suitable to use with traditional methods;
- Current social mobility and migratory patterns are redistributing more Vietnamese into better educated, wealthier social groups; and
- Recent increases in adolescent and extramarital sexual activity, coupled with a growing concern over STD/AIDS prevention.

D. The 1994 Vietnam Inter-Censal Demographic Survey (VICDS)

North Vietnam was among the first countries in the developing world to adopt an official policy to reduce popu-

lation growth. Following reunification, policies to reduce population growth received increasing political attention from the national government. In January 1993, the Communist Party Central Committee identified population growth as contributing to a wide range of social, economic, and ecological problems. A resolution endorsed the recommendation that each family should have only one or two children, so that fertility could be lowered and population stabilization achieved. In June 1993, the prime minister approved the "Population and Family Planning Strategy to the Year 2000," a comprehensive plan to guide the implementation of the resolution.

The 1994 Vietnam Inter-Censal Demographic Survey (VICDS) was conducted from April through June 1994 in a nationwide effort to obtain information about fertility, investigate the prior trend of fertility decline, and determine whether the decline is likely to continue. (An intercensal survey is a national survey conducted to obtain information not gathered in the regular national censuses.) Results revealed a substantial change over recent years in reproductive attitudes and behavior. Fertility has continued to decline to a level not far above three children per woman. Compared with the late 1980s, contraceptive knowledge has broadened and contraceptive use has increased. Stated family-size preferences have shifted noticeably downward. The findings also confirmed that urban women are characterized by far lower fertility than rural women, that the Red River Delta (which includes Hanoi) followed by the Southeast (Ho Chi Minh City) show the lowest fertility levels, and that the Central Highlands show the highest fertility rates. Finally, the survey documented that there is an inverse association between fertility levels and educational attainment: The fertility rate for each successively higher educational grouping is lower than for the previous grouping.

E. Knowledge of Contraceptive Methods

By 1988, 94% of all married Vietnamese women were familiar with at least some methods of contraception, including at least one modern method; 90% of the married women were familiar with the IUD (Goodkind 1997). By 1994, a marked increase in familiarity with specific methods, both modern and traditional, was evident. About 75% of the women surveyed indicated awareness of the condom and both male and female sterilization, whereas 68% said they had heard about the pill. Reported contraceptive use was substantial and, according to the VICDS (1994), continued to increase between 1988 and 1994. About 73% of married women reported ever having practiced some form of contraception, compared with 60% in 1988. In 1997, according to the most recent Demographic and Health Survey of Vietnam (VN-DHS II), more than 84% of currently married women aged 15 to 49 have ever used a contraceptive method. The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) is 75%, and 56% of ever-married women are currently using a modern method. The total CPR is up by 10% over the level of the 1994 survey, and the use of modern methods rose by 12%, with traditional-method use falling by about 2% owing to less-frequent use of periodic abstinence. Compared with the 1988 DHS NCPFP, Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey, 1988 (Hanoi 1990), and 1994 VICDS, the contraceptive mix has not changed very much. About half of the reported increase was attributed to use of modern methods and half to increased use of traditional methods. As far as the "method mix" is concerned, two features stand out: the dominance of the IUD among modern methods, and the relatively high share of traditional methods. Current use of oral contraceptives is still very low, being used by 2% of married women.

F. Abortion

In North Vietnam, since 1962, abortion on request (with the husband's consent) was available during the first trimester of pregnancy and was usually performed by vacuum curettage. Because of the 1933 decree enforcing a French law prohibiting abortion and the use of contraception in the Republic of South Vietnam, abortions could be performed only for narrowly interpreted indications. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, family planning clinics offered services only to women with at least five living children. Even when family planning clinics were later expanded to include women with one living child, a marriage or cohabitation certificate was required to obtain an abortion.

Abortion on request has been available in North Vietnam since at least 1971, and in the entire country since its unification in 1975. The Law on the Protection of Public Health (June 30, 1989) states that "women shall be entitled to have an abortion if they so desire." According to Decision No. 162 of the Council of Ministers in January 1989, the State will supply, free of charge, birth-control devices and public-health services, including induced abortion, to eligible persons that register to practice family planning. As mentioned earlier, it is typical of former Marxist states to primarily rely on abortion, together with the IUD, for population control. Henceforth, all possible grounds for abortion are permitted, as long as the abortion is performed by a physician.

The proportion of single women among all women seeking abortion has increased to 20 to 30% in 1995 (compared with 7% in 1991), suggesting an increase in premarital sexual activity. Attitudes toward informal dating have become more tolerant, especially in urban areas. The availability of Western videos, TV programs, and other media have brought specific images of sex and romance to young people, and these are slowly changing the norms of acceptable behavior in Vietnamese culture.

According to the United Nations, Vietnam had 59 abortions per 1,000 women in 1987, 71 per 1,000 in 1988, and 70 per 1,000 in 1989. The Alan Guttmacher Institute reported in 1998 that Vietnam had the highest abortion rate of any nation in 1996, with 83 abortions per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44. This number covers only abortions performed at state clinics; and when private clinics are included, the abortion rate was 111 per 1,000 women, or a total of roughly two million abortions. In 1999, the state-run media reported that the abortion rate in Hanoi continues to rise. In the first six months of 1999, 33,215 abortions were performed at Hanoi city hospitals, a 3% increase over the previous year, and nearly double the number of reported births. Although the government does not espouse abortion as a preferred family planning method, the procedure is heavily subsidized by the government, and many published family-planning campaigns still list abortion as a method of birth control after IUDs, condoms, and the pill, according to the *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (7/1999).

10. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS

A. Sexually Transmitted Diseases

There is no information on venereal diseases in the early days of what is now Vietnam, although some descriptions of Sino-Annamese medicine suggest that this "scholarly" medicine did already know a distinction between the early and late symptoms of syphilis. Altogether, the frequencies of STDs were apparently only high in those regions that had a close contact with Europeans. Figures for the early French period are also difficult to obtain. The first French colonial physicians were largely concerned with malaria and dysen-

tery, since these were responsible for decimating the troops. However, as rates of morbidity for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the colonial army increased to one in ten in 1887, the French colony of 1890 reached first place, along with Madagascar, in all reports on venereal diseases. The situation did not improve at the beginning of the 20th century. Between 1903 and 1911, morbidity attributed to syphilis increased among the French troops to account for 23 to 40 hospital admissions per 1,000 men. In a division stationed in Tonkin, the medical officer noted that in 1902, venereal diseases accounted for 8.4% of total morbidity (508 admissions), of which 1.1% were for syphilis, 3.7% for gonorrhea, and 3.5% for chancroid and its complications. In 1904, out of 607 admissions, the total percentage of venereal diseases went up to 19.1%, with percentages for each of the three conditions at 3.7%, 9.7%, and 5.7%, respectively. For the medical officer, the spectacular rise coincided with the 1901-1902 expedition to China, which had mobilized contingents from Tonkin (Guénel 1997).

According to Assistance Médicale d'Indochine, founded in 1904, STDs became the second most common reason for hospitalization after malaria in the 1910s. The first statistics regarding STDs in the Vietnamese population are available through the maternity hospital in Cholon: During the first quarter of 1927, out of 2,500 births, 40% of the children had congenital syphilis. Guénel (1997) suggests this accounted for a large part of the perinatal mortality of 38%. In the North, at Hanoi, one in four children was estimated to die of syphilis during the first year. But one has to keep in mind that even in 1930, not more than 10% of the population in the big cities was accessing the services of the Assistance Médicale, and hardly any of the rural population did. All over Indochina, 92% of the prostitutes were infected with STDs compared with 10% in France.

Although hospital admissions because of syphilis infections decreased slightly during the 1930s, from 61% in 1930 to 21% in 1938, gonorrhea increased from 49% in 1930 to 70% in 1938. The two Indochina wars reactivated the problem of infected servicemen: Between 1945 and 1954, 12% of the 1.6 million men (700,000 of whom were Indochinese) were suffering from one of the four STDs then diagnosed. In 1975, the South Vietnamese government estimated that 10% of the population, or one million people, were infected, compared with a paltry 350 STD-infected American soldiers in 1963 (Greenberg 1972). In North Vietnam, as well as later in the unified country, the existence of venereal diseases was denied.

According to the WHO (1993), in 1991, gonorrhea still accounted for the highest percentage among STDs with 11 cases per 100,000 inhabitants. The Ho Chi Minh City Dermato-Venereology Institute, reorganized in 1975, reported a certain stabilization of STDs since 1985, representing, on average, 10% of all consultations (13,700 in 1993 for STDs alone), with a still marked prevalence of syphilis and gonorrhea, 25% and 17%, respectively, of STDs in 1993, according to Guénel (1997). The National Institute situated in Hanoi assesses the prevalence of syphilis at 10,000 cases per annum. But as Guénel points out, the incidence of STDs in Vietnam elude national statistics, much more so than in industrialized countries.

B. HIV/AIDS

Epidemiological and laboratory data indicate that epidemic spread of the HIV virus, the cause of AIDS, did not occur in any large human population until the mid- to late 1970s. During the early to mid-1980s, extensive spread was documented for sub-Saharan Africa, the industrialized Western countries of North America, Europe, and Oceania, and

many countries of Latin America, including the Caribbean. Although a few HIV infections and AIDS cases were detected in Asia during that period, there was no evidence of an epidemic spread, leading to speculation that AIDS would not become a major global health problem. Since the late 1980s, however, when explosive epidemics of HIV were documented in several South and Southeast Asian countries, the general complacency about AIDS has given way to alarm over the virus's potentially devastating impact on individual lives, as well as on the economies of the region.

In Vietnam, the first AIDS case was identified in 1990. It is safe to say that the epidemic will continue to spread, although the prevalence and distribution of AIDS, as well as the future of other STDs, such as syphilis and gonorrhea, will vary widely among Asian countries. Countries with low STD-prevalence rates should not expect to have high rates of HIV and AIDS, but countries and populations with high STD rates are at high risk of developing high HIV/AIDS rates in the future, the reason being that syphilis and other STDs are spread through the same routes as HIV.

A study conducted by Franklin on HIV/AIDS in late 1993 found that 54% of the men interviewed in cafés, restaurants, nightclubs, parks, and the streets where sex was sold or where dates for sex could be made, had had two or more sexual partners in the previous two weeks (as cited by Goodkind 1997). Within three years, from 1996 to 1999, the number of reported HIV cases doubled. By late 1999, approximately 15,800 Vietnamese were reported HIV-positive, and approximately 1,500 had died of AIDS. The actual number of infections, however, could be ten times that number. Most cases go undetected because HIV testing is only done selectively. The actual number of people infected with HIV by the end of 1999 was expected to exceed 129,000. Vietnam's biggest city, Ho Chi Minh City, claimed the highest number with 2,600 cases. The disease is expected to have an especially harmful effect, not only on individual lives, but also on the economy, because 50% of those infected are between 15 and 24 years old.

HIV cases among Vietnam's prison inmates have tripled since 1998, now comprising one fifth of all infections in the country, according to a government newspaper. A total of 22,161 inmates had tested HIV-positive as of July 20, 1999, with 3,621 AIDS cases and 1,895 inmate deaths from AIDS since the first case detection in 1990. A National AIDS Committee official said that the actual number of HIV infections in Vietnam's prisons could be 10 times higher. Infected inmates remain in the general prison population until they develop AIDS, when they are transferred to the prison's clinic. Hoping to curb the spread of the virus, the Ministry of Public Security launched an HIV/AIDS-awareness campaign in prisons and correctional institutions in 1999 (Associated Press 7/28/99).

The Vietnamese government has launched nationwide campaigns to raise people's awareness. Using mass media and other avenues, the campaigns are designed to provide Vietnamese students and 90% of people between ages 15 and 50 with general knowledge of the epidemic and how to protect themselves. However, cultural taboos have proven to be a hindrance to tackling the issue. An estimated 200,000 intravenous drug users and 100,000 prostitutes are blamed for the spread of AIDS.

[Update 2002: UNAIDS Epidemiological Assessment: After the first HIV case was reported in Vietnam in 1990, the number of reported HIV infections and AIDS cases grew rapidly in all provinces. The total of reported HIV infections had reached 43,410 by December 2001. An estimated 130,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2001.

[In 2000, HIV prevalence was highest among injecting drug users (24%). Although data on HIV/STD risk behavior are not included in routine HIV surveillance, behavioral surveys of injecting drug users indicate that 28% share equipment. Sexual transmission of HIV has increased among female sex workers; the prevalence rate increased from 0.6% in 1994 to 3.5% in 2000. In 2000, while the majority of reported HIV infections occurred among injecting drug users (63% of cumulative numbers), estimates of HIV/AIDS indicate that the majority of HIV infections are sexually transmitted (81%).

[Available data from point prevalence studies suggest that there is a major burden of STDs, and particularly syphilis, among sex workers. There is a lower, but still significant, STD prevalence among women, including pregnant women. Quinolone resistance is emerging (56.7% for first-generation Quinolone and 42.7% for second-generation Quinolone). Gonococcal resistance to penicillin is also important (47%).

[The estimated number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS on January 1, 2002, were:

Adults ages 15-49:	130,000	(rate: 0.3%)
Women ages 15-49:	35,000	
Children ages 0-15:	2,500	

[An estimated 6,600 adults and children died of AIDS during 2001.

[At the end of 2001, an estimated 22,000 Vietnamese children under age 15 were living without one or both parents who had died of AIDS. (End of update by the Editors)]

[HIV/AIDS, 2001-2003

[Update 2003: In mid 2001, Vietnam's Ministry of Health AIDS Committee reported positive HIV test results for 37,111 people, but admitted the actual number of HIV carriers in the country might have exceeded 137,000. The committee estimated that the actual number of HIV-positive citizens could reach 197,000 by 2005, with increases of 12,000 to 18,000 per year over the next five years. The number of Vietnamese with AIDS increased by 24.1% in 2001, while AIDS-related deaths rose by 22%. To prevent an increase in cases, the Vietnamese government allocated \$4.2 million to buy HIV test kits, ensure safe blood transfusions, and raise public awareness. Ho Chi Minh City ranked first among the nation's 61 cities and provinces for HIV infection, with 7,690 cases reported. Illegal drug users accounted for 65% of the reported HIV-positive population, while nearly 25% of all IV-drug users in Vietnam in 2001 were HIV-positive. At the same time, 20% of the prostitutes tested HIV-positive, up eightfold since 1994. Between 1994 and 2001, HIV infection rose tenfold among pregnant women and tripled among tuberculosis patients.

[Dr. Laurent Zessler, a UNAIDS representative in Hanoi, said that the AIDS epidemic could easily become "extremely serious" in Vietnam, adding that he does not feel the Vietnamese government is "acknowledging the full magnitude of the problem." Zessler said that schools should offer more HIV-prevention education and the government should increase access to condoms, especially among sex workers. Condoms should be made available at bars, clubs, and brothels, he said, adding that condoms are currently only available in family planning and health clinics. "It's really a political and organizational issue. We have the condoms here. They are quite cheap. But the decision has not been made to make them more available" (Mozes, Reuters Health January 2, 2002).

[In mid February 2003, Vietnam Vice President Truong My Hoa announced that the country needs to "take a more active approach" in its HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention

efforts, according to *Vietnam News*. She said that the "current breathtaking spread" of the disease has "damaged" the health of many citizens and affected the country's socioeconomic growth. Truong called for the country's AIDS Standing Bureau and Health Ministry to offer "more effective" solutions to help establish a national AIDS-prevention strategy by 2010. According to a Ministry of Health report, the number of new HIV cases in Vietnam in 2002 was almost 16,000, up 28% from 2001 (Xinhua News Agency February 19, 2003). According to a February 18, 2003, report by *Agence France-Presse*, Vietnam Ministry of Health officials announced that the ministry would make Lamzidivir, a combination of the antiretroviral drugs lamivudine and zidovudine, available to local health centers at a low cost. HIV-positive pregnant women and healthcare workers will receive the drug free of charge, but the drug will be available to others for \$900 per year. The drugs will be produced by the Vietnamese drug maker, MST Trading. A spokesperson for the pharmaceutical company said it has been manufacturing Lamzidivir for an "unnamed" South Korean firm to export to South Africa. (End of update by J. Pastoetter)]

11. Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies

As O'Harrow (1995) pointed out, Vietnamese men tend to think of lovemaking in almost medical terms, concerned about the maintenance of their potency, psychological as well as physical. The main "sex therapy" for impotence is Chinese medicine. On the side of women, giving birth only to daughters is still regarded as the only noteworthy female "sexual dysfunction." But she can rely on her confidante, the soothsayer, fortuneteller, or *thay boi*. The *thay boi* is nearly always herself female, and although men also come to learn the future from her, the majority of her clients are women, with whom she maintains a semi-psycho relationship. The ability to be of help depends on the *thay boi's* combined knowledge of and sensitivity to the predictable psychological concerns of her women clients, the range going from faithless husbands to vicious mother-in-laws, prying sister-in-laws, and rebellious children. She controls the commonly accepted cultural signs and knows the symbols that are needed to interpret these phenomena in a manner acceptable to her clients. The fortuneteller is the only credible yet disinterested female confidante available to Vietnamese women suffering psychological pain.

12. Sex Research and Advanced Professional Education

A. The Nature of Vietnamese Sex Research and Resources

According to Fahey (1998), very little social science research of any sort—in the Western meaning of the word—has been conducted in the country after the reunification of Vietnam in 1976. The Communist Party's approach to social issues has been prescriptive rather than analytic. It was not until the mid-1980s that social research centers were established. Most contemporary Vietnamese research on women's issues is generated through these centers, including the Center for Research on Gender in Hanoi and the Center for Scientific Study of Women and the Family in Ho Chi Minh City. As Fahey (1998) further observes, the Women's Union and women's branches of organizations like the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor have a much longer history, with the responsibility of lobbying for women's rights and conflict resolution. Although they have generated some information on women's position, more recently they have been co-opted by international organiza-

tions for the administration of aid and have lost much of their lobbying role. At the same time, the Women's Union, a national organization of over 11 million members and 7,000 employees, has shifted from an organization responsible for protecting women's rights to an implementation agency for programs of immunization, family planning, credit, and nutrition education for international funding organizations.

Fahey (1998) points out that, for political reasons, the social science research by Vietnamese scholars largely plays down the importance of divisions other than those stemming from Confucianism or the cult of the ancestors cutting across the nature of the family-like class and regional differences. Research is concentrated rather on politically relevant issues, like female employment, access to birth control, and prostitution and other so-called "social evils," like drug addiction, alcoholism, and gambling. Concerns with no immediate policy relevance, such as the commodification of women, have hardly been considered as yet. But in 1996, a very interesting survey was conducted by the Hanoi Institute of Sociology in cooperation with the Population Council to gain understanding of the participants' views toward sexuality and sexual activity, including differences across the pre-*doi moi* and *doi moi*-era generation (Khuat Thu Hong 1998).

B. Institutes for Sexological Research

There is no independent institute for sexological research in Vietnam. The main Vietnamese organizations involved in sexological research are strictly regulated by the government and its ministries. The more-recent research projects were conducted by the Research Center of Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED) and by the Center for Women and Family Studies (CWFS). The Institute of Sociology and the Institute of Educational Psychology of Hanoi University are leading in surveys dealing with sexual-related topics. The Committee for Population and Family Planning (CPFP) and the Women's Union, as well as the Youth Union of Vietnam, both in Hanoi, have also conducted some sexological research. There is also the Vietnam Family Planning Association (VINAFPA). The Population Council Hanoi supports these institutions and single researchers, as well as conducts its own studies. The Population Council assists the Vietnamese government in testing reproductive-health interventions and incorporating them into current maternal and child health and family planning policies, programs, and research.

The reproductive-health-program objectives are to develop intervention research and training and to provide research results to individuals at all levels in the public and private sectors. The current agenda addresses a broad range of reproductive concerns, including youth reproductive health, male involvement, reproductive tract infections (RTIs), sexuality, violence, and sexual harassment. The Save the Children Fund (SCF) is very active in conducting studies about child prostitution.

[Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors among Ethnic Minorities

[Update 2002: About 10% of the population of Vietnam belongs either to the Chinese, the Cham, or the Montagnards (hill tribes). Especially since the Reunification in 1976, but also in the 150 years since the colonization, first the French and then Vietnamese nationalists worked for the assimilation of these ethnic groups. These efforts, in combination with the devastating effects of the Vietnam War, led to a near extinction of cultural specifics. Many Chinese fled the country as boat people. In the process, the Cham lost most of their customs and were discouraged from using their ethnic lan-

guage. Eighty-five percent of the Montagnard villages were destroyed. Between 200,000 and 220,000 of the estimated one million Montagnards had died. The Vietnamese government resettled large numbers of Vietnamese in upland "economic zones," and the hill tribes were forced to move into newly erected cities. Meanwhile, one fourth of the central highlands had been deforested between 1975 and 1985. The Vietnamese Vice Minister of Culture summed up the direction of future policy when he proclaimed in 1976: "It is necessary to eradicate all the outmoded customs . . . while gradually bringing the new culture to each ethnic minority. The state has the duty to bring new, progressive culture to these people . . . in order to build a new culture with socialist objectives and Vietnamese national characteristics." As a result, nothing is known about the fate of the Cham and Montagnard minorities in recent years. There are some indications that they are disappearing.

[The following summary is based on the most recent reports, which were made several decades ago by Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964), the Cultural Information Analysis Center (1966), Mole (1970), and Hickey (1982ab). One has to keep in mind that the latter two were research projects done for the United States Army. The Army hoped to get a better understanding of these minorities in order to motivate and use them in the war against North Vietnam.

[A. Cham

[The Chams remaining in Vietnam are descendants of the ancient kingdom of Champa. They are located mainly along the south central coast of Vietnam and speak a language of the Malayo-Polynesian stock. Around 1960, there were 45,000 in all of South Vietnam. The sexual behavior of the Cham was strongly influenced by Hinduism and later by Islam, but they have retained some beliefs and practices of both traditions. Parents permitted their daughters great freedom of choice in marriage. The girl's parents made the overtures in asking the boy in marriage. Among the non-Muslim Chams, there was no marriage ritual. When marriage was agreed upon, the boy went to live in the compound of the girl's family. A feast was held, and the boy presented the girl with gold or silver as a symbol of the marriage. Among the well-to-do, this gift may have been larger, including much silver, or several buffaloes. Muslim marriages, however, did entail a ritual. Imams acted as witnesses, and the parents had a role in the ritual. The girl's parents asked the groom if he accepted their daughter in marriage, and he was expected to respond positively. A large feast followed. The boy had to live in the girl's family. For those few who could afford it, polygyny was allowed, though seldom practiced. The consent of the first wife was necessary. Divorce was generally demanded by the woman, who got the house as well as two thirds of the common property.

[B. Montagnards

[Around 60 different tribes dwelled in the wooded hills of the southern portion of the Annam Cordillera. Geographically, this area has come to be known as the Vietnamese Central Highlands. The French gave these tribes the collective name "Montagnards." They speak languages of the Mon-Khmer or Malayo-Polynesian linguistic stocks and physically resemble Cambodians, Malays, and Indonesians. Although divided into nearly 40 distinct ethnic groups, Montagnard characteristics have historically set them apart from the Cham and Vietnamese. According to Lebar, Hickey, and Musgrave (1964), the Montagnard tribes of North Vietnam were the Black Tai, Khua, Laqua, Lati, May, Muong, Nhang, Pa-y, Red Tai, Ruc, Sach, Tho, T'ou Lao, Trung-cha, and White Tai. In South Vietnam were found the

Bahnar, Bih, Bout, Bru, Cao, Chams, Chrau, Churu, Cua, Duane, Halang, Hre, Hroy, Jarai, Jeh, Kalo, Katu, Kayong, Kil, Krung, Lang Ya, Lat, Laya, Loven, Ma, Menam, Mnong, Monom, Noang, Noar, Nop, Pacoh, Phuong, Pru, Raglai, Rai, Rengao, Rhadé Rein, Saran, Seeding, Sop, Sre, Stieng, and Tring. These tribes had further subgroups.

[Men and women seem to have occupied positions of near equality in most Montagnard tribes, although only men could become elders. The health of the adults may be described as good, because they had survived in spite of a high infant-mortality rate, exposure to many endemic diseases, and malnutrition. Village sanitation and the tribesmen's personal hygiene practices were rudimentary. Some tribes, such as the Jeh, held the belief that cleanliness angers the spirits. Mite-borne typhus and venereal diseases were associated with poor sanitation and inadequate sexual hygiene. Malaria was very common.

[As Mole (1970) reported, the family structure varied greatly from tribe to tribe. In some tribes, parents chose marriage partners for their children based upon alliances or economic factors. Others allowed the male to choose his own bride(s) with the encouragement and economic support of the clan. A few tribes were so structured that the girl or her mother made the choice of a groom. The newly married couple might reside with the parents of the groom (patrilocal) in an extended-family longhouse or in a single-unit house in the groom's family village (neolocal). They might live in the same family village as the bride's family in a single-family house or with the bride's extended-family longhouse (matrilocal). In rare cases, the newly married couple established their home in a new community or in one unrelated to the parents of either groom or bride.

[Some tribes required dowries of the husband, others, dowries of the wife, whereas some had no required payments. Marriage arrangements usually required the services of an intermediary in order to save "face" and act as a buffer when marriage-price bargaining became serious. When the marriage ceremony occurred, it was surrounded with prescribed rituals that had to be followed for the villagers to consider the marriage properly begun.

[When children were born, their name was determined by whether the family was patrilineal or matrilineal. Customs pertaining to divorce were so varied that specific statements required reference to a particular tribe in order to have factual relevance. The same goes for the rules about what had to be done after the death of one's husband or wife. For example, among the Upland Cham Group of the Jarai, when a wife died, her unmarried sister had to marry the widower. If there were no unmarried sisters, the widower returned to his maternal longhouse, while his children remained at their mother's longhouse. With the Rhadé, if a husband died, one of his younger brothers was expected to take the widow as his wife. If the eligible brothers were already married, one of them might take the widow as a second wife, although this was not obligatory. It was taboo for a man to marry the widow of his younger brother.

[Reflecting a negative attitude towards the genitals is the widely practiced custom of shielding a newborn child from the influence of evil spirits by giving him or her names like "pig," "naughty," or the names of sex organs. Because male babies were more highly prized, yet had a higher death rate, they were often given girls' names and dressed in girls' clothing to fool the spirits.

[In most tribes, children of both sexes were brought up together until puberty began. Puberty rites included the filing of the teeth, because long teeth were regarded as animal, or as by most tribes, filed down and lacquered teeth were regarded as enhancing the male's and/or female's sex appeal. Premari-

tal sexual relations were mostly discouraged by fines and the knowledge that any village misfortune, such as the sudden death of some animal, was to be blamed upon the guilty lovers. The fine had to be paid to both the village and their parents, mainly as compensation for not consulting them. The couple was also required to marry. On the other hand, among the Jarai, unmarried young people who were not engaged might freely indulge in sexual relations as long as they did not have them with any member of their family.

[Marriage and adultery were regarded quite similarly by the different tribes. They greatly respected marriage, so harmonious relationships between husband and wife were prized. The traditional tribal laws regarding adultery reflected the binding nature of wedlock. However, adultery, a deviation from the marriage pattern, was a frequent cause of family discord. If a married woman committed adultery and had a child, the Bahnar considered her husband the father. If a married man had a child by an unmarried girl, he paid her a fine; if he asked the girl to become his wife of second rank and she refused, he owed her nothing. Theoretically, once the fine had been paid, the normal life of the family went on as before. In actuality, the Bahnar could be very jealous, and adultery could produce antagonism among the persons involved.

[The Hre regarded adultery even more seriously as a violation requiring village intervention to punish the guilty. The penalties for adultery were one buffalo or five copper pots; if one adulterer was unmarried, it was only one pig. Since brother-sister incest was believed not only to bring misfortune to the guilty party, but also disaster to the village, sacrifices imploring the pardon of the spirits were required, and the property of the parents of the guilty pair was confiscated and divided among their relatives. The offenders had to publicly apologize to the village, eat from a trough used by pigs, and were banished from the village.

[Roots and herbs for use as abortive preparations were known by all the tribes, though it depended upon the village policy if they were more or less in use. Generally, it was thought as acceptable to kill ill or deformed infants after the birth. (*End of update by J. Pastoetter*)

Summary

Vietnam is a country with a long and complex history and cultural traditions that vary a good deal in the different regions. We hope this heterogeneous character is clear in our chapter. As in other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnamese society is in rapid transformation because of the enormous influx of "modern" thinking as presented by commercials, international women's and men's magazines, and the introduction of Western economic system rules. The Vietnamese people are trying to find, at least in privacy, some stability and security, especially for the traditional values of the national ethic system of Confucianism. From a sexological viewpoint, this is, literally, a deadly mixture. It involves a tension between sexual hedonism and the perception of sex as something to buy or sell on one side, and the customs and traditions demanding a strict separation between sexual pleasures and ordinary life on the other side. Talking about sexuality, be it in public or in intimate partnership, is a Vietnamese taboo. This makes for an ideal breeding ground for AIDS and other STDs. But it also means that a neutral and unprejudiced approach to sexual habits is hardly possible, not just for the people, but also for the state representatives and researchers. Foreign researchers, in particular, are not seen as neutral and nonjudgmental, but as outsiders. The perceived threat of the etic (outside) researcher calls into play the most important rule of Confucianism, "save face."

Our chapter is a direct result of this cultural rule, and it is not accidental that most of the historic and culturally relevant materials we drew on reflect a strong subjective coloring. This material was gathered by foreigners, who reported (and often exaggerated) only what was interesting from their etic viewpoint, with little objectivity and considerable sensational flavoring to create French or American public interest in their books. Unfortunately, we have no other resources. Sex research in Vietnam is still, even today, only legitimate if it serves public health issues like STD and AIDS research, family planning and abortion-related issues, or elimination of the victimization of women and children. Even then, it is difficult to decide which survey results are accurate and which are only politically correct. Gammeltoft (1999) reports this problem most insistently, and our experience with Vietnamese students and Vietnamese research confirmed this. To all these difficulties, one has to add that Vietnam is a nation with many different regional traditions. Without substantial funding and government cooperation, sexological field research in Vietnam will not be possible. Sexological research in Vietnam still awaits the arrival of a Vietnamese "Kinsey," much as sexological research was not possible in China until Dalin Liu obtained government cooperation and support for a Kinsey-like nationwide survey of 20,000 Chinese men and women (see M. P. Lau's summary of Dalin Liu's research in the chapter on China in this volume).

A long ignored but promising approach to Vietnamese sexuality might be a survey of U.S. Vietnam War veterans. Unfortunately, the U.S. Army did not care enough about the Vietnamese people or their own soldiers to gather data on what was going on in thousands of brothels and in the provinces during the war. Insights and perspectives provided by Robert Taylor (1997) suggest that this kind of retrospective research would still be possible in the U.S.A., as well as in Vietnam. It would be extremely useful to have data regarding how the military and civil societies deal with sexuality under the circumstances of war.

Vietnam won the war against the United States 25 years ago, but now it seems the U.S.A. will win the cultural war. At least, such is the perception of many people in Vietnam and the United States. This is only partly true, and then mainly for the young people. As for effective countermeasures against the rising tide of AIDS and other STDs, and more so for a healthy and even joyful sexuality, neither traditional Vietnamese values nor American pop culture offers any solutions for these challenges. In fact, they may make effective solutions more difficult. What Vietnam needs is an extended understanding of its own sexual heritage, neutral scientific sex surveys, and a broad public embracing of sex education. With these, Vietnam should be able to win the war against sexual ignorance.

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3. The Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality (Francoeur & Noonan, 2004)

". . . [a] treasure trove. . . . This unique compilation of specialized knowledge is recommended for research collections in the social sciences . . . as well as a secondary source for cross-cultural research."—*Library Journal*, March 15, 2004, p. 64

". . . a book that is truly historic, and in many ways comparable to the great sexological surveys of Havelock Ellis and Alfred Kinsey. . . . Many works of undeniable importance are intended to speak about human sexuality. But in this encyclopedia we hear the voices of a multitude of nations and cultures. With coverage of more than a quarter of the countries in the world, . . . not only will the *Continuum Complete International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* remain a standard reference work for years to come, but it has raised the bar of sexological scholarship to a rigorous new level."—John Heidenry, editor, *The Week*, and author of *What Wild Ecstasy: The Rise and Fall of the Sexual Revolution*

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