

Overview of Studies on Multicultural Families between Vietnamese and Foreigners in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the reality and solutions contributing to building a cultural and civilized urban lifestyle in the context of international integration in Ho Chi Minh is presented in the form of an overview study. The research objective of the research team is to review articles on the history of the community and the lives of multicultural families between Vietnamese and foreigners in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam to serve the scientific research topic Class B, VNU-HCM “Đời sống của các gia đình đa văn hóa Việt Nam – nước ngoài tại Tp.HCM: Thực trạng và các giải pháp góp phần xây dựng nếp sống văn hóa, văn minh” (The life of multicultural families between Vietnamese and foreigners in HCMC: The reality and solutions contributing to building a cultural and civilized lifestyle) (2021–2023). The research subjects of the article are multicultural families between Vietnamese and foreigners in Ho Chi Minh City. The research method used by the authors is collecting secondary data and synthesizing research documents related to multicultural families between Vietnamese and foreigners in Ho Chi Minh City. The content of the article includes 3 rubrics: (1) Studies on ethnic culture of foreign origin in Vietnam, (2) International marriage, marriage with foreigners’ element in Vietnam; (3) Theoretical basis and the theoretical research of family, family culture, multicultural family. Through this research, the authors concluded that there has been a sufficient number of studies on multicultural families in Ho Chi Minh City. Various aspects have also been presented yet remains much room for future studies.

Keywords: family, multicultural, Vietnam, foreigners, transnational marriage.

Introduction

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam is known as the “Pearl of the Far East”, where diverse cultures from different regions met and interacted with world’s civilizations. Through many ups and downs, historic crises, Ho Chi Minh City today has been gradually developing, affirming the leading position of the nation in all fields. Along with economic and social transformation, the cultural environment here is also becoming richer and more diverse, including the

expatriate community coming to do business. Many expatriate men who live here, marry Vietnamese women and build multicultural families. So what is life like for multicultural families? What are the difficulties and challenges regarding the barriers of cultural and language differences? What is the theory and research approach of this topic? Those are the research questions when researching about the cultural life of residential communities in general, and the lives of multicultural families with foreign elements in metropolitan areas and Ho Chi Minh City in particular

Studies on ethnic culture of foreign origin in Vietnam

Currently, research topics with the themes of ethnic culture have become very popular domestically and internationally. In Vietnam, besides the Kinh ethnic group, which makes up the majority with more than 86% of the nation's population, there are also ethnic minorities, including the Chinese who have migrated from abroad, who have become a part of ethnic groups in Vietnam. For example: Ngo Tuan Phuong in his Master's thesis *"Đời sống văn hóa tinh thần của cộng đồng người Hoa ở Tp. Hồ Chí Minh"* (The cultural and spiritual life of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City) (2007) researched the current situation of the cultural and spiritual life of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City (including ideology, customs and habits; art; education; belief – religion). Based on the research results, the author proposed a number of recommendations to contribute to building the spiritual cultural life of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City in the new period to meet the spiritual needs of the community, and promote the general development of the city in the orientation of socialism. Besides, there are also research studies about the expatriate community living for a long time in Ho Chi Minh City but not yet recognized as minority in Vietnam, for example, the article *"Cộng đồng người Ấn ở thành phố Hồ Chí Minh – cầu nối cho mối quan hệ hữu nghị giữa Việt Nam và Ấn Độ trong giai đoạn hiện nay"* (The Indian community in Ho Chi Minh city – The bridge for the friendly relationship between Vietnam and India in the current period) of Phan Thi Hong Xuan (2013), the content of the article shows that although the number of Indians in Ho Chi Minh City is not as many as other countries in Southeast Asia, they have nevertheless been contributing a significant part in the relationship and cultural exchanges with the Vietnamese as well as other ethnic groups; attracting investment capital from India, contributing to tightening the good relationship between Vietnam and India in the new development context. The settlement process of Indian immigrants in Ho Chi Minh City is over 200 years whereby the process of cultural exchanges with the Vietnamese is very clear. According to the author's research results, the long-standing Indian settlers in Saigon – Ho Chi Minh City are mostly Indians from mixed marriages between Indians and Vietnamese or between Indians and Khmer people. In addition to the Chinese and Indian communities living and settling in Ho Chi Minh City for a long time, in recent years, the picture of ethnic groups in Ho Chi Minh City has expanded to other foreigners' communities. The Korean community is quite crowded, concentrated in new urban areas such as Phu My Hung (District 7), Thao Dien (former District 2,

Thu Duc City), Pham Van Hai Market (Tan Binh District). The formation of the Korean community in Ho Chi Minh City leads to multicultural families – the result of inter-marriage between Vietnamese and Korean. Despite the diversity of people from different origins settling in Ho Chi Minh City, there have not been many in-depth researches on the life of multicultural families coming from different cultures stemming from transnational marriages between Vietnamese and foreigners in HCMC.

Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong with the topic *"Gia đình đa văn hóa Việt – Hàn ở thành phố Hồ Chí Minh"* (The Vietnamese – Korean multicultural family in Ho Chi Minh City) (Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong, 2007) had shown that previously in Vietnam, marrying a foreign husband was not a common phenomenon, but now, marrying a foreign husband has become a trend in society, especially the phenomenon of Vietnamese women marrying Korean men. The research topic has clarified the real life issues, the cultural adaptation process of Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives, the issues of educating children in multicultural families of Vietnamese – Korean in Ho Chi Minh City in particular and multicultural families in Vietnam in general. The research predicted the development trend of multicultural type and recommendations of policies from both sides, Vietnam as well as Korea, to contribute to building the sustainable happiness for multicultural families of Vietnamese – Korean in Vietnam now and in the future.

Master thesis of Kim Kyung Hee with the topic *"Giáo dục con cái trong gia đình đa văn hóa Hàn – Việt tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh"* (Educating children in the multicultural family of Korean – Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City) (Kim Kyung Hee, 2013) has also contributed to the construction of an appropriate educational environment for children born into multicultural families. Thereby, it can be seen that the attention of the government generally and scientists particularly is in the education of Vietnamese – Korean families' children, a core issue to solve important issues affecting the in the marital life of Vietnamese – Korean families.

And most recently in 2016, the doctoral thesis of Nguyen Duy Mong Ha with the topic *"Giáo dục đa văn hóa trong nhà trường Đại học Việt Nam thời đại toàn cầu hóa"* (Multicultural education in Vietnamese universities in the era of globalization) (Nguyen Duy Mong Ha, 2016) showed us the urgency and importance of the current context of global integration – multiculturalism in education. To be able to adapt to acculturation and accept different cultures, education is one of the essential tools to help us have an overview and a more inclusive view.

The topic has clarified the goals, content and meaning of multicultural education in the era of integration and globalization, and at the same time assessed the advantages and disadvantages in the practice of multicultural education in schools from the cultural perspective, as well as find out the rules that form the universal values of multicultural education in relationships. Since then, there have been directions for formulating policies and strategies for the development of advanced higher education, imbued with national identity in a systematic and creative manner. However, the topic only stops at a general, theoretical form without proposing specific research solutions in each case.

International marriage, marriage with foreigners in Vietnam

In the research paper *“Di cư xuyên quốc gia qua kết hôn với người nước ngoài của phụ nữ ở đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long từ lý thuyết xã hội học”* (Transnational migration through marriage with foreigners of the Mekong Delta women from sociological theory) of M.A. Phan Thuan Du Thi My Han (Phan Thuan Du Thi My Han, 2018) affirms that migration is a common phenomenon in society. In transnational migration, there is migration in the form of marriage to a foreigner. In Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta, this phenomenon has become increasingly common. As the name of the article suggests, the authors present research theories on transnational migration and transnational marriage, which are: structural pressure theory, social network theory and explanation from the perspective of sociological theory. Accordingly, each theory has its “reasonable cores” and applies rationality to explain different aspects of the problem. From the explanations under the perspective of sociological theory, the authors also make a number of recommendations for localities to promote the propaganda of the movement to build a happy and sustainable family, to replicate the movements throughout the country aiming at building a progressive family; promoting gender equality, limiting violence, contributing to increasing the optimism for women in the Mekong Delta about domestic life.

The article *“Các yếu tố xã hội liên quan đến hôn nhân xuyên quốc gia”* (Social factors related to transnational marriage) by the group of authors Tran Thi Phung Ha, Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy and Nguyen Ngoc Le (Tran Thi Phung Ha, Nguyen Thi Thu Thuy & Nguyen Ngoc Le, 2017, pp. 116–129) indicates that transnational marriage and/or marital migration have been around for a long time. In Vietnam, around the beginning of 1990, the phenomenon of transnational marriage was spreading in the Mekong

Delta, mainly among women who married Taiwanese or Korean men. The content of the article emphasizes the social issues, livelihoods and community views surrounding this phenomenon. In addition to recognizing the risks in marriage, the authors have a newer perspective – understanding the contribution of women in household economic development and analyzing the bride’s spiritual and material values that can be brought to families and communities. Through research results in 2 communes Phuong Binh and Luc Si Thanh in the Mekong Delta, the authors showed that the brides decide her own marriage, the risks in marriage stem from the initial lack of preparation, recklessness and defiance; however, up to the time of the study (1997), the level of satisfaction of the relatives about the daughter’s marriage was quite high, the role of the bride in the household economic development was also recognized. In Ho Chi Minh City – Vietnam’s most developed metropolitan, the phenomenon of women marrying foreigners can be due to many reasons with many different foreigners, besides Korean, Taiwanese, is relatively common; however, there are many other foreigners with different occupations, qualifications, religions, etc. The reasons for getting married are certainly different from those of the vast majority of rural women, whereby the role of Vietnamese women in transnational marriages is seen in the perspective of household economic development as well.

In the book *“Hiện đại và động thái của truyền thống ở Việt Nam: Những cách tiếp cận nhân học”* (Modernism and the dynamics of tradition in Vietnam: Anthropological approaches), by Khoa Nhân học (Faculty of Anthropology), University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM, 2007, there was an article relating to the research content, *“Quyền lực ở Việt Nam nhìn từ trong ra: Tranh luận với quan niệm về hiện tượng xuyên quốc gia: Một vài nhận xét ban đầu về những nữ di dân người Việt lấy chồng ở Đài Loan và miền Nam Việt Nam”* (Power in Vietnam from the inside out: Controversy with the concept of transnational phenomena: Some initial observations on Vietnamese female migrants married in Taiwan and South Vietnam) of C. Julia Huang and Kuang-ting Chuang (C. Julia Huang and Kuang-ting Chuang, 2007). This article gave us a multi-dimensional view from a foreigner’s point of view.

Another way of referring transnational marriage, according to Dr. Phan Cong Khanh and the research team is “Marriage with foreigners’ element” through the topic *“Hôn nhân có yếu tố nước ngoài ở Khu vực Nam bộ hiện nay”* (Marriage with foreigners’ element in the Southern Region today) (Ministry-level scientific research project – National Academy of Public Administration HCMC, 2008)

(Phan Cong Khanh & The research team, 2008). The research results are presented in 4 chapters: Chapter 1: Overview of the picture with foreigners' element in the South; Chapter 2: Causes and social effects of marriage with foreigners' element in the South, Chapter 3: Integration ability of Vietnamese brides in foreign countries; Chapter 4: Issues, advocacy trends of marriage with foreigners' element in the South and solutions. Reading all the research results of 305 pages, we see that the topic concentrates on analyzing Vietnamese brides abroad but living in Ho Chi Minh City.

In the international research paper, *“Taiwanese-Vietnamese transnational marriage families in Taiwan: Perspectives from Vietnamese immigrant mothers and Taiwanese teachers”* Eva Chian-hui Chen (Doctoral Thesis in Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2011) (Eva Chian-hui Chen, 2011) shows that transnational marriage, in which one spouse immigrates to the other's home country, has recently increased significantly across Asia. The author's research focuses on Taiwan, where a significant number of Southeast Asian women have immigrated as spouses since the last decade; their children are currently going to school in Taiwan. These trends have caused social and educational controversies in the government and public. However, few people know about these transnational marriages, how they socialize with their children or how the children live once they enter the Taiwanese education system. The research takes the case of Vietnamese women, one of the largest “new” immigrant communities in Taiwan, as the main research object. Questions such as (1) How do immigrant mothers raise their children? (2) What are the teacher's educational goals for Taiwanese-Vietnamese children... the author concludes: most of the immigrant mothers quickly learn Mandarin. They are motivated by a desire for a higher education for their children and realize that speaking Mandarin to their children is important for their success in early grades. The mothers also let their children participate in additional after-school programs. Furthermore, most Vietnamese mothers revealed that they have tried to instill values from their home culture and hope their children will eventually learn the Vietnamese language and customs. They also mentioned the difficulties in keeping the relationship with their husband and parents-in-law in raising their children. The way of posing the problem and part of the research results of Eva Chian-hui Chen is also a suggestive approach for us in conducting the research “*Đời sống của các gia đình đa văn hóa Việt Nam – nước ngoài tại Tp.HCM: Thực trạng và các giải pháp góp phần xây dựng nếp sống văn hóa, văn minh*” (The life of Vietnamese and foreigners' multicultural families in Ho Chi Minh City: The reality and

solutions that contributes to building a cultured and civilized urban lifestyle in the context of international integration), the research objects are husbands with foreign nationality living and working in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Theoretical framework and the theoretical research of family, family culture, and multicultural family

Researching on families can be approached from the perspective of Culturology, Sociology, Anthropology, etc. *“Các lý thuyết tiếp cận nghiên cứu gia đình và văn hóa gia đình trong xã hội hiện nay”* (Theories of approaching family research and family culture in today's society) (Vu Thi Phuong, 2018) has presented many different approaches to the study of the family and family culture. It can be seen that the family is the “cell of society”, so most of the research are based on an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach but are not mutually exclusive. In the research paper, the author has presented a number of theoretical approaches that are commonly used in research on family and family culture in today's society, like functional structure's theory; conflict theory; feminism; development (path of life); cultural area's theory; and intercultural exchange. We completely agree with the author on the interdisciplinary approach to research of family and family's culture; and each theoretical approach usually explains only certain aspects of family life. There will be no theory that can explain all the problems of the family, or in other words, some aspects of family life are only suitable for the application of this theory but not for the other. In the current social context, when studying family and family culture, choosing a theoretical approach will affect the interpretation of data, as well as different conclusions although using the same material. There are cases when choosing to combine several approaches will provide profound and complete explanations that complement each other. Or when two approaches may be at odds, researchers can test which approach is correct by looking at which social facts support which approach. From there, researchers will make decisions on how to approach theories in accordance with their own research purposes, objectives, and viewpoints.

Researching family's culture from the theory and approach method, Tran Thi Minh Thi in the article *“Giá trị gia đình từ tiếp cận lý thuyết và một số vấn đề đặt ra với Việt Nam trong bối cảnh xã hội đang chuyển đổi”* (Family values from a theoretical approach and some problems posed to Vietnam in the context of a changing society) (Tran Thi Minh Thi, 2017, pp. 33–45) has also

given us a new approach: the family is an important social institution. In the past decades, in many countries around the world, the family institution has undergone structural and functional changes, in which it is necessary to mention a significant change in the aspect of family values. From theoretical approaches, the author analyzes family values in Vietnam in the context of a rapidly changing society. Research results show that family values can be seen from many aspects such as: tradition and modernity, individuality and collectivity, gender equity and patriarchy, especially the aspect of marriage and family relationships. Family values are also influenced by many structural factors such as individual socio-demographic characteristics and structural features of the family, in the context of changes in policy, culture and international integration. Compared with the sociological research theories on the family of author Vu Thi Phuong, this article also has the theory of modernization and family transformation. Changes in marriage, family and divorce are supposed to be closely related to modernization. Industrialization can reduce family size, thus increasing the likelihood of divorce, as it increases women's socially independent position. Modern marriages based on love and affection may be less sustainable than those based on socio-economic relationships. Prejudice or stigma about divorce gradually decreases and in turn increases the prevalence of divorce in society. Besides the effects of modernization, traditional values and customs on marriage and family also play an important role in shaping the new norms. Many women today enjoy the social and economic independence they gain from gender equity in education and the labor market. In this article, the author also analyzes the theory of cultural change and maintains traditional values: modernization has a close relationship with cultural change. This relationship is explained on many different approaches. A school of thought that emphasizes the convergence of values as a result of modernization, or political and economic forces that lead to cultural change. In modern society, value transformation takes place in many different fields. The growing popularity of transnational marriages in Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta, are examples of cultural change; maintaining traditional cultural values in parallel with the addition of new cultural elements for cultural integration in different ethnic and racial marriage families. Applying these two theories to study multicultural families living in the most modern urban area in Vietnam – Ho Chi Minh City, will have the dominant character of Vietnamese culture more clearly, especially in economically independent women's families; or couples that live close to the Vietnamese community in the area of residence; the husband goes to work far away; working from morning to evening or working away from home for a long time; the

children study in Vietnamese schools or live closely with their mothers and grandmothers. The theory is that family values is identified as an important institution by economic decisions, human capital, the labor market, and the credit market, such as such as type of work, salary and career opportunities, home ownership and financial assets, etc., depend a lot on family values.

“Văn hóa gia đình trong bối cảnh hội nhập” (Family culture in the context of integration) is the article of Prof. Dr. Ngo Van Le in the Anthropology's researches collection named “Nghiên cứu tộc người và văn hóa tộc người – tiếp cận Nhân học phát triển” (Research on Ethnic Minorities and Ethnic Cultures – Approaching on Development Anthropology) (Ngo Van Le, 2017, pp. 399 – 411) quoted the statement of UNESCO Director-General – Federico Mayor: “... in every society today, regardless of the level of economic development, or political and economic trends, culture and development are two closely related aspects. Any country that sets its own economic development goal but separates from the cultural environment is bound to experience serious imbalances in both economic and cultural terms, and its creative potential will be weakened...” (as cited in Ngo Van Le, 2017). Each ethnic group, each nation has the right to have its own particular beliefs and its own heritage. Culture is the goal and also the driving force of development, an important factor constituting the integrated production, the glue that binds political, social, and community relationships, creating values and cultural identities of an ethnic group, a nation. Culture has the ability to cover and ensure the sustainability of society, the inheritance of history from the past, the present to the future. Culture associated with a nation, an ethnic group, in its development process is dominated by historical and synchronous influences. When researching the culture of any ethnic group, researchers are often interested in social organization (as cited in Ngo Van Le, 2017). The social organization of any ethnic group is, on the one hand, associated with the historical development process of that ethnic group. On the other hand, social organization is a vivid expression of ethnic culture. The family is both a social institution and a bloodline unit. The family is both a part of the administrative system of a country, a basic unit, so it is always strongly influenced by the ethnic community and depends on the development level of the ethnic group, there are different ways of development. But the family is a historical category, an important cell of society, a rather complicated field that includes many aspects and different relationships such as: socio-biological; production – economy; ethics – aesthetics; psychology and law. In the current context, related to the topic of multicultural family research, marriage with foreigner's element or

transnational marriage, it is clear that Vietnamese family culture has been changing in the process of integration.

Furthermore, in the book “Những vấn đề mới của văn minh, văn hóa và văn học nghệ thuật” (New issues of civilization, culture and literature and art), vol. 2, “Về chủ nghĩa đa văn hóa, ngoại giao văn hóa và các vấn đề liên văn hóa” (On Multiculturalism, Cultural Diplomacy and Intercultural Issues) by Viện Thông tin Khoa học xã hội (Institute of Social Science Information) with the article “**Các triết thuyết của chủ nghĩa đa văn hóa**” (Philosophy of Multiculturalism) (Viện Thông tin Khoa học xã hội, 2014) has provided additional perspectives as well as theoretical approaches when studying multiculturalism through the example of the concept of Canadian social philosopher Ch. Teilor and British-Indian philosopher Bhikhu Parekh, the article has pointed out the modern Western philosophies of multiculturalism. Analysis on characteristic aspect of conceptual philosophy “Equality between cultures” by Russian social ethicist A.V. Prokofev. At the same time, the article also analyzes the ideological nature of multicultural rights of two bright representatives of modern multicultural theory. On the basis of research Parekh believes that each culture has an inner limit as he once wrote “actualize the finite realm of human faculties and emotions and represent only a part of the totality of human existence...” (Parekh, 2007. p. 81) so there is a need for interaction between cultures to be able to fill the gaps, which are lacking in human understanding. Parekh also argues that the idea of internal pluralism, the non-monolithic nature of the indigenous cultures themselves, defies the popular view of cultures as something complete, internally whole. Within each culture inherently exist many different cultural traditions. Therefore, in order to develop, culture needs to be open and interact with other cultures. “Intercultural dialogue requires how each culture is open to influences and wants to learn from other cultures” (Parekh, B. 2007, pp. 82–83). At the same time, Parekh also expresses the concept of multiculturalism from an anthropological perspective: “Equal dialogue between cultures as the basis of modern society and dialogue as a general principle for their existence in today’s world (the world of cultural diversity) (as cited in Viện Thông tin Khoa học xã hội, 2014). Through Parekh’s approaches, it helps us to have a more harmonious view of the differences of cultures so that we can make objective judgements when making research conclusions, towards uniformity as a whole.

Conclusion

Generally, there are not many research topics on the life of multicultural families with foreigner’s element in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam in the past 10 years. The scope of

the research is also limited to a generalization, not delving deeply into understanding the aspects of cultural changes, intercultural exchanges, multicultural education and language differences in families with foreigners’ element, thereby offering specific solutions to improve the quality of life of multicultural families with foreigners’ element in Ho Chi Minh City in particular, Vietnam in general. Our review is presented over time, from the perspective of research approach from theory to practice, classified by the topics: transnational marriage, marriage with foreigner’s element, multicultural family, family’s culture, together with secondary data which is thought to have certain scientific and practical significance to help the research team have more information as a premise to implement the topic “**Đời sống của các gia đình đa văn hóa Việt Nam – nước ngoài tại Tp.HCM: Thực trạng và các giải pháp góp phần xây dựng nếp sống văn hóa, văn minh**” (*The life of Vietnamese and foreigners’ multicultural families in Ho Chi Minh City: The reality and solutions that contributes to building a cultured and civilized urban lifestyle in the context of international integration.*), *Research topics at the faculty level, grade B, VNU – HCM (2021–2023).*

Competing Interest Statement

All authors have read and approved the manuscript and take full responsibility for its contents. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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