

Work and family roles of women in Ho Chi Minh City

Tran Phi Phuong

School of International Studies, University of South Australia *phi.tran@postgrads.unisa.edu.au*

This study aims to point out the differences between the North and the South of Vietnam, more particularly, Saigon and Hanoi, in terms of family and work roles of women. It helps to explain the ways women in Ho Chi Minh City reconstruct their reproduction role, the attitudes of Southern husbands towards household tasks and the husband-wife relationship in the Southern family. The literature in Vietnamese studies shows that the regional differences remain considerable. Studies on Ho Chi Minh City therefore must take into account the geographical, historical, cultural, social and economic context. Even the notion of 'family in Ho Chi Minh city' cannot be understood as the same notion of 'family in the South' due to the differences between urban and rural life.

Production, Reproduction, Work, Family, Women, Ho Chi Minh City

OVERVIEW OF THE SOCIO ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF HO CHI MINH CITY

Ho Chi Minh City, or formerly Saigon, was established in 1698 initially with people from the Gia Dinh district with a population of 5000. It has been known as *Dat lanh chim dau* (A good land for a bird to perch), a place where many migrants from other provinces and cities in Vietnam converge. According to the statistics available in Ho Chi Minh city, there are more than one million migrants who are staying legally with household registration (*dang ky ho khau*) in Ho Chi Minh city. The numbers of illegal immigrants are even higher. Official statistics showed that the total population of the city currently is 5.6 million in which there are 2.7 million males and 2.9 million females (HCMC Statistics Office, 2003). The migrants have come from different areas of the country and have different backgrounds in terms of education, religion and custom. Compared with Hue and Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city is a so-called 'new land' only established in the late seventeenth century. The pioneers who first came to break fresh ground (*khai pha vung dat moi*) were poor, often had a low level of education but had highly practical minds (Tran van Giau, 1987).

When the French left after 80 years of colonization, Vietnam was divided into two regions with two different political systems, Socialism in the North and a Republic in the South. The first constitution enacted by the South Vietnamese Government in 1956 declared men and women equal in dignity, rights, duties, pay and ability to vote and hold public office. In 1967, the South Vietnamese Government established a new constitution which retained these rights and emphasized the importance of the family:

The State recognizes the family as the foundation of society. The State encourages and supports the formation of families, and assists expectant mothers and infants. Marriage must be based on mutual consent, equality, and cooperation. The State encourages the unity of the family. (*Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam 1967*)

In the rural areas, today, Southern Vietnamese women work in the rice fields helping their husbands. Approximately a third of the women hold part-time jobs, usually in rice production or commerce, but only wives with no financial support from their husbands hold full-time jobs (Hickey, 1969). Urbanization has been rapid in South Vietnam partially due to the pressure of war, and many families have moved to the urban areas without their extended kin group. Even

when family groups have moved from the rural to urban areas, they have frequently had to find housing in separated areas and live in nuclear households. This has had the dual effect of relieving wives from much of their daily responsibilities when living in extended households. Living in the urban areas, women of all classes have had pressure to get jobs since inflation had made it difficult for urban South Vietnamese families who had to depend solely on a salary income to maintain their standard of living. Newspaper articles written by women in the South in the 1960s and 1970s stressed their need to work (*Viet Nam Magazine*; Chiem T. Keim, 1967). The main reasons these women quoted for working were that it made one a more mature, interesting, and understanding wife, it helped women from acquiring vices caused by idleness, and more importantly it helped to improve the standard of living for the family during inflation. In the North, there was strong governmental pressure towards getting women educated especially for technical and paraprofessional jobs. In some magazines in the North during the 1960s and 1970s there were articles that urged women to fight for their occupational rights, to get better training for higher jobs, to justify their employment in family terms, but very differently from the terms stressed in the South. Unlike their sisters in the South, women in the North were urged to expand the family role into a community duty with the campaign slogan of 'Women of Three Responsibilities'.

The development of different values and the effects of Westernization, probably, created stress on girls in the elite families (especially in the South), who bridged the gap between the Confucian tradition and French education and have since entered the professions. Even though the French developed an economic structure that made new positions available for women at various levels, they also encouraged the concept of unequal wages for men and women. The laws in both the North and the South of Vietnam after colonization, however, encouraged greater gender equality. In the North the government, while encouraging women to make the family role ideal, also extended it to the community. In the South, the government emphasised individual achievement within the social structure as the desired path.

After 1975, the country reunified the two regions under one regime of socialism. In terms of gender roles, peace signalled an end to the drive to assign women to responsible positions by means of sharing their responsibilities. Men returned from the military in great numbers to take up the civilian jobs that they had left behind while women did not move out of their place at the base of the economy. In fact, women's occupation in lower level jobs remained relatively constant throughout the period, and throughout 1986 women formed 70 to 80 per cent of agricultural labour and over 46 per cent of industrial labour in state enterprises (*Woman Workforce in Vietnam, 1987, p.5*).

From 1986, Ho Chi Minh city witnessed the reconstruction of the economy from a subsidized bureaucratic mechanism to an open market economy. This transformation breathed new life into the city, and as a result the quality of lives of its residents improved considerably. Having what was called a 'pioneer spirit', people in Ho Chi Minh city adapted quite easily and quickly to the market economy. Ho Chi Minh city had many advantages in this economic expansion because its population, infrastructure, economic activities and growth potential greatly exceeded other cities in the region (Thai Thi Ngoc Du, 1996). Until the late 1980s the economic growth rate was 4.7 per cent, 1.5 times higher than that of the whole country. The average annual income per capita in Ho Chi Minh city increased from USD 500 in 1995 to USD 850 in 1998, the highest compared with other provinces and cities (Hoang thi Khanh, 1997, p.185). A survey on 1,138 female professionals in Ho Chi Minh city (Tran thi Kim Xuyen et al, 1999, p.71) revealed that 77.3 per cent of respondents reported a higher living standard compared to the last decade. More precisely, they could afford to buy many facilities for improving their daily life. Among the population, 95 per cent had motorcycles, 87.2 per cent had gas stoves, 76.3 per cent had refrigerators, 54.5 per cent had washing machines, 97.4 per cent had television sets, and 78.3 per cent had telephones at home.

Cheap labour force from the countryside (e.g. maids) and the development of the food processing services were also reported by many women as important contributors to the reduction of household tasks for them. The budget expenses structure of the family also changed considerably. Among the 300 households surveyed by Nguyen Minh Hoa (1998, p.39), the average expenses for education, entertainment and other cultural activities reportedly increased by 4.5 per cent, 3.3 per cent and 2.2 per cent respectively in the 1990s, compared with those in the 1980s.

REPRODUCTION ROLE OF WOMEN IN HO CHI MINH CITY

Compared to the North and Centre of Vietnam, the South had been influenced less by Confucianism but more by Buddhism (Tran Dinh Huou, 1994, p.77). The authors of the Cultural Monograph of Ho Chi Minh city (Do Thai Dong, Tran Van Giau and Son Nam, 1987) shared the common views that as they moved further to the South they mainly found lesser impact of Chinese culture and the more common traits of South East Asian cultures. Accordingly, the Confucian factors diminished both in family relationship and kinship in Ho Chi Minh city. In the same vein, Truong et al (1997) emphasized the existence of regional differences based on cultural explanations. They argued that Vietnam had been influenced by two Asian family systems. The North had a closer cultural proximity to East Asia, where the family characteristics were patrilineal, patriarchal, and patrilocal. The South, on the contrary, was closer to South East Asia where a bilateral kinship system is dominant.

However, it became difficult to generalize the characteristics of the family in Ho Chi Minh City. As noted earlier, there were many migrants coming from other areas with different backgrounds. According to a southern scholar, nowadays, the percentage of the 'original Saigonese' (*nguoai Saigon co cuu*) who were born and had lived in the city for three or more generations was quite low (Tran Bach Dang, 1987, p.134). Sources from the local administration estimated that only about 7 to 10 per cent of the city population were original Saigonese who had lived in Ho Chi Minh city for three generations or more, while the rest were new settlers. Therefore families in Ho Chi Minh city today are varied, complicated and not homogeneous.

It should be noted here that the lives of urban women in Saigon and Hanoi before and after 1975 were very different in many ways. In the North a larger percentage of the men went off to war and, when they went off, they might have been gone for years at a time. In Saigon, most of the men who were involved in the war were regular Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) officers and they were gone for no more than a few weeks at a time before coming home for a visit, given the nature of the war in the South. Thus urban women in Saigon were not called upon to take over the responsibilities of the men to the same extent as the women in the North. After 1975, the urban women in the South found their lives more disrupted than those in the North, many people fleeing the country or forced into the New Economic Zones, and many men being sent off to re-education camps. In the North, on the other hand, men were returning home to reassume their previous roles. Therefore there was a reversal of the situation between Northern and Southern women after 1975.

Historical conditions also help to explain the different roles that women in the South and the North played during the war (1945-1975). Although patriarchy and hierarchy were often said to be rooted in the Vietnamese family, especially in the North, the Communist Government exerted an effective policy establishing gender equality. As a result, families in the North witnessed more gender equality than those in the South. In the South before 1975 urban middle and upper class women were said to be more 'traditional' in the role of housewife than their counterparts in the United States (O'Harrow, 1995). On the basis of different survey data on the division of labour in the urban northern and southern families, it was possible to assume that northern men were more involved in household tasks than their counterparts in the South (see, for instance, Do Ngoc Ha, 1990; Nguyen Quynh Mai, 1999; Pham Khac Chuong and Nguyen Nhu An, 1996; Pham Thi Khan, 1999). Therefore compared with their sisters in the North where the communist system had created for them more equal status with the men. Southern women were likely to be more

traditional in terms of family role. It was said that after the reunification of the country many northern men could find their so-called 'lost paradise' in the South (Pham Van Bich, 1999, p. 243). They preferred Southern women who were said to be more traditional housewives¹.

There were also some differences in living arrangements after marriage between families in the North and the South. Unlike the common practice of the patrilocal residence in the North where parents often stayed with their eldest sons and daughters-in-law; in the South parents could live with their daughters and sons-in-law. A survey on 100 households in District 8 in Ho Chi Minh city found more than 24 per cent of parents in these households lived with their daughters and sons in-law and 17 per cent of them lived with their eldest sons. The findings of the survey also reported that living arrangements in Ho Chi Minh city were very flexible and not so much influenced by the traditional patrilocal pattern as by economic and sentimental factors. More precisely, parents tended to stay with children who had better economic conditions and more harmonious relationships in their family (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p.55). While in the North, the eldest sons and their wives had responsibility for taking care of old parents and venerating them after they died (Pham Van Bich, 1999, p.221), in the South the responsibility of parental care was not, it appeared, to be allocated to any specific child.

It should be noted that Northern migrants in the South were more flexible in practising family customs and habits. A survey of Tan Binh district where the majority of investigated households were Northern migrants showed that more than 20 per cent of parents of these families lived with their daughters and sons-in-law. This reality supported the assertion of Do Thai Dong (1990:76) that "Historical continuity does not exclude discontinuities, and the process of cultural adaptation in new areas has caused rapid changes in traditions" (*Tinh lien tuc cua lich su cung khong loai tru nhung gian doan va mot qua trinh thich ung ve van hoa o nhung vung dat moi da khien cho nhung truyen thong phai bien doi rat nhieu*).

FAMILY IN THE HO CHI MINH CITY UNDER THE IMPACTS OF THE MARKET ECONOMY

Family size in Ho Chi Minh City became narrowed down under the impact of industrialization, urbanization and market economy. In the old days '*con dan chau dong*' (having many children and grandchildren) brought pride and prosperity to a family, whereas nowadays people seek social status, certificates, material comforts, houses, and vehicles. Currently the average number of children in a family is down to 1.6 from 6.3 in the 1970s (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p.55). Noticeably, the fertility rate among professional families has also been reported to be strikingly low (Ho thi Kim Chi, 1999). This situation may reflect the changing power relations between men and women, as MacKinnon (1997) argued, that led to a considerable decrease in the household tasks for women through childcare.

In the agricultural and pre-industrial society having many children was considered as a choice of many families in terms of rational economic considerations. Every child in the family was a member of a production unit, they participated in the farm work or in the handicraft work of the family. In the industrial society where the family was no longer an independent economic unit, almost all household members became workers, officials, petty traders and the urban family had been transformed into a consumption unit. Children were no longer the production forces contributing actively to the family's income and, on the contrary, having a child was becoming very costly. Also, the available space for housing in the city was very limited and not suitable for big families. This situation was described by Robertson (1991) in terms of the notions of "reproduction pressures" (p.27) and "demographic transition" (p.63)².

¹ Some scholars raised the question whether southern women were more traditional in terms of their housewifery role due to the American cultural influences and aid (e.g. O'Harrow, 1995).

² In Robertson's (1990) view, as discussed above, the reproductive dynamism of households included four stages *establishment, expansion, fission, decline*. The birth of children initiates the phase of expansion, when the children are mature and create pressure to quit and start their own households, the stage of fission begins. Finally as the

A recent study on family and marriage in Ho Chi Minh city also found that patriarchy had decreased significantly in the urban city (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p.91). Once the family was an independent economic unit, the patriarchal family met the needs of family production in which men were considered as the main pillar in managing production, inheriting the family fortune and hereditary careers. The male preference, therefore, resulted in the expanding size of the family when parents sought boys. In the industrialization and urbanization age, the family became no longer an independent economic unit, leading to a decline in the need for male children, and thus a decrease in family size. It should be noted that the trend towards male preference in Ho Chi Minh city became weaker than that in the North and Centre of Vietnam. Interviews with 300 households in 1998 (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p. 57) showed that 76 per cent of the respondents aged under 30 years said it was not necessary to have one more boy if they already had two girls. If we compare this finding with the statement 'it is necessary to have a boy at any cost' by 70 per cent of respondents in a larger scale poll on family planning conducted in Hanoi and Hai Phong in 1991 (Mai Huy Bich, 1991, p.51), and the different attitudes could be clearly seen towards 'having a boy' among people in the South and the North.

The findings of the survey on the Family in Ho Chi Minh city (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998) also revealed that nowadays the young generation tended to live independently: 52 per cent of the respondents under 30 years of age said they wanted to live separately from their parents' houses after marriage, but would keep supporting economically their parents, partly or totally. However, it has been noted that there was a trend towards living separately from their parents' houses in terms of space and economy but not in terms of sentimental and consanguineal relationships (Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p. 116). In the majority of cases couples retained their relative independence as a nuclear unit but cultivated ties and emotional attachment with their broader home base of familial groups. In the same vein, Truong et al (1997) documented a greater trend for married children to live with a parent from the husband's side in the North than in the South. Residential proximity and exchanges between non-residing kin confirmed the strength of the family institution: frequency of visits was very high among non-residing kin members, and emotional and economic exchanges proved particularly intense (Truong et al, 1997 quoted by Belanger, 2000). By and large, the family in the Ho Chi Minh city was 'residentially nuclear but functionally extended' as was described succinctly by Jones (1995, p. 189).

According to the city's new master plan, Ho Chi Minh city in the future will be enlarged twice with seven more districts, so that urbanization will be extended into the agricultural and suburban areas. The industrialization and urbanization in Ho Chi Minh city has deeply influenced the transformation of the family in terms of function. Many handicraft and small industrial units which could not compete with the large scale corporations have disappeared. According to Nguyen Minh Hoa (1998, p.113) this happened in the textiles sector (e.g. Bay Hien textiles villages with hundreds of power looms had to be dissolved) and other family-scale production units in glass, enamelled tiles, plastic, paper, and toys. Recently in many districts in Ho Chi Minh city there was an increasing number of production units in the form of cooperatives, limited companies but no longer the family scale production unit. Consequently, families in Ho Chi Minh city, nowadays, are no longer independent economic units and are becoming more consumption units in terms of using products and social services.

In the agricultural and pre-industrial society, the socialization of children was mostly based on the family. Grandparents and parents educated their children in ethical values from folk songs, fables, and proverbs to teach them how to behave properly. They taught *gia phong* (family customs and habits), *gia phap* (family rules), *gia le* (family rituals) and *gia giao* (family education)³.

original couple becomes old the household goes into decline, dissolving when the last person dies or moves out to live with another relative or in a retirement home. So there have been some "periodic internal pressure" or "cyclical reproductive pressures" on individuals as well as households.

³ See "Vietnamese Family Culture" (*Van hoa Gia dinh Viet Nam*) 1998. De Tai KX 06-11, edited by Le Minh.

Gia phong were the family customs and habits practised by the members of the family, and represented the ways of behaviours and treatment towards people inside and outside the family. *Gia phong* shaped the cultural identities of family, kinship, and a cultural basis for every member of the family that guided them in the proper behaviour.

Gia phap were the rules created to prevent, correct and punish the inappropriate behaviour of family members. *Gia le* were the practices of behaviour, language, appearance and manners which represented the order, discipline and hierarchy in the family. *Gia giao* was oriented to educating family members in ethical and moral values so that they could treat others inside and outside the family in ways that fitted the moral regulations. Women were taught to have good behaviour of *gia dinh ne nep* (strictly following family rules).

Nowadays, the education role of the family has changed and has been partly transferred to the wider society as both husbands and wives worked outside the house in order to keep up with the rising cost of living. A decrease in the educational function of the family was seen clearly in the trend of sending children to kindergarten and primary school at an earlier age and the reduced amount of time parents spent with their children. Previously children had been taken care of by their parents, grandparents and relatives until six or seven years old. More recently, they have been sent to kindergartens from the age of six months. This could be clearly seen by looking at the increasing number of kindergartens and residential schools. For example, in the school year 1994-1995 there were 89 schools with 739 classrooms; in 1995-1996 there was a total of 104 schools, both private and public, with more than 1000 classrooms (Source: Ho Chi Minh city Service of Education). Among 300 working parents questioned about how and where their children were taken care of during their working day, 70 per cent of respondents said they sent them to schools and only 28 per cent of them had relatives or housekeepers taking care of their children at home. The average time for these parents in earning their living was estimated to be from 10 to 12 hours per day and the average time used by parents for looking after their children was estimated to be from 30 minutes to one hour per day. This figure was reported by 55 per cent of the 300 working parents in the same survey (cited in Nguyen Minh Hoa, 1998, p. 165).

It would be possible to assume that the time children spent with their parents at home was becoming shorter than before and therefore the socialization of children transferred gradually from family to society with “the socio economic transformation driving young people from their home and, to some extent, loosening the parent-child bond” as stated by Pham van Bich (1999, p. 229). Moreover, in the hectic life of the market economy, the relationship among family members tended to be looser. The family sociologists in Vietnam began to raise the question of the risk of disintegration of the traditional family in Vietnam in the globalisation and integration age. Tu Giay (1995, p.6), for example, predicted that “the disintegration of the family relationship seemingly starts from the disappearance of the traditional family meals” (*su tan ra cua quan he gia dinh duong nhu bat nguon tu su bien mat cua cac bua an gia dinh*).

PRODUCTION ROLE OF WOMEN IN HO CHI MINH CITY

As noted earlier, before 1975 more South Vietnamese urban middle class women tended to be full time housewives than their sisters in the North. Financially, under the United States backed regime, the salary of a man who worked for the government as middle or upper ranking offices was often enough to cover all the expenses of his family so as to be a main breadwinner and his wife, a caregiver at home. Culturally, the husband-wife relationship in Southern urban middle class families before 1975 was seemingly more patriarchal than that of the North. However, some newspaper articles written by women in the South in the 1960s and 1970s stressed the desire to work and to justify this employment in family terms (Chiem T. Keim, 1967). The reasons quoted for them were follows: (a) work made one a more mature, interesting, and understanding wife; (b) it kept women from acquiring vices caused by idleness; (c) it helped dutiful daughters-in law get away from nagging mothers-in law; and (d) it helped families improve their standard of living.

One article ended: "So we can see why working not only makes a woman's life independent but also effectively preserves her family's happiness" (cited in Chiem, T Kiem, 1967).

After the Northern socialism forces took over the South, thanks to the gender equality policy of the government and also due to economic needs, female participation in the labour force increased steadily. In Ho Chi Minh city women from the middle and upper classes were involved more in socio economic activity, they were also more active in business and financial transactions, and in the black market in the subsidized system, while most husbands, who worked for the old regime, had to go to the re-education camps. During that time, most women in the South carried the burden of both production and reproduction roles.

After *Doi Moi*, their participation in production even became higher since the non-state sectors contributed considerably to attracting labour under various forms. Cooperatives, private enterprises, production and trade households or individuals (*ho san xuat kinh doanh ca the*) created new job opportunities for people with the so-called 'bursting out' (*bung ra*) of the multi-sector economy. According to the Service of Labour, Invalids and Society (quoted by Hoang Thi Khanh, 1997), in 1997 the percentage of female labour force in the production, service and education sectors in Ho Chi Minh city were as follows: 72 per cent in the Garment and Textiles Companies, 55 per cent in the services, and 57 per cent in education. Private enterprises in such field as textiles, leather shoes, sea product processing were said to attract many female workers.

As for as the professionals were concerned, although there were signs that the school dropout rate was higher among girls than boys due to the increasing cost of education (Mc Donald, 1995: 25); the enrolment of female students in higher education kept rising in the city. According to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (1995) in the whole country, the number of university educated women increased 1.5 times from 1985 to 1994, for example, the number of female candidates for a Ph.D. (Tien Si) increased from 653 to 985. Female professionals mostly worked in the fields of Education, Health, Administration. In the school year 1997-1998, female cadres in the education and training sector comprised 71 per cent, and the percentage of female lecturers at the Universities of Ho Chi Minh city in the school year 1996-1997 was as follows: 48.5 per cent in the University of Education, 41.5 per cent in the University of Economics, 49.1 per cent in the University of Law and 1.5 per cent in the University of Medicine and Pharmacy (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998).

Recently the HCMC Statistics Office (2000) provided the population figures for Ho Chi Minh city classified by age, gender and level of education and occupation. This census provided an overview of the number and structure of female professionals in the Ho Chi Minh City which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The Percentage of Female Professionals in Ho Chi Minh city, by Educational Levels and Economic Sectors

Level of Education	Economic Sectors			
	State Owned	Cooperative	Private Business	Representative Office
Ph.D.	9.7	0	10.0	50
Master	33.9	1	18.0	22.2
B.A	37.8	38.8	32.1	52.9
Junior College	62.7	29.0	42.1	54.2

(Sources: HCMC Statistics Office in 2000)

It should be noted here that at the higher degree level in education there were fewer female professionals, and the percentage of female professionals were highest in the foreign companies (representative offices) and were lowest in private business. It could be argued that in the foreign companies, personnel recruitment was more likely to be based on gender equality than that by the local private business organisations.

The distribution of female professionals in the state sectors in Ho Chi Minh city was as follows in 2000: 48 per cent in Health, 47 per cent in Education, 32 per cent in Processing Industries, and 34

per cent in Commerce. In particular, the proportion of female professionals working in international organizations was 53 per cent.

The number of female professionals who played key roles in the state owned sectors had increased recently but it still remains much lower than that of male professionals. Data from HCMC Institutes of Economics (2000) on the private economic sectors indicated that the percentage of female business managers had increased from 26 per cent in 1993 to more than 30 per cent in 2000. To be precise, in Ho Chi Minh city there were among 8,025 registered enterprises, from which 77 per cent were Trading and Services, and 23 per cent were Industry, Construction, Agriculture and Handicraft, and about 2000 business managers of these enterprises were females (cited in Nguyen Thi Hai, 2000, p.35).

A survey by the Ho Chi Minh city Service of Science, Technology and Environment, that was conducted during the period of 1999–2000 on a sample of 1,138 professionals, from which 61 per cent were females, reported that the majority of female professionals who were aged from 35 years or above, were married (89 per cent). However, the percentage of single female professionals aged from 25 to 35 years old was quite high (39 per cent), reflecting the trend towards late marriage among professional women. Interestingly, the majority of the married informants, mostly in dual career families, said that the household tasks in their family tended to be less heavy than before due to the increased involvement of husbands in sharing household tasks (21 per cent), support from relatives (25 per cent) and from housekeepers (21 per cent), and the use of labour and time saving machines (33 per cent). The divisions of household tasks were reported as follows: men took responsibility for ‘taking children to school’, and ‘tutor and play with children’, women did all household chores as cooking, shopping, washing, laundry, and child care. The average hours for household tasks among these women were 6 hours per day, for work duties are 9.5 hours per day versus those of their partners at 2 hours per day and 10.5 hours per day respectively. Yet, given their higher household work commitment, women’s reported income was only 82 per cent of men’s income in the family.

It is worth noting that in terms of the division of labour, a survey on the professional dual career families in the North revealed that the participation of husbands in household tasks (though still small percentages) such as marketing, care for elderly, cooking, house cleaning and feeding livestock were low⁴. Similar findings in the survey conducted in the Ho Chi Minh city⁵ did not reveal the same results. It was thus possible to assume that the differences in fields of labour sharing, was a reflection of different extents of patriarchal attitudes towards the household tasks between the Southern and Northern men.

In conclusion, due to the historical and socio economic situations, the production and reproduction roles of women in the South, to some extent, had gradually differed from their sisters in the North over time. Before 1975, most urban middle class Southern women were housewives, and usually they carried out all the household tasks. After 1975, they also took on production as well as reproduction roles which had continued since then. However, the husband-wife relationship in the South arguably displayed more patriarchal traits than in the North, especially in the household division of labour in the family. Although, nowadays, most families in both regions became nuclear, the practice of filial duties towards parents and in-laws in the South differed from the North with more flexible living arrangements after marriage in the South.

⁴ In the survey titled “*Đia Vị Nguoi Phu Nu Trong Gia Dinh Nu Tri Thuc*” (The status of women in professional families) by Nguyen Thi Bich Diem (1990, Hanoi) on the division of labour in the family, husbands in the professional families reported that they carried out household tasks such as: marketing (4.5%), cooking (1.1%), house cleaning (2.4%), washing dishes and clothes (1.1%), elderly care (3.4%).

⁵ In the survey on “Professional Women in Ho Chi Minh city” (2000) by a group of female university lecturers, household tasks involvement reported by husbands in the professional families, as noted earlier, only in the activities such as tutor, play with the children or taking children to school.

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