CHAPTER 9

Changes in Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Vietnamese Family

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1 Economic and Social Contexts after Doi Moi and Their Impacts on the Family in Vietnam

The centrally planned economy with a socialist model was implemented in North Vietnam beginning in 1954, after the end of the French war, and continued after the unification of the country in 1975. According to the socialist model, the state determined the direction of all important economic activities through a system of production and distribution plans based on strict regulation of pricing and interest rates. The state and collective enterprises constituted the foundation of the economy, which included numerous private subsidies. Large-scale private enterprises were not encouraged to expand further. Such economic policies had the advantage of helping the state to realise its economic and social purposes. However, these policies did not create motivation to boost the activities of businesses and individuals. Vietnam’s economy under this system proved to be inefficient and costly. The weakness of this management mechanism was even more clearly revealed after foreign aid was reduced in 1979–80. This demanded a new solution for economic development.¹

In December 1986, the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam announced a new policy called ‘Doi Moi’ (Đổi Mới; Renovation). One of its main orientations is to shift Vietnam’s economy from a centralised and subsidy-based economy strictly dependent on public and collective ownership to a socialist-oriented multi-sector commodity economy under state management. Small and medium-sized private businesses have received stimulus from the state.

In agriculture, a transition has been made from the product-based contractual quota system to a new management mechanism recognising the peasant household as a self-helping and self-supporting economic unit (made official in 1988). This has been developed further through, for example, the allocation of land for long-term use to households. Peasant households are now playing an ever more active role while agricultural cooperatives, along with small

¹ Vu Tuan Anh (1995).
industrial and handicraft organisations, are seeing their role and position reduced.²

Doi Moi has been an important platform for change in all economic and social sectors in the country. The past three decades have seen significant economic and social change which have supported changes to traditional patterns of marriage and family in Vietnam. As a number of strategies of economic and social development were implemented from 1986 to 2010, Vietnam’s economy recorded good and relatively stable growth rates. The average annual GDP growth rate was around 7.26 per cent in the period from 2001 to 2010. Economic structures shifted towards industrialisation and modernisation. GDP per capita was about 1,168 USD in 2010, nearly three times that in 2000. The GDP growth rate was 5.9 per cent in 2011.³ With this level of growth, Vietnam moved from the group of poorest countries to the group of countries having low-to-average income levels. Along with fast and stable economic growth rates, Vietnam has also made significant changes to its economic structure.

Vietnam has been integrating more deeply and extensively into the global economy, attracting foreign investment and exploiting international market opportunities to foster economic growth.

Along with economic development, Vietnam has paid special attention to and prioritised resources for social development and has realised encouraging achievements in this area. The number of people who were provided with employment grew by about 1.7 million annually. Urban unemployment remained at 5–6 per cent. Public healthcare became a focus; the healthcare network was strengthened and upgraded, preventive health activities were also enhanced. Some new epidemic diseases were stopped quickly and promptly. Besides sustained universal primary education, significant results were achieved in the implementation of universal secondary school education. The scale of vocational training and tertiary education grew by nearly 20 per cent per year.

Life for the majority of people, especially women, children, and people in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities has improved. The poverty rate fell to 12 percent in 2011, based on the new poverty criteria defined by the government for the period between 2011 and 2015. This rate has decreased about 2 per cent annually on average. Vietnam has been recognised as one of the leading countries in hunger alleviation, poverty reduction, and implementation of the millennium development goals. The average life expectancy of the Vietnamese increased from 72.8 years in 2009 to 73.2 years in 2011. The Human Development

² Ibid.
³ VCP (2011); SRVG (2011).