

Confucianism Perspective on the Position of Women in Society and the Impact of that Perspective on Gender Equality in Vietnam Today

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Article History

Received: 24.10.2019

Accepted: 27.10.2019

Published: 10.11.2019



Abstract: In the 21st century, we try to understand how the roles of men and women have been changed in Vietnam that has firm beliefs of Confucianism in the society. Confucianism in Vietnam instills the concept of male superiority over women. Although the laws in the country establish women's rights, the norms and practices of society still engender male domination. Vietnam family norms promote the unity of the family while placing women in a subservient position, the traditional culture requires obedience to a father and then to a husband and sons. As per family norms, the power of family decisions also remains with husbands. Men keep contact politically and socially at village meetings and exchange the use of resources and production. With the increase of women taking greater productive roles and earn income, their involvement in decision-making also increases. Due to increased women's education, female power within the family has also increased. Over that last three decades (Starting in 1986, Vietnam carried out the renovation of the country), these traditional views on gender roles influenced by Confucianism have changed drastically, although it is still looked down

upon for women to work outside the house, it is slowly being accepted and almost 71.1% of the female population in Vietnam is actively participating the workforce (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019). On the other hand, the male domination over the woman on the family has eased out, and many men do help out with household chores and looking after children while the woman works. Although this population is much lesser than the expectations, it is still a change from the Confucianism principles where the male remains dominant and authoritative. Although there are instances to prove that Vietnam is coming out of its traditional views on gender roles, it is still far behind concerning gender equality compared to globally desirable standards. It is expected that modernization will bring about the empowerment of women and a balance between men and women in both family and society.

Keywords: Confucianism, Women, Society, Gender equality, Vietnam

Introduction: For two thousand years of dissemination in Vietnam, significantly in 3 periods like Trần (1225-1400), later Lê Dynasty (1428-1527) and Nguyễn Dynasty early amount (1802-1883), philosophical doctrine caused vigorous impacts on politics and culture of Vietnam. It principally influenced higher categories and strata in society, however, it didn't settle down in lower social categories and strata. For politic, the philosophical doctrine was employed by Vietnamese structure dynasties to control the country; for the religious culture, philosophical doctrine created a contribution

towards the formation of associate degree orthodox culture besides folks that were connected closely with ethnic sense, leading to the core of ethnic culture. Philosophical doctrine created the religious culture of Vietnamese folks within the medieval time considerably Chinese-inclined; at constant time, it controls back and caused negative impacts on Vietnamese ancient culture, each spiritually and materially. Eventually, the philosophical doctrine became powerless and light, once Vietnam encountered things of losing the country within the middle nineteenth century (1858). In Vietnam as in alternative Asian countries, the philosophical doctrine has exercised a strong influence in the formation of society and continues to be a serious cultural issue. The standard Vietnamese man plays a crucial role in family and society; woman spent her whole life taking care of her oldsters, husband, and kids. These known Confucius statement specify that ideal: “traianhùngnămhêbâythiếp” (a man WHO was thought of a hero should have 5 to seven wives), “tạigiátôngphụ” (serving the daddy at home), “xuấtgiátôngphụ” (upon wedding serving the husband), “phutửtôngtử” (after the death of the husband serving the children). The read “trọngnamkhinhnữ” (the importance of man, disregard for women) of philosophical doctrine has been employed by Vietnamese structure dynasties and existed in Vietnamese society till these days. Within the history of Vietnam, that concept has created a distinction, treatment and lowering the role of ladies, adversely moving the distribution of society. Though these days, within the society of Vietnam, that concept has not affected the event of society it still exists and creates gender differences in social relations, impeding the event of Vietnamese society. The teachings of Chinese thinker Confucius have had a deep influence on Vietnam so much that the country is typically observed as one of the most Confucian society on earth. His teachings concerning family; the importance of men, disregard for women, and respect for elders (“kínhlãođăcthọ”) still feature extremely in Vietnam life. The read “trọngnamkhinhnữ” that considers men more important than women. In keeping with philosophical doctrine, men and women have had specific roles that they have to satisfy so as to measure a balanced life; this role has been schooled to each of the genders for hundreds of years and has been embedded in their means of life. The content of moral education for Confucian folks was focused in basic classes like “Tam Cương”, “NgũThường” and “Chínhdanh” (for man). For women, the content of Confucian ethical education is expressed through the school of thought the “Tam tông” and “Tứđức”. “Tam tông” were 3 problems that ladies fully should listen to: once they are a unit with their families, the ladies should fully hear their oldsters, once married, the lady should fully hear her husband, and once her husband died, the lady had to measure alone all her life to care of her children. “Tứđức” were four qualities that ladies should have: Công (skillful of work), Dung (a pretty face), Ngôn (soft speech), Hạnh (gentle temperament). Confucianism was transmitted into our country since Northern domination. Once coming into Vietnam, it absolutely was changed to suit the inherent temperament of the Vietnamese folks. Within the course of existence, Vietnamese structure dynasties used philosophical doctrine as a tool to determine social order and maintain the dominance of the upper class. Through the ups and downs of history, the philosophical doctrine had a particular place within the philosophical lifetime of Vietnamese folks. Among the ethical contents of philosophical doctrine, “Tam tông”, “Tứđức” was the essential ethical education rules for girls. This thought has had a profound result on the role, position, and lifetime of Vietnamese ladies. The “Tam tông” and “Tứđức” were virtues within the great distance of national history have contributed bound values to the standard fantastic thing about Vietnamese ladies. However, in trendy Vietnamese society, this thought isn't any longer acceptable and expected to be modified in accordance with the final development trend of the planet.

Confucianism Spread into Vietnam and the Process of Establishing a Patriarchy

In 111 BC, the Han Dynasty annexed Nam Việt and turned ÂuLạc into Han's land. ÂuLạc was divided into three districts of GiaoChí: GiaoChí, CửuChân and Nhật Nam. To enslave our people in

ideology, right from the time of the Western Han Dynasty, Confucianism was spread by the government to our country. At the beginning of the BC, the two beasts of GiaoChử and CửuChân districts, TíchQuang and NhânDiên, were actively “building up the school” to teach the ceremony, i.e. opening schools to teach Confucianism and spreading Han ethnic customs. Confucianism entered Vietnam officially from here and “Civilization of Linh Nam land started from those two beasts” (Dai Viet Su Toan Thu, Vol 1, 2004). From the 8th to 25th year of AD, due to the Wang Meng rebellion and peasant revolts in Shandong Province that “a large number of Han soldiers fled, migrated to Jiaozhi, they contributed to spreading Confucianism by opening schools to make a living” (Giau, T. V., 1973, p. 61). By the time of Si Nhạc (SĩNhiếp) (a native of the Han Dynasty who was a beast of GiaoChử), studying Confucianism in our country was relatively popular. Si Nhạc was a man of great economic power, his talent and virtue far surpassed the political leaders of contemporary Han. Moreover, Si Nhạc was also a very knowledgeable man of scriptures and actively spread Confucianism and Taoism into Vietnam. Therefore, the Vietnamese Confucian people later respected Si Nhạc, honored as “SĩVương” (Si King) and considered Si Nhạc as the ancestor of the Southern education - “Male communication team” (Dai Viet Su ky Toan Thu, Vol 1, 2004)). The land of GiaoChâu under his rule was a stable and prosperous society. Han Hien De king at that time had to praise: “GiaoChâu is a land of civilization, a mountain of unmatched mountains, a lot of respect, great writings and outstanding talents” (Giau, T. V., 1983, p. 86). Therefore, in China from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, when many people from South China were in trouble, they tried to emigrate to GiaoChâu. Many Han dignitaries who came to take refuge in this place were encouraged to open a school to study Confucianism. Historian Ngo Si Lien remarked: “Our country passed the letter exam, studied the music festival, became a civilized country, and started from Si Vuong who merit was not only in the contemporary but also transmitted in the future, could not it be big?” (Dai Viet Su ky Toan Thu, Vol 1, 2004, p. 164). Contributing to the spread of Confucianism, there were also Chinese names due to political opposition that were exiled by the court to exile outside the border, such as NguPhien under the reign of Tam Quoc sent to GiaoChâu to open a school “teaching Learning without fatigue, disciples often have several hundred. “ This Confucian scholar, much less, certainly spread some good ideas (Giau, T. V., 1973, p. 60). In centers such as LuyLâu, Long Biên, TưPhố, CưPhong ... there were schools to spread Confucianism and Chinese studies. Studying these schools had not only children of Han rulers and Han emigrants but also children of wealthy people, some of the locals who had cooperated with urban authorities. Among them, there were some GiaoChử, CửuChân people who were well and pass and were appointed to be officials in China, such as Truong Trong, Ly Tien, Ly Cam, and BocLong, etc. (Thu. N. T., 1993). Even many GiaoChâu people study abroad in TrùngAn capital of the Tang Dynasty. The two brothers, Khuong Cong Phu and Khuong Cong Phuc, are from the CửuChân district who hold doctorates in Truong An and were appointed to be mandarins at the court. However, if we look at it in general, it could be seen that, although there were a thousand years of Northern domination and along with the spread of Confucianism, the Lý Dynasty in our country at that time was very devoted to Buddhism and Taoism. The three religions have complemented each other in meeting the political, ideological and spiritual life needs of the rulers and social classes. If Confucianism was applied to the organization of society and the management of earthly life, Buddhism and Taoism will solve the problems of painter and happiness, virtue and sin, the issue of reincarnation and journalism ... the continued development of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, though respected, but its influence on the socio-political life, customs, and Vietnamese life during the Ly Dynasty was slow. Many rituals and customs in the court, as well as the marriages and funerals, were also written by the Confucianists later as contrary to Confucian norms.

With the wisdom of TrầnThủĐộ, the transfer of power from the Lý Dynasty to the Tran Dynasty was carried out smoothly. In the condition of strengthening the state power and organizing the resistance against the Yuan - Mong army, the issue of morality, military meaning, and order on the

bottom need to be enhanced. Therefore, the study and examinations under the Tran Dynasty were carried out quite aggressively. The Confucianism class has thus become a significant social force. Through the academic path, they participate in the state apparatus and work actively in many fields. If in the previous centuries, Buddhism prevailed over Confucianism, from the end of the Tran Dynasty and Confucian life began to intensify. Many Confucianists voiced strong criticism of Buddhism, which caused Buddhism to step back, paving the way for Confucianism rise to occupy a unique position under the Lê Dynasty. The famous masters of the Tran Dynasty such as Lê Văn Hưu, Lê Quát, and Trương Hán Siêu attacked the monks who were extravagant and lavish houses, built too many pagodas and wasted money and energy of the people report clergy as lazy people, only to be happy without worrying about self-reliance. Not only criticizing Buddhism but they also openly criticized the feudal authorities not following the regular Confucianism. Confucianism and the retreat of Buddhism reflected changes in our social-class structure at that time. From the 13th century, in Vietnam, a new class of landlords originated from the people, not from the noble feudal class formed and developed. Besides, the study and examination of Confucianism have been strengthened, making the Confucian class more and more crowded. Their strength are increasing and gradually gaining important position in the feudal state apparatus.

In the 15th century, when the feudal state of Lê Sơ Dynasty was established, the feudal regime of Vietnam went into a period of flourishing development. From this period, Confucianism won a unique position in the political and spiritual life of Đại Việt. At this time, not only the study and examination of the Confucian model but also the field of literature and art with the content of Confucianism developed rapidly. In particular, the position and role of women are also gradually pushed out of social activities. Since then, the woman has retired to preserve the family; a series of strict Confucian regimes for women has gradually been established in Vietnam.

Confucianism Perspective on the Position of Women

In Chinese society from very early times, men have been seen as the core of the family. The ancestors to whom a Shang dynasty or Zhou dynasty king created sacrifices were his direct ancestors, that is, his ancestors coupled solely through men. When women enter the first account, it's actually because they caused men issues. Some women schemed to advance their own sons once their husbands had sons by many women. Women's loyalties were often in question as women in their lives were capable of loyalty, courage, and devotion, but also of intrigue, manipulation, and selfishness.

Confucius in all probability took without any consideration these styles of attitudes toward girls, common in his society, his greatly prestigious ancestral rites and connected family virtues like filial piety. He hoped that through the follow of formality everybody, male and female, high and low, old and young, would learn to fulfill the duties of their roles.

Women's roles were primarily kinship roles: female offspring, sister, wife, relative-in-law, mother, and mother-in-law. In all these roles, it absolutely was obligatory for women to accord with the desires and wishes of closely-related men: their fathers once young, their husbands when married, their sons when widowed.

Confucius's follower Mencius declared that the worst of unofficial acts was a failure to have descendants (The Mencius 4A in Chan 1963, p. 26). In later centuries, these stress on the need of son led many to be frustrated at the birth of a female offspring.

The preference for boy babies over girls in Asian society is affianced partially within the Confucian belief that a male heir is critical to hold on the family name, offer leadership for the family and take care of the family ancestors. China's parents worry that if they don't produce a male heir no one will take care of them in their old age and no them company or look after them in the afterlife. In a traditional one will keep male-dominated Confucian family, the eldest son is held in the highest esteem

and is responsible for carrying on the family name and lineage, keeping property within the family and presiding over ancestral rites.

In the centuries following Confucius, it became common for writers to debate gender in terms of yin and yang. Women were yin, men were yang. Yin was soft, yielding, receptive, passive, reflective, and tranquil, whereas yang was hard, active, assertive, and dominating. Day and night, winter and summer, birth and death, indeed all natural processes occur through processes of interaction of yin and yang. Conceptualizing the differences between men and women in terms of yin and yang stresses that these differences are part of the natural order of the universe, not part of the social institutions artificially created by human beings. In yin yang theory the two forces complement each other, however, not in strictly equal ways. The natural relationship between yin and yang is due to the reason that men lead and women follow. If yin artificially gains the whip hand, order at both the cosmic and social level are endangered.

Confucius magnificently mentioned that a decent woman is an illiterate one. Women often suffered under the Confucian system. Not solely are they ordered around by men, they're typically ordered around by one another in terribly vicious or mean ways. Older sisters have traditionally pushed their younger sisters around with impunity, and mothers of sons are notorious for treating their daughters-in-law like servants. Confucius had very little to say about the roles and expectations of women within the family or in society.

Thus it absolutely was left for Confucian students to use the principles enunciated by Confucius and Mencius to the task of prescribing expectations and behavioural norms for women in a Confucian family and a Confucian society. To these scholars also fell the task of justifying the education of women and the task of laying forth the parameters and techniques for the education of girls and women.

The Analects, the main Confucian text that dates back to the Classical period, has relatively little to say about women. One passage on "On Women and Servants" says: "Women and servants are most difficult to nurture. If one is close to them, they lose their reserve, while if one is distant, they feel resentful" (The Analects, 1996). "Men and women should not mix up with each other, do not hang clothes in the same place, do not share combs, do not give anything to their hands. Aunt and uncle could not get close to each other, did not wash their underwear for their stepmother (father's next wife)" (KinhLẽ, 1999).

Maintaining a physical separation between the worlds of men and the worlds of women was viewed as an important first step toward assuring that yin would not dominate yang. The Confucian classic stressed the value of segregation even within the home; houses should be divided into an inner and an outer section, with the women staying in the inner part. One poem in the Book of Poetry concluded: "Women should not take part in public affairs; they should devote themselves to tending silkworms and weaving" (KinhLẽ, 1999).

During Han times (202 BCE – 220 CE), both the administrative structure of the centralized state and the success of Confucianism helped shape the Chinese family system and women's place in it. Han laws were in favour of the authority of family heads over the other members of their families. The family head was generally the senior male, but if a man died before his sons were grown, his widow would serve as a family head until they were of age. The law codes of the imperial period enforced monogamy and provided a variety of punishments for bigamy and for promoting a concubine to the status of wife. Men were able to divorce their wives on any of the seven grounds which included barrenness, jealousy, and talkativeness, but could do so only if there was a family for the lady to return to. There were no grounds on which a woman could divorce her husband, but divorce by mutual agreement was possible.

In addition, Confucianism appraises the virtuous character of women by their social behaviors. Their dignity will be recognized by the community if they can control their feelings in family and

social activities. Foreigners will rarely see China women kiss their husbands in public; even if they haven't seen each other for a long time. It is one of the faithful expressions of the culture to express sentiment privately and delicately.

The most obvious consequence of Confucianism is the mother-in-law's continuing unfair treatment of the daughter-in-law. The measure of unfair treatment has lessened nowadays because women are very busy with work and normally don't live together with their partner's mother. But the older generations of women often want the modern wives of their sons to obey the admonitions and rites of Confucianism, so the seeds of discord are always there. In the West, it is interesting to contrast with the discord usually occurring between mother-in-law and son-in-law.

The Issue of Gender Equality in Vietnam Today

Gender equality is one of the basic rights and obligations of Vietnamese citizens specifically stipulated in legal documents and in international conventions that Vietnam has signed. The Law on Gender Equality was passed on November 29, 2006, by the National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and takes effect from July 1, 2007. The Law stipulates the doctrine of gender equality in the fields of social as well as family life, measures to ensure gender equality, responsibilities of agencies, organizations, families, and individuals in implementing gender equality. The goal is to eliminate gender discrimination, create equal opportunities for men and women in socio-economic development and human resource development, to achieve real gender equality between men and women and to establish, strengthening cooperation and support relations between men and women in all areas of social life and family. According to Clause 3, Article 5 of the Law on Gender Equality: "Gender equality is the fact that men and women have equal positions and roles, are facilitated and have the opportunity to promote their capabilities for the development of the community, of the family and equally benefiting from the achievement of that development" (Vietnam National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2006).

Since 2007, our country has achieved many achievements in gender equality: Politically, Vietnamese women have their own political organizations, namely the Vietnam Women's Union. And the proportion of women represented in the legislature of Vietnam is always the highest ranked group in the region in particular and in the world in general and this rate is increasing. Typically, thoroughly grasping the spirit of the XII Congress of the Party: "Raising the level of every aspect and material and spiritual life of women; good implementation of gender equality, creating conditions for talented women to develop" (Vietnam Communist Party, the 12th National Party Congress of the Party, 2016, p. 163). The proportion of female deputies to the National Assembly always remains high and tends to increase. Specifically: from 3% in National Assembly I increased to 24.4% in Term VIII (2011 - 2016) and this rate is 26.72% for 133 female National Assembly members on a total of 496 delegates in the XIV course (2016 - 2021). Or in the election of People's Council deputies at all levels in many localities, the percentage of over-elected women is expected such as: People's Council deputies in Ho Chi Minh City, the percentage of women elected is 43%; Representatives of the People's Council of CauGiay District - Hanoi City, the percentage of women elected is nearly 45% (Vietnam Communist Party, the 12th National Party Congress of the Party, 2016, p. 164).

In addition to implementing gender equality in the field of politics, gender equality in labor has also achieved positive results. Specifically, in 2017, the proportion of women participating in labor accounted for 48.4% of the labor force aged 15 and over. And with the labor force participation rate of up to 73% of all working-age women, the proportion of Vietnamese women currently working is much greater than that of most other countries in the world. This rate is also higher than the world average (49%), higher than the average of the East Asia-Pacific region (59%) and the middle-income countries

group (39%) (Report Overview of female workers in Vietnam: Women, employment and wages are made by the Action Network for Migrant Workers (Mnet), 2017).

In the 2016 Human Development Report, with the title “human development for everyone”, published by the United Nations Development Program in Hanoi on April 26, 2017, Vietnam with the index Gender inequality is 0.337, ranking 71 out of 195 countries and territories, continuing to be among the three countries with the best rankings corresponding to the lowest inequality index among ASEAN countries. With this achievement, the United Nations assessed Vietnam as one of the countries that achieved the best gender equality in Southeast Asia. This represents great progress of Vietnam in implementing gender equality.

However, Vietnam still faces many challenges in ensuring gender equality substantially between men and women. Gender gaps still exist in many areas. Gender inequality and violence and abuse of women and children still occur in many regions, regions and social sectors. Female workers account for a large number of occupations with low positions, do not require high technical expertise, and have low income, poor working conditions, long working time and unstable jobs.

Why does the Gender Equality Law set out to create equal opportunities for men and women in socio-economic development and human resource development, but in fact, there are still inequalities between the sexes? The reason for this is that there are many “legal obstacles” that come mainly from the perception and social conception - things that move more slowly than scientific and technological advances and legal documents. Vietnamese society is strongly influenced by feudal and Confucian ideology. The thought of “respect men and women” has been deeply rooted in many generations. Currently, this concept is no longer heavy but in some classes and localities, the inertia is still quite strong.

One manifestation of this thought is educational inequality: the percentage of girls in primary and secondary education is lower than that of male students, especially in poor rural areas and ethnic minority areas. After each summer vacation, especially after each level, boys have more opportunities to return to school than girls. The percentage of girls in mountainous provinces attending school is still low, mainly because they have to stay at home to help their families because boarding schools are too far from home and in some places still continue to be married (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017).

The second manifestation is limited access to reproductive health care services for women in rural and ethnic minority areas. The rate of maternal mortality is still high compared to some countries in the region. The rate of reduction of maternal mortality rates in many years has been slow, especially in remote and ethnic minority areas. The proportion of women with health insurance (calculated in the number of health care providers) has increased over the years, but it is still lower than that of men (Ministry of Health, 2017).

The third is the situation of discrimination between boys and girls. According to the Ministry of Health data, if in 2017 the sex ratio at birth in our country is 112.8 boys per 100 girls, then counting in 2018, this rate has reached 113.4 / 100. Experts are concerned that if the sex ratio continues to increase and spreads as it is today, the issue of gender imbalance in Vietnam in the next 20-25 years is very serious (Ministry of Health, 2018).

The fourth expression is gender inequality in population activities - family planning and reproductive health. The role of men in family planning is limited, women are considered to be responsible for implementing family planning. Of course, pregnancy and childbirth are women’s vocations. But in fact, when pregnant and how many children are born, it is often decided by the husband or the husband’s family, whether or not to use contraception to relax the birth or non-delivery gap is also often due to the husband, her husband’s family decided.

The fifth expression is gender inequality in the labor market and in income. When receiving a young female worker, business owners are often afraid of the 6-month maternity leave. Many

businesses force female workers to sign an appendix in the labor contract to not get pregnant during the first 2 years of work. As a result, some enterprises prefer to recruit male workers despite their ability to work less than women. As for income, according to data reported by the General Department of Vocational Training (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs) in 2017, the average monthly salary of female workers is about 4.58 million VND, lower than male workers (5.19 million VND). This is not necessarily because the employer intentionally pays female workers less than men when doing the same job. The main reason is that women have to take care of their children and ensure that their family work is not as high as men (General Department of Vocational Training, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2017).

The sixth expression is gender inequality in social status, property ownership. Men dominate the control of land and high-value assets. Most land-use certificates are issued with the name of the male household head. This situation may cause women to lose their ownership in the case of divorce or inheritance. Men often make decisions about household business investment and income usage. Restrictions on property ownership reduce women's access to credit and investment opportunities...

Shorten the gap between men and women in all areas of political-economic - cultural - social life stipulated in the Law on Gender Equality. It is also the target of the month of action for gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. Practical activities in the past month have contributed to raising awareness and changing the behavior of the entire people towards gender equality.

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