

# Patrilines, Patrilocality and Fertility Decline in Viet Nam

*Viet Nam's fertility decline implies an  
ongoing rise in the proportion of couples failing to  
meet the demographic preconditions for fulfilment  
of a patrilineal, patrilocal model*

By John Bryant\*

The 90 per cent or so of the Vietnamese population who belong to the Kinh ethnic group (Vietnam, 1991: volume 1, table 1.4) have a patrilineal, patrilocal family system. To conform to the rules of this system, a couple must have at least one biological or adopted son, Viet Nam's dramatic fertility decline has, however, entailed a rise in the proportion of parents unable to fulfil this condition. What does this imply about the strength of Viet Nam's patrilineal, patrilocal norms, now and in the future?

---

\* John Bryant, Independent Researcher, Phu Vieng, Thailand, aree\_john@yahoo.com

## Patriline and patrilocality in Viet Nam

### Patriline and patrilocality

A patriline is, ideally, an unbroken line of descent running from fathers to sons through the generations. Descent lines are recorded in genealogies, and celebrated at ancestral altars. In Viet Nam, as in China, families try to increase the patrimony handed down with the family name (Yang, 1945; Hickey, 1964; Nguyen Due Truyen, 1994).

Patrilines sometimes form the basis of lineage organizations. The classic example is the lineages of pre-revolutionary southern China, which sometimes had thousands of members, genealogies running back several dozen generations, complex internal organization, and substantial communal property (Freedman, 1958, 1966). Lineages in Viet Nam never seem to have reached this scale, but many have traditionally had lineage land (*huong hoa dim*, or 'fire and incense land') used to defray the costs of ancestor worship, and wealthier lineages have constructed ancestral halls. Members of poorer lineages have at least tried to live near one another (Lusteguy, 1935; Hickey, 1964; Woodside, 1971).

Under the Vietnamese patrilocal household formation system, one married son and his family, typically lives with the sons' parents, while any other married sons set up independent households. In Viet Nam, as in China, the cultural ideal is in fact for somewhat more complicated households, consisting of more than one married brother and several generations. Most scholars accept, however, that the stem household formation system has long been followed by the majority of the population (Juong, 1989; Nguyen Tu Chi, 1993).

One practical implication of patrilineality and patrilocality is the expectation that old-age support will be provided by sons (Gammeltoft, 1999). A son who has been thoroughly socialized in his debts to previous generations, who will receive or has already received family property, and who lives with his parents faces strong pressures to provide such support.

### Historical origins

Linguistic evidence suggests that present-day northern Viet Nam once had a bilateral kinship system like most of the rest of South East Asia, but that northern Viet Nam's absorption into the Chinese empire in the second century B.C., was followed by a switch to a patrilineal system (Rambo, 1972). The people of northern Viet Nam attained independence from China after about one thousand years. Evidence on the family system between this time and the

twentieth century is scarce, and historians have relied mainly on a close reading of the medieval Le Code, a system of basic laws promulgated by the Vietnamese State. Passages of the Code dealing with the lineage land (*huong hoa*) clearly show that the family system of the time was patrilineal (Haines, 1984). Compared with similar sets of laws promulgated in China, however, Viet Nam's system was somewhat less male-centred. For example, the Code made provisions for daughters to inherit equally with sons, and it envisaged that children would not claim their inheritance until the mother, and not just the father, had died (Woodside, 1971; Ta Van Tai, 1981).

Even by the early nineteenth century, Viet Nam was a far less Confucian society than its rulers would have liked. In 1825, the Ming-Mang emperor complained that Vietnamese peasants, unlike Chinese peasants, still did not understand the laws properly. Many aspects of popular culture, from the blackening of teeth to the relatively high status of ordinary women, were still prototypically South-East Asian (Woodside, 1971; Reid, 1988).

This was particularly true in the southern reaches of the country. Ethnic Vietnamese had been gradually migrating south from the Red River Delta, displacing or absorbing existing cultures, for hundreds of years, but Vietnamese settlement of much of the Mekong Delta did not occur until the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Vietnamese officials in the nineteenth century still saw the South as "crypto-Cambodian" (Woodside, 1971). In modern-day Viet Nam, the percentage of the population who belong to the Kinh ethnic group is approximately the same in northern and southern Viet Nam (Vietnam, 1991: volume 1, table 1.4). Scholars generally agree, however, that Kinh in the South place less weight on lineages and patrilocal residence rules than Kinh in the North (Donoghue, 1962; Do Thai Dong, 1991). Hickey (1964) states that the departure from northern norms is greatest in the southernmost part of the Mekong Delta.

After establishing control over the North in 1954 and the whole country in 1975, the new communist Government launched a comprehensive programme of social modernization, which included an attack on "feudal" aspects of the traditional family. Patrilocality and patrilineal inheritance do not appear to have been targets, but many of the principles which underpinned patrilocality and patrilineal inheritance were. Elaborate altars and ceremonies for ancestor worship were attacked as wasteful and superstitious (Kleinen, 1999). Children publicly denounced parents during land reform, upsetting the generational hierarchy (Luong, 1992). The Government attempted to raise the standing of women with measures including the promotion of female cadres, the promulgation of laws calling for equal inheritance between sons and

daughters, and emulation campaigns aimed at promoting a democratic, egalitarian “new culture family” (Ginsburgs, 1975; Eisen, 1984). None of these campaigns were, however, as radical or as thorough as the Chinese equivalents such as the Cultural Revolution.

### **Loopholes**

Patrihneal descent and patrilocal residence make families vulnerable to the “demographic lottery” (Smith, 1984): without sons, the prescriptions cannot be followed. It is therefore not surprising that the Vietnamese patrihneal, patrilocal family system, like other family systems, includes institutionalized loopholes in the form of adoption and alternative types of marriage.

Hickey describes adoption in the northern Mekong Delta in the early 1960s: .

“If, after several years of marriage, a couple does not have a child or if they have had numerous daughters, they will adopt a son to maintain the lineage and the Cult of the Ancestors.. It is preferable that the child be very young and a member of the husband’s lineage, but if this cannot be arranged the couple looks for a male infant in the village. Some compensation may be offered if the family is not related to the couple, although there is no evidence of systematic selling of male infants. Should a family be very impoverished, however, and have numerous sons, they may let it be known that one or several are available for adoption...Adoption of girls also occurs in the village, although much less frequently” (Hickey, 1964).

Much the same could probably be said for other parts of Viet Nam during other periods. However, Hickey’s description seems to refer mainly to adopted children who take on all the rights and responsibilities of biological children. As in China (Wolf and Huang, 1980), this is only one end of a spectrum of possible forms of adoption. Sometimes, children such as nephews or grandchildren are nominated as descendants, but are not expected to live with the couple who has adopted them (Jamieson, 1986; Vuong Xuan Tinh, 1994). Others live with the adopting couple and look after them in their old age, but do not act as descendants (Gammeltoft, 1999). Some types of adoptive children are eligible to receive inheritance and others are not. There have traditionally been elaborate rules governing such things as an adopted child’s rights if a biological child is subsequently born (Jamieson, 1986).

Vietnamese couples with daughters but not sons sometimes look for a son-in-law who will be willing to take on the duties of a son. In anthropological jargon, this is known as uxori-local marriage, and in Vietnamese as *lam re*. In both Viet Nam and China, men who are willing to forsake their own filial duties by accepting a uxori-local marriage, are generally looked down upon, and most men marrying in this way are poor (Wolf and Huang, 1980; Gammeltoft, 1999). The stigma is presumably less, however, in southern Viet Nam, as co-residence with the wife's parents is common among the cultures which the southern Vietnamese displaced. In China, uxori-local marriage, like adoption, has traditionally taken many different forms, with different combinations of rights and responsibilities. Some sons-in-law take descent from their fathers-in-law, while others do not; some live permanently with the wife's family, while others live with them for a specified number of years, or not at all (Wolf and Huang, 1980). The same is presumably true in Viet Nam. In both China and Viet Nam, uxori-local marriage can perhaps be considered as a type of adult adoption, since it involves the contractual transfer of a son from one family to another.

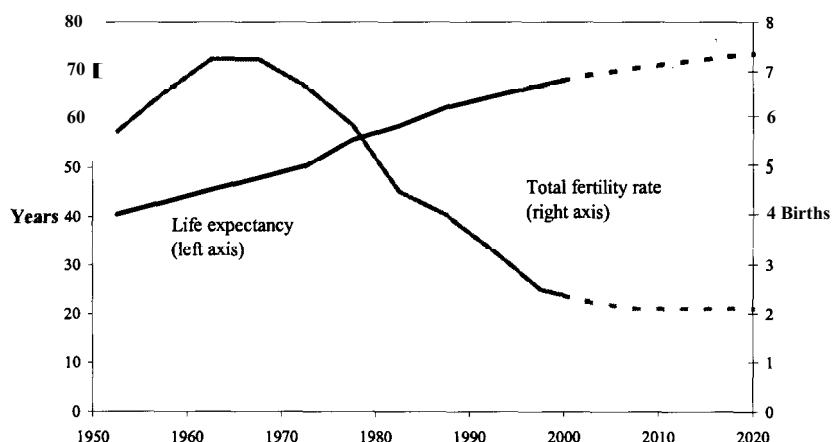
### **The demographic transition and the feasibility of patrilineal and patrilocality**

For a couple to conform to the prescribed patrilineal, patrilocal model, they need at least one adult son, through adoption or through rearing the son themselves. The proportion of couples in each cohort who meet this precondition varies with the cohort's position in the demographic transition.

### **Fertility and mortality, 1920-2020**

The outlines of Viet Nam's demographic transition are shown in **figure 1**, which presents United Nations' estimates and projections of fertility and mortality from the 1950s to the 2020s. The estimates for the 1950s and 1960s should not be taken too literally. In particular, all the published vital registration data and all the estimates based on indirect methods, suggest that the United Nations has been unduly pessimistic about mortality levels during the 1950s and 1960s (Jones, 1982: table 3; Savitz and others, 1993: table 1, 3; Hirschman and others, 1995: table 4). It is nevertheless clear that fertility began to decline at a national level some time around the late 1960s or early 1970s. In addition, a comparison with available data for the colonial period suggests that fertility in the 1950s and 1960s was roughly comparable to that of early times, while mortality was much lower (Gourou, 1936; Anon, 1945; Jones, 1982: table 3; Banister, 1985: table 5).

**Figure 1. United Nations estimates and projections of mortality and fertility**



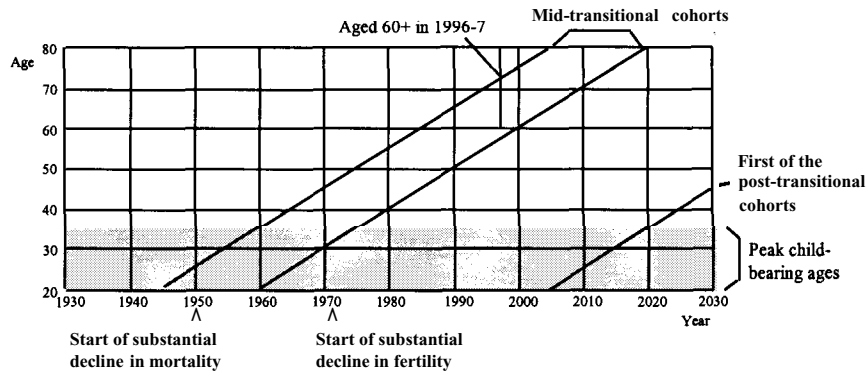
*Source:* United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects, Population Database, <http://www.esa.un.org/unpp/>

### Mid-transitional cohorts

“Mid-transitional” cohorts are those whose peak reproductive period falls mainly in the middle of the demographic transition, when mortality rates have declined substantially but fertility rates have not. As is apparent by comparing **figure 1** and **figure 2**, the mid-transitional cohorts in Viet Nam are those who reached age 20 during the late 1940s and the 1950s. Mid-transitional cohorts have significantly more children reaching adulthood than earlier cohorts, because they have about as many children as earlier cohorts, but their children face lower mortality rates.

Documenting this precisely, requires detailed tabulations on trends in numbers of surviving children and surviving sons. Unfortunately, compared with many other South East Asian countries, relatively little data on fertility has been made public in Viet Nam. In Viet Nam, analysis is also complicated by the Second Indochina War of 1965-1975. As can be seen in **figure 2**, the older of the mid-transitional cohorts will have been reaching 40 years of age by the start of the war and 50 years by the end. Many of their sons would have reached combat age during the war. Hirschman and others (1995, table 7) estimate that the war raised annual death rates among males aged 15-29 by somewhat less than one percentage point. Moving from a life expectancy of

**Figure 2. Lexis diagram**



around 35 years to around 45 years, usually increases the percentage of children surviving to age 5 by around 10 percentage points. It therefore, seems unlikely, even for the older of the mid-transitional cohorts, that the war cancelled out all the beneficial effects of the earlier increase in child survival. Moreover, the war is unlikely to have had a large effect on the number of surviving sons of the younger mid-transitional cohorts, since few of them would have had children old enough to fight. The Second Indochina War, probably only slowed the initial increase in average numbers of adult children per couple.

Though limited, the available statistics provide at least some feeling for the impressive reproductive levels of the mid-transitional cohorts. The results from two surveys carried out in Hanoi and surrounding provinces and Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces in 1996-1997 are shown in [table 1](#) (Truong Si Anh and others, 1997). The surveys were among people aged 60 and over; as apparent in [figure 2](#), this group overlaps substantially with the mid-transitional cohorts (especially since high mortality at older ages means that the sample was weighted towards people in the 60s.) Among those surveyed, only 2 per cent in northern Viet Nam and 6 per cent in southern Viet Nam reported that they did not have a living child. Results from two more surveys are shown in [table 2](#). The mean age of the respondents was 66 years in the national survey and 68 years in the Hanoi survey. Both surveys report found very few respondents to have no living children, and over 80 per cent to have three or more living children. The average number of surviving children was around 4-5.

**Table 1. Data on surviving children and residence patterns of old people, 1996-1997**

	Hanoi and surrounding provinces	Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding provinces
Per cent of old people with at least one living child	98	94
Per cent of old people with at least one living child who live with at least one child aged 18+	14	85
“Patrilineal ratio” <sup>a</sup> - single children only	0.9	1.1
“Patrilineal ratio” <sup>a</sup> - married children only	8.2	1.8

*Source:* Truong Si Anh and others (1997:table 3, 5).

<sup>a</sup> The proportion of old people living with at least one son divided by the proportion of old people living with at least one daughter

Even though the data refer to numbers of children rather than numbers of sons, it is safe to assume that a large majority of couples in the mid-transitional cohorts have managed to raise at least one son to adulthood. For these cohorts, the demographic constraints on fulfilling a patrilineal, patrilocal model have been very loose. Indeed, many couples have probably had too much of a good thing: they have had more sons than they have been able to provide with land and housing. This, in turn, implies that conditions have been exceptionally favourable for those without sons of their own, who have wished to take advantage of the loopholes of adoption and uxori-local marriage. Among all the couples with surplus sons, some have presumably been willing to part with them, either as children, through adoption, or as adults, through uxori-local marriage.

**Table 2. Number of surviving children of people aged 60 and over, from two 1993 surveys**

Population surveyed	Distribution by number of living children (per cent)							Mean	n
	0	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9+	Total		
All Vietnam	2	14	26	34	18	6	100	5.0	501
Hanoi	3	16	57	21	3		100	4.4	196

*Source:* All Vietnam: Dang Thu (1994:tables 12, 13); Hanoi: Institute of Sociology (1993: Question B6).



### Post-transitional cohorts

The United Nations predicts that Viet Nam will reach replacement level fertility at around 2005. Whether fertility will continue falling and what distributions of surviving children will result, are unknown. It is, nevertheless, possible to build a model of family formation which will give some insight into patterns likely to be experienced.

The exercise undertaken here is inspired by Wrigley's (1978) attempt to model distributions of couples by numbers of children in pre-industrial Europe. There are, however, two major differences. The present exercise is simpler than Wrigley's in that it ignores child deaths; given the low mortality expected for post-transitional cohorts, this is not a serious limitation. The exercise is made more difficult, however, by the fact that the Vietnamese population, unlike European populations, shows clear evidence of son preference: among couples with the same number of children, those with the fewest sons are most likely to have another child (Haughton, 1999). Any model of Vietnamese childbearing needs to make allowance for stopping rules like this. Also, notwithstanding Government regulations banning them, it seems likely that sex selective abortions will become more common in Viet Nam, so that it is necessary to allow for higher sex ratios at birth than the usual 105-106 males per 100 females.

The model has two principal inputs. The first is the sex ratio at birth, which is used to calculate  $s$ , the probability that newborn baby is a son. The second is a set of sex-specific parity progression ratios  $p_{00}, p_{01}, p_{02}, p_{03}, p_{10}, p_{11}, p_{12}, p_{20}, p_{21}, p_{30}$ , where, for instance,  $p_{12}$ , is the proportion of couples who go on to have another birth, given that they already have one son and two daughters.

Any given sex ratio at birth and set of sex-specific parity progression ratios implies a distribution of couples by final numbers of children. The proportion, for instance, of couples whose completed set of children consists of one son equals  $p_{00}s(1-p_{10})$ , the probability of having a first birth times, the probability that the first birth is a son times the probability of having no more births after that. The proportion of couples with two daughters is  $p_{00}(1-s)p_{01}(1-s)(1-p_{02})$ . Other proportions are calculated analogously. Once the whole distribution has been worked out, the average number of children per couple can be calculated.

Son preference is modelled here by the extent to which couples with  $i$  sons and  $j$  daughters, where  $i$  is less than  $j$ , are more likely to have another child than couples with  $j$  sons and  $i$  daughters. Thus, if son preference is 15 per cent,  $p_{12}=1.15p_{21}$ ,  $p_{01}=1.15p_{10}$ , and so on.

**Table 3. First hypothetical distribution for post-transitional cohort**

Sex-specific parity progression ratios					Resulting distribution by number of children <sup>a</sup>		
Sons	Daughters				Sons	Children	
	0	1	2	3			
0	0.90	0.95	0.41	0.17	0	0.27	0.10
1	0.83	0.30	0.14		1	0.46	0.10
2	0.36	0.12			2	0.23	0.53
3	0.15				3	0.04	0.24
					4	0.00	0.03
					<b>Total</b>	1.00	1.00
					<b>Mean</b>	1.05	2.00

<sup>a</sup> Assuming sex ratio at birth of 110.

The creation of a hypothetical distribution of couples by numbers of children begins with the selection of values for the sex-ratio at birth, the average number of children per couple, and the extent of sex-preference. A set of sex-specific parity progression ratios which fit these constraints is then found. I have done this by starting with an actual set of parity progression ratios and adjusting them by trial and error until all the constraints were met. Although it might be preferable to use a more systematic approach, in practice, the range of allowable values seems fairly small. Once an acceptable set of parity progression ratios have been found, the implied distribution of couples by numbers of children can be examined.

One hypothetical distribution generated using these procedures is shown in **table 3**. The selected sex-ratio at birth was 110 (to allow for the possibility of some sex-selective abortion), the average number of children was two, and son preference was 15 per cent — a somewhat higher level than the one found in the 1992-1993 Vietnam Living Standards Survey. The right part of the table shows the associated distribution of couples by numbers of surviving sons and numbers of surviving children. Even with the choice of a moderately high sex ratio, near-replacement fertility, and moderately high son preference, 27 per cent of couples have no sons.

To what extent does the proportion without sons change with different sex ratios at birth or different levels of son preference? **Table 4** gives one example. The sex ratio at birth is 150, and son preference is 30 per cent. The associated proportion without sons is 21 per cent. In other hypothetical distributions, not shown here, which assume normal sex ratios, limited son preference, and 1.8 children per couple, the proportion without a son rises to around one third. All these values are, of course, hypothetical, and

**Table 4. Second hypothetical distribution for post-transitional cohorts**

Sex-specific parity progression ratios					Resulting distribution by number of children <sup>a</sup>		
Daughters					Sons		Children
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2
Sons	0	0.90	0.98	0.47	0.13	0.21	0.10
	1	0.75	0.45	0.13		0.44	0.14
	2	0.36	0.10			0.29	0.44
	3	0.10				0.06	0.28
					4	0.00	0.03
					<b>Total</b>	1.00	1.00
					<b>Mean</b>	1.05	2.00

<sup>a</sup> Assuming sex ratio at birth of 150.

different sets of parity progression ratios give slightly different results. But experimentation consistently shows that, even with quite high sex ratios and son preference, a significant minority of couples do not have a son.

In fact, the deterioration, compared with mid-transitional cohorts in the demographic conditions for fulfilment of the patrilineal, patrilocal model is greater than the figures on proportions without sons suggest. In the mid-transitional cohorts, those without sons have been well placed to adopt a son, because many of their contemporaries have had surplus sons. As implied by tables 3 and 4, in the post-transitional cohorts, many couples are likely to lack sons, and very few are likely to have a surplus: an increased demand for adoptive sons will meet a decreased supply. For the post-transitional cohorts, the traditional demographic loopholes will be largely closed off.

Viet Nam's fertility decline, in sum, implies an ongoing rise in the proportion of couples failing to meet the demographic preconditions for fulfilment of a patrilineal, patrilocal model.

### **Evidence on the strength of patrilineal, patrilocal norms**

Does the existence of a growing proportion of couples willing to sacrifice the model for the sake of reduced fertility mean that the patrilineal, patrilocal norms in Viet Nam are not particularly strong? There are, in fact, scholars who claim that the patrilineal, patrilocal model is not strong, and who argue that the Vietnamese family should not be grouped with the patrilineal, patrilocal families of East Asia (Whitmore, 1984; Hirschman and Loi, 1996). Evidence with which to assess these claims is much more plentiful for patrilocality than for patrilineal.

### **Patriline**

For the rural areas of northern Viet Nam, there is a great deal of evidence that the maintenance of patriline is very important to most people. Surveys on childbearing invariably find that the maintenance of patriline is one motivation for wanting sons (Tuong Lai, 1992). Another motivation for wanting sons is to secure support in old age; as noted above, old-age support by sons is underpinned by patrilinearity, and patrilocality. Ethnographic studies have also found that patrilineal ties are strong, and ancestor worship is still practised (Luong, 1992; Gammeltoft, 1999; Kleinen, 1999). Lineage organizations have become important again in many parts of northern Viet Nam (Phi Van Ba, 1992).

Evidence for or against the continued strength of patriline in urban areas or the South is scarce. Among a small, highly educated urban elite, belief in ancestor worship was already declining during French colonial times (Nguyen Van Huyen, 1944). There is, however, no evidence of such changes occurring among ordinary urbanites.

### **Patrilocality**

The most informative measure of adherence to stem household norms like those of Viet Nam is the extent to which old people with living children co-reside with their children. One set of estimates comes from surveys cited in [table 1](#) (Truong Si Anh and others, 1997). Among elderly with at least one living child, around 80 per cent live with a child, though the figure is slightly lower than this in the North and slightly higher in the South. Eighty per cent may not appear high, but it is comparable to figures from stem family systems elsewhere in South-East Asia and is “high enough to suggest no major decline is likely to have occurred”.

For this household formation system to be considered patrilocal, stem households must consist of elderly parents and the families of their married sons. To measure the extent to which old people lived with sons rather than daughters, Truong Si Anh and colleagues constructed the “patrilineal ratios”<sup>1</sup> shown in the third and fourth rows of table. These ratios are defined as the proportion of old people living with a son, divided by the proportion living with a daughter, calculated separately for single children and married children. As expected under a patrilocal system, the ratios are roughly 1 for single children, but are well above 1 for married children. Consistent with standard view about the attenuation of the patrilocal rule in southern Viet Nam, the North’s ratio of about 8 is much higher than the South’s ratio of about 2.

**Table 5. Percentage of respondents who lived with grandparents or other relatives while growing up<sup>a</sup>**

	Lived with grandparent or relative			Did not live with grandparent or relative	Total	Number
	From mother's family	From father's family	From both families			
Northern village	2	14	5	78	100	139
Northern town	1	43	6	49	100	67
Southern village	1	22	14	63	100	72
Southern town	0	19	38	43	100	21

*Source:* Hirschman and Vu (1996:table 2).

<sup>a</sup> Limited to people aged 15 and over who had both mother's family and father's family living in the same neighbourhood or village when they were growing up.

Belanger (Belanger, 1998:table 5) has used the 1992-1993 Vietnam Living Standards Survey data, a national survey of 4,800 households, to make similar calculations, but from the point of view of the married children rather than the parents. Belanger looked at married couples in which both the husband and wife had a surviving parent. To be included in the calculations, the wife had to be aged 15 to 34, and the couple had to be living with a parent of either the wife or the husband. For this group, the ratio of couples living with the husband's parents to those living with wife's parents was just over 50 in the Red River Delta, and almost 5 in the Mekong Delta and South-East. These results confirm the regional pattern found by Truong Si Anh and colleagues, but seem to imply a much stronger patrilocal tilt. Until the discrepancy is explained, or new data collected, Truong Si Anh and others' results should perhaps be treated as a lower bound, and Belanger's results as an upper bound, on the tendency towards patrilocal residence.<sup>2</sup>

An additional source of information on household formation is the 1991 Vietnam Life History Survey. The sample for this survey was drawn from a northern town, a northern village, a southern town, and a southern village. Although the survey was very small - the combined sample was 403 households - it deserves attention because it is one of the rare attempts anywhere in the world to obtain longitudinal data on household formation and because results from the survey have been used to argue against the existence of a strong system of patrilocal residence in Viet Nam (Hirschman and Loi, 1996).

**Table 5** shows results from the survey. These results refer to respondents aged 15 and over, who had both their father's family and their mother's family living in the same village or neighbourhood when they were growing up and

thus had kin available to co-reside with. The fourth column of the table shows that most respondents did not in fact co-reside. Hirschman and Loi (1996) argue that the figures in column four suggest a departure from a Confucian model of co-residence after marriage. It is not clear that this is true. Knowing that the respondents' *families* lived nearby is not sufficient; what counts in a stem household system is whether the respondents' *grandparents* lived nearby. In addition, many parents may have co-resided before the respondent was alive but not be included in the calculations — especially if periods of co-residence were typically brief and if the respondent was not the first-born.

Weighing up all the available survey evidence, it seems that when Vietnamese meet the demographic prerequisites to follow patrilocal household formation rules, they generally do. The recent ethnographic evidence — which unfortunately comes entirely from northern Viet Nam — points in the same direction. Luong (1992; see also Gammeltoft, 1999), for instance, writes that in the village he studied “patrilocal residence was taken for granted”.

### Conclusion

A micro-level counterpart of Viet Nam's rapid fertility decline has been a fall in the proportion of couples fulfilling the demographic prerequisites for the patrilineal, patrilocal model. This might be taken as evidence for the weakness of the patrilineal, patrilocal model. The available evidence suggests, however, that the model is still strong, and that fertility has declined in spite of its continued vitality.

Fertility decline in Viet Nam appears to have entailed couples making difficult trade-offs between conformance with the patrilineal model and other objectives. Recognition of such trade-offs is a useful corrective to accounts which posit a smooth adjustment in “wanted fertility” as attitudes are modernized. It also sits uneasily with accounts which posit a single level of “wanted fertility”. Suppose that a couple have two daughters whom they can barely support, but that they are worried about fulfilling their filial duties and about receiving support in their old age. If the wife becomes pregnant, how should she answer a survey question on whether the forthcoming birth is “wanted”? If she gives birth to a daughter, how should she answer?

The existence of difficult trade-offs may also presage a change in Viet Nam's patrilineal, patrilocal norms. There is abundant social-psychological evidence that when people have chosen one course of action, they tend to reassure themselves about the wisdom of their choice by retrospectively downgrading the potential benefits of alternative courses of action (March, 1994). Accordingly, when a couple has a third daughter and, to protect their

standard of living, decide against trying again for a son, they are likely retrospectively to downgrade the importance of the patrilineal, patrilocal model. The continuing fall in numbers of children per couple implies that more and more couples have been placed in this situation. If sufficient couples respond by downgrading the patrilineal patrilocal model, norms will change.

It might be objected that in pre-transitional Viet Nam, where the average number of surviving children per couple was also low, many couples also failed to produce an adult son, and yet patrilineal, patrilocal norms did remain strong. Under the pre-transitional demographic regime, however, the lack of a son was likely to have been due to death or reproductive failure, rather than to conscious decision. The need for self justification and retrospective downgrading was correspondingly weaker.

This ought to provide encouragement to policymakers wanting to change aspects of Viet Nam's patrilineal, patrilocal model. Campaigns in recent decades to, for instance, increase inheritance by daughters, have faced unfavourable demographic conditions, since never before have so many couples had sons. Campaigns in coming decades face much more favourable conditions: many couples will not have sons and will not be able to adopt sons. These cohorts will presumably be more receptive than their predecessors towards messages about the equal value of daughters and sons.

## Acknowledgements

Comments and suggestions from participants at the "Workshop on Fertility Decline, Below Replacement Fertility and the Family in Asia", and from an anonymous referee are gratefully acknowledged.

## Endnotes

1. A better term would be "pattilocal ratio". "Patrilineal" refers to descent, *patrilocal* to co-residence.
2. Part of the difference is probably due to differences in sampling frame, but not all. Most elderly parents live with just one married couple, so calculating ratios for parents, as Truong Si Anh and others do, should not give dramatically different results from calculating ratios for couples, as Belanger does. It is also hard to see why the restrictions on the age of the wife, or the requirement that parents of both spouses be alive, would have a major effect.

## References

- Anon (1945). "French Indochina: demographic imbalance and colonial policy", *Population Index*, 11:68-81.
- Banister, J. (1985). *The Population of Vietnam*, (Washington, Bureau of the Census).

- Belanger, D. (1998). "Regional differences in household composition and family formation patterns in Vietnam" (London, Centre for Population Studies, University of Western Ontario).
- Dang Thu (1994). *Local Level Policy Development for Integrating the Elderly into the Development Process in Vietnam* (New York, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific).
- Donoghue, J.D. (1962). *Cam An: A Fishing Village in Central Vietnam* (Saigon, Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group).
- Do Thai Dong (1991). "Modifications of the traditional family in the South of Vietnam", in R Liljestrom and Tuong Lai (eds.) *Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family* (Hanoi, Social Sciences Publishing House).
- Eisen, A. (1984). *Women and Revolution in Vietnam* (London, Zed)
- Freedman, M. (1958). *Lineage organization in Southeast China* (London, Athlone Press).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1966). *Chinese Lineage and Society* (London, Athlone Press).
- Gammeltoft, T. (1999). *Health and Family Planning in a Vietnamese Rural Community* (Richmond, Curzon Press).
- Ginsburgs, G. (1975). "The role of law in the emancipation of women in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam", *American Journal of Comparative Law*, 23(4): 613-52.
- Gourou, P. (1936). *Les paysans du delta tonkinois: etude de geographie humaine* (Paris, L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient).
- Haines, D.W. (1984). "Reflections of kinship and society under Vietnam's Le dynasty", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15(2): 307-14.
- Haughton, J. (1999). "Son preference", in J. Haughton, S.B. Haughton, T. Chuyen and N. Nga (eds.) *Health and Wealth in Vietnam: An Analysis of Household Living Standards* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies).
- Hickey, G.C. (1964). *Village in Vietnam* (New Haven, Yale University Press).
- Hirschman, C. and Vu Manh Loi (1996). "Family and household structure in Vietnam: some glimpses from a recent survey", *Pacific Affairs*, 69(2):229-49.
- Hirschman, C., S. Preston, et al. (1995). "Vietnamese casualties during the American war", *Population and Development Review*, 21(4):783-810.
- Institute of Sociology (1993). *Nghien Cuu Xa Hoi Hoc ve Nguoi Cao Tui tai Noi Thanh Ha Noi [Sociological Research about Elderly People in Hanoi]* (Hanoi, Institute of Sociology).
- Jamieson, N.L. (1986). "The traditional family in Vietnam", *Vietnam Forum*, 8:91-150.
- Jones, G. (1982). "Population trends and policies in Vietnam", *Population and Development Review*, 8(4):783-810.
- Kleinen, J. (1999). *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies).
- Knodel, J. and N. Debavalya (1997). "Living arrangements and support among the elderly in South-East Asia: An introduction", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 12(4):5-16.



- Luong, H.V. (1989). "Vietnamese kinship: structural principles and the socialist transformation in northern Vietnam", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 48(4):741-756.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1992). *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press).
- Lusteguy, P. (1935). *La femme annamite du Tonkin dans l'institution des biens culturels (huong hoa)* (Paris, Librairie Nizet et Bastard).
- March, J.G. (1994). *A Primer on Decision-Making: How Decisions Happen* (New York: The Free Press).
- Nguyen Due Truyen (1994). "Van De Thua Ke Tai San 0 Nong Thong Dong Bang Bat Bo Trong Thoi Ky Doi Moi [Inheritance in the Red River Delta during Doi Moi]". Unpublished manuscript, Insitute of Sociology, Hanoi.
- Nguyen Tu Chi (1993). "The traditional village in Bat Bo: its organizational structure and problems", in Phan Huy Le (ed.), *The Traditional Village in Vietnam* (Hanoi, The Gioi).
- Nguyen Van Huyen (1944). *La civilisation annamite* (Paris, Collection de la Direction de l'Instruction Publique de l'Indochine).
- Phi Van Ba (1992). "Socio-economic renovation in North Vietnam and its effect on fertility and development in the rural plain". Unpublished manuscript Hanoi, Institute of Sociology.
- Rambo, T.A. (1972). *A Comparison of Peasant Social Systems of Northern and Southern Vietnam: A Study of Ecological Adaption, Social Succession and Cultural Evolution* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Centre for Vietnamese Studies).
- Reid, A. (1988). *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, Volume One: The Lands Below the Winds* (New Haven, Yale University Press).
- Savitz, D.A., Nguyen Minh Thang, I.E. Swenson, E.M. Stone (1993). "Vietnamese infant and child mortality in relation to the Vietnam war", *American Journal of Public Health*, 83(8):1134-1138.
- Smith, R.M. (1984). "Some issues concerning families and their property in rural England 1250-1800", in R.M. Smith (ed.) *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Ta Van Tai (1981). "The status of women in traditional Vietnam: a comparison of the code of the Le Dynasty (1428-1788) with the Chinese Codes", *Journal of Asian History*, 15:97-145.
- Truong Si Anh, Bui The Cuong, D. Goodkind, J. Knodel (1997). "Living arrangements, patrilineality and sources of support among elderly Vietnamese", *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, 12(4):69-88.
- Tuong Lai (1992). "Suggesting some issues on family, population and development", *Demographic Transition in Southeast Asia: The Experiences for Vietnam* (Hanoi, Institute of Sociology).
- Vietnam (1991). *Vietnam Population Census 1989. Completed Census Results*, Vol. 1. (Hanoi, Central Census Steering Committee).
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1991). *Vietnam Population Census 1989. Detailed Analysis of Sample Results* (Hanoi, Central Census Steering Committee).

- Vuong Xuan Tinh (1994). "The need for sons: problems and solutions", *Vietnam Social Sciences*, 39(1):25-28.
- Whitmore, J.K. (1984). "Social organisation and Confucian thought in Vietnam", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15(2):296-306.
- Wolf, A.P. and C.S. Huang (1980). *Marriage and Adoption in China, 1845-1945* (Stanford, Stanford University Press).
- Woodside, A. (1971). "Ideology and integration in post-colonial Vietnamese nationalism", *Pacific Affairs*, 44(4):487-510.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1971). *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. (Cambridge, Harvard Council of East Asian Studies).
- Wrigley, E.A. (1978). "Fertility strategy for the individual and the group", *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility*, in C. Tilly (ed.) (Princeton, Princeton University Press).
- Yang, M.C. (1945). *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province* (New York, Columbia University Press).