

WOMEN IN VIETNAMESE CONFUCIANISM FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

[AS MULHERES SOB A ÓTICA DO CONFUCIONISMO NO VIETNÃ A PARTIR DE UMA PERSPECTIVA FEMINISTA]

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ABSTRACT: Confucianism has existed in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people for a long time. The positive side of Confucianism is strengthening relationships in families, relatives, and social relationships; and encouraging people to develop their love of learning. Confucian ethics needs to be promoted in building the society in the current context. On the other hand, Confucianism, in general, does not highly appreciate the role of women in society; it even ranks women on the same level as mean petty people. However, in the specific social context of Vietnam, Vietnamese women still find their own place in society. This point of view is deeply demonstrated by researching the deep structure and cultural practices of women on the social level in Vietnam.

KEYWORDS: Confucian ethics; Confucianism; feminism

RESUMO: O confucionismo existe, na vida espiritual do povo vietnamita, desde muito tempo. A parte positiva do Confucionismo pode-se dizer que é o fato de ele contribuir para o fortalecimento das relações familiares, entre os parentes, bem como nas relações sociais de um modo geral; outra parte positiva consiste em motivar as pessoas a desenvolverem o gosto pela leitura e aprendizagem. Estima-se que a ética confucionista precisa ser provocada, a fim de contribuir para a construção da sociedade nos dias atuais. Na contramão dessa positividade, pode-se afirmar que o confucionismo, de maneira geral, não valoriza, na medida necessária, o papel das mulheres na sociedade; na realidade, ele as classifica como pessoas insignificantes. É digno de se observar, entretanto, que, no contexto social específico do Vietnã, as mulheres encontram um lugar próprio na sociedade. Nossa pesquisa visa mostrar exatamente essa diferente concepção do papel da mulher na sociedade vietnamita.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ética confucionista; Confucionismo; feminismo

In the Vietnamese context of a male-dominated society following the Song dynasty Confucianism where women still have to endure patience and be resigned to their fate. Therefore, do women in Confucian societies have the right to live for themselves, to speak out for human rights, to win equality for women, and to fight

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against the patriarchal system? What is the most important factor determining the status and position of Vietnamese women in traditional Confucian society? What is the reason why Vietnamese women "mould" their own shape and appearance? These questions lead to our research on women in Confucianism from the perspective of gender equality. In our opinion, women in feudal Confucian society in Vietnam have awareness of feminism and an attitude of resistance, and fight for women's equal rights during this period. To answer the research questions posed, our study shows that there are two main factors: (1) internal causes: a small-scale Vietnam's agricultural society mainly based on nuclear families (unlike the strong bloodline lineage traditions in China or Korea) where women always have their economic position, which has created certain cultural resources that help Vietnamese women confidently deal with Confucianism; and (2) external cause: Vietnamese Confucianism is not an original system of social philosophy like that in China or Korea, but on the contrary, it is "shallow", Vietnamized as many previous authors commented (e.g. McHale 2004). This study also demonstrates an immutable principle that, as long as women maintain their socio-economic role, they will always retain their role in culture and social life.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Confucianism was founded in China and is a system of political, social and ethical philosophy having a profound influence on the spiritual life of the peoples in a number of countries in the region, especially Japan, Korea and Vietnam. According to De Bary, Confucianism is the basic resource that forms the common foundation of Southeast Asia (De Bary, Theodore 1988; cited in Sun Laichen 2010: 54). Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam from the beginning of the Common Era. The core of Confucianism is political philosophy to organize the society and train model rulers. In addition, the morals in the family are also set out very strictly and systematically.

Confucianism has existed in Vietnamese culture for a relatively long time, so Confucianism has been deeply ingrained in the subconscious of Vietnamese people. Confucianism's view on women is quite strict, which requires women to strictly follow the rules of the three obediences and the four virtues. However, they still suffer from underestimation. The society has stern concepts about women's virginity as clearly stated in the saying "Starving to death is of petty importance; Chastity lost is of a matter of big consequence," which gives prominence to the model of women who keep loyal to their deceased husband, who commit suicide to preserve their virginity, etc. These very concepts have caused women to suffer from unequal treatment for a long time.

To answer the research questions posed, based on our study, there exist two main factors: (1) internal causes: socio-cultural factors of Vietnamese agriculture regulate and create certain cultural resources which help Vietnamese women confidently deal with Confucianism; (2) external cause: Vietnamese Confucianism is not an original social philosophy system like that of China or of Korea, but on the contrary, it is a "shallow" Confucianism, Vietnameseized as many people believe. by previous authors (e.g. McHale 2004). This research also demonstrates the principle that, as long as women maintain their socio-economic role, they will always retain their role in culture and social life.

2. THEORETICAL ISSUES

Concept about Women (woman, female): The word *female* in English means a

woman, a person of female gender. It comes from the Latin word *femila* which refers to a woman, originating from the word *fellare* (i.e. to suck) to determine a woman's reproductive and child-rearing functions. Later, the word *female* means those of female gender, based on this Latin root [Marshall G. 1998, 252].

By definition, the word *woman* is the word that refers to the female gender of humans. In terms of language, the word *woman* is usually used to refer to female humans without mentioning age. Women are a fundamental part of the division of gender categories and are the central research object of feminism.

Feminism: According to the cultural studies dictionary, "*Feminism is considered a political and social movement that seeks to understand the position and interests of women in society. Feminism rejects the cultural model that divides human abilities into masculine and feminine characteristics and seeks to eliminate all social disadvantages that women often face.*" [Barker Chris 2004: 69].

According to researcher Le Ngoc Van, "*Feminism is a system of views on women's status. This system of perspectives includes the description, analysis, and explanation of the causes and consequences of women's oppression and offers strategies for women's liberation. It can be said that the feminist theory is an ideology of women's liberation and gender equality.*" [Le Ngoc Van (c.b) 2006: 31].

3.1. Research theory

* *Feminism theory*

In the context of the traditional Vietnamese society of "male chauvinism" with many firmly established social and cultural norms based on the key role of men, feminism aims to bring about a new concept of women, to properly evaluate the meaning, role and position of women in the relationship with men.

Feminism aims to analyze, evaluate and find the causes of inequality, injustice and gender bias; thereby, promoting the pursuit of equality for both genders. In the case of Vietnamese culture, feminism aims to understand and analyze the causes of injustices that women have to endure; to fight for women's freedom in the economic, political, social, educational and sexual fields; to establish a feminist theoretical system in the field of social science research; and to measure women's value of their contributions to cultural and social life on the basis of properly assessing the nature of women's physical strength and creative capacity, not to weigh their contributions on a scale and compare with men's contributions. All of this content aims to achieve changes in the perception of women's role and their position in culture and society, towards a more humane and equal society. In the process of researching and developing the feminist theory, researchers created a science that studies women, their existence, role, and position as well as their contributions to the science treasure of humanity. Feminist approaches in cultural studies directly promote the recognition and celebration of multivocality in the way of viewing and interpreting socio-cultural practices in a way that respects the diversity of cultural subjects (men, women, etc.) Along with the deconstruction approach, feminism paved the way for the gradual growth of Postmodernism in the European-American world in the last decades of the twentieth century and gradually spread out to the world today.

In our actual research on women in Vietnamese Confucianism, we are especially interested in the perspective of feminism through the following focuses:

- (1) How are Confucian traditions and gender stereotypes expressed and what impacts do they have on women's awareness, attitudes and behavior;
- (2) Impact of State management policies on gender equality;
- (3) Changes in family economic structure and their impacts on women's roles and the process of fighting for gender equality;

Although gender bias is not as strict as in China, the traditional production method of wet rice agriculture has influenced, thereby dominating people's awareness, attitudes and behavior. Changes in economic structure and career diversification have created conditions for women to develop their abilities, directly contributing to gradually narrowing the gap in the status of men and women, achieving changes in women's role and position in culture and society towards an equal society. Furthermore, feminism does not only fight for women's equal rights in family and society, but is also a science that studies women, their existence, roles, position, etc.

Approaching from a feminist perspective, in this article, we use feminist theory in the study of women's position in Confucianism in the family and in society, contributing to a full explanation about the socio-cultural characteristics of Confucianism in Vietnam regarding women's role in family and society.

** Cultural change theory*

Cultural change can be understood as a shift, partial or complete change in the system of cultural values, norms, patterns, "fine habits and customs" along the axis of time and space. Authors Edward Taylor (1832 - 1917) and Franz Boas (1858 - 1942) once divided society according to a unilinear hierarchy from low to high and believed that cultural change is inevitable in human history when people's education levels change leading to more advanced production techniques. Community life changes, which results in constant change in culture. According to Nguyen Van Quyet (2013, 24), any society and any culture, no matter how conservative and traditional it is, always changes. There are changes caused by the social structure itself, but there are also changes that are the result of direct interaction between one society and another (another cultural movement), or an impulse from outside rises and is strong enough to change one or several aspects of the social and cultural community under discussion (processualism). However, the changes of things and phenomena are not completely the same and even the changes within a thing or a phenomenon itself also differ. Transformation depends on space, time, and subject and relies on internal and external influencing factors. In the context of Vietnamese society and culture, it is the cultural framework of wet rice farming villages and communes valuing negative roles and female roles that exerts influences on, then transforms Confucianism. This inevitably leads to a change in women's role and position in the family and society in Vietnam, different from the behavioral patterns and values according to Chinese Confucianism.

3.2. Research Methods

To write this article, methods such as analysis and synthesis, compare and contrast are used. In addition, we exploit existing sources of information, in terms of

theory and reality related to women, Confucianism, and feminism in Vietnam, including magazines, scientific reports, specialized books, statistical yearbook, etc.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN CONFUCIAN SOCIETY FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

4.1. Women's position in the family

In China, women had no right to be economically independent. In fact, women are considered weak, completely dependent on men, and the custom of foot binding is a testament to this point of view. In fact, in the Vietnamese feudal society dominated by Confucianism, according to social concepts for Vietnamese women from the family to the social sphere, women were somewhat constrained by Confucian ethical frameworks promoting virtue, obedience, and life dependence on men. Awareness of women's status is also awareness of values, which is women's social value expressed through their role, position and status in life.

Vietnam is an agricultural country with a cultural tradition of typical wet rice agriculture. Vietnam is also a country in the Southeast Asia region with a long-standing matriarchal culture. Therefore, upon adopting Chinese Confucianism, local cultural elements somewhat adjusted and transformed the values of Confucianism towards integration; thus softening Confucianism to suit the real life of local residents.

Gender discrimination not only appears in Confucian culture, but most cultural communities in the world also attach more importance to men's role than women's. Such differences in perception and behavior have existed for many generations in all socio-cultural fields. Obsolete ideas and outdated regulations are the cause of gender inequality in society.

(1) Regarding behaviors in the family, from a young age, women in Vietnamese Confucian society were taught to "follow the three obediences and four virtues", i.e. at home, she is subordinated to her father; in marriage she is subordinated to her husband; and after her husband's death she is subordinated to her son. In Vietnamese Confucian families, the role of husband and father is very important. The view on the obligations and rights of husband and wife and in the relationship between family members is clearly defined in the Northern Civil Code, "the head of the family is the person who has the sovereignty over all family members." (Article 204, p. 39).

Women in Confucian society are not considered an independent entity but are dissolved into the family, dependent on their husbands, and sponsored by them. All matters, big and small, are handled by the woman alone. She must take on housework, give birth, raise children, serve her husband and his family, and has no authority in the family. With the characteristics of Vietnamese culture, respecting love and gratitude, Vietnamese women accept their fate; Diligence, hard work, and patience became women's nature and "fate".

In a feudal society, following Confucian ideology, so-called gender equality seems to have only one order for men. Feudal society recognizes the polygamy system of "one man, five wives, seven concubines". Polygamy protects men's rights but does not care about protecting women's rights, especially those who are concubines. The tragic fate of concubines was lamented in poems by the female poet Ho Xuan Huong: "*Some had cotton blankets, some suffering from cold; Go to hell the fate of co-husband!*" (2000, p. 20). The role of marriage during this period was mainly to perform

the function of maintaining the race. Hence, if a wife could not give birth to sons, she would proactively look for a concubine for her husband.

The status of widowed women in feudal Confucian society is no better than that of a concubine. Patriarchal Confucian society does not allow widowed women to remarry because the Confucian concept of virginity for women is "Starving to death is of petty importance; Chastity lost is of a matter of big consequence." (Phan Khoi 2017: 105) At a very young age, a woman should have joy and satisfaction in her married life, and yet, there was no other choice but accepting a lonely life with no pleasures of marriage nor the love a marital life would have otherwise brought to her. Women themselves always walk on 2 parallel paths: morality, virtue and a desire for love. Since the feudal society did not give women the opportunity to express their aspirations, they had to raise the moral flag and suppress their true emotions. Chastity is a form of dignity and honored as a family tradition of filial piety. In the Confucian view, women do not receive much attention or care, on the contrary, they were regarded as nothing "One son means haves; ten daughters mean havenots." At a young age, a girl's duty is to obey her father. In marriage, she must obey her husband, and at widowhood, she must obey her son with no rights at all to remarry but being loyal to her deceased husband. (Phan Khoi 2016: p. 56). Confucian rules in the feudal society caused women to partly suffer from a variety of disadvantages and inequalities compared with the "gentlemen" class favoured and given many privileges by the Confucian society.

(2) However, women's position in Vietnamese culture still had many differences compared to Chinese Confucian society. The role and position of Vietnamese women in the Confucian society are influenced by the living environment, natural conditions and social environment. With the emotional and flexible lifestyle of wet rice agricultural culture, Vietnamese Confucianism was not too strict towards women; women's identity and status were not too underestimated.

It can be seen that in the traditional Confucianist Vietnamese family, under the influence of the local cultural structure, besides men's breadwinner role, Vietnamese women play an important role in nurturing and educating children: "Children are spoiled by their mother; grandchildren by their grandmother"; Women are domestic generals, the one who bring an immeasurable number of economic benefits to the family, the one who manage finances in the family "keeping the key of assets", "Trading all year round at river promontory, earning a living for five children and one husband"¹.

One of the important customs in the family is that of looking after the incense fire for the ancestors. Vietnamese family tradition seriously follows the custom of worshipping ancestors. In the family, there is a common property, usually a land as a worship land figuratively called "the incense burner" to worship ancestors for generations. The eldest son takes care of this land and is responsible for duty to worship ancestors. However, the worship land could be entrusted to the eldest daughter if there was no eldest son. This has even been recognized by law. According to Hong Duc Law (The Penal Code of Royal Court of the Le dynasty), Article 391, if a family does not have a son, the eldest daughter can inherit the worship land, meaning that the daughter can still worship her parents and ancestors. This phenomenon is hard to be accepted in China. With its strict system of inheritance, the successor and holder of this important role must be the eldest son of the main ancestral line. That is why in ancient Chinese society, heartbreaking cases often occurred because wives resorted to any means at all costs to have a son, using many tricks, usually exchanging her newborn daughter with a newborn son of a certain family. This kind of tricks was very limited in Vietnam. In Vietnam, it can be seen that in the custom of ancestor worship – a field only for men, when worshipping, the wife stands on a par with her husband in front of the altar, the

husband on the left, the wife on the right, or the wife kneels and bows right behind her husband, in the same place with her husband. During funerals, death anniversaries or family ceremonies, wives stand in the same row as their husbands (Nguyen Van Huyen, 2005, p.82).

The phrase "A wife must obey her husband" or "three obediences" are not unfamiliar to Vietnamese people. Many folk sayings about the status of females who are not considered important in the family can be exemplified as "daughters are children of another family", "daughters-in-law are actually daughters; sons-in-law are like guests", ... but real social developments are not oriented to that way at all, even the levels vary. In China, in any marriage, a daughter depends entirely on her husband and his family; it is difficult to visit her blood parents. China has the Double Yang Festival (重陽節/Chóng yáng jié), also known as the Double Nine Festival (重九節/Chóng jiǔ jié) (on September 9 every year, lunar calendar). This festival/holiday has the custom of married girls returning home to visit their blood parents, and the whole family eats Double Yang cake together. In Vietnam, in wedlock, daughters-in-law stay at the husband's house, but it is not too strict about going out as they are not completely tied to the husband's family. Travel can depend on the distance between the two families and on the convenience level, rather than being bound by custom. Even in wedlock, Vietnamese women still have a certain role in their blood parents' family such as helping with death anniversary offerings, taking care of their parents when in need. They still have a say in resolving some family matters. Insun Yu wrote *"According to Vietnamese customs, even when a girl lives in her husband's family, she does not separate herself from her blood parents and does not let herself and her property dependent on her husband. She always remains a member of her biological parents, and therefore, the family is responsible for taking care of her death offerings if she does not have children. Even half of her property earned after she gets married is transferred to her family if she has no children."* [Insun Yu, 1994, page 167].

In 1483, King Le Thanh Ton rebuilt Hong Duc Law (The Penal Code of Royal Court of the Le dynasty), the uniqueness of "National Royal Court's Penal Code" is clearly shown in the two chapters "Household Marriage" and "Real Estate". Mentioning a number of women's rights in society and family, specifically, articles 53/722 discussing marriage and family; articles 30/722 discuss ancestor worship, sacral services, inheritance and property ownership. In marriage, wives have relatively equal rights with the husband through the content stated in Article 322 "If a daughter sees that her fiancé has an evil habit, she can appeal to the mandarin to return the wedding presents", "If the son-in-law insults her parents, the wife can take it to the mandarin and ask for a divorce." Not only that, the law also protected women who were allowed to ask for a divorce in case the husband did not take care of the wife for 5 months (1 year if they had children). When it comes to public affairs, the law allows forced divorce. After divorce, if the wife is not at fault about her personal property, she has the right to bring it back to her house; In case of fault, the wife voluntarily does not take the property with her or in some cases the law stipulates that the wife must leave the property to the husband. "If the wife commits adultery, the property must be returned to the husband." The law also stipulated that daughters had the right to share family property equally to sons. When parents died, if there was no son to worship them, a daughter would replace them [Pham Duy Nghia 2004: 232]. When getting married, her property still belonged to her alone and was not put in together with the husband's family's property. In any family that did not have a son to inherit, the eldest daughter had the right to inherit the worship land/ fields [Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences 1991:31]. At work, female workers were paid equally with male workers, with no distinction in daily wages. The Hong Duc Code

had great significance in Vietnamese feudal society, recognizing the role of women through progressive articles and its content to protect women from the strict principles of Confucianism. Author Alexander B. Woodside argues that “tolerance and even support for women's inheritance rights was unique among the classical civilizations of East Asia” (Alexander B. Woodside, 1971).

4.2. Women's position in society

Besides the aspect of family organization, the change in Vietnamese Confucianism compared to Chinese Confucianism is most clearly expressed in the change in women's social position.

Because the main purpose of the feudal state's education system is to study to become mandarins, only men could go to school to become mandarins, women were not allowed to become mandarins, so women could not go to school except for filthy rich families who let their daughters study literature to recite poetry and poetry. Women were underestimated because they were uneducated and had difficulty raising children. In order for women to move towards equality and expand their knowledge, they needed to be educated.

In Chinese culture, women in ancient times were almost "banned", not allowed to freely move or leave the house. The more noble the family, the lower the level of freedom for women. In multi-storey houses that went deep inside, daughters were always "carefully kept" separate from the outside, which could almost imprison women. This was a way to help preserve standards, dignity, and chastity. On the contrary, Vietnamese women could move more freely. This freedom left an impression on Westerners during their first contact; they could not imagine such comfort for Vietnamese women. A Westerner wrote, “We have seen that Vietnamese women can move freely. Europeans who visited this country in the 17th and 18th centuries were deeply impressed by that freedom and often thought that Vietnamese women were more comfortable than Muslim women and Chinese women” [Insun Yu, 1994, p. 116].

Vietnamese villages' culture guided behaviors within the village communities in which Confucianism could not be effective. Through the festival aspect, we see the level of freedom and comfort of women in participating in community activities. Vietnamese traditional festivals also recorded folk games in festival customs such as "The Tung Di, or The rub-a-dub – pushing dance involves carrying a bundle of rice and a handful of sticky rice while performing the dance movements of pushing the imitation penis and imitation vagina together to the rub-a-dub-dub drum.”; or men and women, old and young, push and play jokes with each other, in the festival called the jostling festival with the wish of "health for the aged, toughness for the young, thriving for all harvests, prosperity for all families"; or a man and a woman roll up sleeves, join hands together to catch loaches in a big jar, joking with each other and singing love songs" [Institute of Folk Culture, 1992, p.38].

The games in the village festival as described above show that the saying "men and women do not live together" in Confucian standards has almost no place. The Tung Di, or The rub-a-dub – pushing dance carries the concept of fertility in the customs of agricultural residents. The woman holds the imitation vagina and the man holds the imitation penis, and they dances, pushing those two objects together, vividly demonstrating the harmony of yin and yang as a natural way of heaven and earth. It has the practical meaning of maintaining life and maintaining the race. Or like people pushing each other in a "jostling festival", rolling up their sleeves to catch loaches in a

big jar, without gender discrimination, they play together in a pure way without worrying about physical contact. Of course, that freedom lies within the framework of moral standards for women and the habits of village culture as mentioned above, especially in communicating with men, avoiding intimate contact. Until today, in integrating into the world, accepting new Western ideas and styles, and adopting the "handshake" greetings in communication, most Vietnamese women are rarely the first to put out the hand for the handshakes, but men are.

In the nation's history of building and defending the country for many generations, Vietnamese women always clearly demonstrated the good traditional qualities of patriotism and the spirit of strong resistance to foreign invaders; diligence, intelligence, creativity in production; kindness, sacrifice, and a big heart. It is these personalities of women's that have "softened" the strict elements of three obediences and four virtues in Confucianism. At the same time, the image of women is honored and praised for their resilience and sacrifice for future generations to follow.

These include Ba Trung, Ba Trieu, Princess Ngoc Han, Suong Nguyet Anh, Imperial Concubine Y Lan, etc. Female heroes have also escaped the constraints of Confucian regulations, depending on their strength, on all fronts in the fight for national independence. Historian Le Van Huu praised the heroic victory of the Trung Sisters "Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, both women, shouted a shout, and Cuu Chan, Nhat Nam and sixty-five cities in Linh Ngoai all responded to them. Building the nation and declaring themselves "king" are as easy as abc." (Hoang Van Lau, 1998). Or famous female scholars of the Confucian feudal period such as Ho Xuan Huong, Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, Doan Thi Diem, etc. represented women to speak out to attack antiquated ideas, outdated regulations, and to attack Confucianism and feudalism which were the causes of gender inequality in society.

Women in Vietnamese Confucian society were not only the highlight of a country but also changed the cultural concept of the East, of the world from "trivial women" to "heroic women".

4.3 Women's status reflected through folk culture

The concept of women's status in Confucian society can be reflected through many aspects, folk legends, beliefs, etc. It is what happens in daily life from the past to the present. This area not only shows the community's concept of social organization, but also vividly shows the roles of components in the community.

In the treasury of Vietnamese myths, legends, fairy tales, folk songs, and proverbs, women are portrayed quite clearly: from the legend of "children of the Fairy and the Dragon" with the father named Lac Long Quan and the mother named Au Co with different living habits and personalities, they voluntarily parted in equality: fifty children followed their mother to the forest and fifty other children followed their father down into the sea; The legend of Coconut Skull is associated with the image of a woman who toils hard for her children; The canonized national hero – Saint Giong had only mother but no father, etc. It can be seen that Vietnamese women are always mentioned with reverence. Strict forms of Confucian morality and virtue is much more toned down.

Around the second century, Taoism penetrated into Vietnam and quickly merged with the native beliefs of the Vietnamese people. The highlight is the belief in worshipping the Mother Goddess. Among the 27 pure Vietnamese gods, there are 14 Mother Goddesses. Among the 1,000 cultural relics, 250 relics are to worship goddesses and female celebrities (Ngo Duc Thinh, 2012). The Mother – the creator and protector –

is highly revered in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese belief in Mother Goddess worship has merged with the Taoist principle of deification; Mothers and Goddesses such as Lieu Hanh, Tien Dung, Ba Chua Xu, Ba Den, Ba Dan, Ba Danh, etc. have accompanied popular Taoist deities such as the Jade Emperor, Thai Thuong Lao Quan (ancestor of shaman with the pen name Thai Thuong Lao Quan – a supreme fairy of Thai Thanh palace), Nam Tao Bac Dau, etc.

The four oldest pagodas in Vietnam worship four Mother Goddesses related to the natural phenomena of clouds, rain, thunder, and lightning: Dâu pagoda worships Pháp Vân (Thanh Khương commune), Đậu pagoda worships Pháp Vũ (as this pagoda was destroyed, Bà Đậu statue was transferred to Dâu pagoda and has been there for worship since then), Dàn pagoda worships Pháp Điện (Thuận Thành rural district), Tướng pagoda worships Pháp Lôi (Thanh Khương commune). In addition, Vietnamese folk beliefs also worship Bà Chúa Thai, Twelve Midwives, Mothers of Birth and Protection (while men often worship Quan Thánh, Uncle Tài, Uncle Quý). Women worship those goddesses to protect their lives, especially in childbirth.

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The worship of the Holy Mother originated from the worship of nature deities and then evolved into a form of worship of deities bearing human characteristics, initially deities with the ability to control nature, and later heroes worshiped for having achieved great victories for the people and the country. Mother is not only a person of flesh and blood, but also the mother of the universe, mother of nature. Writer Nguyen Xuan Khanh, author of the novel *Mau Thuong Ngan* explained:

Talking about the Mother is talking about the Mother with the vocations of a mother. Vietnamese people worshipping the Mother Goddess is to worship the mother who bore the burden of giving birth, holding her child in her arms, protecting, raising and caring for her child for the rest of her life.

The whole hierarchical institution of Confucianism with the king as its head (the son of God, ranking next to God) was replaced by a simple but convincing folk institution "Wife first, God second"; thereby, the king only ranked third (Tran Quoc Vuong, 2003).

In particular, in the Vietnamese kitchen, three Kitchen Gods are always worshiped (two men and one woman), people call them Mr. Tao. The three blocks made of earth, bricks or green stones are placed like a tripod holding the pot. Usually people make a large block to represent Mrs. Tao, two small blocks to represent two Mr. Tao and place both them in front of Mrs. Tao to create a path for firewood. When shaping the blocks, to mark the block for Mrs. Tao, a small concave mark is pressed into the block. When cooking, depending on the size of the pot, the position of the two Mr. Tao can be moved but absolutely not the position of Mrs. Tao. In the South, there are quite a lot of place names with the element "Ms./Mrs." as Trinh Hoai Duc commented when returning to Gia Dinh:

In the South, a lot of people including women are loyal, courageous, disciplined,

respectful of merit. The South abounds in beautiful women who are wealthy, longevous, and clever. They are devout Buddhists, believe in spiritism, and respect goddesses such as Lady Lord Ngoc, Lady Lord Dong, Lady Hoa Tinh, Lady Thuy Long, Miss Hong, and Miss Hanh, etc.

The important role of Vietnamese women is vividly expressed in beliefs that symbolize prosperity, mother goddess worship, and polytheistic beliefs. To a certain extent, it can be said that Vietnamese holy mothers participate in the process of preserving social relationships and social ethics through dealing with gods.

5. DISCUSSIONS

Vietnam has historically been influenced by Confucianism, the traditional view of valuing the moral standards set by Confucianism, especially absorbing Confucianism during the Song Dynasty in China, when Confucianism developed over many periods of time with its philosophy becoming more and more complete, with its standards stricter, and with the requirements for women's conduct more stringent.

On the other hand, Vietnam is a country in Southeast Asia, a typical wet rice agricultural tradition, and also a long-standing matrilineal region in the world. It means in this region, the role and position of women in the society is completely different from the Confucian society and the Chinese sectarian system. Both indigenous elements and elements absorbed from China are like two strands that together create Vietnamese traditions. These two strands seem to be contradictory, but they exist in harmony in different cases and subjects. Some time, indigenous elements dominate, the other time, Confucian elements rise. For example in urban areas, in rural areas, in Confucian families and farmer families, the level of compliance with Confucian standards varies.

These two strands can be merged. In general, in terms of social concepts towards women, Vietnam always emphasizes virtue, obedience, and dependence, but the level is not too strict and depends on each family. In actual Vietnamese society, women's status is not too overlooked and looked down on. Factors absorbed from China influenced local culture, and at the same time, local factors were adjusted, then changed what was absorbed from the outside in the direction of natural selection consistent with real life.

In the process of absorbing Chinese Confucianism, another indigenous factor contributed to adjusting the results of acculturation, which was closed to agricultural village culture. Within that village community, a number of characteristics such as an emotional lifestyle based on reason, a way of solving problems in social life which was flexible rather than principled, etc. was the basic values that governed behavior in the village community in addition to Confucian values. This also contributed to influencing social concepts and behaviors among different segments of society, specifically women as mentioned in this article.

As stated above, the "respect for men" absorbed from Chinese Confucianism and the indigenous "respect for women" complement each other, so in folklore there exist both sentences *"One son means haves. Ten daughters mean havenots."* and *"Three dong² for a bunch of men, put him in a cage for ants to carry; three hundred dong for one woman, bring her home and spread out flower mats for her to sit on"* or *"Deep fields, sows are not as good as the firstborn daughter"*. Thanks to such moderation between the two lines of thought, the concept of treating women in Vietnam is not too strict. Hence, the fate of Vietnamese women is not too oppressed, and their lives are also not too strict.

Particularly talking about the status of women living in her husband's family,

while Confucianism emphasizes "devotion to one's husband", "four virtues", "chastity", etc., Vietnam mentions those standard values and still attaches great importance to "training and preserving virtues", but at the same time, Vietnam pays close attention to the responsibilities and roles of women in the husband's family. This role is not in a weak position, not in a dependent position in the sense of "follower", but on the contrary, women play a quite important role in her husband's family. The popular saying "when you get married, you take care of your husband's family" shows the great role and big responsibility of the husband's family. Indeed, in many sayings about women's hardships towards their husbands and children, those sayings also show the woman's position in other ways, such as "*The stork-like body wades along the pond, carrying rice, raising her husband in a lamenting cry.*", "*If the wife and the husband are in harmony, even the East Sea can be bailed dried up.*", "*In shallow fields and deep fields, the husband plows, the wife plants rice, and the buffalo harrows*".

As the above content mentioned, the process of absorbing Chinese Confucianism was dominated and regulated by indigenous factors such as agricultural culture and matrilineal areas. It is impossible not to mention another factor whose influence from the "official government" side is also strong, which is the reception of the Vietnamese feudal court. During the process of building the state, the Vietnamese court learned how to organize the society and absorbed Confucian standards, one of which was put into law, from which it was passed down as a custom throughout the country. In general, this path tends to be harsh towards women, such as applying cruel punishments to women who do not maintain their morality: let her on raft floating down river, peeling the back of her neck then applying lime, ...

As mentioned above, the village culture with folk festival customs is open in terms of nature, and does not bind social sectors to the word "ceremony"; the activities of men and women are relatively free. This element of folk culture contradicts the ritual policy of the feudal court. So depending on the level of power controlling the royal court over the countryside, the level of freedom of social sectors, especially of women, varies. In addition, besides state law, there are also regulatory "village rules", which are the customs and conventions of each village, accepted by the village community, in which both reason and emotion exist. In particular, village rules sometimes have a stronger influence than state laws, so the "love" element in village rules also somewhat reduces the strictness of the royal court's policy. Writing about the village convention of Xuan Hy commune, Bac Ninh province, Ho Duc Tho stated "The village convention states respect for the elderly, children must be filial to their parents, parents must be responsible for their children and grandchildren." The convention also clearly states respect for teachers and tolerance for women who have the misfortune of becoming pregnant." [Ho Duc Tho, 20].

Although the status of Vietnamese women is not as strictly constrained as in China, it is of course still within the control of ethics and rites. As in marriage, adopting Chinese customs of performing ritual steps goes with proper adjustments to suit local conditions. However, there is a custom of bidding for marriage where the bride's family requires the groom's to have wedding presents meeting the bride's requirements before marrying their daughter. When the bride's family sets high demands that the groom's family cannot meet, the marriage may not be successful. This has made the girl an object of exchange, able to sell at different high and low prices.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research has answered the two research hypotheses set out: there are two main factors that determine the status and position of Vietnamese women in traditional Confucian society, which is the reason why Vietnamese women "mould" their own shape and appearance:

(1) Internal reasons: Vietnam's agricultural society is small-scale, based mainly on the nuclear family, unlike the strong bloodline lineage traditions in China or Korea. Women in Vietnamese Confucian society always have their economic position, which is the factor that has created certain cultural resources that help Vietnamese women confidently deal with Confucianism.

(2) External cause: Vietnamese Confucianism is not an original social philosophy system like in China or Korea, but on the contrary, it is a "shallow" Confucianism, Vietnameseized as perceived by previous authors (e.g. McHale 2004). This research also demonstrates the principle that once women gain their socioeconomic role, they always retain their role in culture and social life.

Author contributions:

Le Thi Ngoc Diep is the main author who collected the majority of the references, did the analysis of the data, and wrote the first draft of the article, and the parts analysis comparison with Vietnam.

Tran Cao Boi Ngoc helped with collecting materials and with doing the analysis.

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NOTES

- 1 Tran Te Xuong: <http://thoduongdatviet.com>
- 2 Dong (Đồng) = currency unit of Vietnam