

Understanding the High Rates of Unmarried Chinese-Vietnamese Women: A Case Study of Cai Rang

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Abstract

While most Vietnamese women in Vietnam are married by the time they reach twenty-five years of age, there has been a prevalent phenomenon of ethnic Chinese women in Vietnam remaining single into their thirties and forties. Some studies have pointed out the determinants of delayed and non-marriage among women, such as a higher level of education, financial independence, and individualism. However, these factors do not principally affect unmarried Chinese women in Vietnam. This study of single Chinese women in a community in Southwest Vietnam (Cai Rang) shows that the massive waves of Chinese emigrants after the liberation of South Vietnam in 1975, together with the rules of patriarchy, the collapse of match-making based marriage, and the increased number of Chinese men in inter-ethnic marriages, have had a strong influence on the non-marriage status of Chinese women. Since the reform era of Vietnam began in 1986, the processes of urbanization and integration of the Chinese with the dominant ethnic group, the Kinh, has created different marital opportunities for Chinese men and women. However, women born in the pre-reform era maintain the same conception and lifestyle of traditional Chinese women and, therefore, have less of a chance to marry.

Key words

Chinese women, non-marriage, sex ratio, matchmaking, inter-ethnic marriage

Introduction

Studies on the late marriage and unmarried status among Chinese women in East and Southeast Asia have often focused on developed countries. Although the 1989 census of Vietnam shows that the proportion of single Hoa women

was higher than that of Kinh women (General Statistical Office [GSO], 1991), previous studies have yet to unravel this trend and explain why Hoa women have such an unusually high rate of single status in a developing country like Vietnam. This article provides new findings and discusses the factors that may influence the high rate of unmarried status of Hoa women, in the context of Cai Rang District, Can Tho, Vietnam.

There is a recent trend of Chinese women in developed countries having late marriage ages and high rates of single status. The proportion of single Chinese women aged 30–34 was 29.8% in Singapore in 2010 (Osteria, 2015) and 35% in Hong Kong in 2005 (Jones & Gubhaju, 2009). In contrast to the above-mentioned countries, Vietnam is still considered a country with a high rate of early marriage (Jones, 2007; Quah, 2015). Despite this, the proportion of single Hoa women aged 30–34 in Vietnam was 33.1% in 1989, while the corresponding figure for single Kinh women was just 11% (GSO, 1991). The sustained high rate of single status across marriageable and reproductive age groups of Hoa women thus requires a more comprehensive analysis to identify the factors that influence this phenomenon.

Interestingly, by the end of 2016, our case study found that high rates of single marital status also applied to many adult Hoa women of a long-established Chinese community in Cai Rang District, Can Tho. In this community, the majority of Hoa women still work for their families in the household economy sector. Although Hoa women in Cai Rang are not significantly socio-economically different from Kinh women, there are differences in the groups' marital standings. In light of the under-researched incidence of high rates of single Hoa women in Vietnam, the authors thus decided to return to the community in 2017 to conduct further research to discover the factors underpinning this phenomenon.

Literature Review

Previous studies have suggested that the determinants for delayed and non-marriage of women are increased opportunities for higher education, employment, and career advancement, which provide women with income independence without having to go through marriage to be financially secure (Ono, 2003; Oppenheimer, 1994; Raymo & Iwasawa, 2005). According to Bernard (1972), changing the socio-economic characteristics of women makes them reconsider their choice if they have to sacrifice many things to obtain

financial support through marriage. Once staying single became more accepted by society (Thornton & Freedman, 1982), and marriage was not meant for financial security or had a high trade-off, marriage would no longer appeal to women (Bernard, 1972).

Although the influence of Confucian tradition is not as strong now as it once was, it still dominates women's roles and codes of behavior (filial piety, sacrifice, caring for parents and children, and housework) in Chinese families. Researches by Salaff (1976, 1981) and Ferguson (2000) concerning Chinese women in Hong Kong and the United States show that older daughters had to learn to care for the men in the family, including their father and brothers. Filial piety obliges them to dedicate themselves to housework and family management.

The collapse of marriage based on matchmaking is also a relevant topic when studying the single status of women. Retherford and Ogawa (2006) found that when the traditional matchmaking-based marriages disappeared, a lack of other types of marriage connections made it difficult for young people to interact with the opposite sex, and thus became a factor that increased the prevalence of the single status.

Up until now, few studies have existed on the single status of Hoa women in Vietnam. Most studies on the marriage of Hoa women in Vietnam focused on the concepts of marriage, the rules of intra-ethnic marriage, and the customs of marriage. However, these studies also showed some foundations of the basis upon which Hoa women marry. Under the regime of intra-ethnic marriage, Hoa parents only allow their sons to marry non-Hoa women; daughters are forbidden from marrying non-Hoa men (Chau, 1992). In fact, the percentage of Hoa men having inter-ethnic marriages is much higher than that of Hoa women (Chau, 1992; Nguyen, 2005).

Inter-ethnic marriage between Hoa men and non-Hoa women was often interpreted as a measure adopted by the Hoa people to adapt to a changing social context. During the period 1955–1963, many Hoa men married Kinh women and allowed their spouses to register their business in order to circumvent the Southern government's policy of restricting Hoa participation in business (Nguyen, 2005; Tran, 1997). After 1975, Hoa people left Vietnam in massive numbers for economic and political reasons: The policies of nationalizing the capitalist economy and restructuring commerce and industries in the South in the 1975–1985 decade destroyed the economy of the Hoa people. Goodkind (1997) argued that massive international migration in the

1970s and 1980s has made Vietnamese people fall into a marriage squeeze: Domestic women are faced with a shortage of men. The same situation also occurred with Hoa women in Vietnam. From 1975 to 1991, the relationship between Vietnam and China worsened due to the existence of several conflicts which forced Hoa people in Vietnam seek ways to better integrate into Vietnamese society. Based on the 1999 Vietnam census, Baulch, Tran, Haughton, and Haughton (2004) found that Hoa people had the highest rate of inter-ethnic marriage compared to other ethnic groups. One-third of Hoa household heads (3,283 households), mostly men, were married to a member of another ethnic group, mainly to Kinh people. Baulch et al. (2004) suggest that the high inter-ethnic marriage rate between Hoa and Kinh shows that they chose the path of economic development and were willing to “self-assimilate” into Vietnamese culture. These findings were re-affirmed via a study by Nguyen (2012) who analyzed 304 marriage registrations where at least one of the participants was Hoa in Vinh Hai Commune, Vinh Chau District, Soc Trang Province (from 2002 to July 2008). In this study, 46.4% of the total marriages were intra-ethnic marriages, 53.6% were inter-ethnic marriages, and 67.5% of the total inter-ethnic marriages involved Hoa men marrying women who belonged to different ethnic groups.

Data Source and Research Methodology

The article is based on a case study of Hoa people in Cai Rang District, Can Tho City (see Figure 1). This case study is part of a research project conducted by one of the authors in October 2016. A quantitative survey was conducted for 1,400 households in 14 communes/wards in 7 provinces out of a total of 13 provinces in the Southwest region of Vietnam, using a multi-stage stratified sampling method. Regarding the case study, Cai Rang District is home to a long-established ethnic Hoa community in Can Tho, and Le Binh Ward was selected for the quantitative survey of 100 Hoa households. Additionally, we also conducted a number of in-depth interviews with the representatives of 12 Hoa households, and 4 focus group discussions with representatives of local government, households, and production and business establishments located in Cai Rang.

Based on the results of the initial analysis, we returned to Cai Rang in June 2017 to conduct further observations and interviews with 20 people aged 20–50, 13 women (all Hoa) and 7 men (4 Kinh and 3 Hoa). Of the 13 women,

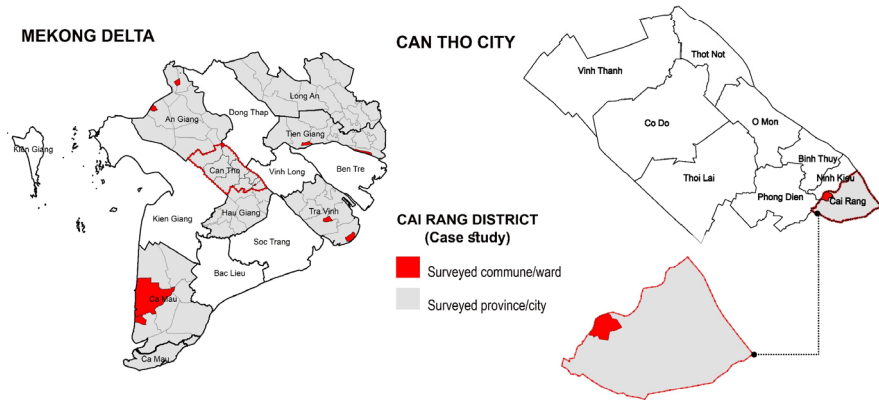


Figure 1. Locations of surveyed communes/wards and Le Binh Ward, Cai Rang District.

9 work in the household sector and 4 either work in the non-household sector or are college students. In addition, we collected important information during our informal conversations with both men and women in the community. This helped to clarify the information obtained from the interviews with Hoa women. This survey is mentioned as the first survey.

In addition to the main sources of data, collected as mentioned above, we also used some results of a research project on ethnic relations in the Southwest region conducted by our researcher in August 2016, to supplement and double-check the related issues. This project surveyed 200 Hoa households in 4 provinces (Tra Vinh, Can Tho, Soc Trang, and Kien Giang), made up of 100 urban households and 100 rural households, where Hoa are living together with other ethnic groups. This survey is mentioned as the second survey. We also used the 1989 census and the 2009 census, which contained unpublished data on the marital status of Hoa women.

This article attempts to create new insights by comparing the data from the Vietnam population censuses with the information collected from the quantitative and qualitative surveys of the Hoa community in Cai Rang. When analyzing the marriage age, single status, inter-ethnic marriage, and some socio-economic characteristics, we also compared the Hoa community with the Kinh community living in the same communes/wards or in other localities with similar living conditions, in order to check the differences between the two. Although not representative of the whole Hoa people, this case study helps to explain to a certain extent the prevalence of single status

among Hoa women in Vietnam, from the insights of a typical Hoa community in the Southwest region.

Main Findings

Marriage Age of Hoa Women in Vietnam

Findings showed that the Singulate Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) of Hoa women is similar to that of Kinh women and is not as high as in developed countries. SMAM of Vietnamese women in the recent census is 22.8 compared to 23.2 in 1989 (GSO, 2016). For the whole country, SMAM in urban areas is about two years higher than in rural areas. In 2016, SMAM was 28.3 for men and 24.7 for women in urban areas and 26.6 for men and 22.1 for women in rural areas, respectively (GSO, 2017). Our research in the Southwest region (see Table 1) showed that the SMAM of Hoa was 27.1 for men and 24.9 for women in urban areas; 25.3 for men and 22.0 for women in rural areas. In general, the findings were quite similar to the SMAM figures for the total population of Vietnam. However, the SMAM of Hoa women born during 1975–1984 was 26.1 in urban areas and 25.4 years in rural areas. It increased sharply compared to the previous cohort and declined to 22.6 in the next cohort. The SMAM of Hoa men in rural areas also increased sharply during 1975–1984, possibly due to the direct consequences of social upheavals and the changes in population and population structure, caused by the massive flows of Hoa international migration post-1975.

Table 1

SMAM of the Hoa People by Cohort, Gender, and Rural/Urban Area

Cohort	Urban				Rural			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	Age	<i>N</i>	Age	<i>N</i>	Age	<i>N</i>	Age	<i>N</i>
1921-1954	27.4	31	23.3	27	25.5	32	21.3	29
1955-1964	27.2	38	23.2	25	24.3	20	20.1	24
1965-1974	27.5	13	24.0	14	24.3	23	22.2	22
1975-1984	26.6	16	26.1	15	29.2	20	25.4	17
1985-1994	26.0	6	22.6	7	23.5	20	22.6	16
Total	27.1 ^a	104	24.9 ^a	88	25.3 ^a	115	22.0 ^a	108

Note. ^aThe average age of first marriage of all people in column.

Source: Our second survey, 2016

Single Status of Hoa Women in Vietnam

While the SMAM of Hoa women, both in rural and urban areas, is consistent with the normal patterns, the high single rate of Hoa women in Vietnam seems to be an abnormal phenomenon. According to the 1989 and 2009 censuses, the proportion of single Hoa women was higher than that of Kinh women and Hoa men (see Table 2). After 20 years, the higher proportion of single status among Hoa women compared to Kinh women still remained in place. In urban areas, the proportion of single Hoa women was 33.3% in the 30–34 age group and more than 26.1% in the older age groups. In rural areas, the proportion of single Hoa women was lower than in urban areas and dropped rapidly in older age groups.

Our surveys in the Southwest region showed similar results (see Table 3). Although the size of these samples was relatively small and did not represent the entire Hoa community in Vietnam, the results reconfirmed the macro patterns derived from the 1989 and 2009 censuses. In rural areas, Hoa women aged 25–29 had a high single rate (10/18), but only a few of those in the older age groups remained single. In contrast, Hoa women were more likely to be single in older age groups in urban areas. At the same time, very rarely were Kinh women aged 35–39 or higher in urban areas and in the Southwest region (SWR) single. In urban areas, Hoa men have a number of older adults who were single but at a much lower rate than Hoa women. In rural areas, the majority of Hoa men still single were from the 30–34 age group, but this dropped

Table 2
Proportions of Single Status of Hoa People and Kinh People by Age Group and Gender in 1989 and 2009

Age group	Census 1989			Census 2009					
			Kinh Women	Urban			Rural		
	Men	Women		Hoa Men	Hoa Women	Kinh Women	Hoa Men	Hoa Women	Kinh Women
25–29	43.4	46.1	17.8	59.9	50.2	26.3	46.4	31.7	14.6
30–34	23.1	33.1	11.0	33.0	33.3	11.7	20.0	13.5	6.3
35–39	13.1	26.7	8.5	23.1	26.1	8.9	9.2	9.4	4.9
40–44	8.5	20.4	5.9	15.9	28.3	8.0	6.0	8.5	4.8
45–49	5.8	11.9	3.3	14.3	26.5	7.0	3.5	7.5	5.1

Source: GSO (1991), vol. 1, p. 283 & GSO, unpublished census 2009

Table 3

Proportions of Single Status of Hoa People and Kinh People by Age Group and Gender in Two Sample Surveys in 2016

Age group	Survey 2016 ^a				Survey 2016 ^b				
	Urban		SWR	Urban		Rural		Kinh	
	Hoa	Kinh		Hoa	Hoa				
Men	Women	Women	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Women	
25-29	(7/7)	(7/9)	(3/17)	25.0	(14/17)	(12/17)	(16/29)	(10/18)	(11/29)
30-34	(3/7)	(1/5)	(6/15)	10.3	(7/14)	(5/12)	(11/21)	(1/12)	(6/48)
35-39	(3/14)	(4/6)	(1/13)	3.2	(8/17)	(6/12)	(8/21)	(2/12)	(0/35)
40-44	(4/14)	(9/15)	(0/9)	4.2	(1/9)	(6/13)	(1/5)	(3/9)	(2/27)
45-49	(3/11)	(6/16)	(0/19)	4.1	(1/7)	(12/20)	(1/18)	(1/15)	(5/35)

Note. With the relatively small number of cases, we present the number of single people relative to the total population of each age group.

Source: ^aOur first survey. ^bOur second survey.

for the 35–39 age group, and almost all men in older age groups were married.

In short, the above results confirm the existence of a tendency among Hoa women in Vietnam to remain single, mainly in urban areas, but not simply because of the higher proportion of Hoa living in urban areas. This required looking for answers from other factors relevant to the Hoa community in Vietnam.

Education, Occupation, and Employment of Single Hoa Women in Vietnam

We found that the single Hoa women in our study were mostly middle-aged, had a lower-medium education level, worked in the household sector, and had no economic independence. In a comparison of the average number of years of schooling between single and married Hoa women (see Table 4), the results show that for those born before 1975, the education level was low and mostly unrelated to their marital status. For those born in the period 1975–1984, their education level increased, but married people had a higher education than those who were single. For those born in the period 1985–1994, the level of education was significantly improved. Pursuing further education after high school graduation can be a factor for the delayed marriage of

Table 4
Average Schooling Years of Hoa Women by Cohort, Marital Status, and Rural/Urban Area

Cohort	Survey 2016 ^a		Survey 2016 ^b			
	Urban		Urban		Rural	
	Single	Ever married	Single	Ever married	Single	Ever married
Pre-1975	8.1	7.4	7.4	7.2	4.5	3.6
1975-1984	9.4	13.0	7.7	10.3	7.5	7.3
1985-1994	14.3	11.3	13.9	13.4	12.3	9.0
Total	9.2	8.0	9.6	8.4	9.7	5.2
(N)	(61)	(64)	(72)	(137)	(31)	(131)

Source: ^aOur first survey. ^bOur second survey.

the group of young women at 22–31 years old. However, since they are still young, they have opportunities to marry later and have not contributed much to the high single rate of Hoa women in the 2016 surveys.

In terms of job training, there is no significant difference between Hoa women and Kinh women. More importantly, most of the trained people were young Hoa women, with 13 out of 16 people born after 1985 at university and college level, while older single women had hardly ever done any training or had only trained at their workplace.

A prominent characteristic of Hoa people is their superiority in the trading sector based on the tradition of “father-son transmission.” The proportion of Hoa women in Le Binh Ward working in the trading and service sector is 61.4%, much higher than that of Kinh women (27.3%). With the exception of a small number of young women with high education levels and gainfully employed by companies, most Hoa women, especially older people, work for their families and live with their relatives. In general, in terms of the levels of education, occupation, and employment of the middle-aged, unmarried Hoa women are not significantly different from those of married Hoa women.

Our in-depth interviews show that most Hoa women born before the 1980s were in large families, less encouraged to study, and had older parents who were conservative and close-minded. They are the descendants of Hoa who migrated to Vietnam from Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces in Southeast

China in the early twentieth century. The interviewed women were all born in Vietnam and had no relationship with their ancestors' places of origin. They were given only a limited level of education, enough to read and write to help with household business, and to do housework. The work and life of nine women working in the household economic sector is quite similar: rare outside activities and daily activities are repeated day after day. Hoa women at home do housework, laundry, prepare food for the whole family, and look after children for their brothers and sisters. Hoa women who participate in the household economic activity start working early in the morning and finish in the late evening, then rest, eat, and entertain in the home. The living conditions and daily work of middle-aged Hoa women make them less likely to communicate with other people outside of the family.

Migration, Population, and Gender Balance

The changes in population and population structure have a high correlation with the single status of women. The Hoa population in Vietnam has been declining steadily since 1975, mainly due to the wave of international migration from the community in the late 1980s and onwards (Amer, 2013; Thompson, 2003); late marriage ages, high unmarried rates, and low fertility rates (GSO, 1991); and Hoa choosing to identify ethnically as Kinh rather than Hoa as we found in field research¹. According to the population statistics prior to 1975, Vietnam had about 1,700,000 Hoa people (300,000 in the North and 1,400,000 in the South) (Chen, 1987). The Hoa population was 935,074 in 1979, decreasing to 900,185 in 1989, and 823,071 in 2009 (GSO, 1980, 1991, 2010).

The sudden large-scale drop in the Hoa population thus created difficulties for those wishing for an intra-ethnic marriage by reducing the number of available partners. In addition, Hoa normally left Vietnam either as a whole family, or a group would go first, and then a second group would follow after that. Men were usually the ones who left first. These types of migrations have altered the gender structure in some age groups, affecting the chances of getting married for the remaining single Hoa in Vietnam.

¹ This issue has not been given sufficient attention, even though many Vietnamese ethnographers have identified this phenomenon in Vietnam. It can be considered as one of the factors for the persistent reduction of the Hoa population in Vietnam.

Comparing the single status of Hoa women with the corresponding sex ratio at the time of 1989, a clear correlation can be seen between the high rates of single Hoa women born before 1960 with a very low ratio of men to women in these cohorts (see Table 5). At the same time, the proportion of single Hoa men is also much lower than that of Hoa women in the same cohorts. The 1989 census showed that the number of Hoa men was considerably lower than Hoa women in cohorts born before 1965 but returned to equal in the cohort 1965–1974. Up to 1979—the peak of migration—the cohort is four to fourteen years old, so it is possible to assume that they were less likely to flee Vietnam by boat due to the high risk, thus leading to a balanced sex ratio for this cohort. Meanwhile, men born before 1965 were more likely to migrate, leading to a decline in men in the older cohorts.

After 20 years, the 2009 census reconfirmed the shortage of Hoa men in cohorts born before 1960, but with those born after this time, the opposite trend began. There were greater numbers of Hoa men than Hoa women in cohort 1960–1964, and even more so in cohort 1965–1974. It can be speculated that this reversal is due to the fact that more Hoa women than Hoa men in these cohorts migrated abroad during the intercensal period 1989–2009, mainly for marriage (GSO, 2011), but also as a result of the high ratio of males to females at birth, affected by patriarchal tradition. Amer (2013) argued that

Table 5
Proportions of the Single Status of Hoa Women and Hoa Men in Comparison to the Ratios of Men/Women in the Hoa Population in 1989 and 2009 by Cohort

Cohort	Age in 1989	Census 1989			Census 2009	
		Single men	Single women	Ratio of Men/Women	Ratio of Men/Women Urban	Rural
1970-1974	15-19	97.0	94.3	103.2	120.3	125.1
1965-1969	20-24	75.5	69.3	99.5	114.0	121.6
1960-1964	25-29	43.4	46.1	93.2	102.0	110.2
1955-1959	30-34	23.1	33.1	79.6	81.1	87.5
1950-1954	35-39	13.1	26.7	87.6	85.7	98.6
1945-1949	40-44	8.5	20.5	94.5	90.6	116.3
1940-1944	45-49	5.8	11.9	80.3	77.4	94.8
1935-1939	50-54	5.2	6.9	76.8	70.6	78.9

Source: GSO, 1991, pp. 280, 283 & GSO, 2010, p. 231

large-scale migration flows in previous periods have established Chinese overseas communities that have a family relationship with those remaining in Vietnam. This social network continued to promote the subsequent migration flows. In the 1990s, Vietnam's policy of reform toward a market economy and diplomatic relations with developed capitalist countries opened a different way for Vietnamese women to marry Vietnamese men overseas as well as foreigners (Wang & Chang, 2002). Due to the lack of official data, it is difficult to assess how the migration flows for marriage of Hoa women in this period have affected the sex ratio of Hoa people in Vietnam.

Regardless of the reversal of sex ratio, the incidence of the single status of Hoa women in urban areas in cohort 1965–1974 (35–44 years in 2009) remained high, even higher than the corresponding age group in the previous 20 years. At the same time, the incidence of single status of Hoa men in urban areas in this age group was also higher than that of the same age group in 1989. Meanwhile, the proportion of single Hoa women in rural areas was much lower than in urban areas but still slightly higher than the proportion of single Hoa men in rural areas, despite the fact that the ratio of men to women for this cohort in rural areas is higher than in urban areas (see Table 2). These results help to reinforce the argument that, besides the demographic factors, there are other factors contributing to the high rates of single status among Hoa women in Vietnam.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analyses indicate that the high rate of single Hoa women in Vietnam is not linked to high SMAM and is not the result of high educational attainment or high economic status. An integrated approach from demographic to cultural, social, and economic dimensions would help to better understand the research issue.

Community Cohesion and the Principle of Intra-Ethnic Marriage

Community cohesion to preserve cultural identity is expressed through mother tongues and intra-ethnic principles. Prior to 1975, the Hoa community of Cai Rang established a distinctive China town. They had their own graveyards, schools, religious institutions, and dominated economic bases in the locality. Significant socio-economic events after 1975, including large-scale

migration, have disrupted the social structures and social networks of the Hoa community. In periods of economic hardship, Hoa actively “assimilated” themselves to the ethnic majority by renouncing their mother tongue and breaking the principle of intra-ethnic marriage, particularly by men. According to our 2016 survey, only 17.7% of Hoa people can proficiently use their native language, 51.5% of Hoa people barely know their mother language, and the rest do not know their mother language. The process of urbanization and dense co-residence with many Kinh has led to decreased cohesion of the Hoa community and the breakdown of the intra-ethnic marriage principle while promoting integration and inter-ethnic marriage with the Kinh people. Our 2016 survey also showed that inter-ethnic marriages accounted for 26.9% of married Hoa men and 16.3% of married Hoa women and occurred mainly in urban areas. Many children born from the above inter-ethnic marriages and even intra-ethnic marriages in Hoa families have been designated ethnically as Kinh by their parents.

Marriage Matchmaking and Marriage Choice of Hoa Women

Significant demographic and socio-economic changes after 1975 have resulted in the breakdown of community-based marriage matchmaking relations. Through interviews, we found that most Hoa women born before the reform era (1986) still retained the role of traditional women, responsible for caring for family members, cleaning the house, and supporting the family economy. Most of these women were born into large families and their parents are now old. In the past difficult economic period, they had to take care of younger siblings and do housework so that their parents could focus on making money. One common feature of these women is passivity in marriage. They passively seek out spouses because of their Confucian conceptions of dating relationships, even if they want to get married. Hoa women assume that dating and the decision to marry are determined by the initiative of men. Most of these Hoa women trade at Cai Rang market and their regular customers are also women. They spend most of the day at the market, while the rest of their time is spent on leisure and entertainment at home with family members. They have few opportunities to come into contact with men they are not related to. The marriages of their sisters in families with similar situations are often handled by a matchmaker and their parents. In the context of urban change and integration, a number of Hoa women could not find a desired husband, resulting in unwanted single status.

Impact of Inter-Ethnic Marriage of Hoa Men on the Marriage Choice of Hoa Women

Population reduction and sex imbalance due to migration, as well as the historical tendency of Hoa men toward inter-ethnic marriage (Baulch et al, 2004; Chau, 1992; Nguyen, 2005; Nguyen, 2012; Tran, 1997), can be considered the dual cause of the position Hoa women find themselves in when seeking an intra-ethnic. Although Hoa women in our interviews wished for an intra-ethnic marriage, many expressed an interest in the economic condition of the potential husband and of the husband's family as a guarantee for their children and themselves when facing difficulties. Among ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Hoa are an ethnic minority but have high living standards (Baulch et al., 2004). In the locality, Hoa households are classified as households who possess assets and middle-income status and higher. Hoa men have the economic advantages of being able to marry either Hoa or Kinh women. However, the high rate of inter-ethnic marriage among Hoa men not only reduces Hoa women's opportunities for an intra-ethnic marriage but also removes "quality" men from their choice of partners. The remaining men, including Kinh men, have lower socio-economic characteristics, discouraging Hoa women from getting married, and may increase the incidence of Hoa women's unmarried status.

In summary, our study has tried to provide additional clarification to better understand the unmarried status of Hoa women in Vietnam. This was a transitory phenomenon that occurred mainly in urban areas under specific conditions of the Hoa in Vietnam after 1975. The cohorts born since the 1990s have witnessed significant changes in the post-reform era. Though the Hoa population is persistently decreasing due to low fertility rates, the high ratio of men to women at birth creates a reversed trend, thus providing more chances for Hoa women in the marriage pool. Still, we recognize that profound social and cultural changes and modern lifestyles in Cai Rang in the past decades have altered the attitudes and conceptions of marriage in the young generation of Hoa women.

In 1989, the single rate of Hoa women in the age group above 55 was only 4.1% compared to 3.0% of Hoa men (GSO, 1991), but after 20 years, these corresponding rates were 12.3% and 4.2% (GSO, unpublished census 2009). This indicates an increasing un-married rate of Hoa women aged 35–55 occurred during this period. Our 2016 case study in Cai Rang also showed that

the single status of Hoa women born in 1955–1964 increased unusually compared to previous cohorts. This is the group of Hoa women who started reaching marriageable age in the first decade after 1975, the crucial period at which the overall Hoa population decreased suddenly, the ratio of men to women dropped, networks and traditional social structures related to marriage became disrupted, Hoa men entered into more inter-ethnic marriages, and economic difficulties for Hoa who remained in Vietnam occurred. The influence of patriarchal tradition on Hoa women is reflected not only in the constraints imposed by the expectation of an intra-ethnic marriage, but also in the filial piety toward their parents and sacrifice for their families. In the difficult economic years after 1975, Hoa women worked hard to support their parents and some lost marriage opportunities when they were young, despite their still wanting to find the right man to marry. Compared to Kinh women in the Southwest region, Hoa women have been more influenced by the patriarchal tradition regarding their choice of marriage. Kinh women have more freedom to marry Korean or Taiwanese men, without being judged by relatives and community. The combination of the above factors has led to unusually high rates of non-marriage among Hoa women entering the marriage age in more than a decade after 1975 in Vietnam.

Since the scale of our research is quite small and in the context of a lack of previous studies on the single status of Hoa women in Vietnam, our results should be further examined and verified by other case studies. Further studies should focus on the differences between the local contexts, where Hoa communities live, population structures, ethnic compositions, social networks, community cohesion, and the economic status of Hoa people, as well as their possible effects on the practice of marriage and the marriage choices of Hoa women.

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