

WOMEN/GENDER STUDIES IN VIETNAM

Tran Han Giang

Institute for Family and Gender Studies Vietnamese Academy of Social Science

I. Introduction:

Women issues and gender equality in Vietnam have been mentioned for a long time in a variety of studies in history, literature, ethnography, etc. Yet, not until 1980s develop the distinct women studies where women are targeted as study object. Given the need of scientific foundation for womenconcerning policy making and legislation, the Vietnam Committee of Social Sciences, now known as Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, established a study program on "Women, Labor and Family" for three years from 1985 to 1987. On March 1987, the Government set up the Center for Women Studies that becomes Institute for Family and Gender Studies later then. From 1985 to 1990, a series of study projects were carried out by the Center. Since early 1990s, many other organizations have started studies on women. At the same time, gender studies have been introduced into Vietnam. Many workshops and training on gender have been held. The Center for Women Studies has then no longer been the only institution that fulfils the responsibility for studies and training on women and gender issues. More and more international and national organizations have joined. Women/gender studies have also been included as a subject in training program of Sociology Faculty in some universities such as the University of Social Sciences and Humanities affiliated with the National University of Hanoi, the National University of Ho Chi Minh City and the Faculty of Press and Communication affiliated with the National Political Academy of Ho Chi Minh and so forth.

II. Women/gender study development history:

11. 1. Institute for Family and Gender Studies:

The Institute for Family and Gender Studies is the only research institution of the Vietnamese Government on women, family and gender issues. It was established in 1985, firstly named as Center for Women Studies affiliated with the Vietnam Committee of Social Sciences, an independent body of the Government (See Appendix1: Organization of Institute for Family and Gender Studies). In the international year of Family 1994, the Government assigned the Institute an additional responsibility for family studies. As a result, the Institute was renamed as Center for Family and Women Studies. In February 2004, the Government modified the Institute's responsibilities to become the present Institute for Family and Gender Studies (IFGS) affiliated with Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences.

IFGS is functioned to do research on fundamental theories and realitybased emerging issues in Vietnam in the fields of family, women, and gender in order to fulfill the mission of a scientific ground provider for the Government bodies in its legislation and policy-making process relating to family, women, and gender equality issues. At the same time, IFGS is in the position of a reliable consultant for organizations and bodies interested in and related to family, women, and gender issues.

To be detailed, IFGS is responsible for:

1. Designing and implementing scientific projects including both theoretical and empirical studies in the fields of family, women and gender independently or in cooperation with other research organizations, institutes, and universities at home and abroad.

2. Delivering lectures at universities, at home and aboard on the matter of family, women and gender.
3. Disseminating scientific knowledge of family, women and gender through IFGS's information channels.
4. Building network of information, documentation, library and necessary technical infrastructure for its studies on family, women and gender as a leading research center in the country in the fields of family, women and gender studies.
5. Giving consultations for organizations and bodies interested in and related to family, women and gender issues.
6. Giving active and effective supports for the development of women through advocacy activities.

II. 2. Organizations with women/gender studies:

Since the beginning of 1990s many non-government organizations have been established and conducted women/gender studies. For example: Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED), Center of Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women (CEPEW), Center for Reproductive and Family Health (RAFH), Center for Applicable Studies on Gender and Family and so on.

Some ministries also create departments for women studies. For instance, Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs set up Center for Female Labor Studies affiliated with Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs, Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs; Ministry of Construction established Division of Gender Studies and Urban Development in Hanoi University of Architecture affiliated with Ministry of Construction, etc.

II.3. Universities with gender subject at undergraduate and graduate levels:

Some universities have included women/gender studies as a subject in their training programs, e.g. the Semi-public Open University, Hanoi University of Pedagogics, Faculty of Sociology in University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi National University, Faculty of Sociology in University of Social Sciences and Humanities in National University of Ho Chi Minh City, Faculty of Sociology in University of Security, Center of Sociology in National Political Academy of Ho Chi Minh and so on.

III. Studied women/gender issues to date:

III.1. Studies of women/gender study organizations:

1. Women/gender and employment, income
2. Women/gender and health care, family planning
3. Women/gender and family
4. Women/gender and education/training
5. Women/gender and development
6. Women/gender and poverty
7. Women/gender and domestic violence
8. Women/gender and gender responsive policies
9. Women/gender and renovation in Vietnam
10. Women/gender and land
11. Women/gender and industry
12. Women/gender and laws
13. Women/gender and social evils (i.e. prostitution, drugs, etc)
14. Women/gender and empowerment

15. Gender and development theories
16. Gender relations in French colonial period
17. Actual status of gender equality in Vietnamese society today
18. etc.

III. 2. Studies of un specialized organizations in women/gender studies:

Gender issues are integrated into particular disciplines of those organizations. For example:

1. Women/gender and fishery (Ministry of Fishery)
2. Women/gender and agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development)
3. Women/gender and urban development (Ministry of Construction)
4. Women/gender and ethnic cultures (Institute of Ethnography)
5. Women/gender and energy (Ministry of Energy)
6. Women/gender and legislation and legislative reform (Committee of Social Affairs of the National Assembly)
7. Women/gender and forestry (Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry)
8. etc.

IV. Awareness of women/gender studies in Vietnamese researcher circle:

IV. 1. Changes in perception:

At the end of the 1980s when the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (i.e. Center for Women Studies) was established, many researchers in the fields of social and natural sciences assumed that women studies are not a separate science and women issues could only be mentioned as a modest part of a certain study in a particular discipline. Some even undervalue women studies as believing there is nothing to study on women.

It is the alien wave of women/gender studies that make an important contribution to promotion of women/gender studies in Vietnam. The impact was created through international conferences, development projects conducted by UN bodies, international development organizations and local-based foreign agencies for development support. Most of development projects with gender mainstreaming make researchers and social practitioners seek for understanding what gender is and how to integrate gender into development projects within their disciplines.

IV. 2. Changes in action:

Gender mainstreaming in research and implementation of development projects in Vietnam has been carried out in various fields. Researchers and social practitioners have understood more and more about the importance of women/gender issues in their studies and practice. Therefore, courses of training on gender have been held in many ministries, sectors and so forth.

V. Actual status of women/gender studies in Vietnam:

V. 1. Theories:

Up to date, not many theoretical works on women/gender have been introduced into Vietnam. There are only some articles in academic journals and some chapters in books that give the most basic knowledge. Vietnam's theoretical studies are, accordingly, not many. This is the weakest point of women/gender studies in Vietnam.

V. 2. Practice:

On the basis of fundamental knowledge of women/gender studies, Vietnamese researchers conduct studies on practical issues. To certain extent, those studies are

valuable in terms of practice. However, not a few studies embody the weakness of being unable to identify relationship among different social processes or unable to detect reality-based study questions, or prone to unreasonable and unscientific explanations. As a consequence, many studies are restricted at description with limited persuasion.

VI. Publications on women/gender issues in Vietnam:

VI. 1. Periodicals on women/gender issues in Vietnam:

Institute for Family and Gender Studies

1. Journal of "Women Studies" (6 issues per annum) (in Vietnamese)
2. Journal of "Women and Family Studies" (2 issues per annum) (in English)
3. Newsletter of "Research and Training on Gender" (6 issues per annum) (in Vietnamese)
4. Website: www.vngender.edu.vn

Others:

5. Newsletter of "Reproductive and Family Health", Center for Reproductive and Family Health.

VI. 2. Non-periodicals:

Institute for Family and Gender Studies:

1. Books (See Appendix 2)
2. Project Reports (See Bibliography of Vietnam-based Gender Projects by Pham Thi Hue)

Others:

Consult at the library of Institute for Family and Gender Studies

VII. Libraries on women/gender issues in Vietnam:

The library of Institute for Family and Gender Studies is the biggest library in Vietnam in the fields of women/gender and family. Most of books and materials relevant to women/gender in Vietnam are archived in this library. It is a library at national level in the fields of women/gender studies, serving readers nationwide. However, its size remains so small compared to that of other libraries on women/gender studies in other countries.

VIII. Other information of research and training on gender in Vietnam:

Other resources for women/gender data in Vietnam could be found in the followings:

1. Library of UNDP Hanoi, 25-29 Phan Boi Chau - Hanoi
2. Information Center of WB, 63 Ly Thai To - Hanoi.

Appendix 1. Bibliography of Vietnam-based women/gender study projects

Appendix 2. Relevant materials about women/gender issues in Vietnam