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Changing Women Stereotypes in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

The global issue of gender inequality can present itself in women's stereotypes, affecting their professional advancement and domestic treatment. Despite the evolution of female stereotypes over time, limited information is available regarding the dynamics of female preconceptions in many contexts, especially in Southeast Asian nations. The research addresses this information deficiency by examining the evolving stereotypes of women in Vietnam through the lens of social role theory. Secondary data and in-depth interviews reveal the evolving stereotype of women over three distinct eras. In the feudal era, Confucian society prioritised the subjugation of women to men. During the Vietnam War, a new discourse regarding women's roles and responsibilities emerged through the narrative "women with three capabilities," which subsequently transformed in post-war Vietnamese society to "women function well at home and in society." The ongoing contentious debates on social media evidently indicate a transformation in public sentiment toward women's societal duties, however not their domestic obligations. A prevalent belief persists that women ought to embrace a subordinate position within the family, supporting their male counterparts. This perspective supports societal perceptions of women's social obligations and their duties in sustaining familial and communal welfare.

Keywords: Gender inequality, social roles, Vietnam, women stereotypes

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality, which is defined as a hierarchical distribution of material resources, power, and status between men and women, has been a global challenge (Lorber, 2001). This global issue manifests itself in many ways, depending on a country's economic structure, social organisation, and culture (Lorber, 2001). As a result, the fight

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against gender inequality necessitated a better understanding of its manifestations, particularly in the developing world.

Gender inequality manifests in stereotypes that define the traits, duties, and behaviours deemed appropriate for women and men (Eagly, 1987; Ellemers, 2018; Heilman, 2001). These stereotypes prescribe views and expectations regarding individuals' characteristics and needs (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). By reflecting everyday practices, they shape how men and women are evaluated and treated across diverse social contexts (Agars, 2004; Ellemers, 2018; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

While gender stereotypes influence both men and women, those about women deserve special consideration because they historically created uneven expectations, opportunities, and societal duties. Women are characterised as feminine, caring, emotional, and selfless (Eagly, 1987; Ellemers, 2018). These social norms continuously affect women's lives. Analysing women's preconceptions thus helps us understand how modern societies reproduce and navigate gender inequity.

Since the 1970s, changing gender stereotypes has become an important topic (Priyashantha et al. 2023). Most research on gender stereotypes examines how gender prescriptions are used to judge, not how preconceptions gain content (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Theories of stereotypes also ignore social role preparation and recruitment (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Thus, while most studies focus on how social roles determine gender stereotypes, little is known about how these preconceptions change in diverse structural settings, particularly in developing nations (Bosak et al., 2018). There are also voids in existing literature, pertaining to the advantages and downsides of changing gender norms (Priyashantha et al., 2023).

Contemporary studies focus on gender inequality at the outcome level (income, employment, leadership), while few analyse women's stereotypes as a cultural and social mechanism that reproduces inequality in developing countries with rapid modernisation. The study of women's stereotypes is essential in rapidly evolving nations where conventional gender norms coexist with contemporary equality and personal accomplishment.

The dynamics of women's stereotypes in Vietnam and their impact on gender equality serves as a good case for filling these gaps of knowledge. Vietnam's Confucian tradition dates back centuries. The Vietnamese monarchies (XI to XI9) were feudal (Dutton et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2023). Confucian theories influenced Vietnamese culture, affecting sex roles and men and women's social position (Schafer, 2010). President Ho Chi Minh spearheaded a push to liberate Vietnamese women after the country declared independence in 1945 and later the Republic Democratic Vietnam in 1954. Women have expanded their household and social roles (Dutton, 2013, 2016). The absence of males who battled to free the country from French invasion and American intervention reinforces these preconceptions.

More than four decades after the country's reunification in 1975, Vietnam has had significant economic growth, enhanced educational achievement for women, and considerable advancements in gender equality policy. The country surpassed many other developing countries in terms of adopting a legal framework based on gender equality and establishing institutions and programmes to support women's advancement (Schuler et al., 2006). Since the late 1980s, the transition of Vietnam from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy has afforded women unprecedented opportunities, enhancing their mobility and economic influence (Hoang, 2020; Nguyen, 2021). Nevertheless, in spite of the Vietnamese government's best efforts, inequitable gender norms have persisted (Hoang, 2020; Phan et al., 2019; Schuler et al., 2006). Women persistently encounter pressures related to caregiving, emotional labour, and familial obligations, while being underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles. In public discourse, the preconception that women lack fundamental knowledge of politics, economics, and society persists (Phan et al., 2019). Post-war socioeconomic conditions have prompted continued debate concerning Vietnamese women's social status in the household and society.

Vietnam exemplifies how modernisation and tradition shape women's preconceptions. It is crucial since most gender inequality research in Vietnam emphasises biases within isolated domains (education, leadership, employment) rather than as a cultural framework. Most research perceives stereotypes as traditional rather than their relevance, negotiation, and perpetuation in Vietnam. Little attention has been paid to gender equality discourse and customary expectations

The study analysed the evolution of Vietnamese women's stereotypes over three eras (traditional, during the Vietnam War, and contemporary society) and their impact on gender equality in Vietnam. The study used document analysis of books, scholarly papers, articles on Vietnam newspapers, and social media posts to determine how different perspectives on women's stereotypes in three eras have affected Vietnamese women stereotypes. In addition, 84 semi-structured interviews were performed with respondents regarding their thoughts and experiences with the title "perform well both at home and in society."

The paper is segmented into six sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 explores theorisation of women's stereotypes. Section 3 outlines the research methodology utilised. Section 4 examines the findings of stereotypes of Vietnamese women across three distinct eras. Section 5 presents the findings, while section 6 offers the study's conclusion.

THEORISING WOMEN'S STEREOTYPES

This section established the foundation for the methodology of the study by examining the literature on women's stereotypes in two principal aspects: as an institution and as a mechanism of gender inequality.

Women's Stereotypes as an Institution

Women's stereotypes represent collective cultural views of appropriate feminine traits. Originating from the division of social roles, they are reinforced through social relationships and evolve into norms that shape expectations, guide behaviour, influence judgment, and determine resource distribution (Early, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Preconceptions of women function as institutionalised mechanisms of accountability through which femininity is continually enacted and evaluated (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Beyond individual attitudes, these stereotypes operate as social institutions that structure expectations, regulate behaviour, assign roles, and reinforce inequity across households, schools, workplaces, and public life (Risman, 2004). Sustained by collective norms and reinforced through social rewards and sanctions (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Stewart et al. 2021), they are reproduced in everyday interactions, becoming benchmarks of compliance with prevailing standards. In this way, stereotypes move from collective cultural perceptions to institutionalised mechanisms of accountability, thereby transforming everyday interactions into instruments that sustain gender inequality.

Women's Stereotypes as a Mechanism of Gender Inequality

By dictating femininity and managing daily interactions, stereotypes shape competence assessments, social roles, unequal labour divisions, and limit and private and public resource and authority access (Risman, 2004; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway, 2011; Ramezani et al., 2026).

A systematic review by Stewart et al. (2021) links gender stereotypes and norms to inequality in education, employment, health care, power, and gender violence. Stereotypes influence women's interests, self-esteem, and career choices—for instance, leading them to feel unqualified for STEM disciplines (Cheryan et al., 2017). Implicit stereotypes are also associated with gender disparities in mathematics and science performance across many countries (Nosek et al., 2009). Gender stereotypes often foster negative perceptions of women in recruitment, competency evaluation, and job allocation (Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Heilman et al., 2024). Women often meet stricter criteria and face harsher evaluations (Johannesen & Muchardt, 2026; Zonno, 2026). The leader archetype remains tied to male traits, creating "role incongruity" that limits women's promotion (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Koenig et al., 2001; Shia et al., 2026).

Women's stereotypes are continuously adaptable to modernisation (Heilman et al., 2024). In the context of globalisation and feminist movements, social norms on gender equality persist by evolving through the language of empowerment (Eagly et al., 2020). Although men are increasingly involved in domestic work, women still carry most of it (Bianchi et al., 2012). Stereotypes thus perpetuate caregiving inequities, forcing working women to work a "second shift" (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Lichard et al., 2021; Wide & Näre, 2024).

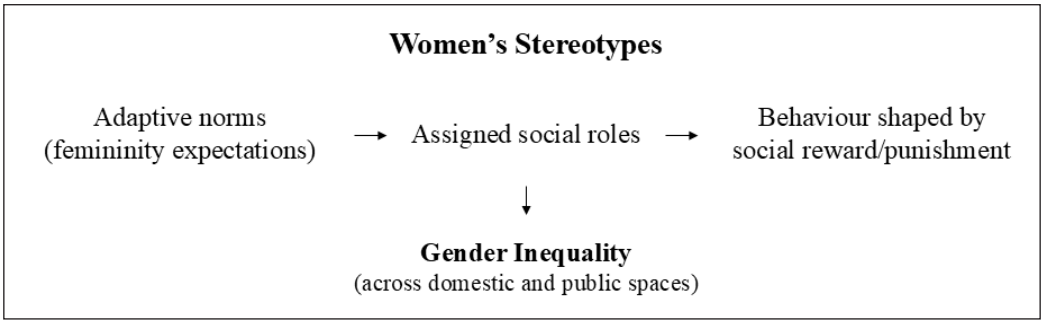

Figure 1. Conceptual framework
Source: Author's own work

Based on these theoretical views, this study conceptualises women's stereotypes as dynamic social constructs that are perpetuated by various institutions while concurrently being redefined by modern societal changes in Vietnam (Figure 1).

METHODOLOGY

This paper constitutes predominantly qualitative research. Documents (books, speeches, scientific papers, and newspaper articles), serving as a primary source that reflects and influences public opinion, were utilised to gather data on prevalent conceptions of stereotypes regarding Vietnamese women. The most widely read dailies in Vietnam were chosen, including Tuổi Trẻ, Thanh Niên, Nhân Dân, Phụ Nữ Việt Nam, Vietnamnet, VN Express, Lao động, and Dân trí were selected. Websites of the Vietnam's Communist Party and The Union of Vietnamese Women, as well as those of some governmental departments were also explored. While newspapers and online media in Vietnam reflect and give voice to the prevalent discourses from leaders, policy makers, representatives of women, politicians, and other notable figures on women's roles and positions in the society, they also conveyed the diverse perspectives of individuals. To get information on how women's stereotypes are characterised in the three eras, the key words for searching included "Phụ nữ & Thời phong kiến" (Women & feudal area), "Phụ nữ & Chiến tranh Việt Nam" (Women & Vietnam's Civil War", "Phụ nữ & Thời kỳ Đổi mới" (Women & socio-economic renovation period).

For the third era, the author also conducted 84 semi-structured interviews with working citizens, both male and female in the major cities of Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh city, Quy Nhon, Binh Duong, Vung Tau) regarding these criteria. Table 1 displays participants' demographic information. Data collection employed as a multi-stage recruitment strategy. A sequential non-probability sampling method was employed. The study commenced with convenience sampling to enlist individuals via the researchers' personal and professional networks. Recommendations from participants to eligible members of the

Table 1
Respondents' demographic information

Respondents' Information	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	61	72.6
Male	23	27.4
Age		
20-30	32	39.0
31-40	32	39.0
41-50	13	15.9
51-60	7	6.1
Occupation		
Civil servants	41	48.8
Students	18	21.4
Doctors, pharmacist, medical technicians	07	8.3
Sellers, accountants	05	6.0
Teachers, lecturers	04	04.8
Others (IT employees, media employees, retiree, forest guard, flight attendant)	05	7.0
Marital status		
Married	46	56.8
Single	31	38.3
Divorced	3	3.6
Widowed	1	1.2

Source: Author's own work

social network then enhanced recruitment through snowball sampling.

The guiding study questions for semi-structured interviews focused on the participants' perceptions of the title "Perform well at home and in society" and inquired whether they aspired to fulfill that title themselves or expected their wives, sisters, or friends to do so, as well as the reasons for their expectations. The semi-structured interviews and methodology for this study were approved by the Scientific and Training Councils of Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University, Vietnam (June 25, 2024; Ref. No: 05/BB-XHNV).

The thematic analysis followed the procedures suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The author started by rereading the transcripts and making rough notes about prospective coding categories. The subsequent step is coding, for which descriptive and analytic codes were employed. The conceptual framework

directed analytical codes that analysed women's stereotypes throughout various eras via the lens of social norms, roles, and systems of social reward and punishment. The coding concentrated on alterations in social norms over the three periods.

The code data were then compiled. The third stage is to look for themes that emerge from the code list and their corresponding data. Different themes were reviewed and refined based on their compiled data in the fourth phase. The final phase involved defining and naming themes and their interrelationships in thematic maps.

RESULTS

Research findings indicated that cultural expectations for women's attributes in Vietnam have markedly evolved across three distinct eras, with women's stereotypes being codified in societal mottos and slogans that influence their values.

Women with "Three Subordinations" and "Four Virtues" in Vietnam's Traditional Societies

Before the 20th century, traditional Vietnamese society was governed by patriarchal principles, which legitimised men's domination in the home. The storyline "*Nhất nam viết hữu, thập nữ viết vô*" ("having one boy means having one child, having ten girls mean having none") highlighted that for parents, only boys were desirable. This was due to the fact that males were expected to care for their elderly parents, whilst daughters would devote their lives to serving their husband's family after marriage. This perspective not only dictated how parents treated their children but also molded their societal roles. Men were expected to possess five virtues: *Nhân, Lễ, Nghĩa Trí, Tín* (kindness, politeness, fortitude, knowledge and reputation) and four capacities: *Tu thân, Tề gia, Trị quốc, Bình thiên* hạ (self-cultivation, family management, country administration, and world settlement). Whilst men were viewed as carrying the society's and families' important purpose, women's roles were limited to the home Women's primary responsibilities included serving their spouses, performing housekeeping, and caring for children and elderly parents. Consequently, women are believed to be permanently dependent on men (Becquet & Ceped 2013; Nguyen, 2015).

These social roles then were strengthened by Confucian values and scholarly regimes. Scholars occupied the highest position in traditional Vietnamese society, followed by farmers, artisans, and merchants. Those who desired to ascend the social ladder may do so by studying diligently and taking civil service exams (Woodside, 1988). Each year, the monarchy held a national competition to select bright individuals for high-ranking administrative positions, which gave economic benefits and tremendous prestige to them, their families, and even their villages (Woodside, 1988). Studying for national competitions and becoming officials was a clear ambition for Vietnamese males, as bureaucracy is seen as a socially prestigious and prestigious elite class (Do & Pham, 2025).

As only men were admitted to schools and national tests for government positions,

women were excluded from social affairs. The position of women in families and society lagged behind that of their male counterparts, who were responsible for advancing in society and making their families proud (Phạm, 2013).

Nevertheless, the Vietnamese Confucian culture also convinces women to be content with their *Xó bếp* (the kitchen corner) by two sets of rules: "three subordinations" and "four virtues" (Taylor, 1999). A woman should submit first to her father, then to her husband, and finally to her eldest son (Becquet & Ceped, 2013). Hard work, excellent communication, elegance, and loyalty to father, husband, and sons are four virtues (Nguyen, 2015). During the monarchical dynasties of the XIth to XIXth centuries, these characteristics were fundamental to the Vietnamese women's stereotypes (Nguyen, 2023). These age-old beliefs were so pervasive that women did not view the two sets of rules as obligatory, but rather as something they followed deliberately and pursued throughout their lives (Taylor, 1999). It was unquestionably the time when Vietnamese women endeavored to follow this set of standards in order to be a successful woman and, consequently, happy.

Although Vietnam's society during that era viewed the main location for women was at *Xó bếp*, Vietnamese women in poor and average families were in fact the breadwinners so their husbands could focus on passing the Palace Examination (to appoint the Trang Nguyen) for getting a prominent position in the feudal systems. Apart from those of well-off families, poor women still worked hard in the rice fields or on the village market to support their families. This contribution, however, was considered their responsibilities by society. Not just the chores, Vietnamese women thus had to carry both the provider and emotion roles.

However, in traditional society, women had also long been symbolised as hard working but unhappy storks. One Vietnamese folk clearly painted the image of poor Vietnamese women in the traditional society as: *"Con cò lặn lội bờ sông gánh gạo nuôi chồng nước mắt nỉ non"* (The stork was foraging on the riverbank, carrying rice to feed her husband with her tears). The well-known poet *Tú Xương* in the 19th century had also written a poem about his wife's hard work: "*Quanh năm buôn bán ở mom song, nuôi đủ năm con với một chồng, lặn lội thân cò nơi quãng vắng"* (All year-round trading at the riverbank to support five children and one husband like a stork foraging in a solitary area).

Although women played the expressive role as care givers, their housework was not considered a contribution, but a duty that is undervalued by the society. Women were encouraged to not think of themselves; sacrifice is considered their virtue. Women absorbed the subservient norm, thinking it to be inherent in nature (Pham, 2013).

Vietnamese Women with "Three Capabilities" During the Vietnam War

By 1945, equality of the sexes and contribution of women to the society were essential for the past 1945 resistance war (Marr, 1981). The virtues of three

submissions and four virtues became obsolete after the Communist Party of Indochina was established. The first credo of the Party stated: "*Men and women have equal rights*." (Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam, 2002). After the country gained independence from the French in 1945. President Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party acknowledged the issue of gender inequality in Vietnam by including it as a component of the revolutionary programme of national liberation (HCM.VN, 2021; Hội đồng Xuất bản, 1995). President Ho Chi Minh claimed, "Women's rights are attached to the right of an independent nation" (Hội đồng Xuất bản, 1995). Only the struggle for national independence can help realise the equal rights of women." He also said: "Women's liberation is first and foremost political emancipation because if the country is invaded, the house is melted, women are the most tormented people" (Hội đồng Xuất bản, 1995).

President Ho Chi Minh established a nationwide programme to eradicate illiteracy (Marr, 1981). With the eradication of illiteracy (*Bình dân học vụ*), schools were opened for both boys and girls, and the Mandarin caste hierarchy was eliminated from national examinations. Women were permitted to engage in a variety of social activities.

The rhetoric of women emancipation was further bolstered during this period by the Second Indochina War (1954–1975), commonly known as the Vietnam War, during which the majority of Vietnamese men fought for the country's unity. This emphasised the critical importance of mobilising women in production and social activities. Women at home were required to assist in providing for their families, participate in production (agricultural, industry), and even fight as warriors (Knodel et al., 2005; Taylor, 1999). Despite previous assumptions and standards about the expectations of North Vietnamese women, their actions in the Vietnam War highlight the transformation of traditional gender roles (deVarennes, 2019).

In contrast to past generations, their contributions were valued. After the country's independence in 1954, the social position of Vietnamese women changed drastically. The virtues of three subordinations and four virtues were legally superseded by the four "golden words" bestowed to women by President Ho Chi Minh: "*Anh hùng, Bất khuất, Trung hậu, Đảm đang* " (Heroic, Indomitable, Fairfull, Capable) (Editorial, 2023; Taylor, 1999; Hội Liên Hiệp Phụ Nữ Việt Nam, 2005). During the Vietnam War, this phrase came to represent the ideal Vietnamese woman in the north of the country (deVarennes, 2019).

In contrast to the four virtues of feudal society, the four golden words emphasised women's capacity to work (capable) and good behaviour (heroic, indomitable, and loyal) while ignoring elegance and effective communication. These characteristics are implied by the two virtues of competent and excellent conduct. In this setting, the idea of respectable labour and good behaviour takes on a new significance, becoming a competency applicable not only to domestic

but also to social matters. If "faithful" in the four virtues primarily referred to a woman's loyalty to her husband and family, "loyal" here refers to patriotism and nationalism.

On 19 March 1965, the Vietnam Women's Union recommended to the Party Central Committee to conduct a campaign for women's three responsibilities, which included the following:

- Responsible for production and work to take the place of men who went to fight in the front line.
- Responsible for providing for and taking care of the family, encouraging husband and children to fight.
- Responsible for combat and ready to fight if required (Hội Liên Hiệp Phụ Nữ Việt Nam, 2005).

The Title "Perform Well Both at Home and in Society" in Contemporary Vietnam's Society

In post-war Vietnam's culture, the title of women with three capacities has been updated. Since 1989, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour has launched an emulation campaign among female employees for the title "Perform well at home and in society" in collaboration with the Vietnam Women's Union (Thai Son, 2021).

The title, it is believed, indicates that gender emancipation or gender equality has occurred in Vietnam, when women are no longer confined to their kitchen corners and are allowed to engage in social events with men. The title's proponents argue that women's dual roles at home and in society are critical. Mr. Tran Van Thuat, Vice President of the Vietnam Confederation of Labour, stated during a seminar on evaluating the effectiveness of the movement "Perform well at home and in society" said that the movement stems from "the self-necessity of each woman" in order to maximize their potential and creativity, as well as to give women greater confidence to rise up and assert themselves (B. D, 2020). By saying so, he is stressing the fact that Vietnamese women are doing gender by their success at home and in society.

Sacrifice is still seen positively as a female attribute. Ms. Dang Thi Kim Nhung, Vice President of the Women's Union of Tan Phu District, shared that knowing how to sacrifice for the family is still an extremely valuable virtue for Vietnamese women and Mrs. Truong My Hoa, former Vice President of the State, affirmed that the woman was the inner minister in the family, shouldering the housework, caring for her husband and children, as well as their parents. Thus, women had to make substantial sacrifices because they were responsible for two jobs concurrently, namely domestic duties and employment outside the society (Viet Van, 2024).

In essence, the proponents' arguments hinge on sacrifice and balance. They extol the liberation of women and their ability to participate in societal activities on an equal footing with men. Women are responsible for social issues as well as household chores, which speaks of a woman's sacrificial trait and also a woman's morality at work (Luong Vu, 2023; Nguyen Van My, 2017).

While proponents of the title acknowledged that women may be overburdened by both responsibilities, they maintained that this was just a matter of balancing domestic duties and employment. They cited examples of women who achieved significant job success as a result of strong familial support (Ha, 2021).

However, there appeared to be significant schisms in the public's perception of this title at the moment. Some have said unequivocally that this out-of-date title indicated gender inequity rather than gender equality because it laid a greater burden on women while leaving men free to focus exclusively on social roles (Duong Nhi, 2013; Nguyen Van My, 2017). Some critics have gone so far as to liken this praise to a shackle that connected women who pursued careers outside the house with the typical household responsibilities they had at home. As a result, the progression of women's careers has been limited not only by the difficulties of balancing work and home responsibilities, but also by the social expectation that women should prioritise the requirements of their families over their own (Duong Nhi, 2013).

In a 2015 talk show hosted by VOH radio, speaker Quach Tuan Khanh expressed concern that one of the most significant disadvantages Vietnamese women faces was their praised obligation to sacrifice: "When we label women and even praise them for their selflessness, we are tying them up with strings that are too sweet" (Quách, 2015).

These critiques reflect the influence of a changing economic, political, and social backdrop, which is not the case during times of war, when women in families without males are compelled to give up time and labour to share the weight of the great country's freedom. While proponents of the title use sacrifice and balance to claim that women require the title and must find a means to accomplish it, opponents inquire as to why women are expected to make sacrifices and to strike a balance between job and family when they get careers outside the house as a result of their emancipation. Ms. Ton Nu Thi Ninh, the Vice Chairman of the National Assembly of Vietnam's Foreign Affairs Committee, encourages women to make less sacrifices in order to live more for themselves (Tuan Viet Nam, 2015).

The interviews of 84 respondents showed some interesting insights, which reflected the social debate on the title. All of respondents (both male and female, married and single) heard and knew about the title "Perform well at home and in society," in which more than 80% knew about the title from social media (newspapers, TV, Facebook, etc.). Around 50% (mainly female respondents) also learned about it from their working places because they had to compete with colleagues to get the title for every year assessment of the Labour Union in their organisations. Of the respondents, 84.5% thought of performing well in society, that is, having a permanent job and fulfilling their work responsibility, while 40% (mainly female respondents) also saw it as having a prominent position.

The results of a thematic analysis of respondents' perspectives on women's

successful job performance highlighted five themes: financial independence, commitment to society, improvement of women's social position, enhancement of self-worth, and happiness. Financial independence appeared to be a prominent theme. Of the respondents, 90.5% (mainly young female respondents) believed women should perform well at work because they need good income to be financially self-reliant:

> Each woman should be financially independent and responsible for her own work. A strong, financially independent woman will always feel confident in herself and feel respected. (Interview Extract)

Financially independent women were able to not only determine their own futures but also provide for and care for their own families, according to respondents. With a career, women would gain self-assurance and the respect of those around them. A woman commented, "A stay-at-home mother is not appreciated, nor does her voice have the same weight as that of a woman with a profession and an income" Possessing control over one's own finances is an additional technique for women to reduce their personal risk in a marriage.

A second common thread throughout respondents was the importance they placed on elevating women's social status, particularly in light of the fact that women now hold certain positions in society outside the home. When women had more influential positions in society, they were able to convey their aspirations and dedication to its betterment through their concerns and roles. And by working as hard as men, women helped to construct and extend the nation.

The thematic map on women's good performance at the workplace reveals a common pattern that a woman's success in the office can give her freedom from financial dependency, raise her social standing, and develop a feeling of civic duty and dedication. All of these things together boost her sense of self-worth and happiness (Figure 2).

Also, 81.7% thought women needed to perform well at home including cooking, taking care of husband, children, and other family members, having good relationship with the paternal families, managing the budgets, and organising a good home. Thematic analysis revealed four themes of taking care of housework: Qualities and responsibilities of women, share of housework, family happiness, good for the society.

The idea that a woman's major function in society is to take care of her family was one of the dominant themes. One of the most important obligations that fall on a woman's shoulders is to see to it that her family is happy and healthy. They did it for themselves, and not only because it was what women were required to do in the past; rather, they did it because they wanted to at the time. When compared to their voices when discussing the same concerns on social media, the respondents' voices were more subdued when discussing home tasks. Only a small portion of the population

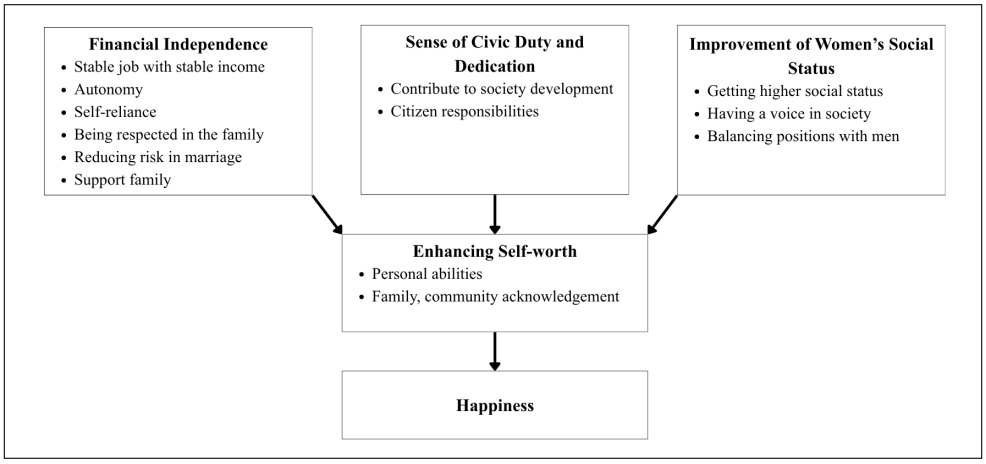

Figure 2. Thematic map on women's good performance at work
Source: Author's own work

was affected by the burden. In spite of this, they both emphasised how important it was for the spouse as well as the children to pitch in and help with the household tasks. In addition, a number of respondents mentioned that women were freed of some of the conventional housework obligations as a result of the availability of a greater range of household goods and services. Because families are the building blocks of any society, it is necessary for women to make contributions to the common good through the work that they conduct in the home.

The pattern that can be seen in the thematic map on women's good performance at home is that for a woman to be successful in the workplace, she must also be successful at home. An explanation for this was that it was no longer a burden with the help of the husband's part of the services and equipment. This is a quality that women are expected to possess, as well as one of their obligations, in order to preserve the harmony within their families, which is essential to the overall health and prosperity of society (Figure 3).

77.4% (mainly female respondents) said women had to perform well in both tasks, because these were two most important things in life. However, more than 20% thought the value of modern women could not be measured by the combination of the above two factors (mainly young female respondents). While 84% expected themselves and other to perform well both tasks, 8.3% (mainly young female respondents) argued that the responsibility to be good at both domestic work and housework placed on women's shoulders was too much, propagating patriarchy in gender inequality.

The findings indicate that the gender role of Vietnamese women in society has undergone significant transformation, but their roles of at home has remained unchanged even in the view of respondents in big cities. Respondents had different

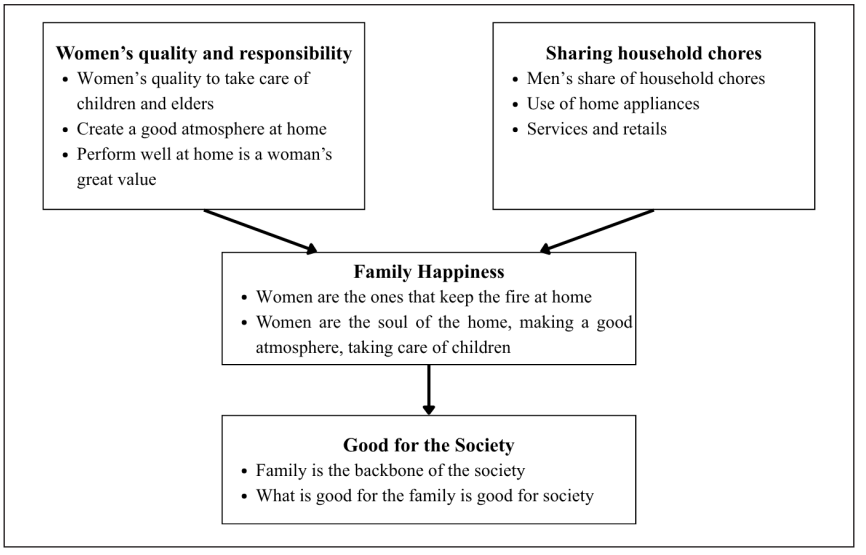

Figure 3. Thematic map on of respondents' views on women's competence in housework
Source: Author's own work

overarching goals for success at home and in society, as depicted by the two theme maps. If women want to succeed professionally, they may feel good about themselves, then the primary motivation for women to become competent at housework is to ensure the well-being of their families and the community.

DISCUSSION

Normative expectations concerning gendered behaviour have long structured social understandings of masculinity and femininity (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014). Traditionally, men provided the role of economic providers, while women were associated with caregiving and emotional labour (Bales & Parsons, 2014). However, the Vietnam case shows that women's stereotypes are not static cultural remnants but adaptive social norms that are continually reconfigured to fit changing social contexts. Female roles in Vietnam have evolved over time, from Confucian "four virtues" to wartime "three responsibilities" and current expectations of "perform well both at home and in society". They are interconnected pieces of a gender hierarchy that perpetuates prejudices. Despite social change, expectations that women shoulder family responsibilities, caregiving, and broader social contributions have remained strikingly persistent.

Research findings shed light on the discussion about gender stereotypes. The phrases "three subordinations" and "four virtues" in feudal culture highlighted what Rabe-Hemp (2009), Teunion-Smith (2010) observed about feminine stereotypes as superior careerists, communicators, and empathisers. It is remarkable that "sacrifice" was used to describe women's

agentic qualities. Although women's labour constituted the principal source of support for their husbands' education and for the family, they were confined to the role of obedient housewives. By contrast, men's role as providers for their families was elevated and celebrated. This stereotype of "gender hierarchy" (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014), in which the 'masculine' is seen more valuable than the 'feminine' confirmed how similar actions are gendered differently depending on who performs them (Leidner, 1991). This gender hierarchy ensures appropriate gendered generalisation. According to this value system, identical behaviours have different gendered expectations (Haines et al., 2016).

Vietnamese women's stereotypes during the Vietnam War demonstrated what Hall et al. (2007) refer to as the possibilities and constraints of gender agency. Although the "three responsibilities" title tended to overlook gender identity, throughout the war it nonetheless encouraged women to assume both traditionally female and male responsibilities while sustaining their feminine identities. Women were expected to serve simultaneously as household heads, production workers, and wartime labourers. This illustrates how gender was either overlooked or enacted in unconventional ways (Nentwich & Kelan, 2014), reflecting the tension between descriptive narratives that celebrate women's increasingly active roles in society and prescriptive attitudes that continue to enforce traditional gender standards (Prentice & Carranza; 2002; Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

The postwar society is witnessing dualistic gender stereotypes (Nentwich and Kelan, 2014). The debates over housework as women's responsibility or burden are dividing opponents and proponents of the title "perform well both at home and society" in social media. While Qualls (1982) asserts that gender equality occurs when females are accepted to work outside the home, the evidence from the article contends that gender inequality may involve more. Inequality may result from women being overburdened with responsibilities that men must share. Gender inequality in this era manifests both in the criticism that devalues women and in the celebrations that paradoxically add to their burdens. Addressing gender disparity cannot rely solely on prescribing women duties or defining sex roles through the division of labour. Yet, debates on social media appear to have little influence on everyday beliefs, even among urban working women. Most respondents still viewed women as those responsible for sustaining family happiness and "keeping the home fire burning". This shows nostalgia for the traditional female role of tenderness and caring in the family, despite changing social conditions. While the findings support the literature suggesting women are more communal than men (Benokraitis, 1997; Willians & Best, 1982), they contradict Diekman and Eagly's (2000) claim that women's stereotypes should be dynamic, with increasing masculinity and decreasing femininity.

Together, the evolution of women's stereotypes in Vietnam demonstrates that while culture is often regarded as the

primary force shaping gender norms (Campa et al., 2011; Giuliano, 2020; Ljunge, 2016; Van Vlimmeren et al., 2017), political and socioeconomic contexts play a decisive role in redefining women's roles and in shaping the substance of stereotypical expectations.

The recent social media debate over the domestic and social roles of Vietnamese women shows that gender stereotypes are not always changing for the better as Diekman and Eagly (2000) argued. It also revealed the urge to clearly redraw masculine and feminine boundaries to maintain power imbalances (Camussi & Leccardi, 2005), which was masterfully camouflaged by the romantic picture of women standing behind men and the word of sacrifice. Given that stereotypical expectations not only reflect genuine disparities but also influence how men and women defined themselves and were regarded by others (Ellemers, 2018), this disguise must be forcefully addressed to relieve Vietnamese women of social roles. This also contrasts with Eagly et al. (2020), who argue that contemporary gender stereotypes grant women a substantial communion advantage and men a modest agency advantage. In Vietnam, however, despite women's expanding social roles, persistent communion stereotypes continue to impose heavy burdens, constraining both their professional advancement and personal well-being.

The study yielded several theoretical contributions. First, several theories (e.g., Social Role Theory, Role Congruity Theory, Doing Gender) contend that gender stereotypes persist through labour division, cultural norms, and social interactions. Building on this, the study shows that women's biases may be adaptive, with female stereotypes evolving alongside social, economic, and institutional transformations while still preserving femininity. Rather than simply mirroring existing roles, stereotypes actively reshape them within new contexts. *Second*, most Western studies view masculinity and femininity as opposites. Changing Vietnamese women stereotypes combine modern aspirations of achievement with old notions of caregiving and self-sacrifice, showing they are hybrid rather than collective.

Third, rather than perceiving stereotypes as ideas, attitudes, or cognitive biases, the study demonstrates that they function as social institutions that govern femininity. Prejudices were spread via families, media, schools, workplaces, and governments. Women's preconceptions are social institutions that perpetuate gender inequity through adaptation rather than persistence. *Fourth*, the paradox of women's stereotypes in Vietnam lies in the coexistence of economic development, high female enrollment in higher education, and strong labour force participation under gender regulations, while women still face caregiving burdens, leadership gaps, emotional labour, and ideals of femininity. Thus, modernisation and equality of rhetoric coexist with enduring expectations. Vietnam illustrates the interplay of Confucian traditions, socialist ideology, market economy, globalisation, and digital media,

showing that gender stereotypes are shaped not only by culture but also by overlapping ideologies.

CONCLUSION

Vietnamese women's stereotypes have evolved over time from doing hierarchies in feudal society to ignoring gender during the Vietnam war, and to dualistic gender stereotypes in post-war society. Prejudices emphasise women's instrumental and expressive roles, ingrained in narratives and controlling images that shape their lives. The first stereotype portrays men as dominant and aggressive, while women appear submissive and weak. The second archetype depicts women carrying both instrumental and expressive responsibilities at home in the absence of men, their heavy workload eased by the glorified notion of sacrifice. The third portrayal shows men at home, reaffirming their authority by the romantic depiction of a woman's shadow behind a successful man, appropriating their spouses' accomplishments as their own.

The intense social media exchanges indicate a shift in popular perceptions regarding women's societal roles, yet their domestic responsibilities persist unaltered. The comprehensive interviews partially validate societal notions regarding women's social responsibilities and roles in families and communities. Nevertheless, respondents regard women's domestic and social achievements as integral to their self-esteem, not a concession. This study addresses certain gender research gaps and challenges. This analysis additionally informs the discussion on how gender stereotypes sustain gender inequity within a nation where women have achieved notable professional success.

This study expands gender stereotype theories by illustrating that women's stereotypes are neither fixed, binary leftovers of tradition, nor declining social beliefs, particularly in relation to evolving social expectations of femininity beyond Western societies. They operate as adaptive social structures that are relational and continuously negotiate the interplay between modernisation and traditional femininity, so perpetuating gender inequity through dynamic normative expectations. Modernisation does not diminish these stereotypes but rather reconfigures them.

These findings suggest several practical implications. First, the interplay between cultural traditions and political–economic transformations on changing women's stereotypes underscores the need for multidimensional policies that address not only structural inequalities but also the evolving stereotypes that continue to shape women's lives. Since stereotypes function as adaptive social norms, education must go beyond teaching equality to include critical gender literacy, stereotype awareness, and media literacy. Second, media campaigns should promote diverse depictions of women rather than idealising femininity, which creates a dual burden. Third, if achievement and caregiving remain conflated, women will continue to endure this burden; businesses should adopt flexible work, parental leave for both sexes, and competency-based evaluations.

Fourth, equality measures must extend beyond representation to address social norms through education, communication, workplace training, and family policies. Finally, since stereotypes persist by adapting rather than disappearing, policies should not assess equality solely by enrollment, employment, or leadership ratios but also by examining gendered expectations in daily interactions.

This study has several limitations. First, reliance on secondary sources restricts analysis due to issues of availability, quality, and bias. Second, the small sample size limits generalisability, and most participants were employed by urban residents. Third, the selection of interviewees and documents may reflect researcher bias. Future studies should combine qualitative methods with large-scale quantitative surveys and cross-cultural analyses to enhance validity. Additional research is also needed to capture diverse perspectives on women's stereotypes across Vietnam, especially in rural areas.

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