

Between Tradition and Revolution: Exploring Feminism and Gender Equality in Vietnam

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Abstract

Over the past century, the trajectory of gender equality in Vietnam has been marked by a nuanced interplay of historical contexts, societal norms, and ideological shifts. A burgeoning women's movement has emerged, favoring the term 'gender equality' over 'feminism' in private and public spheres. Gender equality has historically challenged traditional norms, notably during times of war, reshaping gender roles. Under communism, gender equality became static, confining feminism within a framework of patriotism and heroism. The persistence of gender equality is revealed in the context of a complex and contested amalgam of Western feminist ideas and historical antecedents. This article delves into the evolution of gender roles in Vietnam, exploring how communism and wartime conditions influenced feminism from the national liberation era to the Vietnam War. The article argues that the patriarchal structure present in a longstanding culture of Confucianism in Vietnam does not inherently obstruct gender equality and women's rights. Instead, it stems from changing women's roles outside the domestic sphere to heroism during war efforts. Vietnamese women's movement, before the term 'gender equality,' emerged during wartime but did not contest feminism. The notion of gender equality has become static; however, feminism is still contested and has yet to be adopted to this day.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender Equality, War, Communism, Vietnam*

I. INTRODUCTION

Asian states have diverse cultural values, traditions, and political systems, compounded by different experiences of colonization by Western powers. In Vietnam, the culture is rich with the influence of Confucianist, Buddhist, and Communist values related to gender equality and community behaviors.¹ Cultural values and traditions attached to

¹ Stephen B Young, "The Orthodox Chinese Confucian Social Paradigm versus Vietnamese Individualism" in Walter H Slote & George A DeVos, eds, *Confucianism Fam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 137; Sandra C Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (University Press of Kansas, 1999); Thị Định Nguyễn, *No Other Road to Take: Memoir of Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Định* (Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, 1976).

Confucianism have been associated with rising authoritarianism at the expense of human rights.² The Western conception of human rights has had limited influence under Communist rule.³ Buddhism became deeply rooted in the everyday life of people to do good for the community, especially during the King Ly Dynasty.⁴ During wartime, resistance traditions, via women warriors and heroism, were well documented. “If the enemy comes, women must fight (*Giặc đến nhà, đàn bà cũng đánh*)”.⁵ This slogan, together with the golden words “Heroism, Indomitability, Loyalty, and Dedication (*Anh hùng, bất khuất, trung hậu, đảm đang*)” (Ho Chi Minh, 1965),⁶ reflects a deep-rooted tradition of patriotism, as well as a love of freedom and independence, amongst Vietnamese women.

In Vietnamese culture, expressions of womanhood and gender equality are evolving, blending traditional values emphasizing familial roles with a growing recognition of women's rights. The diversity of women's cultural and political landscape increases the complexity of feminist study. Feminism and women's rights in Vietnam are not often acknowledged in political language or societal norms. Discussing feminism in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam can be sensitive; thus, Vietnamese culture contains no feminist framework. The Western doctrine of feminism refers to the social movement aiming to improve gender equality and women's positions in the family and society. Although Vietnamese expressions of gender identity and equality do not neatly fit into Western feminist theories, there was a women's movement in Vietnam that had comparable objectives.⁷ Women can take many roles in society and gradually build the concept of gender equality. Even women were well organized and mobilized during the liberalization and war times in Vietnam, but the term women's movement was rarely used. Thus, women's studies and feminist research must also distinguish between Vietnamese women in the North and the South (post-division) and how feminism can be realized in the context of Vietnamese political conflict and wars.

2 Thi Minh Huong Ngo, Vu Cong Giao & Minh Tam Nguyen, “Asian Values and Human Rights: A Vietnamese Perspective” (2018) 2:1 J Southeast Asian Hum Rights 302-322.

3 Stéphanie Balme & Mark Sidel, *Vietnam's New Order. International Perspectives on the State and Reform in Vietnam* (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2007) at 11-19; Martin Gainsborough, *Vietnam: Rethinking the State* (Silkworm Books, 2010).

4 Khắc Viện Nguyễn, *Vietnam, a Long History* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1987).

5 Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the women must fight: memories of war from North Vietnam* (New York: Wiley, 1998).

6 On 8/3/1965, on the occasion of 55 years of International Women Day, Ho Chi Minh appraised Vietnamese women with these words: “*Anh hùng, bất khuất, trung hậu, đảm đang*”

7 Wendy Duong, “Gender Equality and Women's Issues in Vietnam: The Vietnamese Woman—Warrior and Poet” (2001) 10:2 Wash Int Law J 191.

Many years of anti-colonial and civil wars between 1954 and 1975 have contributed to a change in the conception of feminism and gender equality. A number of scholars have considered the role of women in these wars, including Sjober and Via⁸, Rukeyser⁹, Turner and Phan¹⁰, and Borton¹¹. These authors discussed how Vietnamese women conformed to Confucian subservience, gendered clothing, and traditional roles to gather supplies for local soldiers, gather intelligence, and resist the French and American armies.¹² Taylor¹³ told stories of Vietnamese revolutionary women. This work highlights how the liberation war also freed Vietnamese women from Confucian constraints, showing their active role and advantage in battle due to gender stereotypes, and preserves their stories to emphasize their significant participation and the broader cultural and gender dynamics of the conflict.¹⁴ Lembcke¹⁵ explained that Vietnamese women had played central roles in the defeat of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam).¹⁶ Stur¹⁷ explores the changing dynamics between men and women both in combat and civilian context, during and after the Vietnam War. Norman shows that the complex roles women played during the Vietnam War challenged traditional gender roles and contributed to broader discussions on gender equality. Norman¹⁸ and Gruhzt-Hoyt¹⁹ explore how women's participation in the war effort in military roles influenced societal views on gender, emphasizing their significant contributions beyond traditional domestic roles.²⁰

8 Laura Sjoberg & Sandra E Via, *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (Praeger Security International, 2010).

9 Sam Huber, "Muriel Rukeyser 'among Wars': Feminist Internationalism in the Second Wave" (2021) 93:4 *Am Lit* 655-683.

10 Turner, *supra* note 5.

11 Lady Borton, "Behind the Scenes, in the Forefront: Vietnamese Women in War and Peace" (2018) 25:1 *ASIANetwork Exch J Asian Stud Lib Arts* 7-59.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Taylor, *supra* note 1.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Jessica M Frazier, *Women's Antiwar Diplomacy during the Vietnam War Era* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Borton, *supra* note 11; Turner, *supra* note 5.

16 Jerry Lembcke, *Hanoi Jane: War, Sex, & Fantasies of Betrayal* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010) at 109; Lembcke explores the gender dynamics of the war by examining the vilification of Jane Fonda and the feminization of the Vietnamese enemy..

17 Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

18 Elizabeth M Norman, *Women at War: The Story of Fifty Military Nurses who Served in Vietnam* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

19 Olga Gruhzt-Hoyt, *A Time Remembered: American Women in the Vietnam War* (Presidio Press, 1999).

20 Stur, *supra* note 17; Norman, *supra* note 18; Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "The U.S. 1968: Third-Worldism, Feminisms, and Liberalism" (2018) 123:3 *Am Hist Rev*; Gruhzt-Hoyt, *supra* note 19.

This article traces concepts of feminism and gender equality from history to post-modern times. First, evolving concepts of gender equality and feminism in Vietnamese history and culture are examined. Secondly, the practice of feminism through the women's liberation movements during wartime (the Vietnam War [1954-1975]) is analyzed. The third section of the paper discusses how Vietnamese communism manifests feminism through gender equality policy during the time of peace (post-1975).

Primary sources used in the article include memoirs of Vietnamese women and interviews with soldiers who lived through wartime. Archival research is used, including policy documents and propaganda materials of the then governments and political parties, as well as books by historians on women's features and women's personal memoirs such as those of Madame Nguyễn Thị Dinh, Madam Nguyen Thi Binh, and Military Nurse Dang Thuy Tram. Additionally, personal communications were conducted with two Vietnam War veterans and five women leading women's rights organizations in Vietnam with regard to the changing women's roles during and after the war. Overall, this paper aims to contribute to the comprehension of gender equality and feminism in Vietnam. The findings presented in this article hold implications for a critical look at the growth of transnational feminist sentiments from a gender equality perspective.

II. GENDER EQUALITY AND FEMINISM IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

1. Conception of Gender Quality and Feminism

The women's movement, encompassing over half of the global population, quickly diversified into various ideological currents such as bourgeois, socialist, anarchist, and anti-colonial movements. Significant strides were made post-1918 and post-1945, with the introduction of equality principles in many constitutions and the gradual elimination of legal discriminations like voting rights and civil law disadvantages. Despite these formal constitutional advancements, achieving substantive equality often took decades, and globally, progress on women's rights remains uneven today.²¹ Even in countries where legal equality is established, persistent disadvantages for women persist, prompting new strategies in women's policy and sparking diverse debates within feminism itself.²² Concurrently, the feminist movement has fragmented globally into numerous, sometimes conflicting, ideological factions. These range from those advocating primarily for legal equality to those proposing the overthrow of patriarchy with women's dominance, even influencing societal and foreign policy debates.

21 Lynn S Chancer, *After the Rise and Stall of American Feminism: Taking Back a Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

22 Christine Stansell, *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2010).

In Vietnam, the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘gender equality’ are not equated in text or practice. From an anthropology approach, feminism can be examined with a cultural identity, which may come from culture or assertions by decision-makers.²³ In a recent trend, Western feminists turned their focus from differences between men and women to differences among women.²⁴ Equality does not necessarily mean having the same or equivalent rights.²⁵ Drawing on post-modernist analysis, Western contemporary feminists stress the inability of any single overreaching framework to provide an adequate account of a social experience.²⁶ Some feminists contend that feminism in the developing world is neither a Western nor communist import.²⁷ Nevertheless, both Western feminism and the Vietnamese expression of female identity strive for overlapping results or objectives. These include (i) Promoting a proactive role, positive self-image, and socioeconomic and emotional independence of women; (ii) Maximizing the leadership and participation of women in traditionally male-dominated areas of society; (iii) Eliminating gender-based societal restrictions by identifying, challenging, and abolishing cultural beliefs and behaviors reflecting or motivated by gender biases; and (iv) Bringing about legal and social reforms, and attitude changes, to improve the status of women. The latter involves changing the inequity in power dynamics between men and women and moving outside the formal legal structure as necessary.²⁸

In reality, in Vietnam, feminist discussions are still sensitive, and those who explore or advocate for it are at risk of being perceived as hypocritical.²⁹ This risk exists because feminist ideology is capable of revolutionarily impacting society. It affects the utilization of women’s roles in revolution within the context of Vietnam, which is appraised from prolonged warfare where the term ‘revolution’ has traditionally been equated with nationalism.³⁰

23 Christine A Littleton, “Feminist Jurisprudence: The Difference Method Makes” (1989) 41:3 *Stanford Law Rev* 751–784 (Book Review).

24 EG Compare & Wendy W Williams, “The Equality Crisis: Some Reflections on Culture, Courts, and Feminism [1982]” (1992) 14:151 *Womens Rights Law Report* 164–174.

25 Drucilla Cornell, “Sexual Difference, the Feminine, and Equivalency: A Critique of MacKinnon’s Toward a Feminist Theory of the State” (1991) *Yale Law J*.

26 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Penguin UK, 1984); Deborah L Rhode, “The ‘Woman’s Point of View’” (1988) 38:1/2 *J Leg Educ* 39–46; Nancy Fraser & Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism Without Philosophy: An Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism” (1988) 5:2–3 *Theory Cult Soc* 373–394.

27 Christine Chinkin, “A Gendered Perspective to the International Use of Force” (1992) 12 *Aust Yearb Int Law*.

28 Duong, *supra* note 7.

29 Notes From Author’s Talk With Some Vietnamese Women Activists, namely N.V.A, K.T.H . in Women’s Rights Workshops And Conferences In Vietnam recently.

30 The Term Is Not Necessarily the Same As “Cach Mang Vo San” [Revolution Of The Proletariat Or Communist Revolution] However, In Today’s Vietnam, Cach Mang Automatically Refers To The Revolution Organized By The Communist Party. For An In-Depth Exposition Of The Vietnamese Revolution, See Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

2. Gender Equality and Feminism in Vietnamese History and Culture

In Vietnam, Confucianism was introduced into what is now North Vietnam (essentially the Red River Delta) by the Chinese during their occupation (111 BCE–939 CE and 1407–1428 CE). During these periods, role models for strong women were available. Ethnic Vietnamese (*Kinh*) saw frequent instances of female-headed families in a matriarchal society.³¹ Meanwhile, Confucian ideology clearly distinguishes the roles of men and women. Men are the pillars of the family and the backbone of all relationships. In the husband's family, the wife must listen. Women were people “raising towels to fix clothes (*nâng khăn rửa tút*)” for husbands, taking care of family work, supporting parents-in-law, and raising children to replace husbands. Women were still formally and informally subordinate to men, and dynasties placed harsh rules and increased burdens on women.³²

Despite norms of women's inferiority under Confucian culture, Vietnam's ancient history is attached to ‘Founding Parents (*Lạc Rồng, Châu Tiên*)’ through the folklore of Princes Tien Dung. In this myth, gender equality is depicted in the friendly divorce of Founding Father *Lac Long Quan* (Dragon King) and Founding Mother *au Co* (Fairly Bird). Here, they mutually agreed to evenly divide the custody of their one hundred children, with fifty going with the Father to the mountain and fifty going with the Mother to the sea.³³ This story serves to illustrate the indigenous Vietnamese matriarchal society (*mau he*). Meanwhile, an alternative version ascribing decision-making to the Dragon King conforms more to Confucian patriarchal values.

The indigenous culture's notion of a female pioneer was alien to the Confucian female prototype, which was imported to Vietnam during the first period of Chinese governance (111 BCE–39 CE). This period occurred approximately four centuries after the life of Confucius (551–479 BCE).³⁴ Despite the Vietnamese patriarchal system where women were inferior in society, role models for strong women have existed since ancient times. At this time, there existed Vietnamese women with warrior propensities, and women could lead protests and armies against Chinese and other invaders. Most notably, in 40 CE, the Chung sisters (also known as *Hai Ba Trung*, or *Trưng Trắc* and *Trưng Nhị*) became national heroines. Trưng Trắc proclaimed herself queen and led an army, launching a rebellion against the first Chinese occupation after her husband was killed by the Chinese government. The sisters resisted Chinese control for over three years. In

31 Mei Feng Mok, “The Story of Việt Nam: From Prehistory to the Present by Shelton Woods” (2014) 29:3 *Sojourn J Soc Issues Southeast Asia* 776–777; Walter H Slote & George A De Vos, *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

32 Mai Thi Tu & Thị Nhân Tuyết Lê, *Women in Viet Nam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978).

33 See Ủy Ban Khoa Học Xã Hội Việt Nam [Vietnam Social Sciences Committee], *Lịch Sử Việt Nam Tập I [Vietnamese History Vol. 1]* (Khoa học xã hội, 1971).

34 Trọng Kim Trần, *Việt-Nam sử-lược*, in lần thứ 7; có sửa chữa cần thận, thêm nhiều chú dẫn ed (Saigon: Tân-Việt, 1964).

248 CE, Ba Trieu (also known as *Trieu Thi Trinh*) led another struggle against China.³⁵ These examples of women as warriors reflect a '*Lac Hong*' spirit, which calls for the respect of women's roles beyond domestic settings.

In the 19th to 20th century, French colonial scholars and their Vietnamese counterparts deployed the image of the 'traditional' Vietnamese woman to measure the 'cultural distance' between Vietnam and the West—a practice Westerners have long used to mark the stage of modernity for the colonized world.³⁶ Vietnamese women thus have two opposing models of womanhood: one which is strong and emancipated, and the other which is Confucian and oppressed.³⁷ The inferior role of women in culture was widely known through the words of the famous female poet Ho Xuan Hường (1772-1822), who challenged society and confronted men who were perceptively unworthy of being called heroes. Ho Xuan Hường is known as a feminist activist poet who criticized feudal rules that impose gender power imbalances. In addition to criticizing the imbalance in gender power, she appraised women in appearance and soul. In her view, women should be brave and outspoken, assert their beauty and talent, and strive to overcome the prejudices and limitations of feudal society.³⁸ Another example of expressions of womanhood in Ho Xuan Hường's poetry compares Vietnamese women's virtues to the red beans inside a "floating glutinous rice cake," representing the soul of the cake. While she describes the sexual exploitation of women, she also praises their virtues for their humanity, femininity, and spirit, triumphing over the injustices inflicted upon them. This message calls for women to improve upon their situations within the limits of society, aligning with modern notions of feminism. Even during wartime, men were often exhorted to give up 'feudal' ways of thinking and accept women into their ranks. In these instances, Vietnamese society did not erase the conventional notion of men being superior to women but only temporarily buried them.³⁹

35 Nguyễn, *supra* note 4 at 14-15.

36 David G Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (University of California Press, 1981).

37 Nhung Tuyet Tran, "Woman as Nation: Tradition and Modernity Narratives in Vietnamese Histories" (2012) 24:2 *Gend Hist* 411-430 at 411-430.

38 In Ho Xuan Hường's poem: [Vietnamese text] "*Vì đây đổi phận làm trai được. Thì sự anh hùng há bấy nhiêu?*" [in English translation: *'If I can transform into male, I can carry heroic work as normal'*]

39 Turner, *supra* note 4; Nhan Dan Newspaper, dated March 6, 1966, citing in Karen Gottschang Turner with Phan Thanh Hao. In 'Even the Women Must Fight. Memoires of War from North Vietnam'.

III. POST MODERN FEMINISM IN VIETNAM

1. Feminism Through Heroism in the Time of War

Vietnamese women, during wartime, were enabled to live lives quite divergent from the traditional Confucian “three obediences” (*Tam tông*) and “four virtues” (*Tứ đức*) values.⁴⁰ The war created opportunities for Vietnamese women to change gender norms and gender roles. The first change was when women stepped into non-traditional occupations, working in factories, agriculture, and other sectors traditionally dominated by men. The war necessitated women's increased participation in the workforce to compensate for the loss of male labor to conscription and casualties. They even join the front to become warriors, guerrillas, and soldiers. These women's roles at war were prescribed in the famous Vietnamese proverb: “When the enemy is at the gate, even the women go out fighting (*Giặc đến nhà, đàn bà cũng đánh*).” This shift challenged the traditional expectations of women as solely caregivers and nurturers.

In North Vietnam, millions of women, accounting for 70% of the labor force, replaced men in managing farmland with the spirit of “hands holding the plow, hands holding the gun (*Tay cày tay súng*).”⁴¹ With the slogan “No shortage of rice, no shortage of soldiers (*Thóc không thiếu một cân, quân không thiếu một người*),” women fulfilled their responsibilities to support the battlefield. In the North and other liberated areas, despite frequent B-52 bombings destroying villages and crops, life returned to normal shortly after the raids in the hands of millions of women. Vietnamese women were then honored with the word ‘dedication.’

Vietnamese women employed their feminine roles as mothers and wives to motivate their husbands and sons to join the war. Simultaneously, they remained prepared to support elderly parents, nurture young children, maintain family stability, and uphold the rear area in the northern region.⁴² Many women thus took on both missions to save the nation and perform domestic roles such as bearing children and being devoted wives.

40 Thi Ngan Binh Ngo, “The Confucian Four Feminine Virtues (Tứ Đức)” in Helle Rydstrom & Lisa Drummond, eds, *Gender Pract Contemp Vietnam* (Singapore, 2004) 47; Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet, *Women in Viet Nam through generations (Phụ nữ Việt Nam qua các đời)*. They noted: ‘*Tam Tông*’ means three rules that women absolutely must follow: When they are with their families, the women must absolutely listen to their parents, When married, the woman must absolutely listen to her husband, and When her husband died, the woman had to live alone all her life to take care of her children. Ngo Thi Ngan Binh (2004) noted ‘*Tứ đức*’ means that women must have: Công (skillful of work), Dung (a pretty face), Ngôn (soft speech), Hạnh (gentle temperament).

41 In Vietnamese text: ‘*Tay cày tay súng*’. This phrase encapsulates the idea of the dual roles and contributions of the Vietnamese people, particularly women, during the wartime. It signifies the concept of actively engaging in agricultural production (“hands holding the plow”) while also being prepared to defend the nation with weapons (“hands holding the gun”).

42 “Vietnam Archive 2320903025 Responding To The Party, Government Appeal - In Praise Of Women's Role In War Effort, 17 December 1970, Box 09, Folder 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06” Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

As dedicated wives and mothers, women nurtured and educated their children, provided loving care for elderly parents, and were steadfastly loyal to the communist cause.

In both rural and urban areas in Northern Vietnam, civilians and women joined the defense civilian militia (*Dân Quân Tự vệ*). Here, their defense roles included using cannons to shoot down aircraft during heightened bombings, especially in the villages along transportation routes, agricultural and forestry areas, key traffic areas, and factories.

The spirit of heroism was found in women who were encouraged to join the front despite hardships. The Ho Chi Minh Trail, connecting the North to the South to support the Southern revolutionary movement, involved 120,000 personnel, including engineering forces, youth volunteers, and civilian workers, reaching various battlefields.⁴³ Here, Vietnamese women made significant contributions to creating the historic Truong Son route that connected the North and South during the resistance war against the invading US troops. Approximately 100,000 male soldiers and over 10,000 female soldiers from all regions of the country volunteered to directly contribute their combat and labor through the Youth Volunteers (*Thanh Niên Xung Phong*), risking their lives. Female participants amounted to approximately 10%,⁴⁴ including civilian workers, communication troops, liaison personnel, medical personnel, writers, journalists, office workers, drivers, and construction workers. They volunteered to be positioned on the open road for the passing army, making themselves a “bronze status, steel wall,” allowing the risk of becoming targets for bombing.⁴⁵ Of the thousands of young women who sacrificed their lives, many cleared the road by filling bomb craters when a jet fighter dropped bombs on their formation. Other women served as communication liaison personnel to ensure the safe and secret transportation of millions of officers, soldiers, patients, and workers to and from the battlefields.⁴⁶

43 On May 19, 1959, President Ho Chi Minh made the decision to establish a strategic transportation route to Ho Chi Minh trail. The total length of the route was nearly 20,000 kilometers of roads, 1,400 kilometers of oil pipelines and thousands of bridges. Read at Minh Vương, “Bảo tàng Lịch sử Quốc gia”, (2013), online: *Bảo Tàng Lịch Sử Quốc Gia* <<https://baotanglichsu.vn/vi/Articles/3097/14301/ky-niem-54-nam-ngay-truyen-thong-bo-djoi-truong-son-19-5-1959-19-5-2013-djuong-mon-ho-chi-minh-djuong-truong-son-huyen-thoai-trong-su-nghiep-chong-my-cuu-nuoc-ve-vang-cua-nhan-dan-ta.html>>; Hồ Tân Đạt, “50 years of Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh trail [“50 năm huyền thoại đường Trường Sơn - đường Hồ Chí Minh (1959 - 2009),”], *Vietnam Women’s Union* (17 April 2009), online: <<https://baotangphumu.com/en/phu-nu-viet-nam-voi-tuyen-duong-mang-ten-chu-tich-ho-chi-minh/>>.

44 Documentation and number cited on Người làm báo. Retrieved from: <https://nguoiambao.vn/phu-nu-voi-tuyen-duong-ho-chi-minh-nhung-tuoi-xuan-huyen-thoai-n13602.html>. Accessed 2 April 2023.

45 Ngo Thi Tuyet, Vice President of the Vietnam Truong Son Soldiers’ Association, “ĐÓNG GÓP CỦA NỮ CHIẾN SỸ TRƯỜNG SƠN TRONG CHỐNG CHIẾN TRANH PHÁ HOẠI CỦA ĐẾ QUỐC MỸ”, (2018), online: <<https://hatinh.gov.vn/dong-gop-cua-nu-chien-sy-truong-son-trong-chong-chien-tranh-pha-hoai-cua-de-quoc-my>>.

46 Nhan Dan Newspaper, 22-11-1972. Cited in Memoire of Nguyen Huu Mao, Vietnam war Veteran, former military soldier of surface-air missile no. 63 Regiment, which fought in Ha tinh - Nghe An during 1972 and forwarded to be 263 Regiment (so called SAM2) officially in Khe Sanh, Quang tri province to join the South Liberal Army in 25 Jan. 1973. Author conducted interview on 9 July 2023.

Women on this battlefield suffered hardship, loneliness, and destruction of health. However, they maintained the courage to hold on to the passage to ensure that the road was clear at all times for soldiers to enter battle.⁴⁷ Thus, these women decided to fight a war for future peace and family. Doctor Dang Thuy Tram, shot in action in 1972 after three years in battle, courageously fought with a dream for peace and independence for the nation. In her personal diary, she chronicled her longing for companionship, her struggle to prove her loyalty to her country, and her love for the people and her comrades.⁴⁸

During the Vietnam War, women in South Vietnam faced unique challenges and hardships. They experienced the devastating impact of the conflict firsthand, enduring bombings, displacement, the loss of loved ones, and severe harassment. Since the signing of the Genève Agreement, US imperialists and their lackeys started a war of aggression in South Vietnam. In the years from 1965, the South witnessed many massacres and attacks on women. In order to weaken women's revolutionary strength, US soldiers placed the control points in many districts in Ben Tre province, Duc Hoa district of Long A province, My Tho, and Go Dau district of Tay Ninh.⁴⁹ As of 1967, they killed 250,000 women and children, tortured and maimed 40,000 women, and jailed 36,000 civilians. Meanwhile, some claim that thousands of South Vietnamese civilians were killed because of the deliberate terror waged instructed by North Vietnam.⁵⁰ In many cases, women were pressured to join the war because their homes and livelihoods were destroyed, leaving them with no future or place.⁵¹ They served roles as soldiers, propagandists, medical workers, and intelligence agents, demonstrating bravery and resilience in combat and making significant contributions to the war effort. They worked to build support for the revolution, providing education, healthcare, and other social services to the local population. Women fearlessly shouldered new and arduous tasks, replacing men on the battlefield. They were mobilized more by the military and (especially with the post-1965 shortage of soldiers) were increasingly utilized as fighters.⁵²

47 Nhan Dan Newspaper, 22-11-1972. Also, Memoire of Nguyen Huu Mao, Militant Veterian of surface-air missile no. 63 Regiment, which fought in Ha tinh - Nghe An during 1972 and forwarded to be 263 Regiment (so called SAM2) officially in Khe Sanh, Quang tri province to join the South Liberal Army in 25 Jan. 1973. Interview with the author on 9 July 2023. Author's communication with Nguyen Huu Mao, dated 19 June 2023.

48 Rider, *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram*, translated by Andrew X. Pham (Harmony Books, 2007) Google-Books-ID: RrmhPwAACAAJ.

49 Extract from Liberation Radio in Vietnamese to South Vietnam 0500 GMT 20 Feb 70s. in *Review of Liberation Women's Achievements*, Vietnam Center and Archive, 2311101007 03 March 1970 Box 11, Folder 01. Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05 - National Liberation Front.

50 "Vietnam Archive 2311311001 Hanoi Cloaks a decade of Vietcong Terror, Vietnam Center and Archive, May 1967 Box 13, Folder 11. Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05" Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

51 Le Ly Hayslip & Jay Wurts, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) at 152.

52 *Ibid* at 27, 114.

Vietnamese women thus had no alternative and joined the National Front for Liberation and the Women's Union for the Liberation of South Vietnam.⁵³ Women played vital roles within the Party and in women's liberation associations. Those in the South became more organized and mobilized communities, employing tactics demonstrating heroism and feminism. The women's movement in the South became more resourceful and aligned with the three fronts to perform offensive roles, including production and attacking Southern troops. Officially, they were mobilized in different roles: subversion (*địch vận*), mass mobilization (*dân vận*), military logistics (*binh vận*), and fighting (*đấu tranh*).⁵⁴

Southern Vietnamese women became fighters. Almost a million women fought in guerrilla forces, with 40% of the guerrilla forces in the South being made up of women.⁵⁵ From 1960 to 1966, more than half a million political struggles occurred all over South Vietnam, with the participation of over 30 million women. Under the 'strategic hamlets' imposed by Ngo Dinh Diem of the Government of South Vietnam, peasants were removed from their ancestral villages to live in the new hamlet to isolate the rural population from contact with and influence of the Communists (*Viet Cong*).⁵⁶ To fight against this program, tens of thousands of women joined guerrilla units to defend their village and foil civilian massacre schemes. Being warriors, many women were awarded for patriotism and other army accolades. Amongst them was General Madame Nguyễn Thị Định (born 1920), who came from a revolutionary family and led a march at the administrative headquarters in Ben Tre province. Nguyễn Thị Định led other women

53 "Vietnam Archive 2311008017 South Vietnamese Women Valiant on the Frontline Dedicated in the Rear, Vietnam Center and Archive, April 1967 Box 10, Folder 08. Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05 -National Liberation Front" Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

54 The tactics used particularly during the Vietnam War, "Địch vận" refers to strategies or tactics employed activities such as espionage, sabotage, propaganda, and other forms of covert operations carried out by the enemy. It refers to covert activities undertaken by the enemy or opposing forces to infiltrate, undermine, or disrupt the operations, organizations, or infrastructure of the targeted side. In the context of warfare or political conflict. "Dân vận" is a strategy of mass mobilization used in communist movements, to engage the population and build support for revolutionary causes through a combination of social, political, and economic activities. "Binh vận" is "military logistics" or "logistics in warfare" including planning, coordination, and execution of activities related to the movement, supply, and maintenance of military forces during combat operations.

55 "Vietnam Archive F015900230526 Study, Research and Analysis Studies - Liberation Women's Association - Record of MACV Part 2, Vietnam Center and Archive, 12 February 1967 Box 0023, Folder 0526." Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

56 Strategic Hamlet as a plan by the government of South of Vietnam used during the Vietnam War since 1962 to combat the communist insurgency by pacifying the countryside and reducing the influence of the communists among the rural population through the creation of concentration camps. See: The Pentagon Papers Gravel Edition Volume 2 Chapter 2, "The Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963" in (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 128; Also see description of the strategic hamlet program in SGM Herbert A Friedman, "PSYOP of the Strategic Hamlet in Vietnam", online: <<https://www.psywarrior.com/VNHamletPSYOP.html>>.

and comrades to spread revolutionary fights throughout South Vietnam, forming a two-million-member troop. In 1965, Nguyễn Thị Định became the Deputy Commander of the Viet Cong, as well as the leader of the Women's Liberation Association of the National Liberation Front (NLF).⁵⁷ In these roles, she led guerrilla war (*chiến tranh du kích*) through political protest, armed fighting, and military logistics assistance. She played a crucial role in organizing and coordinating military operations against American and South Vietnamese forces, forming her and her troop's reputation among Americans as "long-haired warriors".⁵⁸ Nguyễn Thị Định's contributions to the Vietnam War were significant to changing societal and gender norms of the time, as she was a female commander in a predominantly male-dominated environment.⁵⁹ Like many women with patriotism during the war, family and tradition played a role in motivating women to join the war. Nguyễn Thị Định thus offers a clear example of revolutionary heroism in South Vietnam.

2. Gender Equality and Feminism under the Communist Manifesto

The communist approach supports gender equality. During the revolutionary period (1930-1945), Communism and Marxism significantly influenced the concepts and practice of gender equality and feminism. Communism upholds the call for gender equality.⁶⁰ The Cultural Concept (Indochina Communist Party of Vietnam, 1943) aimed to dismantle the Confucian beliefs that were seen as outdated or detrimental to Vietnam.⁶¹ During the country's period of separation (1954-1975), educational policy was also separated between North and South Vietnam. The socialist model of education was implemented in North Vietnam and a Westernized form in South Vietnam. During this period, in the North, moral education was introduced into formal education through learning about Marxist-Leninist philosophy.

In the early days of Vietnam's nation-building, gender equality emerged as a significant aim for people. President Ho Chi Minh, the founder of Vietnam's revolution and a nationalist himself, supported equality for all and the liberalization of women.⁶² With this idea, Ho Chi Minh promoted equality for women. In its first manifesto, the

⁵⁷ National Liberation Front at its early stage, also known including diverse membership of Viet Minh, followers of Cao Dai, Hoa Hao religious group, idealist students, farmers, members of ethnic minority group with which the Lao Dong "Workers' Party" the Communist could work

⁵⁸ Taylor, *supra* note 1 at 45-47.

⁵⁹ Nguyễn, *supra* note 1 at 36.

⁶⁰ Jin Wang & Keebom Nahm, "From Confucianism to Communism and Back : Understanding the Cultural Roots of Chinese Politics" (2019) 48:1 J Asian Sociol 91-114.

⁶¹ Nguyen Chi Hieu, "Tập chí cộng sản", (3 December 2023), online: *Tạp Chí Cộng Sản* <https://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/web/guest/van_hoa_xa_hoi?p_p_auth=QgBjEeK9&p_p_id=49&p_p_lifecycle=1&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&_49_struts_action=%2Fmy_sites%2Fview&_49_groupId=20182&_49_privateLayout=false>.

⁶² Forkan Ali, "The Origins of Contemporary Moral Education and Political Ideology in Confucian-Marxist Hồ Chí Minh's Vietnam" (2020) 8:2 Asian Stud 115-134.

Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) asserted the principle of “equality between men and women”.⁶³ The Party recognized early on that women were an important force in the revolution and saw the task of liberating women as inseparable from the liberation of the nation and the exploited social classes. Ho Chi Minh was able to call for the unification of women by linking women’s equality and liberation to national freedom in the revolutionary battle.⁶⁴ The national call to fight against the French stressed that regardless of gender or age, all must “stand up to fight to save the nation.”⁶⁵ ICP propagandized no class and gender rights for the course of the revolution. From June 1 to August 2, 1930, the Congress of the Communist Party formed mass organizations, including the Liberation Women’s Association. Ho Chi Minh’s ideology was to liberalize women and support gender equality. He says, “Women are half of society. Not liberating women is not liberating half of human beings, and we have only made half a socialism.”⁶⁶ He gave women the hope that their position in society could change after the country’s enemies were defeated. Many young women became motivated to serve the Communist Party (CPV).

During the war (1954-1975), the North Vietnam government promoted equality between men and women while applauding women’s revolutionary spirit. Thus, they used women’s desire for freedom to motivate them during the war. In the spirit of strength and courage for “The Three Ready (*Ba sẵn sàng*),” a movement to light the mighty fire and arouse the revolutionary spirit for union members and youth of North Vietnam, women determined “readiness to fight, readiness to join the armed forces, and readiness to go anywhere and do whatever the country needs.”⁶⁷ The “Three Good” movement (*Ba đảm đảm*) called for women to work in production, farmland, factories, and civil defense, simultaneously raising healthy and educated children, fulfilling household duties in the

63 *Văn kiện Đảng Toàn Tập. Tập 1 (1924-1930)* (Nhà xuất bản Chính trị Quốc gia sự thật, 1997).

64 William S Turley, “Women in the Communist Revolution in Vietnam” (1972) 12:9 *Asian Surv*, online: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2642829>>.

65 The call for national revolutional resistance by Ho Chi Minh, 19 Dec. 1946. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập, Nxb. Chính trị quốc gia - Sự thật, Hà Nội, 2011, tập 4, tr.534*. [In Vietnamese text: Bất kỳ đàn ông, đàn bà, bất kỳ người già, người trẻ không chia tôn giáo, đảng phái, dân tộc. Hễ là người Việt Nam thì phải đứng lên đánh thực dân Pháp để cứu Tổ quốc. Ai có súng dùng súng. Ai có gươm dùng gươm, không có gươm thì dùng cuốc, thuổng, gậy gộc...]

66 In vietnamese text [“*Nói phụ nữ là nói phân nửa xã hội. Nếu không giải phóng phụ nữ thì không giải phóng một nửa loài người. Nếu không giải phóng phụ nữ là xây dựng chủ nghĩa xã hội một nửa*”] Read in Hồ Chí Minh, *Toàn Tập, Vol 12* (Hanoi: Chính trị quốc gia - Sự Thật Publisher, 2011); Also Uncle Ho and the Vietnamese Women’s Liberation Movement. At Nguyễn Bảo Minh, “*Tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh về giải phóng phụ nữ*”, online: *Communist Party Vietnam Electron News* <<https://baotanghochiminh.vn/tu-tuong-ho-chi-minh-ve-giai-phong-phu-nu.htm>>.

67 “Vietnam Archive 2311101007 Archived: Review of Liberation Women’s Achievements, Vietnam Center and Archive, 03 March 1970 Box 11, Folder 01. Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05 - National Liberation Front.” Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam at 10.

absence of their husbands under the slogan ‘(tay cày tay súng).⁶⁸ As dedicated wives and mothers, women nurtured and educated their children, provided loving care for elderly parents, and were steadfastly loyal to the Communist cause. In the South, the “five voluntaries” (*Năm Xung phong*) called for women and youth determination following the slogan “Everything for the frontlines, everything for the beloved South.”⁶⁹

The CPV mobilized the organization of women under its control and instruction. It declared that women must participate in revolutionary organizations such as the Labor Union and the Peasant Union and established separate organizations for women to mobilize those of all social classes to join the revolution. On October 20, 1930, the Women’s Union was officially founded, led by the Communist Party.⁷⁰ Other platforms for women, such as the Women’s Association (changed to Liberation Women’s Association in 1961), were also formed.⁷¹ As the Communist Party supported the establishment of women’s unions for all women, the National Liberal Front (NLF) was able to mobilize women to join the battle. Liberal Women Association (LWA) was established under the guidance of NLF in 1961, with the purpose of uprising against the regime and for freedom from foreign domination. The Communist Party’s support for establishing women’s unions and the subsequent mobilization of women by the NLF through the LWA highlights an early example of feminist activism in a revolutionary context. Women were encouraged to join the struggle not only against foreign domination but also for their own rights within a broader national liberation framework.

The member duties of LWA in South Vietnam were set in Article 5 of the Revised Regulations (1961), namely (i) endeavor to propagandize the Association’s plan and (ii) guide and join non-member women in the struggle for women’s rights.⁷² LWA expanded

68 “Three good” movement (*Ba đảm đàng*) is read more at National Political Publisher House, “Phong trào ‘Ba đảm đàng’ trong sự nghiệp chống Mỹ, cứu nước”, (2020), online: <<https://www.nxbctqg.org.vn/phong-trao-%E2%80%9Cba-dam-dang%E2%80%9D-trong-su-nghiep-chong-my-cuu-nuoc.html>>.

69 Translated from Vietnamese: ‘*Tất cả cho tiền tuyến, tất cả vì miền Nam ruột thịt*’

70 The Congress of Communist Party on 6/1/1930 - 8/2/1930, decided to form mass organisations, including Liberation Women’s Association, led by the Party.

71 The Vietnamese Women’s Union (as now called) have different names over the period of time: the Liberalisation Women Association [Hội phụ nữ giải phóng] (1930- 1931); Democratic Women Association [Hội phụ nữ dân chủ] (1936- 1939), Anti-imperialist Women Association [Hội phụ nữ phản đế] (1939- 1941), Women National Salvation League [Đoàn phụ nữ cứu quốc] (16/06/1941), which played a significant role in the political and social movements in Vietnam during the mid-20th century, particularly during the struggle for independence from French colonial rule. The league aimed to mobilize women in the national liberation movement and promote gender equality in the context of the broader struggle for national independence. The Vietnamese Women’s Union [Hội Liên hiệp phụ nữ Việt Nam] (20/10/1946) and (06/1976 after the National Unification). According to website of Vietnam Women’s Union, “Hội LHPN Việt Nam: Các dấu mốc lịch sử - Cổng Thông Tin Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam”, (2022), online: <<https://hoilhpn.org.vn/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/hoi-lhpn-viet-nam-cac-dau-moc-lich-su-32291-3301.html>>.

72 Liberation Women Association [Hội Liên Hiệp Phụ nữ Giải phóng Miền nam] established on 8 March, 1961 is independent branch of Vietnam Women Association, led by Nguyen Thi Dinh. Its

countrywide on March 8, 1965, and then to all lower echelons.⁷³ The South Vietnamese Women's movement grew rapidly from 1960 to 1966 in the Women's Union for Liberation of South Vietnam, with village-level branches from 1,850,000 members to 8,000 cadres at the central level. The mandate for LWA and its branches included a call for a national struggle for "women's rights" as its communist way to mobilize women in the organization. The LWA's structure and mandates, as outlined in the Revised Regulations of 1961, reflect efforts to organize women across South Vietnam, propagandize their goals, and involve non-member women in the struggle for women's rights. This organizational effort aimed to empower women politically and socially, albeit within the framework of communist ideology.

The involvement of women in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War era was significant, particularly through organizations like the Liberal Women Association (LWA), which was established under the guidance of the National Liberation Front (NLF). From a feminist perspective, this historical context illustrates a complex interplay of gender roles, activism, and the pursuit of liberation within a deeply patriarchal and militarized society.

The "Three Accomplishments" (*Ba đ̣am nḥiệ̣m*) movement exemplifies this, emphasizing military, political, and economic tasks without foregrounding gender equality as a primary goal. The "Three Accomplishments" movement stipulated three tasks for members of the LWA in military, political, and economic categories. Women members of LWA were first described as individuals who served in combat, were ready to fight, and excelled in their duties in production. The mission of the Liberation Women's subcell states that the military tasks are to "Participate in the people's guerrilla warfare movement. Establish combat hamlet, join militia and guerrilla forces. Perform in formation and alert mission. Evaluate wounded soldiers, supply sabotage, et cetera... replace men in the rear..."⁷⁴ The focus on national struggle and communist ideology sometimes overshadowed feminist principles that explicitly challenge patriarchal structures. The "Three Accomplishments" movement exemplifies this, emphasizing military, political, and economic tasks without foregrounding gender equality as a primary goal.

charter regulations was made on 1961. Originally, founded in 1930, the main function of the Women's Association was to act as intermediary between the North Vietnam Communist Party, specifically the National Liberation Front (NLF), and the people, particularly women.

73 Archive USMACV Dec 8-463-65. The message was read on Radio Hanoi, VNA International service in English, 091646Z Mar 65. Archive of US Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Retrieved from Robert E Lester, *Records of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam: Part 1. The War in Vietnam, 1954-1973 MACV Historical Office Documentary Collection* (University Publications of America, 1988).

74 Hanoi VNA Social Domestic Services to Elite Carde, 0946 GMT 27 Feb 70 [text translated from vietnamese] cited in Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, *supra* note 55.

The actions of courageous women were widely disseminated in Communist propaganda. The Communist Party praised heroines and honored specific units. Many women were awarded medals, with their names publicized in newspapers and other documents. Ho Chi Minh praised “Vietnamese women, brave and capable, fight against the Americans to save the country.”⁷⁵ Ho Chi Minh also designated women as heroines, highlighting their courage and acknowledging their contributions and sacrifices in the nation’s struggles: “The Vietnamese people are heroic people, Vietnamese youth are heroic youth, and Vietnamese women are heroic women.”⁷⁶ On March 8, 1965, Ho Chi Minh inaugurated a banner embroidered with eight golden words: “Heroism, Indomitability, Royalty and Dedication (*Anh hùng, bất khuất, trung hậu, đảm đang*).” On December 3, 1965, the Women’s Union of Hanoi held the “Three Good” movement” (*Ba đảm đang*) Congress. Here, 1,718 women were awarded the Ho Chi Minh Medal, over 5,000 women were recognized as national exemplary soldiers, and nearly 4 million union members achieved the title of “*Ba đảm đang*,” honoring 42 individual and 9 units of female heroes that appraised women in agricultural labor as heroes.⁷⁷ Women peasants had the call “Hand with a hoe, hand with a gun,” and women workers had the call “Hand with a hammer, hand with a gun (*Tay cày tay súng, Tay búa tay súng*).” Exemplifying this was the story of Nguyen Thi My Lai, a civilian militia of Huong Phong commune. In her story, she held a rifle and escorted the American pilot when his helicopter was shot and his pilot parachute dispatched in the forest. She became famous for her courage.⁷⁸ She shared, “At that time, I had only joined the civilian militia for two months and had little knowledge of firearms. I only knew the basic safety procedures and how to pull the trigger, but I eagerly grabbed a gun and ran. Surprisingly, I was the first to discover the enemy pilot, Ariam Robinson, hiding in the forest. Knowing that he was armed but with courage overwhelming me, I fearlessly joined my comrades in the squad to capture him. Being so small compared to the tall and sturdy enemy,

75 Ho Chi Minh quoted at the 20th anniversary of Vietnam Women’s Union on 19/10/1966. (12 golden words in Vietnamese: “Phụ nữ Việt Nam dũng cảm đảm đang, chống Mỹ cứu nước”.)

76 On 2-12-1965, President Ho Chi Minh visited the women Congress on women awarded in “Three Good Work. He said : “Dân tộc Việt Nam là dân tộc anh hùng, thanh niên Việt Nam là thanh niên anh hùng, phụ nữ Việt Nam là phụ nữ anh hùng”

77 Lê Chân Phương, *Three ready of women movement in fight against America [title in Vietnamese: Phong trào phụ nữ “Ba đảm đang” trong cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ, cứu nước]* (Phụ nữ Publisher, 2005); tr. 5,6 citing from speech of Hoang Thi Ai Nhen, Vice Chairwomen, Vietnam Women Union. 19/5/2009. Retrieved from Southern Women’s Museum, “Phụ nữ Việt Nam với tuyến đường mang tên Chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh”, (2022), online: <<https://baotangphunu.com/en/phu-nu-viet-nam-voi-tuyen-duong-mang-ten-chu-tich-ho-chi-minh/>>.

78 Ho Chi Minh when saw the photo, decided to send this photo to publish in Vietnam Photo News, the photo of the young guerilla fighter, known as O du kích nhỏ, was later printed as postage stamps by the postal service, further spreading the significance of the artwork. Retrieved from Cổng Thông Tin Đảng Bộ Tỉnh Hà Tĩnh, “Sức lan tỏa của một tấm ảnh và truyền thống quê hương anh hùng”, (2015), online: <<https://hatinh.dcs.vn/hoat-dong-cap-uy/news/suc-lan-toa-cua-mot-tam-anh-va-truyen-thong-que-huong-anh-hung.html>>. It was the afternoon of September 20, 1965, to rescue their comrades on the downed bombers, three US helicopters were dispatched to hover over Huong Son (Ha Tinh) skies.

people teased me, saying, ‘Let little Lai handle the American. Let’s see if she is even as big as his thigh.’”⁷⁹

The Communist Party encouraged women of the North and South to join unions and movements through propaganda and communication. Northern women became more determined to support the Southern Women as they shared sympathy with the harsh hardship and sufferings in the South. As often spoken in the propaganda radio in the South Government, “We were very proud and grateful to women in South Vietnam who had been staging a difficult resistance war to wrest independence and freedom for the nation and to protect the socialist North. The North Vietnamese women are determined to overcome all hardships and sacrifices and to fight side by side with the southern sisters until final victory.”⁸⁰ When women in the North heard about crimes and massacres committed by Americans in South Vietnam, including the use of toxic chemicals to destroy crops, they became angered and motivated to provide support to major frontlines in the South to defeat US aggression.⁸¹ The exemplary ethical values of Vietnamese women, coupled with their strong revolutionary awareness, provided significant encouragement and strength to soldiers on the battlefield. These examples of revolutionary heroism in South Vietnam continue to serve as enduring sources of inspiration and motivation for women in North Vietnam.

The women’s movements of Vietnam during the national liberation period not only made significant strides domestically but also actively engaged with the international women’s movements, seeking both recognition and support on a global scale. For instance, the Vietnamese Women’s Association aligned itself with international counterparts to amplify their cause. In a pivotal moment of international engagement, Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, a prominent figure within the Liberal Women’s Association (LWA), led a delegation to the World Women’s Congress in Moscow in 1963 alongside Ma Thi Chu. Her speech at the Kremlin Conference Hall not only highlighted the atrocities perpetrated by the South Vietnam fascist regime but also underscored Vietnam’s active participation in global feminist discourse.⁸²

79 Army Newspaper. A Talk with Lai. Archive. Read at Hồng Vân A, “Gặp ‘O du kích nhỏ’ năm xưa”, (2010), online: *QĐND Online* <<https://www.qdnd.vn/chinh-tri/tiep-lua-truyen-thong/gap-o-du-kich-nho-nam-xua-436342>>.

80 In the speech of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’s Women Union to South Vietnam Women’s Cadres’ Congress. On 27 Feb. 70. Cited in Hanoi VNA Social Domestic Services to Elite Cadre, 0946 GMT 27 Feb 70 [text translated from vietnamese] cited in Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, *supra* note 55.

81 *Ibid* at 9.

82 Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, *supra* note 53.

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh's role extended beyond advocacy; renowned as a successful female peace negotiator, she served as the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG).⁸³ Her leadership was instrumental in the Paris Peace Talks, culminating in the Paris Peace Accords of 1973.⁸⁴ This international diplomatic achievement not only brought about a ceasefire and the exchange of prisoners but also solidified Vietnam's position within the global arena, demonstrating the intersection of feminist activism and international diplomacy during a tumultuous period of war and liberation. It emphasizes the significance of international collaboration and the leadership roles of Vietnamese women in both local and global contexts.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study examining the courageous roles of Vietnamese women in wartime, particularly their mobilization under communist leadership and international engagement, illuminates a pivotal argument in the ongoing evolution of gender equality and feminism. As Vietnamese women challenged traditional gender norms and contributed significantly to their nation's struggle for liberation, their actions underscore the complexities of feminism amidst war's transformative impact. In scrutinizing Vietnamese women as embodying "Heroism, Indomitability, Loyalty, and Dedication," this study delved into the complex interplay of gender equality and feminism, particularly during wartime.

Stur⁸⁵ argues women's roles evolved during the Vietnam War era, both in traditional domestic spheres and in new, more active roles brought about by wartime exigencies. Werner⁸⁶ suggests that wartime memories create a terrain of gendered desires and longings, prompting inquiries into the lasting impact of wartime roles on permanent shifts in women's roles. Through the facts presented, the paper argues that war served as a catalyst for challenging culturally ingrained gender norms, dispelling prejudices rooted in traditional views of female inferiority. Women, driven by patriotism with a profound love for their nation, have exhibited confidence and made substantial contributions on the frontline during the war. Their pursuit of freedom and equality, underscored by a call for national liberation, illuminates the 'heroism' and 'indomitability' of Vietnamese women, aligning with a collective sense of patriotism. However, even as gender roles underwent a transformation during the war, the paper contends that this does not inherently impede feminism.

83 "Vietnam Archive 2361001034 Madame Negotiator, Vietnam Center and Archive, 07 April 1968 Box 10, Folder 01. Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 08 - Biography" Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

84 Taylor, *supra* note 1 at 124.

85 Stur, *supra* note 17.

86 Emmy E Werner, "Gender and Postmemory in Contemporary Women's Writing: Wartime Memories and the Challenge to Patriarchal Narratives" (2006) 34:3/4 *Womens Stud Q* 265-283.

The feminist movement, catalyzed by the organization and mobilization of women during national evolution and struggle, has been influenced and shaped by communist leadership. Communism, with its egalitarian stance, propelled women beyond traditional roles, urging them to participate in political agendas, act as guerrillas, and provide support on the front lines. The examination of evolving gender roles amid war conditions, influenced by communism, elucidates that gender equality is strategically employed to mobilize women in the national struggle. This study posits that while communism facilitated women's participation in unprecedented roles, the enduring legacies of loyalty and dedication hint at enduring challenges to achieving full gender equality in post-war Vietnam.

However, the enduring identities of 'loyalty' and 'dedication' as traditional roles at home persist and raise questions about the lasting impact of gender equality under wartime conditions on contemporary feminism. Looking ahead, further exploration into the intersection of feminism, national identity, and modernization will be essential to understanding how Vietnamese women continue to navigate evolving gender roles and societal expectations towards feminism and women's rights.

These arguments open for further exploration of feminism in Vietnam in the post-war landscape, as it is evident that modernization demands expanded gender roles for women to support economic development. Education, economic development, modern communication systems, and education have broadened conceptions of possibilities for both genders, potentially accelerating feminism and steering away from traditional roles.⁸⁷ While Vietnamese women have transitioned into diverse social and political roles post-war, the constraints on freedom of choice and authority in social groups persist.⁸⁸ The advocacy for gender equality carries inherent risks. It constrains the social movement towards feminism despite the government's enabling women's participation and empowerment.⁸⁹ This necessitates a renewed exploration of feminism, delving into the historical antecedents of gender equality to ascertain the potential for freedom-based feminism—rather than the controlled women's movement observed in Vietnam.

87 Khuat Thu Hong, "Women and development in Vietnam: Caught between social tradition and economic globalization" (2016) 6:2 Reg Cohes Reg Cohesión Régions Cohésion 110–119.

88 Author's communication with TTH, former Vice-Chairwoman of Women Union, conducted in 2 July 2023

89 Author's communication with a feminist and women rights activist in Vietnam, namely NVA (talk conducted on 10 Dec. 2023).

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