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Hanoi life

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Sept. 1, 1965

(Twenty years ago this week, on September 2, there was a brief, but historic event in Hanoi. In the airy public plaza facing the Palace of the French Governor-General, provisional president Ho Chi Minh defiantly read the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, stating Vietnam was no longer a French colony. Then commander-in-chief General Vo Nguyen Giap reviewed the Vietnamese (Communist) Army, which had been fighting Japanese forces and helping the Americans troops in the jungles during World War II. "It was a ragmuffin army of one thousand peasants with all sorts of uniforms and all sorts of weapons," one Vietnamese recalled.

Only days earlier, Emperor Bao Dai abdicated his throne, handed power over to Ho Chi Minh, and made the famous statement, "I prefer to be a citizen of a free country than king of a slave country." The French colonial government considered the Declaration invalid; but after eight-years of bloody fighting during the French Indo-China War, ~~it~~ could not rescind it.

This week, a twenty-eight year old defector told this story of life in North Vietnam:)

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SAIGON--The Communist regime begins to raise a North Vietnamese baby from the time it is four months old.

From then on, the Hanoi regime shapes, molds and directs the individual's life, including the most personal details of love, sex, marriage and the ~~family's~~ ^{SEVERAL} worship of ancestors, which had ~~previ~~ prevailed through the past ~~four~~ thousand years.

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In an exclusive interview, the young defector discussed the Hanoi regime's policies and practices on love, sex, marriage and religion.

ON CHILD-BIRTH. AT the time of child-birth, the expectant mother goes to a government-operated hospital or maternity clinic, remaining there for a week to ten days after the baby is born. For the next four months, the mother is allowed to stay home to breast-feed the baby.

At the beginning of the fifth month, the baby is placed in a government-operated nursery and the mother goes to work. The mother takes the baby home during the night-time and during the lunchtime; the mother generally works near her house so she can come back and breast-feed the baby when it's necessary. When the ~~child~~ baby is one year old, the mother works farther from the house, if the government decides it is necessary.

At the ~~nursery~~ government-operated nursery, run mostly by women, the baby is first taught to walk and then to talk--and then to sing and to dance. ~~When the child is five or six years old,~~ taught the alphabet when it is five or six years old--and is then ready for formal ~~kindergarten~~ kindergarten and schooling.

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Following the birth of the baby, the family has one week to report the birth to the government authorities—and the sooner the better—the ~~defect~~ defector added hastily, for then the baby is issued it's own rations, rather than using the rations of the family. Rice, and clothing are rationed in the North. But, he explained, families are slow in reporting a death ⁱⁿ so that ~~the rice~~ rice the rationed food and ~~rice~~ ^{Clothing Quotas} of the dead can ~~be~~ ^{still be} issued to the living. But the government authorities can always find out about the deaths because they have alot of cadre checking it. ^{them.} If a family continues to draw the rationed quotas of the ~~dead~~ dead, the quotas are ^{simply} ~~simply~~ subtr subtracted from the family's rations the next month. So, it's difficult to the cheat the government.

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The ~~best~~ most intelligent and most obedient schoolchildren, under fifteen years of age, are selected to join the Redkerchief organization, where they are taught "the five commandants of Uncle Ho." ~~these~~ commandants include being obedient to the family and teachers, to be virtuous and hard-working. The school-children ~~are~~ compete to become selected into the ~~Red~~ Redkerchiefs and regularly copy the five commandants ~~to be followed~~ and paste them on the walls of their ^{Home} ~~house~~. Those who are selected proudly ~~both in and out of the school~~ wear a red ~~red~~ bandana around their necks ~~and neckerchiefs~~.

Then the cream of the ~~Red~~ Redkerchief crop is ~~selected~~ selected for ^{MEMBERSHIP IN} for the Lao Dong (Communist) Youth League, where the members range in age from 15 to 25. From 25 upwards, the best members are then selected into the Lao ^UC Dong (Communist) Party—which has become the new ^{elite} elite.

The Party then becomes the center of life, surpassing even family relationships. ³ In If, for example, a daughter and ⁷ ~~as~~ her father sit together for the same meeting of the government, of the Party or of government-run associations, they address each other as "dong chi"—meaning comrade, instead of traditionally as ^{using their} ~~father~~ ^{Names}. However, outside of working hours, the word comrade is dropped and the traditional family names are used.

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ON LOVE & SEX: The Hanoi regime has a puritancial view towards illicit male-female relations; free love is discouraged. If, however, a love affair occurs, the couple is not married and an illegitimate baby is born, a committee judges the percentage of guilt of the man, the woman, or both, and that percentage will be applied to the future support of the child. 7

For example, if the woman willingly submitted to the love affair, then she must also help support the child with her food and clothing rations and money; if however, the man imposed himself on the woman, then he is judged to be more guilty than the woman and must contribute more to the upbringing of the child.

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ON MARRIAGE: Traditionally, the Vietnamese family arranged ¹⁹⁸ and dictated the marriage of the children; in North Viet Nam, the Party dictates marriage. Usually, the couple ~~x~~ submits a request to be married to the ~~Communist Party~~ ~~Communist Party~~ ~~Communist Party~~ leading committee of the association or organization to which the couple belongs. This committee is dominated by the Communist Party cadre. The committee then studies the marriage request and makes recommendations ² and or suggestions. The committee can approve or disapprove of the ~~x~~ request of marriage; in case of disapproval, the couple can still go ahead with the marriage plan, but ~~they will be indirectly punished, usually through economic discriminations of rations or government housings.~~ they will be indirectly punished, usually through economic discriminations of rations or government housings. ⁴

⁺ From the government ¹⁹⁸ view point, the marriage may not be wise because ~~they~~ might want to send the cadre to different parts of the country.

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Marriage ceremonies have been drastically simplified and standardized. The most important traditional aspect of these ceremonies in former times was a giant feast for the whole family, which might number hundreds including aunts, uncles and great-grandchildren. Now, in the North, couples can still have "collective celebrations with songs," but there's not enough food for the feasts. There are no church marriages.

ON RELIGION. The ancient Confucianistic-~~Tao~~^{SEVERAL} Taoist worship of the ancestors, which had prevailed in Vietnam for ~~four~~^{SEVERAL} thousand years, has also been very drastically simplified. The family altar, where the ancestors and the dead were traditionally honored, is now called "The Altar of the Fatherland." Unlike before, the altar displays ~~the~~ the national flag, a picture of Ho Chi Minh--and thirdly, ~~a~~ photographs of the ~~ancestors~~² ancestors and the dead. At best, now, the family can afford to have a candle or petroleum lamp to light the altar and a few cups of tea, a few fruits and flowers for ~~respect~~² reverence. But even if the family wants to and can afford to buy the traditional joss sticks and fake paper money used as part of the religious rites, the government stores ~~do~~ not sell them, except at special times such as the lunar new year.

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As in the case of marriage ~~ceremony~~² ceremonies, the large family ~~Banquets~~^{Banquets} formerly held to honor the dead on their anniversary of their death can no longer be held because of food rationing.

About Catholicism, the defector said he knew there was once a heavily populated Catholic area in Ben Thuy, near the city of Vinh. But, he said, when he visited Vinh, there was no trace of the Catholics. He said he never saw a person wearing a Catholic cross or a home with a crucifix or picture of Jesus ~~or~~^{of} Christ. Now, there's no trace of the Catholics; ^{He explained} they have disappeared, ~~he explained.~~