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SAIGON, VIETNAM.

The 44-year-old wife of a low-ranking Vietnamese government official recently visited the damp, cluttered office of a woman lawyer, explaining that in more than two decades of marriage she and her husband lived in a small ^{House} with maids and in-laws.

"But, now it is just too much," she explained to the ~~same~~ compassionate lawyer. "I can't take it any more. In the past six years, my husband has not spoken a word to me--not a mortal word. I want a divorce."

Several days later, at the same lawyer's office in downtown Saigon, a young housewife staunched through the door and also requested the initiation of divorce proceedings.

"After six months of marriage, my husband slapped me--and I refuse to take it," ~~7~~ she explained vehemently. The woman lawyer, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Vui (~~Gaity~~ (Gaity)), confessing she felt more like "a psychiatrist," forged a reconciliation in both cases. She urged the older woman to have her hair bobbed, instead of wearing the old-fashioned bun, to replace her missing front teeth and to erect a small partition between her bedroom and the sleeping rooms of her in-laws to produce some intimate privacy. Mrs. Vui's formula was magical: for the first ever, the recalcitrant husband put his wife on the back of the family scooter, called at the lawyer's office to thank her and to present her a gift of delicate fish sauce from the Mekong Delta.

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In the second case, Mrs. Vui recalled that not ^{long} ~~only~~ ago the "suffering" tradition of the Vietnamese wife was to kneel before her husband as he beat her with a rattan stick or feather duster; she then "tricked" the young housewife by telling her that indeed even Mrs. ^P Vui--a prominent professional ~~am~~ man in Saigon--occasionally slapped her too.

Even the ~~comp~~ contemplation of a divorce suit epitomizes a miniscule facet in the galloping evolution of Vietnamese womanhood in a country in which only three years ago divorce was illegal except under special dispensation of Roman Catholic President Ngo Dinh Diem and his spitfire sister-in-law, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu. The two prospective divorce cases illustrated the slow-motion equalization in the husband-wife relationship, which is the heart of the Vietnamese family, and which, in turn, is the stark quintessence of the nation-society. In the setpiece battles of the sexes, husband-wife entanglements commonly end up with barriages of ~~#~~ dia bay--"flying saucers," as vases, soup ^B bowls or bamboo chairs are hurled into orbit. In other cases, the wife's sphere of influence already dominates that of her husband's in the ^hhome, but unlike American wives, the Vietnamese wife in public still creates the appearance that her husband dominates.

One American advisor was flabbergasted that his counterpart, a Vietnamese province chief, consistently had to ask his ~~f~~ wife for ~~two~~ twenty piastres (about twenty cents) in order to get a haircut. One Vietnamese high-society wife gloated, "Maybe the Vietnamese generals and ministers run the country, but their wives run them." One Vietnamese general once laughingly replied to a foreign correspondent's question, "I'll have to ask my own commander-in-chief."

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The wife of one Vietnamese colonel once organized the wives of her husband's subordinates into search squads to ferret out their husband's when in "top secret conferences" with rival lovers. During the flaming Buddhist crisis in mid-1963, Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu jerked the linen tablecloth, which sent bowls of chicken soup flying into her husband's face, when she deemed he had made too many concessions to the wily monks who ~~were later to~~ sparked the toppling of the regime. Even Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky and his lovely ~~24~~ 25-year-old wife are known to engage in shrill verbal battles when Mrs. Ky demands to go to Kong Kong on extravagant shopping ~~spree~~ ~~sprees~~ and her husband refuses in the grounds that the Vietnamese ~~poor~~ population would accuse her of smuggling gold and diamonds out of the country, as other top-level wives are criticized. Authoritative sources report that these bitter tiffs between the Prime Minister and his wife usually cause a flurry of official cables at the American Embassy.

If such marital battles are viewed as commonplace within the context of the full-fledged egalisation of the Western woman, in the non-Communist Orient, they are part of the ~~an~~ smouldering evolution of the emancipation of Vietnamese females, whose traditional heritage was Confucianistic since the first Chinese conquest of Vietnam in 111 B. C. While Confucius did not ~~a~~ codify a religion, the teacher-scholar presumed the existence of God--he did establish a ritualistic code of ethics which would guarantee earthly ~~political~~ political harmony by defining the five basic human relationships--king and subject, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife and friend and friend.

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The~~x~~ tormenting plight of the Vietnamese woman was epitomized in the proverb Thap Nu Viet Vo--one son is a son, but ten daughters are nothing. The moral indoctrination of every Vietnamese woman was to obey without question, first her father, then her husband when she married, and then her eldest son when her husband died. Before the French colonialism in the late 1800's, a Vietnamese daughter was considered a stranger even within her own family. She was never ~~x~~ taught ~~such~~ secret family recipes, such as the medical cures for diphtheria (a mixture of rhinoceros horn and burned herbs), neck cancer (pulverized pearls) or pyorrhea (green snake poison and ^{pork} ~~snake~~ fat).

Child marriages were the norm; she often tended her infant husband. She could be sold as a concubine, or hired out by her father as a servant. "My own father was 11~~x~~ and my mother 10 when they were married," a 43-year-old Saigon scholar ~~x~~ explained recently. "But my father really loved my mother. He never took a concubine or second wife as his fortuneteller advised. He was considered a revolutionary at the turn of the century. Because he cut off his hair. He was a customs official for the French and could have become fabulously wealthy, but he collected rice bowls instead of money."

This Confucianistic structure prevailed for two millennia, first as one of earliest and most highly developed civilizations and then as a fossilized social structure which worshiped the ancestral past and stifled any social movement--from ~~an~~rural to urban life, from one region to another, from one class or occupation to another. Yet, Vietnamese women were still less restricted than Chinese women; they never had their feet bond, for example. The twisted ~~twisted~~ deformation of the feet of Chinese grandmothers in Vietnam still show the effects of this Confucianistic practice. (More)

During more than half century of colonialism, the French discouraged, ~~in~~ such "feudalistic" practices, but did not abolish them in the countryside; in the cities the French veneered the social-economic elite with Westernization; they changed the arbiters of the social structure from the scholarly mandarins educated in Chinese characters to the French-educated functionaries. But, the basic social pattern in the non-Communist areas ~~xxxxx~~ while somewhat diluted, remained still in tact during the ^R rule which ended in 1954.

By all accounts, the American buildup of combat troops, which dramatically impacted in mid-1965, unleashed an acceleration of the emancipation for women far beyond the wildest expectations of the Vietnamese, leaving them "dizzy and disoriented," as one husband explained. The traditional slow-moving, nearly-petrified Vietnamese social structure lurched as though ~~sidew~~^{E/}d sideswiped by a violent hurrican of Westernization and modernization. ("For better or worse, Vietnam will never be the same," one old Asian hand explained as he watched the American buildup). The weight of the American war machine--and equally important, the accompanying "green tide of American dollars"--produced a series of cross-currents unparalleled in the preceding two thousand years--the results of which are still unknown and the end of ~~x~~ which is still not in sight. ("Twice in the past 1000 years we had such a miraculous opportunity to make money," one middle-aged businessman explained. "The first was the French war, but we were too young; the second is now. We can't let this chance escape.").

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The vicious acceleration of the bloody fighting on the battlefield in the past 15 months brought a flood of rural families to the adventures of urban life; a total of 900,000 were listed as war refugees, but untold thousands more came, as wide-eyed immigrants in their own country, to live with relatives in the cities. ("Vietnam has become a giant-sized railroad station," one American observed). The influx of American money brought demands for thousands of washer-women, shoe-shine boys, maids, cooks, entertainment, ^{And} construction work, ^{ERS,} which sommersaulted overnight Vietnam's chronic unemployment into one of labor shortages. Woman-power became an immediate substitute for manpower, which for the past two years had been bled white on the battlefield. The biggest private employer in Vietnam, Vietnam, an American construction combine, hired half of his its 50,000-
man labor force from the not-so-weaker sex. Women--even those eight-months' pregnant--increasingly unloaded the military and commercial ships that docked in Saigon and the coastal cities. One American Special Forces officer, in the wilderness of his remote outpost reported women comprised half of the workers he hired for digging trenches and mortar emplacements. "They work harder than the men, but the men raise hell if we pay them the same wages," he confessed. "So, we have to pay the women about seventy percent of what we do the men." While Vietnamese women had always done heavy manual and field work in the countryside, they did it alongside their husbands and children within the for framework of the family.

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As more and more Vietnamese sons and husbands were drafted and separated from their families, more responsibilities were dumped onto the narrow shoulders of the Vietnamese wives and mothers, which effect an even more rapid acceleration of the disintegrating Vietnamese family life. Vietnamese family is considered a far stronger bond than in the West; the family is composed three generations, at times, ^{plus} uncles, cousins and in-laws. ~~At~~ times it may number more than a hundred; sometimes 15 or 20 of them live under one roof, all obeying the dictates of the father. America's deadliest enemy in the cities--inflation--which eroded any ~~gyn~~ genuine increase in living standards--forced more members of the family, including wives, to become rice-winners. ("Vietnam will just roll along on a green tide of dollars," ~~are~~ ^{AN} American official boasted. But one old-time American resident exploded, "That will be America's death-wish. It's a chimera to dream of buying political loyalty. The Vietnamese will take your money, ~~and~~ and curse you at the same time."). In short, the violence of the war forced the already fragmenting Vietnamese family to leave the countryside; American dollars unleashed for the women new economic opportunities; "the big heart" of the American troops gave a new social independence and status even for the lowest-class maids, cooks and bar-girls. ("Only the Vietnamese women know what they want and how they are going to get it," one Vietnamese banker~~explains~~ complained. "You foreigners think they are China dolls with hummingbird voices. They are in public, but in private, they are beserk panthers devouring their husband-victims unless they get what they want.").

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The American ~~build~~ build-up of combat forces has hurled into orbit a new feminine ~~entity~~ ^{the} creation, which the Vietnamese call Phu-Nu He Moi (Girl of the New Generation) or Phu-Nu Doi Song Moi (Girl of the New Life). "There's been a big evolution for women throughout Asia in the past twenty years, but ~~ex~~ especially in Vietnam," one woman French sociologist, who has lived in Vietnam for 18 years, explained. "There's much more schooling for the girls; ten years ago, only the girls from rich families with good talent could study; now every girl can have 12 years of schooling. There is now the beginning of the working wife. In the family some years ago, the girls couldn't speak to or sit with the boys; there were segregated classrooms. Now you have a rapid revolution. Ten years ago, the Vietnamese wife rarely appeared ~~in public~~ with her husband outside the home; now she can go to public receptions and affairs with him him."

Two decades ago, a well-bred Vietnamese girl was forbidden to ride a bicycle--it would spoil her elegant ~~head~~ head-high posture. At the end of the French Indo-China War 12 years ago, only one aristocratic woman dared drive ~~through them~~ a car through the streets of Saigon--she drove a crimson Cadillac. Today, ~~chauffe~~ ^{chauffe} chauffeurs are too difficult to hire (even for the diplomatic corps); middle-class women more often than not drive their own family car; upper-class bar girls openly solicit trade on the mainstreets in the newest of American sports ^fcars. Vietnamese secretaries regularly own and drive their own motorbikes, or sit behind their boyfriends (American or Vietnamese) swerving through the traffic with their legs so gracefully poised they appear to be riding the winds.

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In the urban centers, even the relationship between the modern Vietnamese girl and her parents on the most fundamental question--her marriage--has evolved into a spin. In Saigon, for the generation of the grandmother, her marriage was arranged by her parents--at a sub-teenage--and she was not permitted to refuse. The split-level generation of wives in their thirties and forties would likewise have her marriage arranged by ~~her~~ ^{their} parents, but she could refuse a number of selections until she found one suitable for herself. This marital arrangement was made in a ~~rit~~ ^{rit} ritualistic ceremony at her parents' house in which the future bride and groom sized up each other over a cup of tea. Today, however, the "new life" girl is free to choose her own husband; ~~pre-mai~~ pre-marital relations occur, but not frequently. Leading from Saigon to the northwest provinces, the four-lane, fluorescent-lighted Bien Hoa ~~Hiw~~ ^{Hiw} Highway, built at a cost of US\$66 million, is one of the most popular lover lanes for the teenage motor-scooter set from Saigon. They are often seen necking in the roadside coconut groves--or watching a portable television set while sitting on a rice paddy dike. While it is not uncommon for an upper-class family to assign a younger brother to chaperon his sister when she leaves the house, the youngsters simply form a common alliance and she runs off to see her momentary boy friend of the moment.

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Many non-Catholic brides still choose to be married in a simple traditional wedding ~~cer~~^{cer}emony, in which ~~both~~ bride and groom ~~kneel~~^{And} prostrate themselves before the family's ancestral altars ~~in~~ⁱⁿ gifts of lotus-scented tea and narcotic betel-nuts are ~~ex~~^{ex}changed between families and friends. But, long white Western satin-and-lace bridal gowns are becoming more popular, even among lower middle-class families. Mrs. Nguyen Cao Ky typified this nouvelle vague (new wave) when at her wedding reception in November, 1964, she wore an elegant white bridg^{al} gown at one of the crowning social events in ~~Saigon~~^{Saigone}. In the first wedding between a Korean soldier and a Vietnamese teenager, the bride wore a Western gown. In hamlets and villages, brides wear their best ao dai ~~to~~^{to} gown; in Viet Cong controlled areas, the bride wears her best ba-ba, the ~~pajama~~^{pajama} pajama-like costume of flowing pantaloons and long-sleeved ~~blouse~~^{blouse}. In the Viet Cong ceremony, there are no religious rites; the permission to ~~m~~ marry and the pronouncement of marriage is granted by the ranking pro-Communist political or military superiors. Viet Cong "godmothers" frequently serve cakes and candies to the ~~new~~^{new} newly-wed couple and their friends at the wedding ~~re~~^{re}ception in their jungle strongholds.

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In traditional times, ~~there~~^{the} more the children, the bigger the family joy. Today, Vietnamese wives are expressing more and more interest in various birth control methods. Even for the upper-class, "the pill" is still too expensive and has to be especially obtained from Hong Kong; American males have introduced it to their girl friends. One American official, however, was astonished when the wife of a Vietnamese province chief in a remote area expressed interest in it. Other contraceptives are sold at the U. S. military exchange ~~at~~^{And} at the street-stall cigarette counters. Even when Madame Nhu banned the use of contraceptives before 1963, they were still sold clandestinely. They are widely used by bar-girls and by some of the Westernized elite. In the cities, abortions are expensive, ~~but~~^{And} common, though technically illegal. In the hamlets and villages, birth control is rarely used--and then the age-old method of separate beds.

Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, during the Presidency of her brother-in-law from 1955 to 1963, did much to raise both the political and social status of Vietnamese women--but in still more ~~modest~~^{modest} moderate fashion than the Communists. Polygamy was legally abolished, but violations were not prosecuted. In one extreme example in 1962, a Vietnamese mechanic, a well-paying skilled job in Saigon, continued to live with his seven wives and 49 children--all under one roof in a seven-room house. Her organization of a reported one-million women did little to wield the government closer to the rice-roots level of the countryside; but it did provide the social pretext for teachers, wives of government officials and officers to get to know each other in the provincial cities. With the fall of the Diem regime in 1963, the organization immediately crumbled; in the provincial cities, the government wives, though they had little fondness for Madame Nhu--did complain about the social vacuum created with the demise of the organization. Since then, no Vietnamese woman has even dared attempt the political feats of Madame Nhu for fear of absorbing her stigma. (More)

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The evolutionary process has manifested itself in the exterior of the urban Vietnamese, who are considered ~~breath~~ breath-takingly beautiful, with a rippling comma in each lotus-colored cheek and long flowing ~~back~~ black hair which rhythmically sways with the ~~fin~~ graceful fluidity of a willow in the wind. The tiny-boned, small-waisted women caused on Western diplomat, who has traveled around the globe, to exclaim, "These are really the most beautiful creatures in the world. If one had to imagine the most beautiful of all women-goddesses, you would come up with the Vietnamese. They are not women; they are ~~a~~ works of art." The national costume, called the ao dai (pronounced ~~ow dai~~ ^{zai}), is a long-sleeved, mandarin-collared dress hugging the body from the neck to the waist and then breaking wispily into two flowing panels which seductively flit over ~~the~~ "elephant-footed" satin pantaloons. Though some Vietnamese women accuse an ~~18~~ 18th-century Dior of designing the dress as a means for French textile merchants to sell more material, the couture is a ~~spin~~ splendid match for the diminutive Vietnamese figure.

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Yet, many of the Vietnamese schoolgirls--and more significantly, the in the countryside, ba-bas are worn exclusively. bar-girls, have forsaken the ao dai for Western clothes. The traditional high-heeled, ~~and~~ open-toed wooden sandals ~~are~~ painted with lacquer have given way to lowcut sling pumps for the modern girls. In traditional time, it was "contemptible" for a Vietnamese woman to appear with a bulging chestline; special straps were worn to maintain a flat-chested appearance. Today, not only the modern girl--but also the wives of upper-class families--relish the heavily padded ~~versions~~ versions which American GI's have jokingly termed "Hong Kongs", because they are not indigenous to Vietnam. Today, the new beauty status symbol is plastic surgery on the breasts, the unslitting of almond-like eyes and the "straightening" of the noses, since a Vietnamese characteristic is to lack a bridge in their noses. Mrs. Ky had eyes and nose operation of this kind in Japan before her marriage.

Before World War II, almost all Vietnamese women wore the traditional hair-style of turbanding their hair around their head in a lazy coil, like that of a drunken cobra. During the Japanese occupation of the country, a few urban women cut their hair short as a matter of convenience. Today, in both Saigon and the provincial capitals permanent waves or high-styled beehives are popular; even peasant girls in the Viet Cong zones wear short curly hair.

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While middle and upper-class wives in the urban centers can buy a simple dress without their husbands consent, the style of the clothes is often a matter of intense debate. In Saigon recently, the wife of a middle-class accountant--and the mother of three children--began to work as a cashier in a neighborhood bar as a means to add income to combat inflation. To his astonishment, the husband returned one day to find his wife wearing pedal-pushers and a beehive hair-do, which the Vietnamese call "the Birmingham Palace Guard upsweep."

"What do you think you're doing," the husband ranted. "You belong to a traditional family. Why do you have your hair combed like that--you look like a whore."

The wife retorted, "I have to wear this to look presentable for my job. What do you care--the kids are better dressed and I make more money than you do." The wife won the argument, but the husband made the last threat, "if you don't behave well, I'll take the children and leave the house." In another case, one husband used to threaten his second wife that if she didn't behave well, he would marry a third. Today, the wife maintains the family by selling diamonds, leaving her husband home to do the laundry and take the children to school. She now threatens him to that if he doesn't treat her well, "I'll marry an American. I'm still prettier than a bar-girl."

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The traditional view that the wife should stay at home and take care of the offspring gradually began to change during World War II, but with the arrival of American combat troops--and galloping inflation--the pattern accelerated dramatically. At the time of the French Indo-China War, few women were employed ~~and~~ except in teaching, nursing, or clerical work for the French or the banks. Even four years ago, the majority of Vietnam's nurses and teachers were male; now only thirty per cent of the nurses in the training programs are male, according to official sources.

At the jet set--or more accurately, Dakota set--elite top of society, several prominent women are doctors, dentists, pharmacists; one is principal of a leading girls' school; one is director of a Vietnamese bank; several are managing directors of radio battery and textile plants. Two "Dragon Ladies" control most of the construction in the northern provinces where American Marines are based. One American official was astonished, when in an organizational meeting to form a new company, one woman without hesitation replied, "I'll chip in 100,000 ~~piastres~~ piastres (US\$1000)." While most economic experts concede Vietnamese women are more gifted than Vietnamese men in financial affairs, they must compete in the economic sector with the male sex of Chinese and French nationalities, "and even ~~the~~ they hold their ~~own~~ own fairly well," one American economist explained.

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The upper-elite of Saigon and other ~~usa~~ urban centers--the families of doctors and dentists, or successful businessmen--~~at~~ considered themselves under the Diem regime as the social arbiters of the country, because of the old Confucianistic status placed on education. But, with the move of the Vietnamese military juntas into the political domain since 1963, the educated elite has eclipsed in their privileged decision-making importance. Not without some justification, Vietnamese generals have publically ~~accus~~ accused this educated elite of doing little to support the anti-Communist war effort, while the ~~y~~ consistently snippily criticize the government.

The life in this small bracket of elite at the top fo of the Vietnamese social pyramid is cocor~~ne~~ in elegance and luxury. Many own barn-like villas in the old "French Quarter" of the city. They are at least a one-car family (chauffeured), and often a two-car family; they often own either a black Mercedes or an older model of a flashy American car. Their sons and daughters attend the ~~lite~~ French grammar and high schools in the country and become "awkward Frenchmen," speaking better French than Vietnamese; knowing more about French history, ~~and geography~~ geography and literature than that of their own birthplace. Many of these children--especially sons--are ~~wisk~~ whisked out of the country before they are eligible for the military draft; many study in Paris--and in American ~~on~~ American-government scholarship--~~and~~ some seldom return to their homeland.

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^{ir}The homes are decorated with such modern luxuries as air-conditioning in the bedrooms, stereo tape recorders in the living room. And, in addition, they possess the most ancient convenience in the Orient--servants--who are a combined baby-sitter, maid, automatic dishwasher, cook, ~~and~~ ^{And} laundromat. In this urban elite, the families in which the husband and wife are older than 40 are dim carbon-copies of the ~~old~~ French cultural tradition--"they are just chocolate Frenchmen, being more French than the French," one Westerner observed. In thier homes, a seven-course candlelight dinner of French cuisine, capped by champagne, for as many as 20 persons is not uncommon. All are discreetly anti-American in their political views and cultural prejuidices. The younger elements in this Westnerized elite--younger than 40--are often more Americanized than Frenchified.

"Since the French-Indo-China War, there has been a big difference, even between my grandmother and myself," one 39-year-old wealthy, and highly educated Saigon housewife explained. "My grandmother was stricter; she had three girls and ~~it~~ wanted them to get married young. When my mother married my father, I was the only child and my mother always wanted me to be someone. She wasn't happy in her marriage because it was an ~~arranged~~ ²arranged one. Vietnamese women ~~xxxxxx~~ were submissive; there was no divorce; it was her ~~lif~~ ²lifetime responsibility to serve her husband. My mother wanted me to be different; to have a higher education which she couldn't have. She wanted me to go to America or France to study--and I did.

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"She allowed me to be free, except for one thing--love. She didn't want me to marry young, being afraid I would be unhappy. Though she was liberal, she didn't let me have any boy friends, even when I was 15 or 16. She did allow male tutors to come to teach me English, Chinese characters and how to play the mandoline and guitar. But, she always watched what I did in the big mirror in the hallway. Of course, when I was a teenager, I wanted to be admired and I like to flirt; I read French novels about girls and boys. My mother spoiled me, but then built fences around me when it came to boys.

With joyful reminiscences, the young housewife, continued: "My mother always told me boys weren't nice and would take advantage of me. If I went to the movie or market, there was always someone trailing me. One boy wanted to marry me--he's now a general--but my mother wouldn't allow it. 'He's just a weak, noodle type,' she told me. My mother tried so hard to make me someone--not simply a woman--but someone.

"I wanted to be beautiful; though we had money, my mother didn't want me to waste it. The day I left for study in France, I had only 7 Vietnamese dresses and 10 suits. My mother said 'It's enough'."

"I said, 'It's not enough. Someday, I'll have 100 beautiful dresses'. Mother ~~me~~ said, 'fine--but now you do what I want you to do!'"

"I suppose she succeeded. I married for love; my husband is kind and well-off; we have four ^{lovely} children--and yes, I have the 100 beautiful dresses my mother wouldn't let me have twenty years ago."

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"Now, all Vietnamese ~~but~~ know that our national destiny depends on international events. We Vietnamese don't think we are the top of the world or the center of the world; the question of war or peace in Vietnam--and whether Vietnam is free or Communist--will be decided by others. But if we Vietnamese can not decide peace--we can decide order within the society. But the problems are too big for us, a small nation with an old culture--we can not be changed overnight, even by the big policy-makers of the world. No one yet knows we will be changed into."

If the role of the elite has been somewhat eclipsed by the Vietnamese generals, the plight of the low-class urban working woman has ~~impr~~ improved considerably in the economic field because of boom-time war spending and in the social field because of the courteous way in which American men treat women of all nationalities and of all classes. This narrowing of the gap between the high and low-class Vietnamese is exemplified by one elderly maid, who began to ~~wo~~ work for the Americans in 1964. Today, she owns a small house in the Mekong Delta city of Can Tho, and rents two rooms to American enlisted men, thus achieving lower middle-class status. In one ~~mid-cl~~ middle-class apartment area in Saigon, Vietnamese wives are entranced as they watch the way an American private treats his Vietnamese wife; he opens the car doors ~~for~~ her, allows her to enter the taxi before himself, carries their small baby instead of ~~having~~ having his wife do it. In the same apartment area, two American sergeants, rentin ~~an~~ an upstairs apartment in a government officials' house, pay their cleaning-laundrywoman more and treat her better than the landlady treats her servants--eventually the landlady began to ~~h~~ treat her maids better.

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Because of the vast employment opportunities, three Vietnamese maids who had worked years for one of the wealthiest families in Saigon resigned en masse when they could no longer bear the tantrums of the owner's wife. "We how now have to speak softly to the maids," one Saigon matron conceded.

One maid, named Sau (No. 6), a peasant girl from the Viet Cong-infested portion of the Mekong Delta explained that her mother had promised to marry her to the local Viet Cong guerrilla.

"Do you love him?" she was asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "How can I love him? My mother says he's a good boy in the village. He came once in awhile with a pistol to see my mother. He should be important because he wore a pistol; most of the guerrillas were rifles."

She was asked why she ~~didn't~~ didn't did not marry him.

"My mother says I'm too young and he's too busy," the 16-year-old maid explained. "We're only engaged."

Despite her parents' disapproval, the young woman ~~had~~ left her home village because of extensive fighting in the area, and then came to Saigon.

"We can't have security in the countryside," she explained. ~~A~~ "the sergeant can marry me by force. The soldiers can rape me. I can be put in jail if I'm caught in a trench during an operation. Virginity is important-- but how can one preserve it? So, I just took a chance to come to working in Saigon and to see the city."

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Unhappy working for the middle-class Vietnamese family, she tried to work for the Americans, but lacked the proper connections to get a job. Asked how she could work for the Americans when she was engaged to a Viet Cong guerrilla, she replied:

"Oh, I don't care if he likes it or not. The Americans treat others well. I saw how the American treat the other maids; they joke with their maids and sometimes take them to the movies or give them candy for their children."

Another 17-year-old maid, from the Communist-infested province of Quang Ngai defiantly recited Viet Cong poems around the house of the middle class family she worked for in Saigon. A former fish-peddler, she was asked about the American troops.

"Yes, the Viet Cong say the Americans are evil," she replied. "The Viet Cong say the Americans eat people--that they open up the abdomens of people and take out the people's liver and eat it. But that's not true. The Americans eat canned food only. I see alot of empty cans at the rubbish heap."

She was asked if she like the Americans.

"I don't hate the Americans," she replied. "I would never marry one--if I went back to Quang ~~Ngai~~ ^{Ngai}, the people would criticize me and say I was a prostitute. But, I like the way the Americans treat their maids--they treat them much better than the Vietnamese in Saigon treat theirs. That's real democracy." The Vietnamese word for democracy is "Dan Chu", which means literally, "People is the boss." The Saigon government ~~describes~~ describes its superior relationship to the people in the phrase Phu Mau Chi Dan--the government is the parents of the people.

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A violent tornado of female social mobility was unleashed for the bar girls, hostesses and prostitutes, the so-called "Sin-Dolls" and "Night-faces" which blossomed around each American cantonment. ~~While~~ ² the social plight created a political furor internally within Vietnam, and created a political-social eyesore, in which downtown Saigon became a street of "cheap drinks and cheaper women." Despite the moral ^{And political} considerations involved, the economic ladder enabled illiterate women from the countryside and the city slums to become the supporters of their families and to become the walking exponent of Americanization.

"Maids and country girls go into prostitution not simply because they need money," one Vietnamese sociologist ~~explained~~ explained. "Deep inside, they want to get outside their own environment and to be something else-- ² like someone else. They'll no longer be happy as servants or pineapple-sellers."

One Vietnamese mother of three, abandoned by her Chinese husband, began working as a bargirl in 1963 as the American advisory effort mushroomed. And, in one year, she saved the enormous sum of 500,000 piastres (roughly US\$5000). Today she owns the bar.

"If I married a Vietnamese now, he would beat me," she explained. "And he wouldn't let me work in the bar. Since I've been married, I've already lost my virginity. Now, as a bar owner, no one looks down on me; I own a car, house and stereo set. My children are well-fed and attend the best private French school in town.

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"Now, when people come in and have a drink, they have to be courteous to me. This is better than the old tradition of being a ~~cook~~ ² cook for a husband that beats you--or better than keeping your virginity. I doubt that virginity matters any more. Now everyone treats me as a princess."

Leaving Saigon or any ~~a~~ major urban center, the sociological ~~landscape~~ ² landscape, only minutes from the city limits, jumps backwards into a time frame several centuries old. ~~While~~ ² in the urban centers, time moves quickly-- "what happens in most countries in a century happens in one year in Vietnam," one Saigon politician once observed. But, in the countryside, time ~~seems~~ ² slept for centuries, bringing little change. Between the cities and the countryside, there is no suburban bridge; while Western press dispatches commonly refer to suburban areas, these are little more than semi-skilled urban workers living in rural rice-straw houses.

Only five miles from Saigon, in the village of An ~~Phu~~ ² Phu, this correspondent interviewed on ^{EJ} peasant family, the lowest of the three classes in each Vietnamese village. The upper village class is composed of the rich landowners, who do little of their own farm work, and the rich businessmen, such as the rice-miller. These often live in ~~masonry~~ ² masonry villas; they served both the French and American interests during Vietnam's two wars. The middle class, who live in wooden houses, own their farm land and sometimes have a surplus to rent to tenants. But the lowest class, such as the Dung family, live in a house made of thatch roof, palm-leaf siding, and hard-packed mud floors--the ^{Replica} ~~duplicate~~ of the houses of their forefathers for a thousand years. They are the farm tenants and laborers; many American officials suspect this class ^{on the whole} serves the Viet Cong Communists.

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In An Phu (pop. 2161), each thatch-roofed house has its own trench, generally under the large wooden family bed. Generally ~~they~~ the trench is surrounded by a thick, three-foot high mud dike. This trench may have saved the life ~~thex~~ Mr. Dung ^{on the} ~~this fall~~ autumn ~~on the~~ day his son was killed only thirty meters from his front-door.

"My wife got up early to go to the rice field at 6 a.m.," Mr. Dung explained, twisting his long wispy white beard and tucking his barefeet under the bamboo stool." I ~~got~~ ^{got} got up to fix breakfast for the children and grandchildren. Then the firing started and we all got under the bed. One bullet came into the house, sped through the ~~curtain~~ and hit the mud dike and piece of dirt flew into my soup.

"Then I was afraid that the American planes would come and bomb the Viet Cong and would set the whole village on fire. So, I took the children and grandchildren to the mainstreet of the village. Then one of the villagers came up and told me the news: my son was dead, when ~~the~~ ^H Viet Cong company wiped out the ~~government~~ ² platoon of government militamen (14 men). When I went to find my son, he was only only thirty meters from our home. Half of his body was on the high ground and the other half was in the mud."

Summing up the battle in which a Viet Cong company wiped out the militamen, the old father concluded stoically, but simply, "It is tragic to see the dead." (More)

The war had hurt his family in other ~~ways~~ ways. In 1963, under the old strategic hamlet program, he had been ordered to move his home along the main highway artery; in this new village he became a farm laborer, rather than a tenant. The lack of security affect his work.

"We used to work in the rice paddies from dawn to dark," he said quietly, serving his guests more tea. "Now we work fifty per cent of the time. If we see a plane circle above us twice, we leave the land because we are afraid of being bombed. When we werent't working on the paddy land, we could go to the river to catch fish. But even 700 meters from here, the Viet Cong control the canals and river. The inflation has hurt us too; the price of food is more expensive. If we have 100 piastres (roughly US\$1), we buy more food; if we have eighty 80 piastres, we buy less food. When we are waiting for the rice crop to be harvested, we eat only two meals a day, but when we are working in the fields we eat three meals a day. We never save any money; everything is from day to day."

His mind was filled with questions without answers. Would the family receive the one year salary of his dead son, as the government regulations provided? ("The government is very bad about pay us what is our due." Would his ~~18-year-old~~ ^{second} 18-years-old, son be allowed to stay in the village and help support the family, or would he too be drafted to serve the government? ("God has put these young men in this age bracket," he observed. "What can we do? It's up to God to decide their fate.").

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Philosophically, he ~~seem~~ summarized the ~~plight~~ of his family.

"We are all caught between two crossfires--the government and the May Ong ("those ~~m~~asters"--~~or~~ referring to the Viet Cong). We, the citizens of the land, have no protection from the people with power; anyone can blame us." Or, as another elderly ~~far~~ farmer explained more incisively, "Both sides are vermin."

On the non-Communist side, the old Confucianistic-based social structure is rapidly disintegrating without any new organized pattern for the pieces to drop into. Despite official statements by the American and Vietnamese governments announcing a new social revolution, the Vietnamese see only the disintegration and equate it with social anarchy. The reaction of individual families is based on uncertainty and insecurity over the future; sometimes belief rests on the traditional fatalism that one's destiny will be decided by the ~~m~~ovement of the stars. During the ~~political~~ series of political crisis in 1964, one anti-Communist housewife, wrenched her hands, ~~cried~~, and shrieked, "Oh, my god! my god! What was I born Vietnamese?"

~~But~~ a lower-class bar-girl ~~simply~~ simply shrugged ~~x~~ matter-of-factly, "Life is a lotus floating down the river--sometimes hitting bad storms, ~~or~~ sometimes gliding smoothly."

But, in North Vietnam, the Communist regime, in a ~~an~~ swift-stroked revolution 12 years ago, crushed the "feudal" Confucianistic aspects of Vietnamese society and then immediately replaced this regimented social order with a totally new, but even more tightly regimented order of their own, a social order veering towards collectivization.

One 26 year-old North Vietnamese prisoner explained life in the rural Communist state. From the time a baby is four months old, he said, the Communist regime in the North begins to rear its young and continues to mold the individual's life until death. The dictatorial decisions, once made by the father in the Confucianistic society, are now made by the Communist state and its party apparatus, including the most personal details of love, sex, marriage and the family's worship ancestors. The first four months after birth the mother feeds the new baby; then the government places it in a state operated nursery and the mother returns to work. As a teenager, the child's social values are established by the Red Kerchief organization, instead of the family; the cream of the crop then move into the Lao Dong (Communist) Youth League, and then later the Communist Party. The Party then becomes the center of life, surpassing even family relationships. If, for example, a daughter and her father sit together at a meeting of the government, or of the party, or of government-run associations, they address each other as "dong chi"--"comrade"--instead of using individual names.

The Communist Party member approves marriage plans; each individual marriage request is studied. Those who marry in spite of the disapproval of the Party members are indirectly punished, through economic discrimination in rations or government housing. The wedding ceremony, now drastically simplified, still includes, "collective celebrations with songs," but there is not enough food for feasts. There are no church marriages.

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The imponderable non-military question now confronting South Vietnam is this: will be the regimented Communist social revolution weering towards collectivization prevail; or will the social upheaval on the non-Communist side--now orbitting in mid-air--fall into a more orderly, yet modern and just social framework. This question will not be decided by tough-willed generals or ministers, who now presume to guide Vietnam in its so-called "nation-building" process. It will be decided within the context of each Vietnamese family by those China-doll Cinderellas, who are made of steel and grief-tears.