

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE OF CHUT ETHNIC MINORITY IN VIETNAM: THE SERIOUS CHALLENGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract- Child marriage is typically defined as the union of two children, and inbreeding marriage is usually defined as the mating between relatives. It is considered traditional marriages of many ethnic communities in Vietnam, including Chut minority ethnic group. Nowadays, many Chut's traditional marriages and cultural practices are creating their poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, low life expectancy.... Our paper will indicate the current situation of marriages of Chut ethnic minority and the challenges in their human development.

Key words - Child marriage, inbreeding marriage, human development, poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, low life expectancy

I. Introduction

Chut minority ethnic group in Viet Nam has about 7.000 population (2014), belonging to 10/54 ethnic groups with a least population. This minority consists of 5 local ethnic groups: May, Sach, Ruc, A Rem and Ma Lieng, who leaved wildlife in the mountains latest in comparison with the others in Viet Nam, and in their language still preserved lots of synods and elements of proto Viet-Muong as the ancient Vietnamese language.

So Chut minority ethnic group has a huge significance for international and Vietnamese scholars to study the national history of Vietnam and history of Vietnamese language, also. But nowadays, Chut's traditional marriages are creating their extreme poverty and hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition, low life expectancy...., trammeling their meet the MDGs and their human development goals.

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II. The different marriage directions in Viet Nam history and nowadays

1. Traditional marriages in Viet Nam history

Child marriage has been a type of traditional marriage of many ethnic communities in Vietnam. In the past, with Vietnamese tradition, not only ethnic minorities but also majority Kinh people got married during early ages, so Vietnamese have folk song: "Getting married since 13 years old. Now I am 18 years old with 04 small kids".

2. Current situation of marriages in Viet Nam

Nowadays, the Vietnamese Law on Marriage & Family regulates the minimum of marriageable age for men are 20 and for women are 18. However, there is a significant difference in the trend of marriageable age among different regions and ethnic communities in Vietnam.

Population and Housing Census in Vietnam (GOS) in different time in period 1989-2013 said that, Singular Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) indicates the average number of years in single status of a generation before they have the first marriage. This indicator is usually calculated for each gender because of different characteristics (Tab.1).

Table 1. Singular Mean Age at Marriage period 1989-2013

Year	Men	Women	Difference (Men – Women)
1989	24,4	23,2	1,2
1999	25,4	22,8	2,6
2009	26,2	22,8	3,4
2013	26,4	23,0	3,9
SMAM of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam			
1999	18,3	17,2	1,1
2009	18,5	16,7	1,8
2013	18,2	15,9	2,3

Source: General Statistics Office (GSO),
Population and Housing Census in Vietnam 2013

In 2013, Singular Mean Age at Marriage (SMAM) in Viet Nam in general, was 26,4 for men and 23,0 for women, which mean the

difference was about 3,4 years. SMAM of the ethnic communities in rural and remote areas in general was 18,2 for men and 15,5 for women. In which the higher SMAM of Tay, Muong, Thai ethnic groups is 19.5 for men and 17.8 for women and lowest SMAM of the Lo Lo, Si La, Hmong, Chut ethnic groups was only 17.5 for men and 15.2 for women. Recently, Vietnamese scholars have been found out all the negative effects on the sustainable human development.

However, unfortunately although the scientists have warned, in many ethnic communities in highlands and remote areas in Vietnam, such as Lo Lo, Si La, Romam, Brau, O Đu, Bo Y, Pu Peo, Mang, Lu ethnic groups and Chut including....., where there is high rate of child marriage and there have had serious social consequences. Their children regularly left 6^h-grade or 7^h-grade of school and “catch husbands” as their common tradition. Typically, in R’Coi commune of Romam minority in Sa Thay dist. Kon Tum province as everywhere in the others communes near by it, in 2012 there are more than 20/37 cases of “catching husband” in 13 – 17 age, equal 55% marriages. A lots of girls at the age of 13-14 years old were proud of “catching” their husbands earlier than the others in community. Typical examples are husband and wife-catching tradition of Hmong in many villages in Tay Bac highland or in coastal areas, the boys or the girls who are more than 16 years old but unmarried are considered as too dull.

In regards to the trend of early marriage, currently in Vietnam there is a wide debate whether we should lower the marriage age or not? That question has received 2 streams of contradictory opinions: *First opinion*: Currently children, especially girls are usually growing more quickly. So from the view of international law, marriage age in Vietnam is believed to be higher than other countries. So the marriage age should be lowered for male from the age of 18, woman from age 16 to be in line with international law; *Second opinion*: We should not lower

the marriage age in Vietnam, because the law cannot follow backward habits. This is a big question for scholars and those who are interested in family marriage for the purpose of sustainable human development in Vietnam.

Table 2. Percent of Child marriage in 10 remote provinces (2013y.)

Province	Male from 15 to 18 years old	Female from 15 to 18 years old	Female from 15 to 18 years old
Ha Giang	17,25	25,52	14,31
Cao Bang	10,70	16,73	8,64
Bac Can	5,49	13,08	5,86
Lao Cai	11,37	23,16	11,83
Dien Bien	14,40	27,60	17,53
Lai Chau	18,65	33,83	21,20
Son La	14,03	29,08	17,14
Yen Bai	5,16	16,11	6,15
Kon Tum	4,69	15,75	7,85
Gia Lai	5,46	17,26	7,83
Average of all minority 's provinces	10,77	21,80	11,83

Source: Department of Children Care of MOLISA of Vietnam (2013).

III. The current situation of Chut minority ethnic group's marriages

1. Child marriage in community Chut

Chut ethnic minority by tradition has the stable and monogamous marriage. But child marriage is a common situation in almost of Chut's communities. In period of 2014 – 2015 years, our research is done in the all 5 local groups of Chut ethnic minority in 11 communes with 871 household questionnaires, 100 cases of deep interviews and 12 focus group discussions. It turns out that, the young people there quite early marriage than many other ethnic groups in remote areas in Vietnam. The representatives of 871 households and personal answers in Chut communities illustrated that about 90% couples have got marriage in the age from 16 – 18 years old for men and from 15 – 17 years old for women. During the field works at Chut communities, we also meet many women of May, A Rem local groups of Chut

minority, who had up to 3 or 4 children, when just they are 18 years old. That means they were married from under 15 years.

2. Inbreeding marriage of Chut minority

Inbreeding marriage is usually defined as the mating between relatives and the progeny that result of a consanguineous mating between two related individuals is said to be inbred¹. Because a long time of Chut minority lives in small groups with life in nomadic wandering in the woods, the more nature timid, afraid to communicate with strangers, to marry outside the community previously considered to be strange. Therefore, Chut minority accepts the marriage to their loved ones of cousins (Inbreeding marriage), it is the normal thing. Model of popular inbreeding marriage in this community is the marriage between secondary cousins. They did not know the undesirable consequences happen to the family and their future generations. Especially, inbreeding marriage becoming most “serious problem” in Ma Lieng’s community in Rao Tre village of Huong Lien commune of Ha Tinh province. There are at least 3 cases when the first cousins have got marriage to each others as families of Ho Thi Sam, Ho Go, Ho Hai... and their children have met the serious genetic diseases as Huyen Trang (daughter of Ho Thi Sam) disabled by no left foot, Ho Kieng (son of Ho Hai) with congenital heart disease, some the others of their kids with ascites and thalassemia.... The kids from inbreeding marriage parents often are unhealthy with limited intellectually and working capacity. It also is leading to the kids death before their ages of 5. In these cases, the parents consider the forest ghost abducted their kids.

IV. Common causes of child and inbreeding marriages of Chut minority

There are a lot of causes of child and inbreeding marriages of Chut minority ethnic group in Vietnam, bellowing:

1. Low levels of Education

Education is one of the factors most closely correlated with SMAM. Countless studies have proven that early marriage is universally associated with low levels of schooling. Our research in 2014 in Chut community areas, there are about 70% of the population are illiterate and about 80% of girls have not finished secondary school and they were married off before the age of 18.

Scientists explain that Child marriage is the phenomena of male and female who get marriage under legal age. And scientists have warned that: Child and inbreeding marriages would cause many negative health consequences for mothers and their children, together with many other social negative impacts. However, our survey in Chut communities indicates that more than 50% of young minority couples, including about 70% teen mothers and fathers, are not informed about the minimum statutory marriage age and not be warned about negative consequences of child marriages and inbreeding marriages.

2. Poverty and hunger

Child marriages have a close relationship with poverty. In Vietnam, the poorest localities are areas, where the highest rates of child marriage. Poverty becomes one of the main determinants of early and child marriage. Due to the labor source is needed, the parents of poor families usually led their children more early marriage. Other side, the poverty drives families to give their daughters in marriage in the hope that this will alleviate the family's poverty and secure the family's honor when it is at stake. Although child marriage is seen as a way to escape the cycle of poverty, but child marriage in fact drives them worsens the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

3. Traditional marriage culture of Chut ethnic minority

¹ Cavalli Sforza & Bodmer, 1971; Hedrick, 2005; Vogel & Motulsky, 1997

Child and inbreeding marriages are also a tradition practice of Chut communities, because it happened for many generations – and straying from tradition could mean exclusion from the community. Inbreeding marriage of Chut minority is explained that they lives in small groups in the village with difficult communication with other communities. They are timid, afraid to communicate with strangers. Moreover, under their tradition, to marry outside the community previously considered to be unaccepted.

Although poverty is one of the underlying causes of child and marriage as parents see this as an opportunity to receive a lots of money or save money, otherwise they do not have money for upgrade their life, sometime for drinking alcohol only. Child marriage is not restricted to poor families and inbreeding marriage is also one way of preserving wealth in families of a higher socio-economic class.

V. Social consequences of child and inbreeding marriages of Chut ethnic minority in process human development

1. Child marriage has created negative effects to poverty and inequality

And scientists have warned that: Child marriage would cause many negative health consequences for mothers and their children, together with many other social negative impact. Dropping out of school early, getting married early and going to work early are three issues which have a close relationship to each others of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam in general, and of Chut minority also. First of all, child marriage of Chut families is a obstacle for their social progress. Because it has took away their rights and opportunities of studying and development of Chut's girls at the age of schooling. In fact, education for Chut's girls and mothers has very important meaning for not only current life, but also for their future. Because the Chut mothers by themselves give birth, bring up the good future generations for the Chut community. The uneducated mothers are the main reasons

to create a families with limited social knowledge and children of limited social skills and knowledge. We - as the scholar on human development emphasized that the future of Chut ethnic minority depends on their girls and mothers in current time.

2. Child marriage has created negative effects to implementing basic human rights of Chut ethnic minority

"Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education and health rights with long-term prospects,"² that says Babatunde Osotimehin. A girl who is married as a child is one whose physical and biological potential will not be fully developed for giving birth and grow up perfectly their good kids. Since we also want the very best for Chut girls and their families, we must work together and end child marriage in this community.

3. Child and inbreeding marriages has created obstacles to improving population quality and developing human resources in the future

It is clear that child marriage and inbreeding marriage have and will continue to seriously affect not only the quantity but also the quality of population of Chut ethnic community. In appearance, Chut's men and women are too small in comparison with the other ethnic groups. By our measurement, the average weight of male only reached to 52,3kg and of female - 41,4kg. The fact and science has proven that the percentage of children suffering from congenital genetic disease are higher among child and inbreeding marriage than the others. Specifically, newborns children of child marriage pairs are usually underweight (under 2500g as average weight of Vietnamese child), have slow development and congenital malformations which is higher than other children. Obviously, when the mother's body is not fully developed and not

² Babatunde Osotimehin, M.D, Executive Director, UNFPA in Viet Nam

healthy enough to nourish the fetus, it will influence on the mother's health and normal development of her fetus. It is one of the main causes leading to neonatal and birth death, premature birth, low birth weight, malformations, deformities, etc. in Chut's children..

Conclusion

We all understand that preserving the cultural diversity of Chut minority requires synchronous solutions of economic, cultural and social, etc... And on the other hand, we also need to eliminate traditional practices that are incompatible with modern life.

However, the most important thing is the commitment from each member of Chut community, who play a pivotal role to narrow the development gap. So Chut people must be capable to participate, manage, construct, and develop local economy, culture and society in their community. This means that in the long term, Chut people and their children must be educated and trained. The children - results of child and inbreeding marriages today will not be able to play the role of promising future owners. In other words, child and inbreeding marriage is one of reasons why Chut ethnic minorities as some other ethnic groups is always behind plain people, and this is also one difficulty for narrowing the gap between the Chut areas and the other mountainous remote regions. When the development gap is not narrowed, it will be difficult to achieve social justice in the regions where Chut minorities live.

Meanwhile, the Viet Nam government and the all majority both spent a lot of interest and national budget for the development of Chut communities. But it is clear that the socio-economic conditions, culture, health, education conditions in mountainous areas have a lot of difficulties. Along with this, child and inbreeding marriage cause more difficulty is narrowing the development gap between Chut areas with other mountainous and plains in Viet Nam country. And this is the great duty and mission of not only

Vietnamese policy-makers for ethnic minority development, but also of Vietnamese scholars like us.

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