

Conditions Affecting Social Mobility of the Vietnamese Family in Thai Society

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Abstract: The research study focuses on conditions which affect the social mobility of the Vietnamese family. The study has conducted using a qualitative approach. Life history interviews, in-depth interviews and group interviews were carried out in this study. The 32 representatives of Vietnamese (Viet Kieu) household members were selected to find out the results. The study were conducted in communities where were in Udon Thani, Nong Khai, Nakorn Panom and Sakon Nakorn Provinces. Research results found that family institution played an important role to embed individual actions on family members and these actions were transferred as the social interaction to society. The social interaction was presented with the ideal type, rationale thinking, speculation thinking and capitalism idea which they acquired from their families. These ideas were finally generalized and presented as the spirit of capitalism of the Viet Kieu family.

Key words: Vietnamese family, Viet Kieu, the ideal type, rationale thinking, speculation, capitalism

INTRODUCTION

Max Weber, a German sociologist, suggested that the spirit of capitalism in Western society was based on the individualism and the Protestantism (Weber, 1978). The concept was developed and constructed by the ideas of Rationality, Speculation and Exchange (Weber, 1964). However, the development of the capitalism spirit in the Vietnamese-Thai family aka Viet Kieu family was different from the Western. It was found that relationship within family could be a condition supporting the rise of capitalism spirit of the Viet Kieu (Krishna *et al.*, 2014). Family was the primary structure which functioned the transferring of values to family member and finally became the capitalism value.

The Overseas Vietnamese or Viet Kieu who moved into Thailand had been under continuous control by the Thai government, using a diverse range of policies and laws since, WWII through the Cold War (1945-1989), employing different government agencies and organizations to maintain strict control, e.g., the Ministry of foreign affairs, police, military and the department of provincial administration. Thai government control policies confined them within district and/or province boundaries and they were forbidden from leaving these areas without obtaining permission papers to travel outside. These conditions instilled patience and strength into the Viet Kieu and these traits have guided their life progress to date, so much so that Thais acknowledge

that the Viet Kieu are industrious, thrifty and enduring (Krishna *et al.*, 2014). Over the last 50 plus years, the Viet Kieu have confined themselves to cultural identification through family and many were taught Viet Kieu heritage through teachings centered around the fatherland shrine and Vietnamese language schools which engaged in a socialization that provided a rationality that was expressed in an ideal type which had an effect on self-discipline. This produced and controlled their range of action to an accepted generality and exemplifies the spirit of capitalism among the Viet Kieu. Consequentially, Thai society has accepted the Viet Kieu.

According to context of the Viet Kieu above, it resulted in the difficulty of status mobility of the Viet Kieu in Thai society. However, there were some Viet Kieu who attempted to raise themselves by using individual characteristics such as diligence, patience and thriftiness as conditions. In addition, the strength of relationship within family might be a condition that caused social mobility. This study, then focused on a research question that what are conditions that contributed the social mobility of the Viet Kieu.

Research objective: The objective of this study is to explore conditions that contributed the social mobility among the Viet Kieu family in Thailand.

Literature reviews: Max Weber's interpretation concept concentrates on individual actions and behaviors. Weber

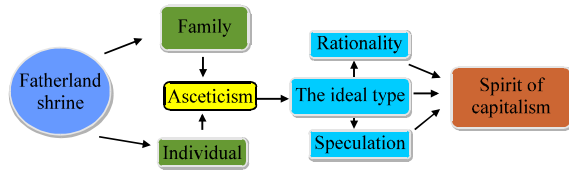


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

explains that individuals can understand human behaviors by examining actions stemming from ‘social fact’ which has a directly related link to ‘social relationships’ and results in ‘social action’ (Verstehen). What Weber proposed regarding interpretation is that ‘the ideal type’ is responsible for actions and that the ideal type has the abstract and general characteristics and that these inter-relate. Weber further proposed that in the general aspect of the ideal type, there was a component of the individual and a practice or asceticism that becomes the rationale in the process of analyzing and synthesizing. The abstract therefore has an innate perfection. The general component is comprised of normal actions related to everyday life and living, although, the actions are different from the overall society and arise from a process that has a definable aim, invariably accompanied by a discipline. Therefore, Weber placed importance on using this model to understand individual actions (Fig. 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was designed by qualitative approach. Life history interviews in-depth interview and group interview were applied to collect data. Key informants were 32 representatives of the Viet Kieu families in Udorn Thani, Nong Khai, Nakorn Panom and Sakon Nakorn provinces. Family representatives were selected based on occupational differences. Triangulation method was applied to test validity of data. Data then was categorized and analyzed by content analysis method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study attempts to describe a social phenomenon based on the ideal type of the Viet Kieu Ethnic group and the rationality of thought which is able to describe the spirit of capitalism of the Viet Kieu. The study found that family plays important role in transferring the value of capitalism and constructs the spirit of capitalism in the Viet Kieu family. Family also is a condition which is able to control individuals within family unit.

The ideal type of Viet Kieu family

The abstract of the Viet Kieu: The Viet Kieu has developed their “self” continuously. Since, they were born, they were instructed by family and from the fatherland shrine which inscribed the Confucianism’s doctrine and Ho Chi Minh’s doctrine. The doctrines were written by Vietnamese language “Can kiem liem chinh” which means “Diligence, Thriftiness, Loyalty and Integrity” (Krishna *et al.*, 2014). In details, diligence refers to the working hard. “Thriftiness” refers to the savings. The Viet Kieu separates their savings into three parts which are savings, money for emergency incidences and money for daily expenses. “Loyalty” refers to the honesty to family members, neighbors and customers. And “Integrity” which refers to the nobly living such as helping neighbors. It was found that these doctrines are reproduced all the time especially during on Vietnamese important days.

The abstract thinking also appears in the ritual of ancestor worshipping. In Nakorn Panom Province, Thailand, the Viet Kieu normally runs the ritual at the shrine of “Dai Vuong” spirit where located in Na Jaug village, Nakorn Panom Province. Three ceremonies are conducted at the shrine of “Dai Vuong” spirit which are the Vietnamese New Year ceremony, Buddhist Lent and the ceremony of fulfilling one’s vow. These ceremonies are an essential part of Viet Kieu family tradition because all family members would come together to participate in the ceremonies. Family would have chance to re-instruct their family members about some good things that they should do in daily life. However, presently, though the Viet Kieu no longer has the fatherland shrine, many seniors still recognize the doctrines very well. These seniors are not only instruct to their family members by words but they also show examples of what they instructed their family members in practically.

The generalization of the Viet Kieu when the Viet Kieu was instructed about the Ho Chi Minh’s doctrine by families, they then realize on the doctrine or actions from parents. The Viet Kieu realizes that the doctrine may be a cause of better family’s economic status in Thai society. Therefore, the family members set up the same goal in improving their economic status through the trading. Trading becomes a career that the Viet Kieu uses to improve their status in Thai society while other careers were limited due to the Thai policy on Vietnamese immigrants. The trading then produces the discipline manner to the Viet Kieu and later become the generalization among the Viet Kieu family.

“...Our parents always teach us to be diligent, for instance; everyone must learn Vietnamese at least three hours every day. During the day, mother would go to Udon Thani to buy fish to sell at Pang Khon district, Sakon Nakhon Province. At night, children would help their mother to cook sweets until 9 p.m. We had to wake up at 5 a.m. to help family working before going to school. We did these until it became our usual way of life...”

“...In a Vietnamese family, no member of the family can lay around and do nothing. We were taught to help family working as same as our parents did...”

“...When I was child, I had neighbors who were Vietnamese. My Vietnamese friends helped their family work all the time which was quite different from Thai or Lao families. One thing I knew about Vietnamese, they had to practice themselves about making trade. They started with selling small things to other students to make some extra money. I could assume that they got trading skill from their families according to their current financial conditio...”

Activities or works that the Viet Kieu engaged are the rationale reason which explains the generalization of Viet Kieu. Many activities such as housekeeping, cooking or trading are things that were instructed by family. Children were instructed to work or do something all the time. They all would have goal all the time. For instant, when older brother went to play outside the house, they had to take their younger brother with them. As same as a case of trading career, the Viet Kieu always set up their goal to improve financial status and to mobilize their status in Thai society, so they had to work very hard based on the doctrine. This becomes the generalization among the Viet Kieu which makes pride and honest to them and later got the respect in Thai society.

Rationality of the Viet Kieu family: Webber placed importance in rationality as a place that was between economy and society with an appraisable number, relational aim and clear reason (Turner *et al.*, 1991). Rationality is improved through practice and asceticism by the individual which enables abstract thinking becomes the abstract with intention and emerges for example as numbers with a tangible and predictable probability. Webber concludes that people have corresponding intentions and causality (Weber, 1978) because the underlying thinking is clearly visible in the behavior. The thinking is formed as that of a new

capitalist city but the behavior is one of an old rural small town economy (Turner *et al.*, 1991). The things that measure reason are abstract and are the result of discipline which is evidenced through practice and behavior. Weber explained that the thinking behind social behavior results from reason which arises from being an individual who recognizes their aim and knows what has value and what should be kept as private property. The preceding is significant evidence of the modern democratic capitalist society which is the cumulative contribution of everyone and always founded upon reason.

Rationality of thought given through the family: The Viet Kieu family in Thai society is a social institution that Thai state has no authority to access. Family members worship fatherland shrine which inscribes Ho Chi Minh's doctrine as a core of living pattern. Many of the Viet Kieu raise Ho Chi Minh as "a monk who strictly adheres to his practice". This respect is brought to the instruction within family unit and seniors then instruct these principles practically. Many Viet Kieu has lived in daily life base on Ho Chi Minh's doctrine which is easy to adopt in Thai society (Krishna *et al.*, 2014).

The fatherland shrine (Ban tho to quoc) is a symbol which was constructed in Thailand around 1948 by Hoang Van Hoan (1905-1991) who was an intimate pupil of Ho Chi Minh. He built the shrine to promote patriotism among the Vietnamese, who were living in Thai society to fight against the French empire in Vietnam. Hoang Van Hoan inscribed Ho Chi Minh's doctrine on the top, bottom, left side and right side of the shrine. Inscribed sentences on the shrine related to family, social group and the country. In addition, the shrine also was influenced by the Confucianism which later the doctrine was given a new meaning when applying to use in Thai society. On top of the shrine, a sentence "To quoc tren het" (country is above all other concerns) was inscribed while a sentence "can kiem liem chinh" (diligence, thriftiness, loyalty and integrity) was inscribed on the left side of the shrine. On the right side has a sentence "Viet Thai than thien muon nam" (have gratitude to Thailand for giving you a place to live and build connections to liberate Vietnam) which referred to the relationship between Thailand and Vietnam. Lastly, on the bottom of the shrine is inscribed with "Ho Chu tich muon nam" (Long live Ho Chi Minh). On the center of the shrine is placed with a Vietnamese flag and a picture of Ho Chi Minh.

The doctrine plays important role to conceptualize Viet Kieu's thinking and practices within family rationally. We can conclude that the Viet Kieu families have engaged in the doctrine and applied in Thai society very well. Many social actions by the Viet Kieu reflected to the doctrine such as keeping relationship with Thai

citizens for living peacefully. Therefore, the Viet Kieu has adapted themselves to have rational relationships in many different level of relationships such as individual, collective, family and the country. These relationships then are linked together and reflect through the social actions in the living area.

The rationality of thought given through the Vietnamese language school when Viet Kieu children are around 7 years old, they are required to attend Thai school during the day and they would go to the Vietnamese language school in the evening for couple hours to learn Vietnamese language with a Viet Kieu teacher. Each class has five or six students. Teachers in the school are seniors who graduated Grade 6 of Vietnamese School. The Vietnamese school is constructed by the cooperation of Viet Kieus in the area with the objective that Viet Kieu children must know Vietnamese language and still maintain Vietnamese identity even they are in overseas. In the school, Viet Kieu teachers also taught Mathematic to children because main occupation of the Viet Kieu is trading. Viet Kieu adults normally teach their children on calculation at home and take their children to Vietnamese school for more skills. Every subject in the school is taught with Vietnamese language as the primary language in order to preserve the Vietnamese identity.

Years later, many of Viet Kieu got married with Thais and settled their family permanently in Thailand. They discovered way of wealthy which is the trading career improve their families' stability. They found that Thais mostly did agriculture while only few Thais did trading. Trading then became opportunity to mobilize their family up in Thai society. Therefore, Vietnamese then put Mathematic as a primary subject in Vietnamese language school. This resulted in every Viet Kieu children have ability to calculate numbers, cost and profit accurately:

“...The Vietnamese language school promoted math and the teacher told us that math would help us enter a trading career successfully...”

“...As a result of my schooling in math, wherever I go, I can calculate the cost of investment and always think about that. For example, if I invest in corn, I then have further question that how can I increase the selling price...”

“...When I was in primary school at Alunrungsi School, I had to cook sweets for sell, so I was late to attend class many times and was punished by teacher. However, it was necessary because my family was poor. My mom always said that if you need money, you have to find by yourself...”

The Viet Kieu's way of life has enabled them to have the ability to calculate probability. Max Weber states that individual actions always have it own rationality. Due to this, the Viet Kieu has been able to realize on opportunity channel since, they were children. They realized that everyone have to help family to work and find a way to get something by self if they needed. Children who realized on this thinking would have goal and find a way to achieve. Therefore, the usual actions or the generalization of thought of the Viet Kieu would arise from family's instruction, Vietnamese language schools and the examples of action from their family members. In conclusion, the social fact about the Viet Kieu which are about patience, thriftiness and diligence is the interaction among the rational thinking of calculation and Max Weber's generalization concept.

Speculation of the Viet Kieu family

Speculation is a practice of engaging in risky trading: Speculators are going to buy assets that they think its value will increase in the future and later sell to other customers with higher price (Weber, 1978). The Viet Kieu plays important role as the speculators in local market. They attempted to buy assets and sold. This could make much profit to the Viet Kieu and they would use this skill to mobilize themselves as per details; Mr. Kob jaiyai (anonymous name) told that his grandparents immigrated to Thailand 60 years ago. His family firstly settled their home at Nakorn Panom and then move to Udon Thani Province. His primary family did aquaculture business for a long time. His grandparents made much money from this business and then they decided to buy some lands in the center of Udon Thani city. The land they bought currently has its worth >10 million baht. However, Mr. Kob and his brotherhood decided not to sell the land because they think the price will increase in the future. they can make more money from that land. Regarding on a case study, this reflects an idea of the Viet Kieu about the speculation and later lead to the capitalism spirit in the family.

The spirit of capitalism of the Viet Kieu

Individuality of the Viet Kieu: Firstly, some rights of the Viet Kieu who immigrated to Thailand has been limited by Thai government. Thai government tried to reduced their social interaction from groups to family unit. This action resulted in the Viet Kieu had to focus more on their relationship within family and instructed their children to be successful in the future. Moreover, some conditions also affected to the Viet Kieu who have lived in Thailand such as the discourse of Communism. Thai government had attempted to label the Viet Kieu immigrants as the enemy of the state. Due to the limitation, the Viet Kieu were able only to gather for traditional ceremony. Thai government did not allow the Viet Kieu participated in events >5 persons. Due to this issue, the Viet Kieu at that

time would keep themselves silent during they were in the events. They tried the best to avoid problems with Thai state officers. This condition pushed the Viet Kieu take action only in their family space and the individuality of the Viet Kieu has been formed within family unit.

Division of labor within family: In 1946-1992, the Viet Kieu had no freedom to choose their own occupation since the Thai government only permitted them to work for some careers such as trading and agriculture. There is an evidence that Thai government forbid them from entering 39 kinds of work (Thai policy forbid foreign nationals from working in certain fields, B.E. 2522). So, the Viet Kieu had to divide their work strictly to raise the family. Each family member would have clearly specific responsibility of working such as father would do plantation while mother would be a merchant at the market. Everyone knows what their own responsibilities are:

“...My mother she was a clever person. She had many ideas of working. For instant, when there was a movie truck came to community, she would find something to sell to ones who were watching movie...”

An outstanding characteristic of the Viet Kieu is that they would research together but clearly separated the responsibility of working process. For instant, the family sold vegetable at the market. Father would be a vegetable grower while mother was being as merchant in the market. Their kids would help parents to deliver vegetable from plant garden to market. So, everyone understands the work process very well.

In 1992, Thai government granted fully Thai citizenship to the Viet Kieu immigrants, the Viet Kieu then had right to have own places of business, some families took their savings and set up businesses in the fields in which they were skilled such as watch and clothes outlets, Vietnamese food restaurants and motorcycle repair shops. After their startup businesses were successful, they began to expand their business to areas outside their residence such as in Chiang Mai and Phuket. The expanded business the parents would assign family members such as their children or cousins to take control while total profits from expanded business belong to the primary family.

CONCLUSION

Family institution plays important role to instruct the Viet Kieu family members who have lived and worked

in Thai society. The contents that family gives to family member came from the inscription on Ho Chi Minh's shrine. Seniors in family would practice the way of life to other family members as an example. The seniors tried to reflect the doctrine through the diligence, thriftiness and patience and combine with Mathematic skill from the Vietnamese Language School. These actions resulted in the rationale thinking in Viet Kieu children about the opportunity of working. Many of Viet Kieu still support their children to do trading followed their seniors. The Viet Kieu family also instructs the goal of achievement to their children by assigning clear responsibility of work to children. Children then have to work their responsible process successfully to prove themselves. Children are able to help support their off spring families in business which helps grow the family business, based on family, knowledge, experience, investment knowledge and trusted advice. Due to these circumstances, work methods of the Viet Kieu families provide members with an opportunity to practice rational and put in place reasonable expectations that can be used to carry on daily business. Weber consistently said that social action involves four things: rational actions to reach ones goal, rational actions to attain one's personal values, actions that arise from feeling or moods and finally ritualistic or ceremonial actions and every type of action creates social relationships. For instant, social relationships within the Viet Kieu are developed from the workings of the family unit creating their unique abstract and general form of the spirit of capitalism within Thai society.

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