

Vietnamese Women and Leadership in the 20th Century: Prospects for Vietnamese Women Leaders in the 21st Century

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The last few decades have marked a turning point in the role of women in Vietnam. Formerly acknowledged as the "Minister of Home Affairs," women were able to break free from the shackles of traditional beliefs. These beliefs kept them from having a life outside household servitude. During the decades of war, women displayed leadership and courage. In peace time, women educated themselves and later held important government positions as Vietnam transformed itself into a free market economy. The former second class citizens were able to distinguish themselves further in the economic, political, social realms. Now supported by government and an appreciative society, there is a brighter future for the women of Vietnam as leaders in the next century.

Vietnamese Women in the 20th Century

Traditionally, Vietnamese women are seen as "second-class" citizens. They have no rights to make decisions in the family, no choice for the future, no educational and employment opportunities. They cannot participate in any social, economic and political activity. Two main factors, Confucianism and economic dependence, explain the inferior status of women in Vietnamese society.

Confucianism is a strong influence in Vietnamese society and has shaped the lives of Vietnamese women for thousands of years. Together with a feudal ideology, Confucianism allowed society to perceive wrongly the place of women in family and society as a whole and because of this women are oppressed and exploited. An old saying illustrates the status of women in the traditional Vietnamese context: "To have a son is to have something, to have ten daughters is to have nothing."¹

In the old days, women practiced the "three obediences" ("Tam Tong"): "To obey the father's words in the family, to obey the husband's when married and to obey the eldest son's after the husband's death."² This means that they did not make decisions. When they were young their parents decided their future. They were disciplined and told what to do, whom to marry, etc. When they did get married, their husbands were the "policy-makers" in the family. Married women were dependent on their husbands' families. They must be patient, tolerant, polite, obedient,

industrious and respectful toward both the husband and his relatives. When the husband dies, the widow follows her sons' arrangement. Paternalism was the cause of this paradox. Individuals are identified primarily by paternity. Children follow the father's family name. Only sons had the right to worship or uphold the cult of ancestors and to inherit properties. Sons were considered children of their own families, while "a daughter is a child of other people" when she gets married.³ Thus, the status of women was enhanced by the birth of a male baby. In contrast, having no sons was one of the "seven sins" according to tradition.

Another basis for the women's disadvantageous position was their economic condition. People who are economically dependent also cannot make their own decisions and obedience is the way to survive this harsh reality. They performed household tasks and took care of the entire family. They worked not only in the house, but also in the fields. Nevertheless, all of their output belonged to their husbands. Peasant women had no private property, jewelry or any means of production. Serving their families was their duty and this is done without question.

Obviously, Vietnamese women had no position of importance in the family or in society in the early 20th century. No significant figures of female leadership were recorded during this period. Naturally, participation in social and political activities was only a dream for most women.

Women at War (1930 - 1975)

The public role of women expanded after the world economic crisis in the 1930s. Like many other countries in the region, Vietnam was affected by the two world wars. Vietnamese society underwent rapid changes, both politically and economically and the status of women changed accordingly.

Many factors contributed to the change in women's position and how society perceived women. Firstly, economic conditions played a crucial role in the liberation of women. Vietnam is an agricultural country with majority of the population in the agricultural sector. They were peasants who lived in the rural areas. The feudal landlords and foreign rulers oppressed the peasants during the 1920s and 1940s. When husbands could not provide sufficiently the needs of the family, their wives took

action. Women left for towns seeking employment as retailers, servants, etc.⁴

Aside from assuming a great deal of responsibility for the cultivation of the family paddy fields, and sometimes doing more work than the men, women also shared the financial burden. This enhanced the role of women in family affairs. In addition, the new educational system gave women the opportunity to study. Other old Vietnamese sayings (such as "The wife is most important above all, then comes heaven" or "The man's orders are not worth the woman's jobs")⁵ began to hold true. Wives in the urban areas, who received formal education, were accepted as intellectual equals by their husbands. Of course, there were other reasons that made husbands acknowledge their wives' status. In fact, there were women who owned agricultural estates, factories and other businesses.⁶

Secondly, wars permitted women to prove they had leadership capabilities especially in the liberation movements. The men joined the army and due to the shortage of labor, women replaced them in nearly all domains, from taking care of the children, to producing goods in factories and even fighting in the battles. From 1946 to 1954 about 840,000 female guerrillas operated in the north and some 140,000 in the South.⁷

Thirdly, several political parties and new religions came into being in protest of foreign domination. Later these groups competed for power and interests. To recruit as many members as possible, political parties sought the women. In return women were promised equal political, social, economic rights and status under a new regime.⁸

In the North, The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) contributed a great deal to the liberation movements and the struggle for a better status for women in society. VWU was set up in 1930 by Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, a female intellectual and member of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) under the auspices of the ICP. The ICP recognized the importance of women to the revolution and even sent Nguyen Thi Minh Khai to represent the Party at the Seventh International Congress in Moscow in 1935.⁹

In the South, Nguyen Thi Dinh started the movement of concerted uprisings and the "Long-Haired Army," consisting mostly of women,

appeared in 1960 in Ben Tre Province. Later, Mme Dinh was appointed Deputy Commander of South Vietnam Liberation Forces. Under her leadership, women took responsibility for most of the propaganda activities such as convincing people to join the struggle, organizing protest demonstrations, planning rallies to raise people's spirits and persuading soldiers in the enemy army to desert.¹⁰ Women were admired for their bravery and capacity for sacrifice. Thus, the "Long-Haired Army" became the symbol not only of the struggle but also the pride, gratitude and love of Vietnamese people for women.

Finally, the regulations and codes on family and marriage, as well as women's rights of both North and South governments, contributed a great deal to the improvement of the role of women. Although these codes and regulations were more theoretical than practical, they reflected a more open-minded view on gender equity and equality.

In the South, Western religion played a very important role in liberating women from traditional, backward customs. The Catholic influence was strongly evident in the Code of the Family of January 1959. This code stated that polygamy and concubinage were outlawed; separation was hardly acceptable and divorce was impossible except in instances of presidential intervention. Its emphasis was the equal responsibility of both spouses in the "fulfillment of marriage obligations and the raising of children."¹¹ The Decree Law of July 1964 is similar in spirit but states that "divorce or separation are permitted after two years of marriage on grounds of adultery, cruelty, abandonment or a criminal act on the part of the spouse."¹²

Similarly, in the North after independence in 1945, President Ho also encouraged people to practice gender equity and encouraged women to participate in social activities. He said: "Women are half the people. If women are not free then the people are not free."¹³

The accomplishments of Vietnamese women deserved the admiration not only of their countrymen but also of the international community. Among the most admired were General Nguyen Thi Dinh and the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Thi Binh.

The Life of a Vietnamese Leader

After the declaration of independence in 1945, Vietnam turned a new leaf. In the North, the number of women leaders increased both at national and local levels. The achievement of the "great heroines" had a huge impact on the public's choice in the elections.

In politics, women leaders became known for their dedication, hard work, competence and integrity. There were very few cases of corruption among women cadres.

Table 1: Women in the National Assembly (NA)

	1945-1950		1975		1975		1987-1992		1992-1997	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. Member of NA	10	2.5	137	32.3	132	26.8	28	17.8	73	18.5
2. Vice President of Country	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	15.0	1	100.0
3. Vice President of NA	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	20.0	0	0.0
4. Chief of Committees of NW	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	42.9	2	22.2

Source: Vietnam's Women's Union, Statistical Data (Hanoi, 1983), p.13; Statistics on the Work of the Women 1985-1994, Statistical Publishing House, 1995.

From Table 1 we can see that women's representation in the National Assembly is significant. More women candidates were nominated by various mass organizations, including the Women's Union. The public had more confidence in women leaders and voted for them. Thus, the number of women leaders has increased gradually from 1945. The percentage of women in the National Assembly increased from 2.5 percent in 1945 to 32.3 percent in 1975.

Table 2: Women serving on People's Councils (%)

Type of Council	Percentage of Council Members who are women			
	1965	1975	1979 *	1981
Provincial	17	33	- na-	23
District	25	38	29	22
Village	21	41	29	23

* Note: Percentages are for reunified Vietnam, others are only for the North

Source: Cecilia Molariter, *Women in Vietnam* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority, 1978), p.95; Jayne Wemer, "Women, Socialism and the Economy of Wartime Viet Nam", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 2-3, Summer/Autumn 1981, p.173; Viet Nam Women's Union, *Women of Viet Nam: Statistical Data* (Hanoi, 1981), pp. 1 - 16, and "Appendix to Report to the Fifth Congress of Vietnamese Women", May 1985 unpublished mimeo, p.64; and unpublished correspondence.

At the provincial, district and village levels, the People's Committees are in charge of planning economic and public works, environmental protection, cultural activities as well as providing other basic services for the communities. In addition, they examine and approve local budgets, maintain public order and security and protect the rights of citizens in their areas. With a direct relationship with the people, the Committees had more opportunities to effectively promote the development of society.

Nevertheless, gender equality varies among urban and rural areas, ethnic groups and education-level groups. During the war, people were focused on repelling invading forces and called for solidarity from all classes, sexes and ages.

After Liberation Day in 1975, women who assumed leadership positions encountered difficulties returning to civilian life. Husbands came home and re-assumed their former positions as family heads. People reacquired their traditional points of view regarding gender. The number of female leaders began to decline gradually. For example, there were five female ministers in 1982, but only three in 1986. The proportion of women participating in the National Assembly also fell from

26.88 percent in 1976 to 17.8 percent in the 1987 election (see Table 1).

During the war, women sacrificed their youth and lives for the country but as wives and mothers the pull of family was stronger. Naturally, they were more devoted to their families and paid less attention to their role as citizens in society.

According to Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh, who was vice president from 1992 to 1997, the proportion of women elected to the Assembly declined due to the heavier residue of feudal attitudes in the south. There was also the gradual fading from public life of the "grand old women of the revolution,"¹⁴ reducing women's political authority and the legitimacy of their claim to leadership positions in the national government. In addition, the lack of feminist consciousness and male resistance contributed to the "redundancy" of women in leadership roles. Moreover, the "narrow-mindedness and lack of confidence in women among male executive cadres" (Mai & Le in "Women in Vietnam")¹⁵ also added to the problem of gender equity and equality. Therefore, many people consider the women's struggle for leadership in society a struggle involving power: "a revolution within the revolution."¹⁶ Researchers Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Thiam Tuyet stated that:

The promotion of women was the real revolution which upset the old social order founded on male hegemony and contempt for women... Cadres opposed the promotion of women colleagues, husbands hampered the progress of their wives, worrying lest the latter overtake them.¹⁷

In fact, had women not been given the right to practice their leadership in production, defense and the rearing of future generations, liberation would not have been achieved completely.¹⁸ Erroneous concepts about women still prevail in Vietnamese society and political system of politics is still inadequate in addressing this. Besides, a number of women lack self-confidence and do not exert any effort to improve their situation.¹⁹ Some of them seem are actually quite satisfied with their situation and accepted inequality as the norm. Overall, the percentage of female among government officials was in decline during this period.

Although the influence of women in politics was not as strong as before, the "Doi Moi" policy of 1986 created additional opportunities for women to pursue further education and to take part in economic activities. A higher education level means more opportunities to apply new technology, new ways of doing business as well as new business ventures. Recently, state enterprises were reorganized and retrenchment occurred at all levels. Among the workers who lost their jobs, women accounted for 60 to 70 percent²⁰ In order to earn a living, some women established their own enterprises. More and more women assumed managerial positions in private or joint-venture companies (20 percent), while in state enterprises the number was 4.5 percent.²¹ In addition, their sensitivity to marketing changes, their ability for public relations and external contact favored them in business negotiations. Despite many obstacles and the narrow mindedness of society, the achievement of women were recognized especially in the years of Vietnam's transition to a free-market economy.

The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) and the Achievements of Vietnamese Women

Despite the disadvantages and lack of opportunities, the VWU prepared continuously for leadership. For example, they conducted training courses for female cadres at the national, provincial and the grassroots level. By 1978, about 1,500 women had received leadership training. Later on, 120,000 women were able to begin their political education in the meetings organized by the Women's Union.²² The number of cadres trained by the Women's Union is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Women's Union Cadre Training, 1975 - 1980

Level	Number of classes	Number of women trained
National	9	1,370
Provincial	899	47,495
District	1,854	207,513
Village	11,247	1,183,098
Total	14,009	1,439,476

Source: Appendix to the Report on the Fifth National Congress of Vietnamese Women (unpublished mimeo) 5/1982, p.64. Ariene Eisen (1984), *Women and Revolution in Vietnam*, Zed Books Ltd., London.

In addition, the VWU carried out other forms of training for situations where women are more effective. For example, they mobilized young men joining compulsory military service, spread information on the harmful effects of drug abuse and the spread of HIV/AIDS, or mobilized people to take part in the family planning programs.

Vietnamese women are both hardworking and creative. Despite budget and time constraints they were able to plan and implement programs tackling social, environmental and urban problems through the "Women's Mutual Help in Household Economy" programme, vocational training programs and various credit schemes. Many seminars were also held to inform the general public about the role of women in society. Among them were "Women's Role in National Industrialization and Modernization," "Men's Role in the Family," "Domestic Violence Against Women," "Exemplary Grandparents and Parents, and Good Children," "Happy Family" and "Women and Family in Market Mechanism."²³

Achievements of Vietnamese women:

Although there were certain constraints in the improvement of women's status and roles in leadership positions as mentioned in the first part, Vietnamese women are still able to produce notable achievements. At present, women account for 18.5 percent of the National Assembly seats.²⁴ Women occupy 20.1 percent of the provincial People's Committees and 18.4 percent of the district or ward People's Committees. In state enterprises and government institutions, women cadres make up 10 to 12 percent of the total personnel. In the Vietnam Communist Party (VCP), 10.5 percent of the Central Committee are women. At provincial, district and grassroots levels, 7 to 15 percent of the VCP are women. In various political and social organizations, with the exception of the VWU, the percentage of women cadres is in the range of 15 to 25 percent. Vietnam has one female vice president, one female minister and several high-ranking government officials on the list. With the present percentage of women in the National Assembly, Vietnam ranks 19th in the world in the proportion of women in parliament, higher than Japan, France, England and even the US (4.6–11 percent). In some countries in the Middle East and South Pacific, the number of women in parliament can be counted by fingers. For example, in Jordan there is only one woman in parliament. While in Kuwait, women still have no right to vote.²⁵

In the economic sector, the promotion of women in agricultural management is not significant although the government has stipulated quotas for women in leadership position. After the flow of promotions from 1967 to 1973, progress in enforcing the directive has slowed down. For example, in 1966 only 3 percent of co-op presidents are women. Fifteen years later, the percentage for all of Vietnamese female co-op presidents was only 5.1 although the number of female vice presidents was 18.3 percent.²⁶ This showed that women were still second class when it came to management positions.

However, the percentage of women managers in selected industries has increased gradually since the reunification. Women occupied high positions in state enterprises or private companies. In a survey of 788 enterprises conducted by the Labor and Social Affairs Institute, 21.3 percent of all private company directors are women. In the garment and food processing industries, this percentage increases to 30 percent. The data in the survey also shows that 62.5 percent of female directors are in the age group of 36 to 49.²⁷ These women are able to run medium and small-size enterprises in both private and public sectors. In addition, there were twice as many women leaders in light industries in 1976: from 23 to 54. The figure of women managing handicraft co-operatives also doubled during the same period of time.²⁸

Although the number of women with postgraduate education is low compared to other countries, this number is very high compared to 20 years ago in Vietnam. According to a report by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, 38 percent of all working women hold university degrees, 13.5 percent of them have master or doctorate degrees, and 4.5 percent held the title of professors or associate professors in 1994.²⁹

In the cultural and social fields, women hold most of the top positions in NGOs and religious groups. Previously, men headed family enterprises. Now, 27 percent of 900,000 family enterprises in the country are headed by women.³⁰

Prospects for Vietnamese Women

Family Versus Profession

Women have many valuable traditional virtues: diligence, industry, dynamism, creativity, altruism and a high sense of responsibility for the family and society.³¹

Compared to men, women are given more responsibility, but afforded fewer rights. The following "Seven Roles Framework" as examined by the ILO 32 can help us to have a more systematic and comprehensive understanding of the constraints imposed on women regarding their time, health, strength and creativity, and how these affect their ability to lead.

(a) Parental role/maternal role: focuses on women's function as bearers, nurses and socializers of the next generation.

(b) Occupational role: mentions the ability of women to carry out productive and income-earning activities.

(c) Conjugal role: refers to the role as a wife/partner. This may include procreation, sexual satisfaction, domestic services, financial/material support, economic cooperation, companionship, etc.

(d) Domestic role: refers to all behavior related to housework or any domestic affairs.

(e) Kin role: means the responsibility of women as daughters, sisters, grandmothers, nieces and so on. This includes a series of activities and participation in protocols, life rituals such as funerals, weddings and birthdays.

(f) Community role: means the relationship with the community, neighbors, colleagues, friends and so on. Women must be involved in communal welfare meetings, celebrations or festival feasts. In the rural areas, in particular, much time is spent on preparing and cooking for these occasions and on tidying up when the festivity is over.

(g) Individual role: refers to the leisure and cultural activities, sports and artistic endeavors of women.³³

Given such multi-functional roles, women balance social activities and family activities. Men are allowed to concentrate their efforts on careers. Women must divide their energies among their children, relatives and the community. Thus, time and health are some of the factors that act as hindrances to the development of women.

If women spend more time for social activities, their time used for family tasks is less and vice versa. To achieve a healthy balance, not only do women need to allocate carefully their time and strength, but also need sympathy, understanding and assistance from their families and society.

Overall, Vietnamese women are able to manage the demand of family and career fairly well. Vietnamese women are not only the "Ministers of Home Affairs" but "Ministers of Foreign Affairs" as well. Now, there is no field where women have not made a mark and behind a man's success, there is usually the shadow or the picture of a capable woman.

Policies to encourage Vietnamese women

To address the needs of women with both career and family, the government and various social organizations and interest groups created more favorable conditions for women to develop their potentials:

In December 1986, the government enacted a new family law that incorporated the 1959 law with new provisions. The goal of the new legislation was "to develop and consolidate the social marriage and family system, shape a new type of man, and promote a new socialist way of life eliminating the vestiges of feudalism, backward customs, and bad or bourgeois thoughts about marriage and family." It stated that "the wife and husband are equals who love each other, who help each other to make progress, who actively participate in building socialism and defending the fatherland and work together to raise their children to be productive citizens for society."³¹ These regulations have allowed women to have more opportunities to participate in community and social activities.

In addition, to promote gender equality, members of the VWU took active part in a consciousness-raising campaign under the slogan "As good in running society as in running a home, women must be equals of men." Such campaigns resulted in a fairer division of labor between husbands and wives and the decline of customs and practices founded on belief in women's inferiority.³² This is also reflected in the right of individuals to select their own marriage partners. The VWU has tried to enhance the role of women in general and of female cadres in particular.

Some VWU strategies assisting women in developing their abilities and playing an active role in the society included the following:

(i) Supply sufficient and relevant conditions to enhance women's awareness and knowledge in all fields,

(ii) Help women to have a stable life, feel secure and have equal footing with men in the development of economy and society by creating jobs and generating income,

(iii) Provide better health care for women and children, implement the family planning program, build happy families and fight against social evils, such as prostitution, drug-abuse, gambling, obsolete literature and corruption,

(iv) Participate actively in the drafting of state laws, policies, regulations and supervise the implementation of these policies and regulations concerning women and children.

(v) Enhance the role and position of women in leadership and in the decision-making process by improving their leadership skills and ability in strategic planning.

(vi) Consolidate and develop Women Unions at all levels and for other women's interest groups.³⁶

Moreover, VWU has created significant opportunities for Vietnamese women to take part in international seminars, workshops as well as to expand international relations with countries in Europe, America, Africa, the Middle East and other countries in Asia. VWU also cooperates and asks assistance from international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Many projects have been effectively implemented. Overall, women are present in all social activities, from environmental programs, family planning and birth control programs, to anti HIV/AIDS programs.

By the year 2000, VWU aims to have 20 to 39 percent of women elected to state agencies, 15 to 20 percent at different levels of the government. Woman leaders must appear in all ministries and branches. Capable women should be directors or vice-directors in enterprises where 30 percent or more of the workers are female. Another goal is, among 52 percent of the social labor force, VWU will try to realize that 37 percent

of the workers are diploma holders.³⁷ However, this goal requires special efforts to become a reality.

Prospects and challenges for women leaders

In the First International Leadership Program held in Amman, Jordan (June 1 to July 3 1997), 35 percent of participants were women³⁸ from all over the world. Although they were of different backgrounds, different professions, different expectations and views, they all looked at the same purpose: equity and equality for women as well as opportunities for female leaders in the next century. Dr. Nafis Sadiq, Executive Director of UNFPA and UN Under Secretary General, stated that enhancing the roles of women and encouraging the participation of women in population control programs, sustainable development and other programs related to women, children, environment, etc. was one of the priorities in the Agenda of the 21st Century.

Another event worth mentioning is the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995 which was followed by a series of international, regional and national activities to implement the Global Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women up to the year 2000.³⁹ It did not only generate new opportunities for women in different countries to show their solidarity, to promote friendship and cooperation, but it also opened the door for women to the technological and scientific era.

With their strong will and the support of the government and various international and national organizations, Vietnamese women will have even more opportunities to get better education, better working conditions as well as quality employment opportunities. In addition, the progress of technology and sciences will help liberate women from housework, which take most of their time. Nowadays, international organizations and several interest groups encourage the participation of women. In an interview with *Women of Vietnam* magazine, Mme. Nguyen Thi Binh stated her belief in the prosperous future of Vietnamese women. She said:

Recently, negative factors of the market mechanism begin to affect the social life as well as the family life of women. But we are confident of the trend for progress in the solution of women's problems in Vietnam,

since the Party and the State consider it an important soci-political task. Vietnamese women themselves, with their long-standing traditions, have better and better understanding of their legitimate rights for the equality.⁴⁰

In fact, compared to other countries, the prospect for Vietnamese women is more optimistic. Ms. Nana Mouskouri, singer and goodwill ambassador for the UN Children's Fund recognized that:

Women in Vietnam have more opportunities than those in some Western countries and particularly Japan...They are more appreciated and they participate much more in social life and they are active in political life which is not always the case elsewhere in the world.⁴¹

The difficulties and challenges are still there. All requirements for male leaders also apply to females with no exception. Adel Safty, in his report to the UN University Council in December 1996 (Santiago, Chile), stated that:

A multi dimensional modern leaders must be the person who is a critical thinker and problem solver, autonomous, involved, empowered and willing to empower others, enthusiastic, in touch with people and sensitive to their identity, willing to take risk, able to effectively evaluate a situation and adopt appropriate responses, moving between task orientation and people orientation, able to allocate and delegate responsibilities, has a vision and the ability to effectively communicate it, and to mobilize and motivate others to share a passionate commitment to its relation.⁴²

It also requires a fair and impartial playground in which both male and female leaders can join. Given such prerequisites, women leaders will face big challenges in the future.

Firstly, they need to have a broad international perspective. Thanks to scientific and technological progress, our world has become smaller. Nations and human beings are brought closer. Future leaders must make important decisions in a broader context, beyond the boundaries of their countries. Nationalism must be harmonized with internationalism to help a nation integrate into the world trend.

Secondly, coordination of capabilities should be emphasized. Internationalism needs highly competent management and coordination capabilities from the leaders. This coordination is related to various dimensions, namely, coordination among different countries, different organizations in different fields. Poor coordination will keep leadership from moving forward. Therefore, women leaders need to be open-minded, radical and determined to look beyond their gender view. They must be ready for new ideas to accept new ideas and positive changes.

Finally, to control, instead of being controlled by the situation, leaders must have enough creativity. This requires female leaders to have broad interests and thirst for knowledge in order to understand the gap between theories and practices. They can close the gap with better ideas. Once goals are set, women leaders should be confident in pursuing the goals, even though they may face several obstacles or defeats,⁴³ such as in case of declining political power of Vietnamese women during the 1970s and 1990s. There are not too many opportunities for women and opportunities do not wait for anybody. Sometimes the opportunity appears only once so it is extremely important to catch the opportunity. Therefore, women leaders need to continuously sharpen their interpersonal and managerial skills, to continuously enhance their knowledge and to equip themselves with a better understanding of technology, management and other aspects. When the door of the 21st century opens, they can step into the world of leadership with greater confidence.

Conclusion

Although the doctrines of Confucianism and feudalism still influence the thinking of Vietnamese society, women and their achievements are changing this point of view.

Women do not ask for special favors to prove themselves. They only want the equal right to take part in the policy-making process and other activities that can contribute to the development of Vietnam as well as the world.

In addition, women in Vietnam do not have the intention of assuming a role superior to men. Women only want a chance to contribute to the peace-making and peace-keeping process. They want to bring prosperity to the world because when wars or conflicts erupt, women and children suffer the most. Women are often praised as "the beautiful flowers, the

bright moon at night, and the pure stream that can bring inspiration to many poets and writers.' However, women do not wish to be seen as ornaments. They want to live, to take part, and above all, to have a choice for a society of equals. ♀

Endnotes

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