

Viet Kieu Families and the Pattern of Social Mobility in Thai Society

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Abstract

The research article is a part of a Ph.D. dissertation titled "Social Mobility of Viet Kieu Families in Thai Society", and aims to investigate patterns of Social Mobility in the Viet Kieu Families. The study was conducted using qualitative approach. Observation, Life history, In-depth interview, and group interview were used to collect the research data.

Research results found that the background of the Viet Kieu Families has developed based on the Ho Chi Minh doctrine. The doctrine has focused on ancestors, families, societies, and homeland, described as "Patriotism, sedulity, thriftiness, goodness", and "May the Vietnamese and the Thai live together peacefully". The doctrine has appeared in the form of ancestor shrines in the Viet Kieu Families, and has impacted on the internal conditions within families including structures, roles, communications, values, power structures, network relationships, etc. When families were faced with external challenges, they would remind themselves of the doctrine and apply it for use in Thai Society in economic, social, political, and cultural terms until they joined with Thai society.

Keywords: Social Mobility, Viet Kieu Families

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Introduction

Society in the 21st century has unlimited Social Mobility. Degeneration of the Nation-State which used to consist of population, area, government, and sovereignty leads to a decrease of hegemony that makes people, information, ideology, technology, and capital shape a new generation of society able to collaborate in providing a main stream of change. Economically, these are the opportunities to develop a country under the principle of capitalism. On the other hand, this mobility brings about social inequality of people in many ways. People in each society have unequal potential for capital mobility, (Vincent Parillo, John Stimson & Ardyth Stimson, 1996). Under the change in world social conditions, Social Mobility for a group of people who settle down in a new area by establishing a family can be described in the form of Upward Mobility, Downward Mobility, and Horizontal Mobility of the next generation away from the Family of Orientation. Because family is the main institution of society, then social mobility is insistent and fights to get rid of social hegemony (Lever & Estrada, 2012). Therefore, research for information about the State of knowledge of social mobility of the family lead to a policy to develop the main institute of society which is related to the shape of society in the 21st century that focuses on the importance of family. Thus, Social Mobility is an adaptation of Globalization which creates hegemony and provides both the opportunity for social mobility while retaining a balanced society such as with the Viet Kieu Families and the Pattern of Social Mobility in Thai Society

Concepts and arguments on Social Mobility

Social mobility is the movement in the social position of an individual, family or social group to change their status or social role as a form of social mobility, for example, horizontal mobility and vertical mobility, upward mobility or downward mobility (Turner, 2003) However, to study economic social mobility using quantitative

research methods is to just look at a part of society. In fact, having economic status cannot lead to social mobility until there is prestige within the society as Max Weber mentioned that "Patterns of social life are a social requirement, not an economical requirement. And those who are rich may not have social prestige." (Max Weber, 1967). Weber believed that conditions of social mobility must include the Power, Privilege and Prestige of society. Max Weber defined that having power is the possibility that a man can achieve his goal, although there is resistance, regardless of whatever it is (Max Weber, 1978). Traditional authority is a form of power that is given on the basis of being a charismatic authority whereby the authority comes from the personality and leadership qualities of the individual such as morals, courage and sacrifice. The rational of legal authority is the power coming from a legal order and the laws that have been enacted in it (Supang Chantavanich, 2008) Weber believed that the power of these three often appear to blend because of the combination of various powers, it is the process of establishing authority in society. (Somsak Samakkeetham, 2011). Having authority can show the amount of resources that can be utilized, and they can be recognized by society. (Burke, 2011). Privilege is the dominant ability to earn opportunities in society more than others can. The need for permission to be allowed to join a group/society can be viewed by the prestige of the current members such as the Viet Kieu themselves and Thai people (Max Weber, 1967). In this study the qualitative research method was used to study the pattern of social mobility in a holistic way to examine meaning, context, and the specific social conditions that can dynamically explain the phenomenon of social mobility in the age of globalization. (Somsak Srisontisuk, 2006)

Research Methodology

This article is part of a research study titled "Social mobility of the Viet Kieu families in Thai society" The study was conducted using qualitative approach. According to the research, question 1 aims to investigate patterns of Social mobility in Viet Kieu Families. The researcher employed a case study approach which consisted of the following research tools; Observation, Life history, In-depth interview, and Group Interview to obtain the data covering the research objectives. Units of analysis consisted of family and social groups including (1) the prestige Viet Kieu Families (2) the privileged Viet Kieu Families (3) the accepted Viet Kieu Families and (4) Social Group (Clubs, or Thai Viet Association in Thailand). The research areas are Nakorn Panom, Sakon Nakhon, Udon Thani and Nong Khai provinces.

Results

Background of Viet Kieu social mobility of the families is the turning point of their inclusion in to Thai society at community, social and nation-state level (Thanyathip Sripana & Trinh Dieu Thin, 2005). The start of Viet or Annam Immigrants appearing in Thai society began with the issue of harming National Security because the Vietnamese moved during the age of Colonialism, in 1946 when the French Colonialists of Indo - China vanquished the Vietnamese patriots from Suvannakhet, Tha Kaek, and Vientiane. This caused about 47,000 Vietnamese citizens to migrate to Thailand. (Kachadpai Burudphat, 1983)

Status of Viet Kieu Families in Thailand

The early days of the old Vietnamese families in Thailand saw them often dispersed and settled in new areas such as Bandong, Muang Pijit, Bannong One, Muang Udon Thani, Thasadet Community, Muang Nong Khai, Amphur Sawangdandin, Sakhon Nakhon, and Bannajog, Muang Nakhon Panom. The Vietnamese first arrived during

the time that Thailand and France still had a relationship. As a result, the Vietnamese dared not expose themselves publicly. The existence of the Vietnamese within this phenomenon is referred to as families taking care of themselves alone. However, the situation changed after a meeting at Udon Thani province in 1926 when 600 heads of family attended. At the meeting, they explained that the Vietnamese people, living in Thailand, took care only of themselves, not anyone else. Every family, both close members and relatives, had different opinions on joining the Association and if these divisions were to continue, the fight for independence of Vietnam would not be successful. In the meeting, that had Ho Chi Minh as the chairman, they established Hoi Than Ai Associations, which translates to "Love, Hospitality", to develop careers, to create a bright future of their children, and to restore their nation (Sern Thung, 2008). After the meeting, Viet Kieu Families in Thailand increased their unity and had a closer association to Vietnam (Aiji Murashima, 2012). Regarding the movement of the Vietnamese into Thailand in 1946, the Thai government called these immigrants the 'New Vietnamese group'. The New Vietnamese group also showed respect to the Shrine. From the interview, Ho Chi Minh's doctrine integrated with the ancestor's shrine to become the homeland shrine which the Vietnamese respect highly. (Sunthorn Panrath: interviewed)

Motherland's shrine

Motherland shrine (Ban Tho To Quoc) or Vietnamese ancestor's shrine, symbolized their ancestors and was produced in Thailand when the Vietnamese first arrived. It was upgraded from the ancestor's shrines which the Vietnamese used to respect their ancestors from ancient times. After they were devastated by French colonialism and then the USA, the Vietnamese in the country formed many groups to defend their country. The Viet Kieu supported their comrades. They hoped that after the war ended, they would move back to their homeland. The shrine became a new

symbol of patriotism. The doctrine has focused on ancestors, families, societies, and homeland with the quotation "Patriotism, sedulity, thriftiness, goodness", and "May the Vietnamese and the Thai live together peacefully". The doctrine appeared in the form of ancestor's shrines in the Viet Kieu Families, and affected the internal conditions within families including structures, roles, communications, values, power structures, network relationships, etc. The keywords on the shrine state: on the top row "Nation is supreme" left (of shrine) hard work, saving, honesty and morality" right (of shrine) "The relationship between Thailand and Vietnam is forever" (Sunthorn Panrath: interviewed)

Mobility in the Economic Dimension

The Thai government defined them as "Refugee Annam" in 1984. They were under the Alienation of Land Act 1979 B.E. Before that the Veit Kieu families were under the control of Martial law resulting from the coup d'tat, issue 332, 13 December 1972, that the Thai government controls the limits of occupations for aliens to protect jobs only for the Thai citizen. Since there were 39 general occupations the Vietnamese were prevented from taking part in, they started to sell and save following in Ho Chi Minh's Doctrine (Sunthorn Panrath, interviewed) Therefore, the Viet Kieu have had money to save since they arrived and have had the values of their life path as "hard work, saving, honesty, and morale" in every dimension of their life. (Kerm, Thuesak Dinhdok, Thien, Preecha Laksanasakulchai, Sunthorn Panrath, Sorath Pitchuancom, and Wu Mangh Hung: interviewed)

It can be concluded that social mobility in the economic dimension of the Viet Kieu Families was begun at that time. In 1994 the Thai government gave Vietnamese, who were third generation, Thai citizenship (Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin, 2005). This was the beginning of The Viet Kieu being able hold the rights to their properties and economic capital legally via their family members or

relatives who became Thai citizens. This was the starting point for the Viet Kieu to save money over a long period, while they started to seek other jobs namely as civil servant, entrepreneur, merchant, and so on (Sumeth Woraharn: interviewed)

Mobility in the Cultural Dimension

Getting the right to stay legitimately brought about mobility in a cultural dimension that the Vietnamese had believed in for a long time, since the beginning of national liberation. Thailand was the main focus for the Vietnamese national liberation movement to raise funds and support the war to restore their country. Awareness of Vietnamese culture is a feature that should be retained and passed on continually. This is because the movement group believes that history, culture, and language are the key to keeping the Vietnamese and the Overseas Vietnamese or Viet Kieu respecting and supporting the nation restoration movements. (Aiji Murashima, 2012). However, after the independence war was completed in 1975, the idea of Vietnamese culture was still quite concentrated, until Vietnamese culture in Thailand became fully recognized in 2004. The Thai -Vietnamese Friendship Village at Ban Najog, Nakorn Panom province, through the cooperation of the Government of Thailand and the Government of Vietnam (Thanyathip Sripana and Trinh Dieu Thin, 2005) has been upgraded to international relation level and shows a higher level of mobility in terms of Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese culture also expanded with the opening of the Ho Chi Minh history learning center at Ban Nong - On Chiang Pin, Muang Udon Thani district in 2011 (Preecha Laksanasakulchai) Since then, Vietnamese people have held a Memorial day for President Ho Chi Minh and celebrated the Vietnam National Day on September 2, quite openly within Thai society (Jatuporn Donsom., 2012) up until now.

Mobility in the Social Dimension

After the Vietnamese started to play a role in the economic and cultural society of Thailand, they became more and more recognized by Thai people as "Vietnamese-Thai" rather than in the old way as "Kaew" or "Refugee Annam". Up to the present time, the Vietnamese people continue to devote themselves to serve their surrounding community in many ways in the form of the "Vietnamese Thai club" in many areas such as Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Sakon Nakhon and Nakhon Phanom province. For example, they built the very first overpass for Udon Thani province, which is located in front of Udon Thani Rajabhat University. They take part in supporting government agency requests for assistance with club activities and events such as providing aid for the Bangkok Flooding in 2011 (Kerm: interviewed). The Viet Kieu in Nong Khai also supported the public sector by building a hospital, Vietnam monument, and by providing a Public Park. (Theusak Dinhdok: interviewed). However, after the start of the relationship between Thailand and Vietnam in terms of cultural relations in 2004, the relationship between the countries and people has grown substantially until there has become a change of the social groups into the Vietnamese - Thai Association. There are Vietnamese - Thai Associations in many provinces such as "Udon Thani Vietnamese - Thai Association", "Nong Khai Vietnamese - Thai Association", "Sakhon Nakhon Vietnamese - Thai Association", "Nakorn Panom Vietnamese - Thai Association", and the latest, the Vietnamese - Thai Association of Thailand, opened on January 24, 2013 and is located in Sakhon Nakhon province.

Mobility in the Political Dimension

Receiving Thai citizenship for Viet Kieu in 1992 led to the right to enter political circles at both local and national level. However, the political dimension of the Viet Kieu still has a minor role to play because those who have citizenship are of

the third generation and are young, still making their way in life. However, some of them have taken their place in local political circles; for example at the municipality of Nong Khai and the Udon Thani provincial administrative organization. However, the way into the Thai political circle is not easy, because the Vietnamese come up against the old discourse about things that used to be harmful to Thailand such as communism and that affects them a lot. The result of this study shows that Viet Kieu Families have a pattern of Social Mobility from economic, cultural, social, and political perspectives.

Pattern of Viet Kieu Social Mobility in Thai Society

Mister Tuesak Dinh Duk is a former president of the Vietnamese Thai Association in Nong Khai Thailand, who owns Vietnamese food stores in Nong Khai municipality. His family is descended from a primary family. The authority that he has consisted of traditional authority which he believes he obtained after he participated in social activities such as the invitation of a National Artist from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam who came to exhibit in Nong Khai municipality in 2004, after which, his shop sales became much higher. Also, there are new customers, such as the civil servants in Nong Khai province. Economic authority is intimately connected with the traditional authority that has been established. **Authority on the basis of Charisma**, Viet Kieu families believe that most on the power of charisma is descended from the family foundation. Because their family values are "diligent, saving, honesty, morality, and ethics," values which have been recognized widely by the surrounding society. The most important trade area or market in the municipality is Po Chai market in Nong Khai municipality, its importance regarded as being derived from their diligence, honesty and patience. **Authority** Economic power might be strengthening their position and directly affect their businesses such as holding the position of President of the Thailand Vietnamese group. **Privilege**; Financial institutions, such as banks often have

special offers for Viet Kieu families when loaning money. Sometimes, bank officials will visit their houses to ask them to save money in the bank that is offering the privilege for Vietnamese.

Prestige comes from having the ability to earn and hold property which comes from their "work hard, saving, honesty, and ethics," that they still have today. By recognizing the efforts of their predecessors who saved money for them, they were able to build a family and expand their business that they can now run legally. (Teerawuth Charoenrath, 2008) However, from the point of view of Thai people, they often think that the Vietnamese businesses grow very fast. Actually, their capital comes from their predecessor's hard work and saving. The primary generation of Mister Tusak Dinh Duk's family moved from Amphur Sawang Dandin to Amphur Muang Nong Khai in 1965. His father was employed in sewing work and his mother was in sales. His siblings needed to help their parents to work in the shop. Therefore, the people surrounding the family all accepted their diligent and work hard doctrine. Later, Mister Tusak's father expanded his business and bought a series of townhouses. After Mister Tusak got married, he opened a restaurant in his father building. He was accepted by both his family and the community around for his success. (Thuesak Dinduk: interviewed) In conclusion, the pattern of economic social mobility begins with charisma. Due to their life path of "work hard, saving, honesty, and morality" the Vietnamese can expand their businesses continually. They can build their power from their culture, and that leads them in to political circles. Their prestige has led them to have opportunities in trading. They can loan money at a low interest rate. Successes in trading brought more income and an increase in acceptance from the people around them.

Viet Kieu Families' Pattern of Social Mobility in the cultural dimension

One pattern that is related to the social mobility of a family is when it has been involved with Vietnamese cultural festivals (Preecha Laksanasakulchai: interviewed). The study includes the family of Mr. Preecha Laksanasakulchai, 68, whose father worked in Vietnamese culture and with the Ho Chi Minh learning center. Mr. Preecha Laksanasakulchai is now the administrator for education and tourism concerning historical sites and Ho Chi Minh's life.

Authority is of a traditional nature; the family leader has the chance to work in Vietnamese culture and the language school. Also, he takes part in events like opening Vietnamese language schools in many provinces, while he will also be in charge of and organize events and festivals. Currently, the present family leader has become the administrator of the Ho Chi Minh history learning center, and an ecotourism site of Ho Chi Minh's life that plays a big role in displaying Vietnamese culture to Thai people. **Authority on the basis of charisma;** Due to Family orientation, the family leader will introduce Vietnamese culture in terms of language and rituals, the charisma of the primary family will affect their children in terms of knowledge that will be transferred from generation to generation so that they are trustworthy people within society. Therefore, the role of the family leader who worked close to President Ho Chi Minh and his role in introducing Vietnamese culture increased his charisma.

Authority The Family of orientation did not have any authority from the Thai state, but they were recognized by the Vietnamese Communist Party. A descendant who became leader of the family was appointed by the Thai government to manage the Ho Chi Minh leaning center, so they then had complete authority. **Privilege** began with the family of orientation leader who had the chance to work closely with President Ho Chi Minh, which the Vietnamese regard as a very special position. Therefore, the privilege was transferred to the offspring who were asked to manage and to deal with

special occasions between the Thais and Vietnamese and they also had the right to meet the Vietnamese leader, Thai Vietnam association leader, and so on. Prestige; the family of orientation had prestige from President Ho, the Communist Party, and other people; therefore the family descendants inherited that prestige.

In Conclusion, the Viet Kieu family's social mobility begins with their knowledge of Vietnamese culture, and the rituals and ceremony of their culture. They can use that knowledge to teach other people, this leads them to have a traditional authority. With the quotation "Work hard, saving, honesty, and morality" on the shrine, by working closely to President Ho, and teaching, this leads them to have authority on the basis of charisma. Because of their appreciation by the Communist Party and their position at the Ho Chi Minh learning center, they have the right to meet the supreme leader of Vietnam. All of these things lead them to have prestige in the eyes of the people in their group, and also with Thai people.

Viet Kieu Families' Pattern of Social Mobility in the social dimension

Mister Germ (Winai Le Vanh) the former chairman of the Vietnamese Thai association and former chairman of the Udon Thani Vietnamese association comes from an original Vietnamese family. His family is involved in farming. He has a father, mother and four siblings. His father passed away when he was 2. Therefore, Germ replaced his father as the family leader from that time. Because his mother was a member of the national restoration group, he was accepted by the comrades so when he was ready, he could take the position of chairman of the Vietnamese Thai association and become chairman of Udon Thani Vietnamese association (Kerm: interviewed). Power in the form of traditional authority did not appear in Mr. Germ's family, but the authority was based on charisma. When the family leader joined with the patriots to restore the nation, the family increased its charisma and gained credits in the communist party and among Vietnamese people. The strength of the family leader eventually

brought his child to the chair of the Vietnamese Thai association and Udon Thani Vietnamese association. Mister Germ believed that his family's success came from his mother who joined the nation restoration group which increased her charisma. Power: This family is not listed as having authority in Thai law; however, it appears in the new generation. Being the chairman of the Vietnamese Thai association and Udon Thani Vietnamese association, which are under Thai law, they have the permission to hold activities that support public benefit, as long as they have the privilege. **Privilege;** The family of orientation of Mister Germ did not have any privilege within society. However, the descendents have more support from the government because Mister Germ assisted the government by building a hospital. Therefore, their family members have paid their dues. Prestige; the family of orientation leader was recognized by the government and people of Vietnam because he joined the partisan movement in Vietnam. Subsequently, the family is recognized by Government agencies and is increasingly recognized socially in Thailand.

Social Mobility of the Viet Kieu Families in the social dimension is on the basis of the charisma that they earned in the past. It helps them to have the authority to hold the position of Vietnamese Thai association chairman. It shows that they have the authority under Thai law and they earn charisma because they use their authority to hold benefit activities for the community. Supporting the government and the people brought them recognition. For example, they contributed the first flyover road in Udon Thani which helped them to gain privilege with the government. At the same time, they have become accepted by the Government of Thailand and its people.

Viet Kieu Families' Pattern of Social Mobility in the Political dimension

To be voted for political positions such as Member of Parliament, Senator, President of the Provincial Administration, Member of the Provincial Administration and Mayor show that the Vietnamese clearly have prestige at the highest level. In this dimension, the power and privileges of the Vietnamese is recognized quite clearly. Politicians are public figures, therefore, this reflects on the family of Mr. Tien who was a Nong Khai city council member. Mr. Tien was born in 1965. His father is a Thai citizen who operated a bicycle taxi. His mother is Vietnamese. There are six children in the family, Mr. Tien was the fourth born. In his own family, Mr. Tien has a wife and 2 daughters.

Authority consisting of traditional authority: Traditional authority is not clear in the political dimension. They took part in ceremonies such as funerals, wedding ceremonies and charity events and Vietnamese festivals such as Vietnamese New Year. Mr. Tien stated that there are 26 temples in Nong Khai municipality. He had good knowledge of the temples because, before he took up his political position, he attended festivals in those temples.

Authority on the basis of charisma The quotation "work hard, saving, honesty and morality" is the teaching that makes the Vietnamese, continue to step up into leadership roles in the political dimension of society. In his previous career Mr. Tien was a construction contractor. He dealt with both private and government sectors. So he was recognized by both Vietnamese and Thai people.

Authority of Law: In 1993, Mr. Tien received Thai citizenship. Because of his charisma, he had the idea to enter into politics. He was a candidate for Nong Khai city council four times, and at the fifth attempt he was elected in the 2007 election. He was voted in again in 2012. Today he has been appointed to be the vice president of Nong Khai city council. Mr. Tien believes that he was elected by the people because of his charisma that he earned from helping people and so he became accepted (Thien: interviewed).

Privilege: Mr. Tien mentioned that his family does not have any privilege in politics because his father is Thai but his mother is a Vietnamese refugee. However, his primary family still has an advantage from his mother being Vietnamese. His two brothers served the army as conscripts and he enrolled in a Thai school. His education was; primary school at Watarun Rungsarit, and secondary school at Patumtep school in Nong Khai province. He has also got a diploma from the Thai - German Technique vocational school. His documentation is only a birth certificate and household registration while he has an alien identification card.

Prestige for the Vietnamese from the Thai government agencies took place in some circumstances such as Mister Tien's brother's having the right to serve in the army but the prestige ended after that. Mister Tien was able to enter Thai school for higher education which is more special than for other Vietnamese. Becoming registered in the government system can count as being very crucial. After mister Tien got Thai citizenship and had his family, he became more accepted. In conclusion, social mobility by authority of the law is the most important dimension. It can lead to building authority and charisma. In the practice of the quotation "work hard, saving, honesty, and morality" they will do any occupation and the Vietnamese get on with others easily and interact with people in the surrounding community. They can win a position in political circles which leads them to achieve power.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the article "*Viet Kieu Families and Pattern Social Mobility in Thai Society*" which is a part of a Ph.D. Dissertation "Social Mobility of Viet Kieu Families in Thai society" aims to examine patterns of Viet Kieu family's social mobility. The result of the study shows that Viet Kieu Families development is influenced by the principles of Ho Chi Minh. These are very important for Vietnamese Thai people because Ho Chi Minh played a very important role to support their morale in order to

awake and fight against colonialism. From the case study it was found that the social mobility of Vietnamese Thai is systematic. It starts with social mobility in the economic dimension. It continues with the new generation of Vietnamese families in Thailand. They built family businesses as well as introducing their culture, language, life style, arts, and history of fighting to the Thai people. They move in the social dimension to get the social recognition that they are a part of the society. Lastly, social mobility in the political dimension is still reduced for Vietnamese Thai. However, the literature shows that the overview of Vietnamese Thai social mobility is as follows; economic, cultural, social, and political dimensions.

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Interviews

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Mr. Thien on 27 August 2013 at the Nongkhai Municipality, Muang District, Nongkhai Province.

Mr. Preecha Laksanasakulchai on 23 August 2013 at Center of Learning and Historical Tourism of Ho Chi Minh, Muang District, Udon Thani Province.

Mr. Sunthorn Panrath on 16 August 2013 at the Udon Thani Municipality, Muang District, Udon Thani Province.

Mr. Sorath Pitchuanom on 22 August 2013 at Udon Thani Rajabhat University, Muang District, Udon Thani Province.

Mr. Wu Mangh Hung on 21 August 2013 at the Udon Thani Municipality, Muang District, Udon Thani Province.