



Women, Feminism, and Confucianism in Vietnam in the Early 20th Century



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[*Abstract*]

The early years of the twentieth century introduced Vietnam, then a French colony, to feminism, which helped expose the problem of suicide among women, prostitution, and the trafficking. This article surveyed writings in three influential newspapers published for and by women, namely, “*Phụ Nữ Tân Văn*” (PNTV) (*Woman’s Newspaper*) 1929-1934, “*Phụ nữ Thời Đàm*” (PNTĐ) (*Women’s Discussions on Topical Questions*) 1930-1934, and “*Đàn Bà*”(ĐB) (*Women*) 1939-1945. The writings were analyzed to illustrate how feminism was perpetrated in this period, and how the writers were able to reconcile it with prevalent Confucianism, which this paper also argued as having put in place, gender inequality.

Keywords: Women, Confucianism, Feminism, Women’s Newspapers

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I . Introduction

In general, women's rights became an issue of concern in Vietnamese society in the early twentieth century. It was widely reported and discussed in the press. More than ten newspapers were established for the sake of women in this period. This article surveys three newspapers, namely, *Phụ Nữ Tân Văn* (*PNTV*) (1929-1935), *Phụ nữ Thời Đàm* (*PNTĐ*) (1930-1934), and *Đàn Bà* (*ĐB*) (1939-1945), considered most significant because rallied for substantially change in society's understanding of women and fought for the female labor force in Vietnam. This study assumes that the press played a critical role in changing public perception about women, especially during this period.

As advocates of women, each paper kept a specific perspective and concretely developed principles. *PNTV* confirms that it was "an independent organization, working single-mindedly at women's issues, and surveying all matters relative to women. That means, it will deal with issues connected to the whole nation's fate" (No.1, 2/5/1929). Meanwhile, *PNTĐ* utilized two keywords, "Balance" and "Neutral" to express its editorial attitude. Both *PNTĐ* and *ĐB* advocated to "heighten knowledge," by elaborating on their mission: "What are backward things we change, what are legitimate benefits we follow, in such a way that is appropriate to an evolution of human beings and preservation of a particular beauty and identity of Vietnamese women" (No.1, 8/11/1932). The three established a common platform for people to discuss women's rights and issues—a landmark in Vietnamese culture rife with gender inequality.

The French introduced feminism to Vietnam, and it certainly made an impact in public consciousness. It also led to conflict, as it interrogated traditional views on women and their role in society. The aforementioned newspapers focused on forwarding causes, proposing solutions to change a depressing reality from the context of Vietnamese culture and history, and encouraging women to participate in freeing themselves from inequalities.

II . Feminism: Causes & Effects

2.1. Internal and External Conditions of Vietnam Society in the early 20th century

2.1.1. French Colonial Policies in Indochina

Long before the rise of newspapers for and by women, the press in general has been instrumental in French colonialism in Indochina. Publications such as *An Nam tạp chí (Annam Review)*, *Đông Dương tạp chí (Indochina Review)*, *Ngày Nay (Present Day)*, *Phong Hóa (Mores)*, *Tri Tân (New Knowledge)*, *Trung Lập (Neutral News)*, *Thanh Nghị (Enlightened Opinion)*, among others, mirrored colonial values and programs.

The book, *Giáo dục Việt Nam thời kỳ thuộc địa, qua tài liệu và tài liệu lưu trữ 1858-1945 (Vietnamese Education in a Colonial Period through Materials and Stored Materials 1858-1945)* (2016), published by National Archives Center N.1, Vietnam, contains materials that attest to education policies on education between 1858 to 1945. This period saw how the French deployed an educational system that broadly formed subjects from the basic to the disciplinary levels. Ngo Bac, in a review of his translation of John K. Whitmore's "From Classical Scholarship To Confucian Belief In Vietnam" wrote that "the invasion of the French finished a Confucian cycle in Vietnam by the abolishment of tests in Han and a propagation Vietnamese language, using the sound notation replaced hieroglyph of the Chinese" (2016).

Governor-General of Indochina (1897-1902) and France President (1931-1932) Paul Doumer, in his memoirs *Xứ Đông Dương (L' Indo-Chine Francaise)*¹, asserted that "being present at Indochina of the Republic of France not only deployed the missions of organization and management of colonies but also... strengthened France's reputation, power and actions in Indochina" (2015:15). This was confirmed by Alleyne Ireland, FRGS, in his essay "French Indochina": "With Indochina, Paul Doumer's reforms achieved lots of meanings in the direction of improving the colonial administration

¹ These memoirs were written and published in French. But in this article, all quotations of this work were translated from the Vietnamese.

and finance.” (1905: 145). Despite aversion to colonialism, it cannot be discounted that the French invasion is a historical turning point for Vietnam, considering the many changes that will be surface the early twentieth century.

2.1.2. Social conflicts and its Manifestations: Suicide among Women, Prostitution, and Trafficking

French colonial policies led to a “Europeanization” in Vietnam, as Vietnamese poet Hoai Thanh attested: “A nail has also carried a part of the Western spirit on human life and the universe, and one day, it will change the mind of the East.” (1942: 16); “The encounter with the West is the biggest change in Vietnamese history for many centuries” (1942: 15). And change resulted in social conflicts, as Virginia Thompson, in her *French Indochina*, emphasized that “no other culture can compare to the attitude of the Vietnamese with Western education” (1937: 434). The Vietnamese way of life changed as it adopted, and to a certain extent “distorted” Western culture and values. Thompson reported a specific case: “Annam people sacrificed by sending their children to study at French schools. They accepted the change in their children's behaviors: respect and traditional manners have been altered with rudeness and arrogance. The Patriarchal system was shattered. Western culture has given birth to an individual self in society” (1937: 434). Despite conflicts, more ideas continued to proliferate, like feminism.

Our subjects, the three newspapers, *PNTV* in Sai Gon, and *PNTĐ*, and *ĐB* in Hanoi, provide the most comprehensive account of the feminist movement in early twentieth century Vietnam. While feminism (Phong trào Nữ quyền in Vietnamese) was found to be quite strange by intellectuals in Vietnam, it significantly rallied for equal rights, as it focused on issues that directly affected women. One issue was the spike in female suicide, which these papers related to oppressive social structures between the 1920s to the 1930s. In *PNTV*'s “Women Have Committed Suicide Again” (No. 123, June 2, 1932), for instance, the paper lamented that “the suicides have been an infectious disease which no power can stop.” The paper, by way of its two columns, “The Domestic News” and “Our Opinions of the Topical Questions” reported on these cases. The

first one more specifically reported in about 30 to 70 words the names, ages, and reasons for suicide—*PNTV*, No. 118, 28/1/1932: "Two Female Teachers Committed Suicide," "A Female Teacher Cut Her Bosom and Neck to Commit Suicide," "A Mother and Four Her Daughters Committed Suicide at Truc Bach Lake"; *PNTV* No. 115, 14/1/1932: "Because of the Obstacles in Love, a Girl Committed Suicide From a High Building"; *PNTV*, No. 98, 3/9/1931: "Two Female Siblings Committed Suicide at Hoan Kiem Lake at the Same Time"; *PNTV*, No. 218, 28/9/1933: "A Victim of the Constrained Marriage." Most were about 16 to 25 years old.

The papers also attempted to expose the sensitive issue of prostitution. By the end of the 1930s, *DB* reported that brothels rapidly increased like "mushrooms up after rain." (No. 35, 24/11/1939). Discussions were made in the form of literary works (novels, short stories, investigative reports), debates, and articles on treating venereal diseases (syphilis, gonorrhoea, etc). While only a few writings discussed prostitution, advertisements selling medicines for treating venereal diseases regularly appeared in the papers' pages.

Phan Khoi, a well-known scholar, wrote in *PNTV* that "society is getting sick, and the traditional Vietnamese views of the family are no longer compatible with the rapid changes in the society itself." The scholar added, "we must wake up and find the way to deal with the problem" (No. 83, 21/5/1931). His conclusion that "all deaths have risen from the family" (*PNTV*, No. 83, 21/5/1931) reminds of Vu Trong Phung's fierce polemics on the chaos of Vietnamese society in the early 20th century: "This society has a wound, and I have proposed how to cure it in my work *Lục Xi* (*Luc Xi: Prostitution and Venereal Disease in Colonial Hanoi*) Prostitution is the country's venereal disease. It has been destroying 9 out of 10 this society" (*Tuong Lai*, No. 11, 1937).

Related to both suicide and prostitution is trafficking of women. This phenomenon was less publicized in the press, however, when surveying news as well as non-fictitious and fictitious texts in the newspapers, trafficking (hidden in the form of marriage) caused the most suicidal deaths and prostitution. In the article "The

Unfair Disadvantage of Women” TB.ĐB asserted “wedding customs and marriage are essentially a sale of their daughters” (*ĐB*, No. 54, 3/5/1940). Forced marriages brought the girls in a wide range of a dismal situation.

2.2. Search for Reasons

The papers analyzed different social dimensions of the said problems. They maintained that kind of attitude despite being fundamentally incompatible with Vietnamese traditional culture, steeped in Confucianism. These interrogated the Confucian doctrines that encouraged male chauvinism, as they also proposed strong opinions on family issues such as marriage among young people, arranged marriage, dowry and wedding presents, and after-marriage matters, which illustrate the regime of a multi-generational family and customary laws based on Confucian practices. Some writers went to the extent of relating suicide, prostitution, and trafficking in women with Confucian ethical norms. For instance, Thu Linh, in "We Have Encouraged Prostitution," emphasized that arranged marriages only led men astray and women forced to engage in prostitution (*ĐB*, No. 35, 24/11/1939).

2.3. Solutions and the Emergence of Women's Equal Rights

The three newspapers sought to propose solutions to the crises of female suicide, prostitution, and trafficking, by “improv(ing) women's knowledge... (and) mak(ing) women broaden their knowledge and have an open mind,” as *PNTV* would have it (*PNTV*, No. 1, 2/5/1929). They concentrated on the publication of articles on education, the professions, sciences, literature, and family life, where women were deemed important.

For instance, in "What in Women's Brain Make them Inferior to men?," Dao Hoa discussed the need to “attend to the education of women” (*PNTV*, No.5, 30/5/1929) if society intends to embrace feminism. *PNTV* also recognized that "the noblest purpose of education is training human beings to have good behavior" (*PNTV*, No.17, 22/8/1929). In *PNTĐ*, No. 1, Monday, December 8, 1930, GGTP also argued that "if we want to gain an equal social position with men, we must have equal knowledge and profession." On the other hand, Doan Tam Dan emphasized that "women should realize

that their virtues and knowledge are very closely related to the country's future. Because the country's prosperity will depend on our educative responsibility" (*PNTĐ*, No. 2, 9/12/1930).

Meanwhile, Van Chung, in "The Education of Women Concerns the Future of Society," said that "women are a family's and a nation's models. A good or bad family, a healthy or weak nation depend on their hands" and "education can change the human mentality, amend the country's customs, complement human spirits, and stir human behavior" (*PNTĐ*, No.3, 10/12/1930). Intellectuals writing for the papers also showed how a lack in education leave women to a sad state, or as Nhan Viet would have it, a "weak mind" or "spiritless energy." "Committing suicide," she wrote, "comes from narrow-minded thoughts." (*PNTV*, No. 135, 6/6/1932).

Meanwhile, *PNTĐ* also argued not only for women's education and involvement in disciplinal fields and intellectual fields but also for their right to participate in political activities. (No. 21, 2-3/1/1931; No.22, 4/1/1931; No. 23, 5-6/1/1931)—in the name of liberating women's minds. The change this has brought was made evident in the use of language.

2.4. Women's Language in the Early 20th century and Traces of Confucianism in Vietnamese Social Life

In both cases of newspaper fora "Well-known Men's Opinions on Women" and "Women's Opinions on Women Themselves," male opinion almost drown women's voices, though the latter was still made a significant impact. It could have been otherwise, had there been more women registering their opinions. In *PNTĐ*'s forum, Phan Khoi reported that "female newspapers in our country is initiated by men with a goal to help women become fully human" (No.12, 3/12/1933).

Male writers were very instrumental in bringing forth the cause during the early years of the twentieth century. Until more women were educated and compelled to turn to writing, the movement gradually brought in changes. It was still notable however that papers became "a forum where Vietnamese educated women can share their ideas to educate and clearly understand their rights and

duties mutually" (*PNTV*,1929) or a "common institution where one is willing to receive and propagate all ideals related to maintaining ethics, broadening knowledge, and supporting women's activities" (*PNTĐ*,1930), despite being penned by male intellectuals.

When Susan Lanser argues that if women are voiceless, their language is "a discourse of the powerless," their speech may be characterized as "polite, emotional, enthusiastic, gossipy, talkative, uncertain, dull, and chatty" (1986: 348).

A characteristic feature of women's language in their writings is self-effacement, as may be seen in Huynh Lan's "Women's Opinions on Women's Issues" and Bang Tam's "The Feminist Narrative." Both started with wordy explanations about Western feminism and norms of a virtuous woman. Both authors were highly educated women but could not begin very directly and strongly in terms of language, a discourse of convolution and repetition. They represent many female authors who did not refer to their status and who seem to feel compelled to hide their individuality in all levels of Vietnamese grammar.

Their arguments mainly concentrated on the education and training of women to have good behavior and skills for looking after their children and supporting their families. Also, to resolve a complex or sensitive issue, female authors usually resorted to the flexible and indirect styles of intimate conversations or heart-to-heart stories. In Doan Tam Dan's "The Issues Women Should Discuss First," the writer conceded that the feminist movement brought women to much a better position in society, but however maintained the need for them to subscribe to traditional ethics and norms, as "women's ethics and knowledge are closely related with the nation's future" (*PNTĐ*, No.2).

Feminist texts by women of this period also used the kid-glove and indirect discourse. Although encouraging women to participate in the struggle for equal rights, some still could not transcend limiting thoughts. Articles by Bang Tam, Huynh Lan, Mrs. Nguyen Duc Nhuan, and Van Dai in *PNTV*; Doan Tam Dan, Trinh Lan Phuong, and Lien Huong in *PNTĐ*; and Thuy An, Ngoc Minh, and Hoang Ngoc Dung in *ĐB*, motivated women to excel in their fields

and jobs, but also emphasized that the family is the best place of women.

For instance, *PNTV* editor-in-chief Nguyen Duc Nhuan talked about feminism in Vietnam (*PNTV*, No. 91, 92, 23/7/1931) but emphasized three primary responsibilities of women: 1) to become the husband's friend; 2) to become the children's mother; and 3) to be the master of the house. The editor said: "the education and training of women are to do well in these things."

Looking at the lexicon and grammar of feminist writings may also provide insight to how women writers often utilized the grammatical structure of "should" or "should be + participle" in sentences: "The law 'One Husband-One Wife' should be passed"; "We should eliminate male chauvinism" (Huynh Lan); "Women should have their jobs in order to get equality with men" (Nguyen Duc Nhuan); "Women should step on all obstacles and advance forward" (*PNTV*, no. 117, 21/1/1932); "Women should give up timidity" (*PNTV*, No. 122, 13/3/1932). This provided them room for flexibility.

This will change when they confront the suicide and prostitution issues. Phrases "must" and "must be" became more prominent in the texts, as in the following: "Women must oppose the polygamous marriages because it makes women mean" (Nguyen Thi Bach Minh, *PNTV*, No. 96, 20/8/1931); "We must fight to build an equal society. We must abolish unsound customs that hurt women; we must eliminate what sets apart women and men, lower and higher classes." (Nguyen Duc Nhuan, *PNTV*, No. 110, 26/11/1931). These illustrated changes in women's discourse, as it gradually becomes stronger, more direct and undoubtedly sure.

2.5. Men's Discourse

As mentioned, although *PNTV*, *PNTĐ*, and *ĐB* were newspapers published by and for women, the most robust discourses made in these papers for women's equal rights were written by men.

Men's writings occupy a large portion in these papers. Male scholars and intellectuals of various education and persuasion occupied their pages—Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh, Nguyen Van

Vinh, Pham Quynh, Nguyen Phan Long, Phung Ngoc Tuong, Ngo Thuc Dich, Trinh Dinh Ru, and Phan Khoi.

Phan Khoi alone wrote about 70 articles discussing and fighting for women's equal rights, while at the same time resolving the conflict of women and Confucianism. It is quite clear to him that Confucian practices brought about gender oppression, most especially Confucian thought from the Han period and the Song dynasty. The latter, which introduced neo-Confucianism, taught that virtuous women must submit to men.

As a positive collaborator of *PNTV* and the Editor-in-chief of *PNTD*, Phan Khoi vigorously struggled with regressive Confucian thought. When encouraging women to get an education, he told them that "women must realize their fundamental requirements and entitlements" (*PNTV*, No. 7, 13/6/1929); he used the language of a magistrate to discuss the law that rules that women must stay loyal to their husbands when they die: "the principle that insists the cult of chastity for women was born from men's selfishness and has made women insignificant"; "Neo-Confucian ethical norms have caused men to turn nasty!" (*PNTV*, No. 21, 19/9/1929); "I want all the people in our society to wake up, repent, and adjust the moral principles and norms of male chauvinism" (*PNTV*, No. 22, 26/9/1929).

Lexical and grammatical differences, undoubtedly, reveal the attitudes and real status of men and women in society. Robin Lakoff, in her *Language and Women's Place* (1975), maintained that: "our use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings. Woman's language has as its foundation the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concern of life, which are preempted by men" (1975). Moreover, language used also illustrated that "a man is defined in the serious world by what he does, a woman by her sexuality, that is, in terms of one particular aspect of her relationship to men" (1975: 30). This is a viewpoint that we find appropriate as we continue to illustrate Vietnamese women's marginality. This perspective is also shared by Kira Hali, Miriam Meyerhoff, Susan Ehrlich, and Scott Fabius Fiesling (2004), and Susan Lanser (1985). Their works compel us to find implied

meanings in texts that are normally covered by different discourses and purposes.

It cannot be denied that the language of Vietnamese women writers of this period shows how they are still bound by many social conventions. They cannot completely transcend from Confucian ethical norms and the traditional culture. By and by, these writers avoided vague discourse and became stronger, as can be seen in Hue—Tam Ho Tai, who insisted that in Vietnam, “woman as a singular conceptual category does not correspond to reality” and her language “does not recognize the autonomy of the individual but instead enmeshes each and every speaking self in webs of familial and quasi-familial relationships” (2001: 168).

III. Reconciling Feminism and Confucianism in Vietnam

3.1. An Antagonistic Relationship

In the early twentieth century, Confucian practices were mainly influenced by the Han-Song Dynasties' neo-Confucian ideology. Essentially, Confucianism espouses power relations in maintaining political institutions, and from this, the Han Dynasty instituted the virtuosity of women's full submission to men. This kind of Confucianism was embraced in Vietnam.

The "Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues" and "Three Obediences and Four Virtues" of Confucianism were used to perpetrate female oppression in Vietnamese society. In discussing female suicide and prostitution, Phan Khoi, in a series of articles titled "Family in Vietnam Has Become a Problem" (N.83, 21/5/1931), "Comparing between the Family Regime in Vietnam and Confucius-Mencius's ethical Norms" (No. 85, 4/6/1931), and "More Discussion on the Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues" (No. 89, 30/7/1931), pointed out why Confucian ethics need to catch up with the times.

To do this, he needed to distinguished between Confucian ideology in Confucius and Mencius and Confucianism in the Han-Song period. The latter's neo-Confucianism consolidated the

authority of political leaders, especially the King that governs the country. He also asserted that Confucian practices and interpretations of the "Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues" have changed a great deal. During this period, only the "Three Principles" remained. He emphasized that "the Vietnamese family model has long deviated from how it was imagined in Confucius and Mencius's ideology," which he said "mainly served the sake of the Monarchic system and maintained the authority of king" (*PNTV*, No. 85, 4/7/1931). Phan Khoi illustrated the real nature of the "Three Principles and Five Constant Virtues" and underlined what Bell mentioned as its function to support "the monarchic system" and "define the power and authority of the political leaders" (2006). For him, neo-Confucian thought may have "trampled on" the personhood of women despite its aspiration to be humane (No. 89, 30/7/1931).

He also argued against traditional norms that dictate how women should behave. In "The Word *Virginity*: Loyalty and Virtue" (*PNTV*, No. 21, 19/9/1929) and "Song Dynasty's Confucianism and Women" (*PNTV*, No. 95, 13/8/1931), Phan Khoi he criticized the valuing of virginity and the "cult of chastity" in widowhood. He condemned these as pushing "many women into a dismal and depressed life." (*PNTV*, No. 21, 19/9/1929). He also said that the "keeping of virginity and loyalty are borne of men's selfishness," as he advocated that these must be practiced "in more educated and cultivated manner rather than obligated." (*PNTV*, No. 21, 19/9/1929). In quoted a statement by the Song Dynasty Confucian Cheng Yi, "to starve to death is a small matter, but to lose one's chastity is a great matter," he asserted that "enforcing the 'cult of chastity' is an unnatural thing," and that "prohibiting widows to remarry is an unfair, inhumane, and robs women of their human rights. Thus, we must abolish it" (*PNTV*, No. 95, 13 May 1931).

Doctor C.'s "Virginity in Marriage" (*DB*, No. 24, 1/9/1939), Dong Tung Thon Nu's "Are *Three Principles and Four Virtues* Suitable for Women of Today?" (*PNTV*, No. 93, 30/7/1931) also comment on the doctrine's inadequacies. However, both concede that these views are not easy to repudiate.

The newspapers also re-evaluated Confucianist filial piety and

ancestor worship. Filial piety is a cardinal virtue of respecting one's parents and ancestors, which extends to the privileging of male heirs and their mothers. This practice has led to several inequalities, including being forced to come to terms with the possibility of polygamy. Only women who can provide male heirs are perceived to be fulfilling the obligations to this essentially patriarchal order. It was necessary to find a way to reconcile the two opposing paradigms, Confucianism and feminism. Intellectuals, both men and women, engaged in it, as it proved to be very challenging. Confucianism is deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture. Feminism, a creature of modernity, proved to be incompatible with it in many ways.

3.2. Exploring Reconciliation Further

Vietnam was not alone in Asia in its attempt to reconcile tradition with feminism. The early twentieth century brought Europeanization in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Malaysia. These cultures, with economic conditions, political institutions, and the cultural traditions, also had to come to terms with feminism as it was propagated and practiced in different levels. Feminism's encounter with the so-called "Asian values" (Doh Chull Shin 2012) inevitably had to be dealt with.

Confucianism is a set of philosophical, political, and social doctrines attributed to Confucius, which also underwent drastic changes and interpretations over the years. "Undoubtedly, Confucius was the founder of Confucianism," said Shin, "but all of the ideas of Confucianism did not originate with him." (2012). The dynamics of Confucianism, also according to Shin, both in principle and in practice, "can be understood from two contrasting perspectives: historical and spatial. Confucianism can be viewed as a historical phenomenon that has undergone a great deal of transformation or reformulation over time" (2012: 23). Eventually, Confucianism was expanded and turned into an official ideology of the imperial state. With regards to women, Han dynasty Confucianism valued the virtue of chastity, and as a cornerstone of family and social stability, its norms perpetrated gender disparity.

Li- Hsiang, in *Confucianism and Women*, pointed out that

“gender oppression in premodern China might be interpreted as being interconnected with filiality, patrilinearity, and ancestor worship” (2006: 123). As a very complicated issue in China, “the intersection between gender oppression and Confucianism lies in the mutual reinforcement of these three cultural imperatives and Confucian virtue ethics, which takes the familial virtue of filial piety as the root of civic virtues” (Li- Hsiang 2006: 124).

Recently, some scholars began to discuss the viability of constructing a “Confucian feminism,” one that espouses an “ethic in-the-making,” and Li-Hsiang affirmed its possibility: “Despite its emphasis on reciprocal inequalities of social roles and its emphasis on the familial virtues of filiality and continuity, Confucianism is assumed to be able to inform feminism with an alternative theoretical ground for women’s liberation. A fully articulated Confucian feminism will be reserved as a future project to do justice to contemporary feminist theories” (2006).

A test case for this is that of Korea and Japan. John Ducan (1998), in *Confucianism and Family*, mentioned that “the Korean adoption of the Neo-Confucianism” depended on “the social context,” while in Japan, the ethics of filial piety was “incorporated into a different human network from that of China” (1998: 63).

In this manner, reconciling Confucianism and feminism in Vietnam needs a contextual application of what had been carried out in other places in East Asia. Retaining the exceptional views of Confucianism and reconsidering the new ideas of feminism may definitely help in reconciling them. The interface between the two may also be contextually appropriated to Vietnamese culture and realities. Huynh Thuc Khang once warned that in dealing with feminism, “we must look for what is suitable, and what is not” (*PNTV*, No.9, 27/6/1929). Phan Khoi, Nguyen Duc Nhuan, and Dong Tung Thon Nu (*PNTĐ*, No. 15/11/1933; *PNTV*, No. 89, 2/7/1931) wrote spirited discussions utilizing feminist keywords “emancipation” and “freedom” while looking for a reconcilable path for feminism, a key for national emancipation in Vietnam. This may be seen in *PNTĐ*’s vision (No. 1, 8/12/1930) of “finding the *middle way* to help women have enough knowledge and experiences for

cultivating their personhood and developing society." *PNTV's* Pham Quynh supported this cause by saying that the paper's priority is to enlighten women so they "can receive new ideas" (*PNTV*, No. 6 June 1929). These may have reduced friction, but how the two were reconciled more specifically is a complicated matter.

Throughout history, and in many cases, Confucianism became an inherent obstruction to Europeanization, though Wolters, in John K. Whitmore (1987), was quick to suggest that Confucian creeds were not intrinsic in Vietnamese culture. Wolters maintained that "we must think twice before using the term "Confucianism" to Vietnam History, and that "there is a difference between what looks like a Chinese model seen from the outside and what aspects of the model is to be considered reasonable for specific purposes within Vietnam itself." (1987: 49)

It may be perceived that the looseness of neo-Confucian practice in Vietnam has led to an easy reconciling of Confucianism and feminism. However, the latter was not really able to completely shatter the ceiling, so-called, as women still continue to be oppressed.

IV. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, French colonialism has profoundly changed Vietnamese society in various ways. The early twentieth century ushered in the introduction of feminism, at a time when suicide among women, prostitution, and trafficking were prevalent. These were the issues touched on by the feminist movement that emerged from newspapers for and by women.

In the process, the movement, as may be seen in the example of the three papers in the study, not only rallied the cause for women equality and empowerment, but also the reconciling of traditional Confucianism with the new gender paradigm. It had been quite a challenge in Vietnam, but scholarship was able to turn to Japan and Korea for the possibility of doing so. The work of emancipation in Vietnam continues to the present.

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