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Studies indicate that the socialist government's attempts to reform the traditional marriage and family system gained moderate success in northern Vietnam during the 1960s and early 1970s. Among the law's most salient outcome was the near eradication of parent-arranged marriages after 1960 (Nguyen, 1998; Pham, 1999). While the law could not completely get rid of marriage payments, evidence suggests that the payments became less common. According to Goodkind (1996), a northern Vietnamese community observed a decline of gift exchanges at the time of marriage (either brideprice or dowry) from over 30% among couples married in the 1950s to 10-20% among those married a decade later. In addition to declining prevalence, the magnitude of brideprice was reportedly scaled down. Brideprice during this period tended to comprise of non-monetary items, such as cigarettes, tea, biscuits, rice, pork, betel leaves, and areca nuts, whereas dowry was largely restricted to personal clothing, pillows, or blankets (Kleinen, 1999).

Following the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1975, the socialist government attempted to implement in the South similar economic and social policies that had been quite successful in the North two decades earlier. However, the attempts to collectivize the southern economy and consolidate the newly-unified country failed—resulting in nationwide economic stagnation. The socialist agenda to reform marriage and family systems also faced significant challenges in the South. While evidence was rather scanty with regards to how the socialist policies affected marriage practices in this region during the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was a general impression that the South had a greater tendency than the North to adopt behaviors that were different from the ones prescribed by the government (Belanger, 2000). A retrospective survey in one South-Central community demonstrates that there was no apparent decline in interfamilial gift-giving among marriages contracted after the reunification (Goodkind, 1996).

In the late 1980s, Vietnam shifted from a centrally-planned to a market economy in response to deep economic recession and widespread poverty. The economic policy, also known as *doi moi* (renovation), led to reduced government control over household production, rapid economic growth, and improved living standards in the following decades. With the state's loss of interest in promoting Marxist orthodoxy and less control over individual lives, several observers speculated that Confucian-based religious and social practices would be revived. Pioneering research suggests that during the period immediately after the reform, there was a resurgence of traditional marriage practices that were once considered feudal (Luong, 1993; Goodkind, 1996; Kleinen, 1999; Malarney, 2002). As families gradually regained more control over household economy and family life, lavish wedding feasts became more prevalent. Malarney's ethnographic study during the early 1990s reveals that while families still routinely recounted that demanding brideprice equated selling one's daughter, in practice they willingly accepted brideprice which was then used as a dowry or as a fund for throwing the wedding banquet.



Marriage payments during this period tended to involve an increasing variety of gift items, including money, gold, clothing, mosquito nets, household items, and bicycles. Further, it also became customary for wedding guests to offer cash gifts to bride's and groom's families.

Various social forces during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were likely to have direct and indirect influences on trends in marriage payments in Vietnam. While the socialist government's efforts to reform traditional family through enacting the 1960 Marriage and Family law appeared to have suppressed brideprice in certain communities in Vietnam as evidenced in past ethnographic research, its population-level impacts are unknown. Further, the government's determination to accelerate the modernization and industrialization process first through collectivization and subsequently through market measures may have impacted marriage payments through their effects on intra- and inter-familial relationships such as the extent to which family invests in children's education, how children contribute to the household economy, the social position of daughters relative to son's, and the degrees children could exert their independence from parents' influences. To explore trends and mechanisms underlying changes in marriage payments, we analyze survey data representative of both northern and southern Vietnam and three marriage cohorts that were in turn exposed to wars, socialist policies, and market reform. Trends and determinants of brideprice and dowry payments as well as those of bidirectional marital transfers are examined within bivariate and multivariate frameworks.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

Our data come from two regional surveys conducted by the Hanoi-based Institute of Sociology that comprise the Vietnam Study of Family Change. The first survey was carried out in March and April 2003 in seven provinces including Hanoi in the northern region of the Red River Delta. Using an identical questionnaire, the second survey was conducted exactly one year later in 2004 in Ho Chi Minh City and six neighboring southern provinces covering substantial parts of the Mekong River Delta and the southeastern region. Each regional survey was administered to 1,296 currently married individuals. For convenience, we refer to the Red River Delta sample as the North and the sample of the Ho Chi Minh City and environs as the South. Because we relate behavior at the time of marriage to the present region of residence, some respondents and their spouses migrated between that time and the time of the survey and may even have lived outside the sample areas covered by the two surveys. However, according to our diagnostic analysis,<sup>3</sup> such mismatch accounts for only a small proportion of the samples. Almost every respondent and their spouse in the North sample were born in the former North Vietnam. Although results point to more migration in the southern sample, a majority of respondents who came from

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<sup>3</sup> The surveys did not ask where respondents lived during their early married years. Place of birth, however, was asked and this information enables us to assess how serious the mismatch between current and early marriage residence might be. In the northern sample, 84 percent of respondents were born in their current province, 95 percent were born in one of the provinces covered by the survey (i.e., the Red River Delta) and 99 percent were born in the former North Vietnam. In the southern sample, 60 percent of respondents were born in their current province, 70 percent were born in one of the provinces covered by the survey (i.e., Ho Chi Minh City and six surrounding provinces) and 87 percent were born in the former South Vietnam. Results for their spouses are virtually identical. Note that these percentages would all be even higher if reference were to the place of residence at the time of marriage since they refer to net lifetime migration and not to migration since the time of marriage.

outside the survey area came from neighboring provinces in the Mekong River Delta and southeastern provinces near Ho Chi Minh City. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the regional comparisons presented are potentially, even if only modestly, affected by post-marital migration into the survey areas from outside.

The sample was selected based on a multistage stratified cluster sampling approach.<sup>4</sup> To understand marriage behavior over time, three marriage cohorts were targeted for interviews. For the wartime cohort, the range of marriage dates (1963-1971) ends a few years prior to North Vietnam's victory in 1975, thus representing northern and southern respondents who experienced their early marital years during the time of military conflicts and in the case of the South, who were exposed to the pre-socialist social structure and traditional family system. Since Vietnam's socialist policies were officially implemented in the North during the mid-1950s but the earliest marriage cohort in each regional sample was contracted in 1963, we are mindful about our limitation in assessing pre-socialist marriage behaviors among northerners. Further, the middle cohort (1977-1985) represents new marriages during the post-reunification period when Vietnam underwent a pervasive centrally-planned economy and experienced severe economic stagnation. The most recent cohort (1992-2000) was selected to capture marital experience during the period when the market reform that originated in 1986 became widely effective. We refer to these three cohorts as the wartime, the post-reunification, and the renovation cohorts respectively.

Each regional sample was divided equally into 12 categories among male and female respondents, urban and rural settings, and the three marriage cohorts. Since either a married woman or man was interviewed in each surveyed household, husbands and wives interviewed were not married to each other. The sample was designed to be representative and self-weighting within these 12 categories.<sup>5</sup> In this study, we restrict the analyses to couples whose current marital relationships are their first marriage and who had at least one parent on both their and their spouse's side alive at the time of marriage. One hundred respondents reported that either one or both spouses were previously married, while 240 respondents reported that either one or

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the targeted sample size, the sample design of each survey involved drawing respondents from nine urban districts/towns and nine rural districts. Within each district, three communes were selected and within each commune, two villages were selected. Within each village/urban residential grouping, households were randomly selected using a preset interval determined by the total number of dwelling units within the sample site (based on the anticipated number of households that would need to be visited to obtain the desired number of interviews of each category). Each household was asked a short set of screening questions to determine if it contained an eligible respondent. Screening continued until the number of interviews of each type needed from the sample site was completed. Response rates were 79.6 percent for the northern survey and 72.8 percent for the southern survey. Most non-response was due to the eligible respondent not being at home at the time of contact or re-contact. Less than a third of non-response in both surveys was due to refusal to be interviewed.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the sampling design, the distribution of respondents differs from the general population of Vietnam. For example, while almost three quarters of the national population is rural, the study sample is half rural. In addition, very young married individuals were disproportionately excluded because the most recent marriage cohort omitted persons whose marital duration was below 3-4 years at the time of survey. To minimize the inclusion of couples who might be involuntarily childless, the surveys included only married women who were under age 40 at the time of marriage and married men whose wife was younger than 40 at the time of marriage. Other than this, there was no age restriction for respondents to participate in the surveys. Given several unique features and limitations of the samples, we do not attempt to weight the results to make them representative of Vietnam as a whole.

both sides of parent(s) deceased by the time of marriage. Our preliminary analysis suggests that marriage payments were significantly less common among those who had previously married and those whose parents were not alive (see Appendix Tables A1 and A2). The restriction yields a sample size of 2,283 observations, of which 52 percent are from the North and 48 percent the South. Approximately 32 percent of the restricted sample are marriages contracted between 1963 and 1971, 33 percent between 1977 and 1985, and 35 percent between 1992 and 2000.

**Measurement of marriage payments.** The surveys asked each respondent if there were any brideprice or dowry transfers at the time of marriage. The Vietnamese culture prominently distinguishes these two types of marital transfers by prescribing distinct terms for them: “*thach cuoi*” for brideprice and “*hoi mon*” for dowry. When respondents reported that either or both types of marriage payments occurred, they would be probed if the families gave the following items as brideprice or dowry: money, gold, house, land, household goods, and others. The information allows us to measure prevalence and direction of the payments. While the surveys did not ask respondents about monetary values of the payments, we can gauge the magnitude of the payments based on types and number of gift items being exchanged. We are limited, however, in the assessment of the property rights of the payments since the surveys lack such information. It is unlikely that our measurement of marriage payments is biased by the stigma imposed by the socialist policies against marriage payments. By 2003-4 when the surveys were conducted, Vietnam had fully embraced market capitalism and such stigma had likely subsided. According to a more recent study conducted in remote areas of northern Vietnam where socialist legacies lingered and cadres still commanded a high status in the village life, middle-aged villagers who got married during the socialist period comfortably discussed their and their children’s marriage payments (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007).

While it is not possible to rule out recall errors in the surveys, the questionnaire instruments were carefully designed to minimize such errors. For example, instead of probing monetary values of the payments, respondents were prompted whether a particular gift was exchanged as brideprice or dowry. Not only is such a question straightforward but it permits a cohort comparison without requiring an adjustment for changes in the cost of living and currency values. It is important to note that gender of the respondent likely influences the reporting of marriage payments. Our diagnostic analysis (Appendix Table A3) suggests that female respondents tended to report dowry transfers more frequently than their male counterparts. It is plausible that some male respondents might not be aware of dowry given to the bride by her family or that they may not recognize that gifts such as blankets or personal clothing brought into a new conjugal unit by the bride are considered dowry since the transfer of dowry is much less official and less ritualized than that of brideprice (Kleinen, 1999; Malarney, 2002; Personal communication with sociologist Tran Minh Thi, 2011). Given that by study design, essentially equal numbers of men and women were interviewed for each cohort in both regions, it is unlikely that any biases associated with reporting distort observed cohort or regional differences in marriage payments – the focus of our study. This would only be the case if the extent or the nature of the bias differed systematically by region and cohort.

To determine prevalence and direction of marriage payments, our analyses use dichotomous variables indicating whether any brideprice, any dowry, or both types of payments (i.e., bidirectional transfers) occurred at the time of marriage. Approximately 43 percent of marriages in the sample reported brideprice, 39 percent dowry, and 28 percent bidirectional marriage

payments. To measure multifaceted aspects of marriage payments, we also include additional dependent variables to identify marriages without any payments, those with only brideprice, and those with only dowry. About 46 percent of the sample observed no exchange at the time of marriage, 15 percent only brideprice, and 11 percent only dowry. To gauge the magnitude of marriage payments, we further incorporate a series of dichotomous variables indicating whether or not the marriage involved a brideprice or dowry transfer of money/gold, house/land, household goods, or multiple gifts. An exchange of money/gold as brideprice and dowry accounted for 28 and 32 percent of the sample respectively. Meanwhile, one fifth reported transferring house/land as brideprice; only 5 percent did so as dowry. Twelve percent of the sample observed brideprice and dowry transfers of household goods, which include a small proportion of miscellaneous gifts. Multiple-gift giving as brideprice and dowry transfers was not widely practiced involving just 13 and 9 percent of the sample respectively.

**Measurement of independent variables.** Key independent variables in our study are marriage cohort and region. Since a marriage cohort represents an aggregate of couples who had a common exposure to Vietnam's historical events and socioeconomic transformations, we use marriage cohort to measure the compounding effects of major structural and policy changes that took place over the three key historical periods, including war, post-reunification, and market reform. Additionally, we use region as a covariate to estimate potentially different cultural orientations between the North and South and, because of different North-South timing of exposure to socialism, to gauge the roles of socialist agenda in transforming marriage payments. Within a bivariate framework, we describe for each marriage cohort and region how prevalent the practice of marriage payments was, to what extent the payments were bidirectional or one-directional, and which direction the payments originated from. Moreover, we illustrate the extent to which levels of brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional marital transfers varied by marriage cohort and region and examine what specifically in each marital transaction was transferred as brideprice and dowry. Within a multivariate framework, we use binary logistic regressions to examine the net effects of marriage cohort and region and to address other important determinants of three dominant patterns of marriage payments, namely brideprice transfers, dowry payments, and bidirectional marital transfers.

**Measurement and description of control variables.** Since Vietnam's rapid structural and policy transformations over the last half century might have altered bride's and groom's characteristics and manner of mate selection across successive cohorts and the changes in these attributes might in turn have affected practice of marriage payments, our multivariate analyses incorporate the following covariates as control variables, including spousal location of growing up, bride's and groom's educational attainment and marital age, and parental involvement in mate selection. Our choice of control variables is influenced by the existing literature and governed by the availability of data. Table 1 presents the distribution of the sample by the control variables. Descriptive statistics are presented separately for each marriage cohort and region.

Covariates	Year of marriage								
	1963-1971			1977-1985			1992-2000		
	North (N=366)	South (N=353)	Sig.	North (N=403)	South (N=359)	Sig.	North (N=418)	South (N=384)	Sig.
Spousal place of growing up									
Both rural	80	63	***	71	52	***	64	52	***
One or both urban	20	37		29	48		36	48	
Total	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	
Bride's education									
Less than 12 years	76	91	***	68	81	***	58	78	***
High education	24	9		32	19		42	22	
Total	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	
Mean years of schooling	9.0	5.6	***	10.0	7.1	***	10.0	7.9	***
Groom's education									
Less than 12 years	58	75	***	64	69	n.s.	51	70	***
High education	42	25		36	31		49	30	
Total	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	
Mean years of schooling	10.1	7.7	***	10.1	8.4	***	10.3	8.7	***
Mean bride's marital age	21.4	19.9	***	22.1	21.4	**	21.7	22.9	***
Mean groom's marital age	24.7	23.6	***	25.2	23.6	***	25.9	25.8	n.s.
Manner of mate selection									
Chosen by children	87	57	***	96	72	***	97	82	***
Arranged by parents	13	43		4	28		3	18	
Total	100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	

\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference between North and South is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ;  
\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4

Cohort trends and regional differences in the control variables reflect changes in population characteristics as a result of societal transformations during 1963-2000. First, spousal place of growing up is incorporated by a variable indicating whether both spouses grew up in rural areas or at least one of them was raised in urban location. For every marriage cohort, there were significantly higher proportions of southern couples than northern who grew up in urban localities. The regional difference appeared to narrow overtime. For the North, this could be a result of the socialist government's rigorous attempts to swiftly industrialize and modernize the society first via socialist means and subsequently via market measures. Results demonstrate increasing proportions of northern couples in the post-reunification and renovation cohorts with urban upbringing. Nevertheless, the North-South gap remained significant among the most recent cohort. Given that modernization perspective posits that the custom of marriage payments tend to decline first among urban populations followed by their rural counterparts, we anticipate that the odds of marriage payments –be it brideprice, dowry, or bidirectional marriage transfers –to be lower among marriages in which at least one spouse was raised in urban locations.

Bride's and groom's education and, to a certain extent, their marital age are basic indicators of human capital levels and to a certain extent, their family socioeconomic status. Results suggest that gender gap in schooling was more salient in the South than in the North, especially among the earlier marriage cohorts. Northern brides and grooms were generally better educated than their southern counterparts, although educational attainment improved among recent marriage

cohorts in both regions. The regional differences reflect the North's earlier and longer exposure to socialist policies which attempted to eradicate illiteracy and to expand equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. In addition to regional gaps in educational attainment, Table 1 also indicates North-South differences in marital timing. For the war and post-reunification cohorts, average age at first marriage was higher among northern brides and grooms than their southern counterparts. This likely echoes the impact of the family law, implemented in 1960 in the North and after 1975 in the South, which mandated a minimum age at marriage to be 18 years for brides and 20 years for grooms. Interestingly, the regional differences in timing of marriage were negligible among grooms from the recent cohort, whereas average northern brides married at significantly younger age than their southern counterparts. Our analyses incorporate bride's and groom's education as dichotomous variables indicating whether they have high education (i.e., having 12 or more years of schooling) and include their marital age as continuous variables. According to human capital perspective put forth by economists, as society becomes more developed; the labor market more diversified, and return to education increases, it will be more rational for parents to invest in their children's education, which likely causes marital delays, rather than to invest in marriage payments. We hypothesize that high educational attainment and delay in marital timing will reduce the likelihood of marriage payments. Nevertheless, high educational attainment, as a proxy for high family socioeconomic status, could increase the odds and magnitude of marriage payments, especially among the most recent cohorts, since well-off parents are likely more financially equipped to transfer resources to their children when they get married.

Lastly, manner of mate selection is incorporated as a dichotomous variable signifying whether spouse was chosen by children or was arranged by parents (with or without children's approval). Table 1 indicates that while there was a continual decline in parental influence over time, every cohort of southern marriages was significantly more likely than their northern counterparts to be arranged by parents. Such observed finding can be due to generally younger age at marriage among southern brides and grooms (especially the first two cohorts); some cultural preferences unique to the South; or the fact that arranged marriage was prohibited first in the North and later in the South after the reunification. Since marriage payments traditionally went hand in hand with the practice of arranged marriage, we expect parental involvement in mate selection to increase the likelihood of brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional marital transfers.

## RESULTS

**Trends in marriage payments.** Table 2 describes prevalence and direction of marriage payments across successive marriage cohorts in the North and South. Several findings stand out. First, during war years, marriage payments were not common in the North, with less than 30 percent of the cohort observing the custom. In sharp contrast, some forms of payment occurred in nearly 6 out of 10 southern marriages contracted during the corresponding period. Following reunification, the North witnessed a moderate increase in marriage payments, whereas proportions of southern marriages that witnessed any payments declined slightly. More striking was the surge in prevalence of marriage payments during the 1990s in both regions but particularly in the North. This resulted in the North-South convergence, with approximately 70 percent of marriages in the two regions practicing some forms of marital exchange.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, Cohort and regional trends in prevalence and direction of marriage payments.

Percentage of marriages	Year of marriage								
	1963-1971			1977-1985			1992-2000		
	North	South	Sig.	North	South	Sig.	North	South	Sig.
	(N=366)	(N=353)		(N=403)	(N=359)		(N=418)	(N=384)	
% Any marriage payments	29	58	***	39	55	***	70	71	n.s.
% Any brideprice	21	50	***	25	49	***	51	61	**
% Any dowry	20	36	***	29	30	n.s.	63	52	**
% Bidirectional payments	11	28	***	16	24	**	44	42	n.s.
% One-directional payments	17	31	***	23	31	**	27	29	n.s.
(% Brideprice only)	(9)	(22)	***	(9)	(25)	***	(8)	(19)	***
(% Dowry only)	(8)	(9)	n.s.	(14)	(6)	***	(19)	(10)	***

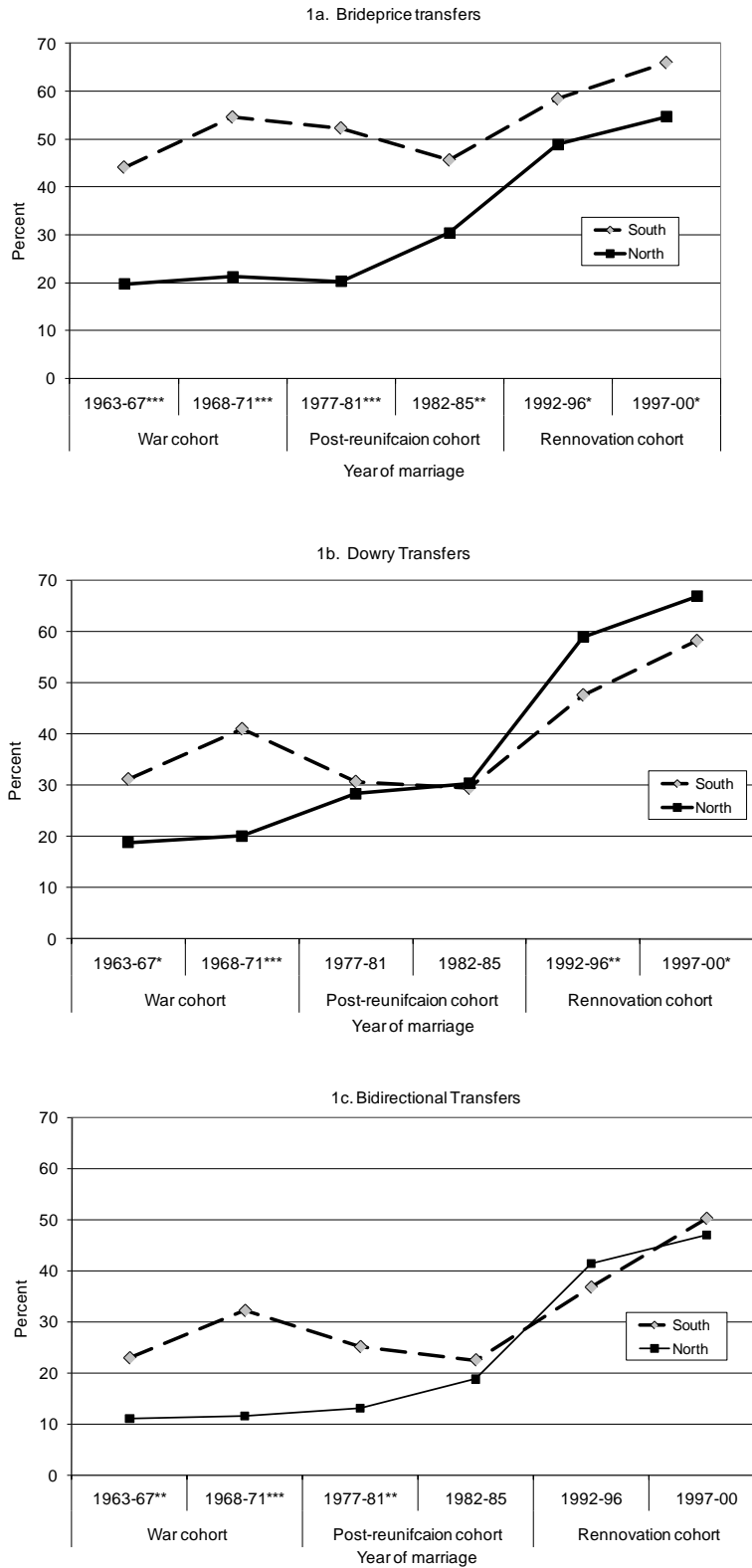
\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference between North and South is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4

When brideprice and dowry are considered separately, it is evident that both increased substantially following market reform but that in both regions the practice of dowry rose more than brideprice. Moreover, for all three marriage cohorts, brideprice occurred more frequently in the South than in the North, even though by the time of market reform the regional gap had already narrowed considerably. In contrast, while dowry was more prevalent during war years in the South compared to the North, the difference reversed among the renovation cohort with dowry becoming more typical in the North than the South. Contrary to past ethnographic studies, our analysis shows that bidirectional transfers were far from being widely practiced in Vietnam. During war years as well as after reunification, one-directional payments accounted for a larger proportion of northern and southern marriages than did bidirectional transfers. It was not until the 1990s that bidirectional payments became the dominant pattern of marital exchange for both regions. Our empirical evidence further indicates that it was not always the case that brideprice was compulsory and that dowry was voluntary. For example, when one-directional payments occurred, it could be either brideprice-only or dowry-only transfers. Although brideprice-only transfers were more common than dowry-only payments for all cohorts of southern marriages, the opposite was true for northern couples married after reunification and economic reform.

Figure 1 depicts more nuanced trends in the extent to which prevalence of brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional transfers changed across marriage cohorts and regions, with each of the three cohorts subdivided into two groupings of 5-year and 4-year intervals. The main regional difference seen is in prevalence of brideprice (Figure 1a). Among marriages contracted in the North, it started to increase during the early 1980s, whereas in the South brideprice payments continued to decrease moderately during the corresponding period compared to prior to the socialist collectivization. Only after market reform is an increase apparent with the prevalence of brideprice in the South surpassing even the levels observed during pre-socialist years. Also noteworthy is that following reunification the southern levels of dowry and bidirectional transfers dropped more significantly than that of brideprice, as evidenced in Figures 1b and 1c, before rebounding in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, the North witnessed a consistent rise in the practice of dowry and bidirectional payments across successive marriage cohorts, although only to a modest extent prior to economic reform. Another notable trend is that throughout the 1990s the frequency of all three patterns of marriage payments continued to increase and that by the late 1990s nearly half of all marriages in both regions involved bidirectional marital transfers.

Figure 1. Cohort and regional trends in brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional transfers.



\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference between North and South is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$



In lieu of addressing the magnitude of marital transfers, we examine how brideprice and dowry were expressed and how such expressions transformed during 1963-2000. Results are presented in Table 3. Significant differences were evident between the North and South with respect to material gifts that were exchanged as brideprice. Across all three cohorts of northern marriages, approximately two thirds of brideprice payments involved transfers of house/land. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the newlyweds, rather than the bride's family, hold property rights of such transfers. Further, while household goods were reported as a typical brideprice among earlier cohorts in the North, money/gold became increasingly more common among more recent marriages. Unlike the North, brideprice transfers in the South appeared to heavily involve money/gold. Across all three cohorts, they accounted for nearly or over 80 percent of all brideprice payments. Even among the cohort anticipated to experience severe economic hardship (1977-1985), preference for transferring money/gold as brideprice seemed to remain strong. Transfers of property such as house/land could also be observed among southern marriages but to a much lesser extent than the North.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, Cohort and regional patterns of material gifts exchanged during brideprice and dowry transfers.

Type of material gifts	Year of marriage								
	1963-1971			1977-1985			1992-2000		
	North	South	Sig.	North	South	Sig.	North	South	Sig.
<b>Brideprice transfers</b>									
<u>Percent of all marriages</u>									
(Number of observations)	(366)	(353)		(403)	(359)		(418)	(384)	
% Any money/gold	7	43	***	7	38	***	27	52	***
% Any house/land	13	13	n.s.	16	20	n.s.	34	23	***
% Any household goods <sup>a</sup>	9	7	n.s.	12	7	**	21	12	***
% More than one items	6	11	*	8	12	*	21	21	n.s.
<u>Percent of brideprice transfers</u>									
(Number of observations)	(76)	(175)		(100)	(177)		(215)	(236)	
% Any money/gold	33	86	***	26	77	***	52	84	***
% Any house/land	63	27	***	66	40	***	66	38	***
% Any household goods <sup>a</sup>	45	13	***	50	14	***	41	19	***
% More than one items	30	22	n.s.	32	25	n.s.	41	34	n.s.
<b>Dowry transfers</b>									
<u>Percent of all marriages</u>									
(Number of observations)	(366)	(353)		(403)	(359)		(418)	(384)	
% Any money/gold	13	30	***	18	24	*	57	46	***
% Any house/land	1	9	***	1	6	***	2	10	***
% Any household goods <sup>a</sup>	10	4	**	17	6	***	27	8	***
% More than one items	4	6	n.s.	7	5	n.s.	22	10	***
<u>Percent of dowry transfers</u>									
(Number of observations)	(72)	(128)		(118)	(108)		(262)	(199)	
% Any money/gold	64	84	***	62	81	**	91	88	n.s.
% Any house/land	6	23	***	4	21	***	3	19	***
% Any household goods <sup>a</sup>	50	11	***	59	19	***	42	16	***
% More than one items	19	16	n.s.	25	18	n.s.	35	20	***

<sup>a</sup> Household goods include a small proportion of miscellaneous gift items.

\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference between North and South is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4.

Compared to brideprice, there was greater regional similarity in how dowry was expressed. Table 3 (bottom panel) demonstrates that dowries in the North and South alike often involved money/gold. In the North, it accounted for nearly two thirds of all dowry payments during war years and immediately following reunification and characterized 9 out of 10 dowries occurring during the 1990s. Likewise, in the South throughout the four decades examined, over 80 percent of dowry transfers were expressed in the form of money/gold. Concurring with anthropological accounts, we find that dowry transfers of household goods were typical in all three cohorts of northern marriages, whereas the South observed transfers of house or land more frequently than the North. Also important is increasing levels of multiple-gift giving as brideprice and dowry in both regions, although the prevalence was somewhat greater in the North than the South.

**Determinants of marriage payments.** To move beyond the detailed descriptive picture of trends in marriage payments, we turn to multivariate analyses to explore mechanisms underlying the observed temporal trends and regional differences. In particular, we use binary logistic regressions to address determinants of three patterns of marriage payments: 1) brideprice, 2) dowry, and 3) bidirectional marital transfers. In the following analyses, each dependent variable is coded 1 if the particular aspect of payments (e.g., any brideprice) took place and 0 if not (e.g., no brideprice). When analyzing each dependent variable, we incorporate two models. First, the baseline model treats trends in payments (e.g., brideprice) as a function of marriage cohort and region. Second, the saturated model adds control variables, including measures of bride's and groom's place of growing up, educational attainment, marital age, and manner of mate selection. Essentially, two key questions are addressed here. First and foremost, to what extent can marriage cohort and region explain observed trends in payments, after taking into account control variables or changes in population characteristics? Second and of lesser importance, to what extent are variations in payments a result of differences in individual background characteristics, net of cohort and regional influences?

Our multivariate analyses, presented in Table 4, consist of two procedures. In the first procedure, we analyze all marriages, regardless of their regions, in the same regression models. For convenience, we refer to this as analyses of the combined sample. Coefficients are expressed as the odds ratios of a specific type of marriage payments to non-payments for each category relative to the comparable odds of the reference category for each variable. Odds ratios above 1 indicate that the particular category is associated with higher chances than the reference category that the particular marriage payment took place, whereas values below 1 indicate the opposite. The reference categories are as follows: the marriage contracted during wartime (1963-1971), residing in the North, both spouses growing up in rural areas, the bride and the groom having less than 12 years of schooling, and the couple making their own decision about mate selection. The bride's and the groom's marital age are incorporated in the analyses as continuous variables. Results from the analyses of the combined sample are presented on the top panel of Table 4. Following the first procedure, the second procedure features separate regression analyses for each regional sample in order to consider possible interaction effects between region and each of the control variables. While using a similar analytical approach as in the combined sample, only coefficients for marriage cohort are reported in Table 4 (lower panel), largely to make the discussion of our findings more focused and secondly, because analyses based on either combined or regional samples yield roughly similar results with regards to direction and size of additional coefficients.

Table 4. Binary logistic regression analysis, The determinants of marriage payments in Vietnam, 1963-2000.

Covariates	Brideprice				Dowry				Bidirectional marital transfers			
	Baseline		Saturated		Baseline		Saturated		Baseline		Saturated	
	Odds ratios	Std. Error	Odds ratios	Std. Error	Odds ratios	Std. Error	Odds ratios	Std. Error	Odds ratios	Std. Error	Odds ratios	Std. Error
<u>COMBINED SAMPLE</u>												
Cohort 1977-85	1.09	0.11	1.27	0.12	1.10	0.12	1.12	0.12	1.01	0.13	1.04	0.14
Cohort 1992-00	2.53 ***	0.11	3.25 ***	0.12	3.51 ***	0.11	3.96 ***	0.12	3.17 ***	0.12	3.48 ***	0.13
South	2.46 ***	0.09	2.02 ***	0.11	1.08	0.09	1.19	0.11	1.48 ***	0.10	1.51 ***	0.12
Growing up in urban areas			0.86	0.10			1.00	0.10			1.01	0.11
Bride having high education			0.71 **	0.12			1.35 **	0.12			1.06	0.13
Groom having high education			1.12	0.12			1.23 †	0.12			1.21	0.12
Bride's marital age			0.98	0.02			0.96 *	0.02			0.98	0.02
Groom's marital age			0.96 **	0.01			0.98	0.01			0.98	0.02
Arranged by parents			1.47 **	0.13			1.42 **	0.13			1.26 †	0.14
<u>NORTH SAMPLE</u>												
Cohort 1977-85	1.26	0.17	1.35 †	0.18	1.69 **	0.17	1.65 **	0.18	1.43 †	0.21	1.46 †	0.22
Cohort 1992-00	4.04 ***	0.16	4.22 ***	0.17	6.86 ***	0.17	6.78 ***	0.17	6.01 ***	0.19	5.81 ***	0.20
<u>SOUTH SAMPLE</u>												
Cohort 1977-85	0.99	0.15	1.14	0.16	0.76 †	0.16	0.73 †	0.17	0.82	0.17	0.79	0.18
Cohort 1992-00	1.62 ***	0.15	2.15 ***	0.17	1.89 ***	0.15	2.03 ***	0.16	1.90 ***	0.16	1.94 ***	0.17
Significance level: ***p≤0.001; **p≤0.01; *p≤0.05; †p≤0.1												
Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4												

Marriage cohort is the most robust predictor of marriage payments in Vietnam. Results indicate that marriages contracted in the 1990s cohort were several times more likely than the war cohort to observe marriage payments – be it brideprice, dowry, or bidirectional transfers. A comparison between baseline and saturated models indicate that these net cohort effects remained largely unchanged after additional covariates were considered. In the analyses of the combined sample (top panel), not only were the coefficients for marriage cohort unaffected by control variables but the size of coefficients also grew modestly, implying even greater importance of cohort in predicting marriage payments. Findings suggest that given other characteristics being equal, marriages contracted after economic reform had between 3-4 times greater chance than those married during war years to experience brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional payments. Further, when each regional sample is analyzed separately (lower panel), the independent positive effects of the 1990s marriage cohort remained strong. The most striking is that the North observed a considerably more dramatic upward trend in marriage payments, especially dowry and bidirectional transfers, following economic reform than did the South. Saturated models, for instance, suggest that northern marriages contracted after reform were about 4-7 times more likely than their wartime counterparts to involve brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional transfers possibly because payments were suppressed relatively severely during war years. Compared to the North, the South observed more modest, yet strongly positive, effects of economic reform on marriage payments.

Unlike the impact of economic reform on marriage payments, change in payments following reunification appeared to be minimal. Based on the analyses of the combined sample, the difference in the likelihood of marriage payments between the wartime and post-reunification cohorts was negligible. None of the odds ratios suggest any statistically significant difference. However, when the analyses are conducted separately for each region certain nuances stand out. On one hand, southern marriages observed roughly no change in brideprice and bidirectional transfers between war and post-reunification years, as the coefficient for the 1977-85 cohort remained statistically insignificant, with exception for dowry which showed a modest but significant decline following reunification. On the other hand, our analyses suggest that there were moderate upward trends in all types of marriage payments among northern marriages contracted after reunification. The significantly increased odds of marriage payments among the North's post-reunification cohort calls into question how successful the socialist regime managed to suppress this traditional marriage practice, especially brideprice, in a socialist stronghold such as northern Vietnam.

Although the North and South were quite different in their cultural orientations as well as historical, social, and political trajectories, the effects of region on marriage payments were more modest than the influences of cohort which we observed earlier. Results shown in Table 4 (top panel) indicate that the South was more likely than the North to observe brideprice and bidirectional payments and that these net influences changed only slightly after the introduction of control variables. We find that there was no significant difference between the North and South in dowry payments and that it was only when analyzing each regional sample separately that some regional divergence in trends in dowry emerged. While the North observed a steadily upward trend in dowry across successive cohorts, the South experienced a decline in dowry after reunification before it rose again in the 1990s.

To address the second key question of the multivariate analyses, we turn our attention to the extent to which observed variations in payments can be explained by net differences in population characteristics. Our descriptive analysis (Table 1) demonstrates remarkable changes among recent marriage cohorts with regards to background characteristics of brides and grooms and their manner of mate selection to becoming more urbanized, better educated, married at a later age, and more independent in spousal selection. Such transformations were expected to lead to a decline in marriage payments according to modernization or human capital perspectives. Yet, as noted earlier, the introduction of these variables into multivariate analyses barely affected the net effects of marriage cohort and region on marriage payments. Moreover, when examining the effects of each control variable more closely, results are rather inconclusive. For example, net of cohort and region influences, bride's high education had independent negative effects on the odds of brideprice; yet, the factor was positively associated with the likelihood of dowry. Meanwhile, groom's high education positively (although rather weakly) increased the odds of dowry but made no difference in explaining variations in brideprice or bidirectional transfers. Similarly inconsistent are the effects of groom's and bride's marital age. Manner of mate selection is perhaps the only control variable that had consistent, independent effects on all types of marriage payments. Results suggest that the likelihood of payments increased when marriages were arranged by parents. Nevertheless, the net effects of manner of mate selection were far less robust when compared to those of marriage cohort and region.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Our study extends prior research by conducting systematic analyses of population-based representative survey data from the Vietnam Study of Family Change to examine recent trends in marriage payments and to address mechanisms underlying the observed change in payments across three successive marriage cohorts, particularly the recent resurgence of brideprice and dowry in the country. Not only are we able to document prevalence of payments but we can also describe directions and magnitude of the payments – thus, producing a comprehensive assessment of trends in brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional transfers in Vietnam from 1963 to 2000. In addition, we investigate the extent to which structural and policy transformations during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced the practice of marriage payments as well as estimate how these societal changes indirectly impacted payments via their effects on population characteristics. Further, our research also represents one of the few existing studies that empirically examine the prevalence and determinants of bidirectional marital transfers.

Our study is not without limitations. We are mindful about restrictions such as potential recall errors, gender discrepancy in reporting dowry, lack of information about who exactly holds property rights of marriage payments, limited choice of control variables, and reliance of retrospective reporting to measure trends given the cross-sectional nature of our data. We are also aware of certain caveats with regards to inferential explanations. For example, since our study relates behavior at the time of marriage to the present region of residence, our regional comparisons might be affected by post-marital migration into the survey from the outside even though we have documented that such migration was relatively modest during the span of time covered by the survey. Moreover, we are limited in our discussion of pre-socialist North because the oldest cohort interviewed in the survey was married in 1963 when the socialist revolution had already taken place there. Further, it is possible that North-South differences, especially among

earlier cohorts, could result partially from underreporting of brideprice in the North due to stronger social norms against brideprice there. Since the survey was conducted two decades after the reform whereby marriage payments had already characterized a majority of marriages, we assume that stigma against brideprice had already diminished greatly by the time of the survey.

Despite certain limitations described above, several interesting findings stand out from our analyses. First, we demonstrate that population-based prevalence, directions, and magnitude of payments were considerably more nuanced than what conventional wisdom or past ethnographic studies had suggested and that these variations existed at least in the South even prior to socialist collectivization. The trends observed among southern marriages contracted during 1963-1971 provide some empirical evidence of how marriage payments were practiced in the region during pre-socialist years. Descriptive results suggest that traditionally marriage payments were commonly observed but they were far from being universally practiced. About 60 percent of southern marriages observed some forms of payments with brideprice payments being more prevalent than dowry transfers. Further, we find that payments in the pre-socialist South were not necessarily bidirectional and that one-directional payments (mainly brideprice) were actually slightly more common than bidirectional transfers during this period.

The socialist agenda which attempted to reform Vietnam's traditional marriage and family system definitely had some impacts on the practice of marriage payments. But it appeared to affect the North and the South differentially. Our multivariate results point to very strong independent effect of marriage cohort, which is used to estimate compounding effects of structural and policy change, and that of region, which is incorporated to control for differential timing in exposure to the socialist agenda, in explaining observed variations of trends in payments. We find that the government very likely was able to suppress marriage payments in the North to a considerable extent but it could not completely eradicate either brideprice or dowry. Among the war cohort, for example, the prevalence of brideprice and dowry payments was considerably lower in the North than in the South; yet, some forms of payments still occurred in about 30 percent of all marriages. Further, the suppressing effects appeared to be rather short-lived, as evidenced in our descriptive and multivariate findings. The prevalence of dowry began to increase gradually since the early 1970s and its upward trend became even clearer among marriages contracted after reunification. The early return of dowry could possibly be explained by existing policies at the time in which the regime did not attack dowry directly as it did to brideprice and that dowry could potentially be perceived as enhancing the status of newlywed daughters, which went along well with the socialist goal to promote women's status. By the early 1980s, a few years prior to the implementation of market reform, it was apparent that the upward trends in dowry among northern marriages were followed by moderate increases in brideprice and bidirectional transfers. At this point, the family law might have been less strictly enforced by local cadres, corresponding to evidence indicating that in the late 1970s subpar productivity led to much less rigorous attempts by the state to collectivize farming which eventually gave way to the official market reform in 1986 (Fforde and de Vylder, 1996).

Compared to the North, the regime's attempts to restrict marriage payments in the South appeared to be unfruitful. Descriptive and multivariate analyses concur that the only tangible decline observed in the region following reunification was that of dowry. There was no significant change in prevalence of brideprice and bidirectional transfers. Nonetheless,

descriptive evidence (Figures 1a and 1c) seems to hint that a slight decrease in brideprice and bidirectional payments may have occurred during the early 1980s. If this was the case, it could still be argued whether such decline was really a ramification of the socialist agenda or rather a result of Vietnam's severe economic stagnation. It was plausible that under collectivization, it became less feasible for families to afford brideprice because of very limited disposable income. It was interesting, though, to observe that the decline of brideprice was less salient than that of dowry, perhaps suggesting that southerners might consider brideprice to be more important than dowry and therefore were more ready to forego dowry. Consistent with the above finding, our analyses also reveal that brideprice became less frequently expressed as money and gold during the period after reunification. This plausibly echoes the economic condition at the time when the government tightly controlled goods and market transactions (Beresford, 1988).

Conventional wisdom posits that traditional practices, including those related to marriage customs, prior to Vietnam's partition in 1954 were more prevalent in the North than in the South (Rambo, 1973). The socialist regime's moderate success in suppressing marriage payments in the North are arguably attributable to a number of factors, including northern Vietnam's stronger historical patterns of communality, longer exposure to socialism, more rigorous organization efforts by the Communist Party during the late 1950s, and the strengthening of local cadres during the Vietnam War (Goodkind, 1996; Malarney, 2002). Under collectivization, the state likely replaced the family to a certain extent by providing housing, jobs, and benefits to the population. Evidence suggests that despite flaws in the socialist system, many northern peasants favored collectivization because their livelihoods were improved (Moise, 1983 cited in Goodkind, 1996). In such political climate, northern family strategy for survival likely required knowledge of the government policies, including complying to laws such as brideprice bans, and ideally vertical connections with local authorities as opposed to strong horizontal family networks (Luong, 1993; Kleinen, 1999). Nonetheless, this does not mean northerners passively following whatever imposed on them. Past studies suggest that with respect to marriage customs, northern villager actively negotiated their way around the socialist agenda and reworked them to fit their traditional beliefs. For example, the traditional custom of exchanging betel leaves and areca nuts remained largely intact because the gifts were argued to be inexpensive and the exchange did not support religious professions (Goodkind, 1996). Further, although villagers were asked to organize weddings at their local government's building, many villagers resisted such mandate because it was deemed very important (perhaps more important than their loyalty to the Communist Party) for the newlyweds to conduct an ancestral worship at home (Malarney, 2002).

Although the reemergence of brideprice predated the market reform by at least a few years, both descriptive and multivariate analyses strongly concur that the impact of Vietnam's market transition on marriage payments was paramount. During the 1990s, practices of brideprice and dowry returned with vengeance, with a majority of northern and southern marriages contracted after economic reform practicing some forms of payments. The surge was particularly remarkable in the North, given the effective suppression of marriage payments in earlier decades. Descriptive results also suggest that the increase for brideprice and dowry continued throughout the 1990s suggesting the increase had likely not peaked by the time of the surveys. Also noteworthy is that corresponding to the upward trends of brideprice and dowry, bidirectional marital transfers became the dominant form of marital exchange during this period. In addition to increased prevalence, results also indicate that marriage payments, particularly dowry, were

increasingly expressed as money/gold. Transfers of property rights such as house and land were still commonly practiced. There was greater tendency for multiple gifts to be exchanged as brideprice or dowry during this period than in the past. Changes in prevalence and magnitude of marriage payments observed after market reform were plausibly facilitated by two important changes related to state policy: decreased governmental control over household decisions concerning family life and growing household disposable income as a result of market liberalization.

As illustrated in our multivariate analyses, marriage cohort appeared to be the most robust determinant when it came to explain why marriage payments changed in Vietnam during 1963-2000. Against the backdrops of significant temporal changes in characteristics of brides and grooms and their manner of mate selection to becoming more urbanized, better educated, married at a later age, or more independent in mate selection, our results suggest that these factors mattered relatively little when compared to structural and policy changes in predicting observed variations in marriage payments. Our findings lend very little support to the modernization perspective put forth by anthropologists and to economic perspectives which are largely based on notions of supply and demand in the labor market. This implies that in Vietnam marriage payments, at least after economic reform, may have become increasingly disconnected with the notion of economic functionality. In other words, structural and policy transformations in the 1990s facilitated the reemergence of marriage payments via more permissive policy and conducive economic conditions, even though the payments rarely served economic functions anymore. Urban or rural upbringing did not differentiate the likelihood of practicing marriage payments. Highly educated grooms were as likely as those with lower education to observe brideprice. The net effects of bride's education and marital age were largely inconsistent and could be interpreted as a result of her human capital or family background characteristics.

What then was the key function of marriage payments among recent marriage cohorts? As economic development does not necessarily bring pervasive cultural change and cultural values could be "an enduring autonomous influence on society" (Inglehart and Baker, 2000, p.19), we argue that the reemergence of marriage payments might reflect the persistence of traditional values and cultural resilience of marriage payments in the Vietnamese society. Anecdotal evidence, combined with our analyses of magnitude of payments, suggests that brideprice, dowry, and the resultant bidirectional transfers may have increasingly become a status symbol for bride's and groom's families in recent decades. Given its increasing size (i.e., rising prevalence of multiple-gift giving), there could potentially affect the wealth distribution across generations and families, even though marriage payments might have been valued for their symbolic meanings rather than their practical functions. What could our findings tell about trends in marriage payments in the near future? As Vietnam's economy continues to expand rapidly; as younger generations tend to come from a small family due to Vietnam's successful population control policy; as Vietnam has observed relatively slower rise in age at marriage compared to other Southeast Asian nations (Jones and Gubhaju, 2009), and as there is a growing importance of wealth display, including those related to brideprice and dowry, as status symbol, it is likely that families are more financially equipped to invest in both their children's human capital (e.g., schooling) as well as in customs closely tied to social prestige such as marriage payments. Thus, in years to come, brideprice, dowry, and bidirectional transfers will likely continue to be prevalent and culturally functional, regardless of their economic functionality.



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Appendix Table A1. Prevalence of brideprice and dowry by the order of current marriage among respondents and their spouses.

Current marriage is...	Number	% Any brideprice paid	% Any dowry paid	% No marriage payments
The first marriage for both bride and groom	2492	41.5	37.3	47.5
The first marriage for bride only	57	31.6	33.3	49.1
The first marriage for groom only	17	11.8	17.6	76.5
Not the first marriage for neither bride nor groom	26	19.2	0.0	80.8
Difference by status of current marriage		**	***	***

\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference by the status of current marriage is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ;  
\*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4

Appendix Table A2. Prevalence of brideprice and dowry by the presence of parents at the time of marriage.

Presence of parents at the time of marriage	Number	% Any brideprice paid	% Any dowry paid	% No marriage payments
At least one parent on both sides alive	2352	42.6	38.4	46.3
Only parent(s) on husband's side alive	72	41.7	13.9	56.9
Only parent(s) on wife's side alive	144	18.8	25.7	65.3
No parents on either side alive	24	4.2	4.2	91.7
Difference by presence of parents		***	***	***

\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference by presence of parents is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ;  
\*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4

Appendix Table A3. Prevalence of marriage payments by gender of the respondent.

Gender of the respondent	% Any brideprice paid	% Any dowry paid	% No marriage payments
Male	41.5	32.6	49.6
Female	44.3	45.1	58.3
Male-female difference	n.s.	***	***

\*\*\*Based on ANOVA, difference between male and female is significant at  $p \leq 0.001$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ ; n.s= Not significant p-value.

Source: Vietnam Study of Family Change, 2003-4.



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