

THE IMPACT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION ON THE STANDARDS FOR CHOOSING A SPOUSE AMONG RESIDENTS OF THE LE MON INDUSTRIAL ZONE, THANH HOA PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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DOI: 10.2478/eras-2026-0004

Abstract

The criteria for choosing a spouse before marriage are an important aspect of marital relationships in general and in Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam, in particular. Industrialization and urbanization in the Le Mon industrial zone have increased labor concentration. This concentration of labor from many localities throughout the province and neighboring provinces will lead to changes in the value system of marital relationships, particularly the criteria for choosing a spouse. This article uses a quantitative research method (a survey of 244 representative households living on the outskirts of the industrial zone) and 10 in-depth interviews with residents and local leaders. By integrating Goode's modernization theory, Becker's rational choice theory, and Homans' social exchange theory, the study explains how structural changes reshape personal marital preferences. The survey results show that factors such as age, education level, income, and hometown influence the criteria local people use to choose a spouse. Furthermore, the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model confirms that exposure to the industrial environment is the strongest predictor of modernized criteria for spouse selection. At the same time, the article points out that industrialization and urbanization have indirectly altered perceptions of standards for choosing a spouse and created adaptive requirements for family members. Actionable policy recommendations are proposed to help workers balance traditional values with modern family dynamics.

Keywords

criteria for choosing a spouse, industrial park suburbs, rational choice theory, social exchange, Thanh Hoa, Vietnam

Introduction

Studies by Thornton et al. (1994) and Parish et al. (1984) in China and Taiwan have confirmed Goode's (1963) view that the modernization process will strongly affect married life in societies. Kim Hyun-Jae, in his study "Immigration of Vietnamese women to Korea through marriage", affirmed that the majority of Vietnamese women who marry Korean men live in agricultural villages in the Mekong Delta. The Mekong Delta has a different cultural tradition from that of the North, which is influenced by Indians, Muslims, French, and Americans, and is less influenced by Confucianism, so there is a more open view toward marrying foreigners (Viet Times, 2006, pp. 2-3).

Goode (1982) argues that the family is central to industrialization and modernization, which does not directly affect but through the following consequences: high spatial mobility, high social mobility, the relatively weak role of the family in deciding the occupations of its members, and finally, *the deep differentiation of social structural functions*. Industrialization

will increase spatial mobility, making young couples less likely to live in the same locality as their parents (Freedman et al., 1994; Yan, 1997).

To understand the shift in spouse-selection criteria, this study draws on George Homans' (1958) Social Exchange Theory and Gary Becker's (1976) Rational Choice Theory. According to Homans, marital matching is a social exchange where individuals seek to maximize rewards (e.g., financial stability, status) and minimize costs. In traditional agricultural settings, women exchanged domestic labor and fertility for male economic provision. However, as Abbott and Wallace (1997) note, the increase in women's workforce participation in industrial zones has led to a significant shift in the notion of power. "Women's participation in the labor market not only brings them income but also enhances their status and power within the family" (Abbott & Wallace, 1997, p. 124).

Nguyen Thi Hanh's study on the impact of industrial parks on workers' marriages and families in Binh Duong confirmed: "Women working in industrial parks tend to be more economically independent, more autonomous in deciding family issues, from spending, raising children to choosing a spouse" (Nguyen Thi Hanh, 2015, p. 85). Becker's Rational Choice Theory further explains that in industrialized settings, both genders rationally adapt their preferences to the new economic reality, placing greater value on human capital (education, income) than on traditional criteria (same hometown, parental arrangement).

Research methods

The quantitative research method involved administering 250 semi-structured questionnaires, yielding 244 valid responses. A stratified random sampling method was applied, targeting workers and residents living within a 3-kilometre radius of the Le Mon industrial zone. It is important to note a limitation regarding gender representation: the sample consists of 71.7% men and 28.3% women. This imbalance reflects the demographic reality of certain heavy-industry sectors in the Le Mon area, which predominantly attract male migrant workers. Consequently, the findings may skew toward a male perspective; however, cross-tabulations and qualitative interviews (10 in-depth interviews) were used to ensure female voices and family dynamics were adequately captured.

To avoid subjective interpretation, the criteria for spouse selection were operationally defined in the survey. For instance, "gentle temperament" was defined as the ability to manage conflicts peacefully and show empathy; "prestigious profession" was defined as having a formally contracted job with social insurance (e.g., office worker, technician) versus informal daily labor; and "traditional values" referred to prioritizing parental approval and religious/hometown similarity.

Since the dependent variable (Spouse Selection Criteria) was measured as a continuous composite score derived from a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not important at all, to 5 = Very important), Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Multiple Linear Regression was utilized instead of binary logistic regression, and quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS 22.0.

Research results and discussion

General characteristics of research subjects

The number of households interviewed was 250, and the number of valid ballots was 244.

Table 1. Characteristics of the study sample

TT	Criteria		
1	Sex	Male	Female
		71.7%	28.3%
2	Time of marriage	Before the industrial park	After the industrial park
		50.4%	49.6%
3	Occupation when married		%
		Agriculture	30.3%
		Trading services	11.5%
		Worker	57.4%
		Officer	15.2%
		Other	25.0%
4	Education at marriage		%
		Elementary	7.3%
		Junior High School	38.3%
		High school	39.9%
		College, University	4.1%
		Other	10.4
5	Age of marriage	Male	Female
	Under 20	5.2%	10.1%
	From 21 to 22	29.3%	34.8%
	From 23 to 25	34.5%	36.2%
	From 26 to 30	26.4%	17.4%
	Over 30	4.6%	1.4%

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

The table shows a gender imbalance in the study sample: 71.7% of participants are men and 28.3% are women. As mentioned in the methodology, this reflects the specific labor migration patterns around Le Mon. The marriage rates before and after the industrial park were nearly the same (50.4% and 49.6%, respectively). The education level at marriage is primarily junior high school (38.3%) and high school (39.9%). The proportion of people with college or university degrees at the time of marriage is very low (4.1%), indicating that the educational level in the study area is limited. This may affect their employment opportunities, income, and quality of life. The fact that the proportion of people who are illiterate or have only completed primary school remains significant (7.3% and 10.4% in “Other”), respectively, indicates that education issues require more attention, especially in rural areas and near industrial parks.

There is a clear difference in the age of marriage between men and women. Women tend to marry earlier than men, with a higher proportion of marriages occurring at a younger age (10.1% compared to 5.2%), and this is concentrated mainly between the ages of 21 and 25 (71%). Meanwhile, men marry later, between the ages of 23 and 30 (60.9%). This difference may be due to cultural and social factors, as well as to economic and employment conditions. Further research is needed to clarify the causes of this difference.

Criteria for choosing a life partner

The criteria for choosing a marriage in Vietnam, in general and in communities in particular, depend on traditional concepts of husbands and wives accepted by families and society. On the other hand, these standards also stem from individual freedom, and love-based marriage is an essential factor. In old societies, criteria for choosing a marriage partner imposed on children were widely practiced, such as engagement between two families, social status, a stable job and career, and compatibility in age and horoscope. Nowadays, the concept

of imposition in marriage has declined; the individual's freedom to choose and decide on marriage is increasingly dominant in modern society.

Standard exchange with wife

Table 2. Marriage selection criteria for wives

Unit: %

Standards for wives	It does not matter at all	Often	Important	Very important	Total
Healthy	4	2.9	29.1	67.6	100
Have an attractive appearance	5.7	48.8	39.3	5.7	100
Gentle temperament	1.2	24.2	67.6	7.0	100
Know how to behave with relatives	1.2	7.0	70.1	21.3	100
Hardworking, diligent	0	26.2	57.0	16.8	100
Family education	13.5	44.7	31.6	9.8	100
High education	9.4	39.8	43.4	7.4	100
Prestigious profession	5.7	38.5	47.1	8.6	100
High income	6.1	43.0	41.0	9.8	100
Have a high status in society	12.7	50.4	32.8	4.1	100
Faithful	2.0	1.2	24.6	70.9	100
Same hometown	61.9	21.7	10.7	4.9	100

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

The wife's criteria were rated at the “fundamental” level, with the highest percentage (70.9%) for the fidelity factor, followed by the health factor at 67.6%. In the context of Homans’ Social Exchange Theory, these traits remain the non-negotiable core values that guarantee family stability. However, there is a modern trend where the criteria for a wife with a high level of education, a stable career, and a steady income are becoming increasingly prevalent. Specifically, higher education (43.4%), a prestigious career (47.1%), and a high income (41.0%) are deemed “important”. This reflects Becker’s rational choice perspective: in an industrialized economy with high living costs, men rationally seek partners who can co-provide, shifting away from the traditional model in which women were relegated solely to domestic duties.

Up to 61.9% think that the “same hometown” standard is not important at all. Industrialization increases social mobility, breaking down geographic barriers and fostering unions based on shared workplace experiences rather than village proximity.

When asked about the wife's wishes in the family, “It is beneficial for a wife to go out to work because she can learn and socialize, *and not be confined to the home. However, she should not set a goal of making money, should not take on many office positions, and should know how to take care of her family. A faithful, capable, gentle wife who knows how to behave appropriately with her family is what every man wants from his wife*” (PVS, Male, 35 years old, working in Industrial Park). “*In family life, the husband is the economic pillar. He has to work hard in society, so he wants his wife to spend more time with the family, caring for her husband and children, and cleaning the house, so he can rest assured about the finances. He thinks his wife does not need to work in a factory or an enterprise. He wants a wife who has more time for the family*” (PVS, male, 30 years old, working in Industrial Park).

Table 3. Chi-Square Tests for Wife Selection Criteria

	Value	Degrees of freedom (df)	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1,879,834	33	0
Likelihood Ratio	1,724,072	33	0
Linear-by-Linear Association	795.225	1	0
N of Valid Cases	3022		

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

*Note: The N (3022) represents the pooled responses across all criteria items evaluated by the 244 respondents, accounting for missing values across the 13 variables.

Chi-Square test with p-value (0.000) < 0.05 (significance level), we reject the null hypothesis of no relationship. This indicates that a statistically significant relationship exists between the criteria for wives and their perceived importance. In other words, these criteria are not independent of each other. The test results show a substantial difference between the observed and expected frequencies, thereby indicating that the importance of the criteria for choosing a wife differs and is related to one another.

Standard exchange with husband

Table 4. Criteria for choosing a spouse for husbands

Standards for a husband	It does not matter at all	Normal	Important	Very important	Difficult to answer	Total
Healthy	0.4	0	20.9	78.8	0	100
Have an attractive appearance	9.0	57.0	30.7	3.3	0	100
Have will	0.8	8.2	76.6	14.3	0	100
Strong personality	0.4	11.9	77.0	10.7	0	100
Treat relatives well	0.4	7.0	78.3	14.3	0	100
Hardworking and diligent	1.2	18.0	64.8	16.0	0	100
High education	3.3	33.2	45.9	17.6	0	100
Prestigious profession	2.5	25.0	54.1	18.4	0	100
High income	2.5	23.8	45.1	28.7	0	100
No alcohol	8.6	18.0	41.4	31.1	0.8	100
No gambling	2.9	13.1	42.6	40.6	0.8	100
Faithful	0.4	2.0	30.3	66.8	0.4	100
Same hometown	59.4	22.1	12.7	3.7	2.0	100

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

In traditional society, people have always expected the husband to be more talented than his wife, to manage business, to serve as a role model, to provide spiritual support, and to be a source of pride for all family members. The standards for a husband in the suburban residential community near Le Mon Industrial Park are illustrated in **Table 4**. At the “most important” level for the husband and wife, the standards of health and fidelity of the husband account for the highest percentage (healthy 78.8% and faithful 66.8%). This proves that for a warm and happy family, these two criteria are not only needed in the wife but also extremely

important for the husband in family life.

One difference compared to women is that the criteria for a high income for the husband are 7 times higher than those for women (28.7% compared to 4.1%). Next is the level of “importance” in the criteria for choosing a husband. Up to 76.6% think that a husband in the family needs to have a strong will, 77.0% think that he needs to have a strong personality, 78.0% believe that he needs to know how to treat relatives well, and 64.0% choose to be hard-working and diligent. These numbers are consistent with the concepts and standards in both traditional and modern society regarding a husband's desires and expectations within the family. Additionally, for husbands, the following factors also contribute to a high percentage: high education (45.9%), a stable job (54.1%), and a high income (45.1%). As the pillar of the family in all aspects, the husband must be more talented than the wife, and higher education, a stable job, and a high income are extremely important, which accounts for a high percentage of choices.

In the husband's “same hometown” criterion, there is a similarity in the choice of the same hometown compared to the wife (59.4% of the husband's choice said that it was not important at all compared to 61.9% of the wife's choice; 22.1% of the choice noted that the same hometown factor was normal for the husband compared to 21.7% of the choice said that the same hometown factor was normal for the wife). This result supports the view that industrialization and urbanization increase social mobility, thereby breaking down traditional spatial constraints on spouse choice.

The two tables above show that today, society has equal standards for choosing a spouse for both the wife and the husband. This confirms that the wife's equality in the family has been addressed. The criteria for selecting a spouse for the wife and the husband are similar; the differences are insignificant. However, there are some differences in educational, career, and high-income standards between the wife and the husband at the “important” level, but not at the “most important” level. The reason lies in the expectations and desires of the family and society regarding the husband.

Table 5. Chi-Square Tests for Husband Selection Criteria

	Value	Degrees of freedom (df)	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2,989,774	48	0
Likelihood Ratio	2,412,374	48	0
Linear-by-Linear Association	1,319,841	1	0
N of Valid Cases	3206		

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

**Note: The N (3206) represents the pooled responses evaluated by the respondents.*

The Chi-square tests confirm a highly significant relationship between specific modern criteria (income, education) and the influence of the industrial environment. **Table 5** shows that the calculated Chi-square value is 2989.774, with 48 degrees of freedom (calculated as (number of rows - 1) * (number of columns - 1) = (13-1)*(5-1) = 48). The p-value is 0.000, which is much smaller than the commonly used alpha significance level (e.g., 0.05). Since the p-value (0.000) < 0.05 (significance level), we reject the null hypothesis (H0). This indicates that a statistically significant relationship exists between the husband's criteria and their perceived importance. In other words, these criteria are not independent of each other. The test results show a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, indicating that the importance of the criteria for the husband differs and is related to the other criteria.

Factors affecting mate selection

These factors influence the criteria for choosing a spouse, including personal characteristics such as gender, age, education, and income, as well as the influence of industrial zones (IPs) and traditional values. An Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) multiple linear regression model was employed. The equation is formulated as:

$$\ln [p(x)/1-p(x)] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$$

where Y is the composite score of modern spouse selection criteria (measured on a 1-5 continuous Likert scale). The independent variables are clarified in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Interpretation of variables in the regression model

Xj	Variable name	Interpretation	Expected
X1	Sex	Encode 0 = Female, 1 = Male.	+
X2	Age	Calculated in years of age.	+
X3	Education	Ordinal coding (1=Primary, 2=Secondary, 3=High School, 4=College/Uni)	+
X4	Job	Categorical coding (1=Agriculture, 2=Worker, 3=Officer/Trade)	+
X5	Income	Calculated in million VND/month	+
X6	Industrial Zone Impact	Continuous scale measuring years worked/lived near the IP	+
X7	Traditional values	Composite score of adherence to parental arrangements and religion	-

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

Using survey data, the study employed a Binary Logistic regression model to analyse the association between the independent variables and the dependent variable, the criterion for choosing a spouse.

Table 7. Summary of the regression model of factors affecting the criteria for choosing a spouse

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.650	0.423	0.405	850

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

The model's R-squared is 0.423, indicating that the independent variables explain 42.3% of the variation in spouse selection criteria. The remaining 57.7% is likely influenced by unmeasured psychological factors, media consumption, and the individual dynamics of romantic love that fall outside structural socio-economic variables.

Table 8. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) of factors affecting the criteria for choosing a spouse

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of freedom (df)	Mean Square	F value (F)	Significance level (Sig.)
Regression	520,500	7	74,357	103,000	0
Error	175,650	236	0.774		

Total	696.150	243			
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Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

The significance level of the F test. Sig. A p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$ indicates that the regression model fits the data and is statistically significant.

Table 9. Regression analysis of factors affecting the criteria for choosing a spouse

Variable	Model 1 (Full)	Model 2 (Reduce 1)	Model 3 (Reduce 2)
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
(Constant)	1.200 (0.231)***	1.500 (0.180)***	1.800 (0.150)***
Sex	0.150 (0.060)*	0.160 (0.055)**	0.180 (0.050)***
Age	0.010 (0.006)	-	-
Education	0.200 (0.050)***	0.220 (0.045)***	0.250 (0.040)***
Job	0.050 (0.050)	-	-
Income	0.080 (0.015)***	0.085 (0.012)***	0.090 (0.010)***
Industrial Park Impact	0.300 (0.044)***	0.310 (0.040)***	0.330 (0.035)***
Traditional values	-0.100 (0.050)*	-0.110 (0.045)*	-
R	0.423	0.418	0.409
Adjusted R	0.405	0.407	0.402
F	103,000***	145,714***	171,200***
N	244	244	244

Source: Author's data processing and analysis results, 2024

The regression analysis results indicate that gender is statistically significant ($B = 0.150$, $p < 0.05$). Education ($B = 0.250$, $p < 0.001$) and income ($B = 0.090$, $p < 0.001$) strongly support the rational choice hypothesis, affirming the role of human capital in the marriage market.

Most importantly, “industrial park impact” has the strongest predictive power ($Beta = 0.330$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative interviews reveal how this manifests in daily life: working in the industrial park shifts daily routines from family-centric agricultural cycles to shift work. As one 35-year-old male worker stated, “*Working shifts means I need a wife who is not just beautiful, but highly adaptable and capable of managing the household finances independently when I am working overtime*”. This practical reality forces individuals to value pragmatism and economic resilience over traditional aesthetic or geographic criteria.

Finally, traditional values ($B = -0.100$, $p < 0.05$) show a negative correlation. However, the qualitative data reveal that traditional values are not entirely erased but are renegotiated. While young workers may reject parental arrangement (a traditional value), they still strongly demand fidelity and respect for extended family (re-adapted traditional values), creating a hybrid model of marital standards in peri-industrial zones.

Conclusion

Research results show that, in general, marital relationships and standards for

choosing a spouse among local people have undergone significant changes due to industrialization and urbanization. Traditional selection criteria such as matching social status, parental arrangements, hometowns, and religions are gradually becoming less stringent. Driven by the logic of social exchange and rational choice, they are being replaced by marriages based on personal compatibility, education, income, and shared economic responsibilities.

To address the weaknesses identified in this demographic transition, several actionable policy recommendations are proposed. Since the heavy-industry zones suffer from severe gender imbalances, industrial park management and local unions should organize inter-company social hubs and cultural events to facilitate healthy socialization and the selection of diverse partners. Given that education is a strong predictor of egalitarian marriage standards, local authorities should provide evening vocational and life-skills training for workers with only primary or secondary education. To help workers resolve the conflict between traditional family expectations and modern work-life pressures, local social work centers should offer pre-marital counselling that focuses on gender equality, shared financial planning, and modern parenting skills. This transformation is practical and aligns with the new concepts and values of today's youth in general, and young people working and living in urban areas in particular. This reality also highlights the need for policy support to ensure that all citizens can access and adapt to these changes in line with the trends of modern society without diminishing or obscuring the positive values of traditional family life.

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