

LEVELS AND TRENDS OF THE SOCIAL CHANGE IN VIETNAM TODAY: SEEN FROM THE SOCIOLOGICAL ANGLE

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In Vietnam, many studies of the social change in the fields and aspects of the social life have been conducted. In which, the sociological surveys showed the characteristics and nature of the social change in the past time, for example in the Northern rural area, the social structure with the monotonousness in the social stratum is changed to the complicated social structure with a lot of very diversified social strata and groups. However, the survey results of this subject have not been generalized in order to find out the trends of the social change from the microscopic to macroscopic social levels. This is the main purpose and content of this article.

1. Social change: concept and levels

Concept

The social change is the social process in which the constituents of the society and the whole social system are changed from this state to the other state.

The above-mentioned concept of social change shows that any change in component and structure of the society called “social change”. The social

change occurs in scale, structure and component of the society such as the social group, social position, social role, social institution, culture, social network and the whole social system constituted by these factors. Together with the aspect of structure – social system, it also includes the aspect of time: any social change also happens in a certain time frame and may temporary, short or sustainable, permanent.

In nature, the change is a form of movement, method of existence of all things, including the society with its all very complicated components and structures. In other words, the social entities, social phenomena are always in a continuous movement and change state. For example, in the field of population: every year, more than 1 million children are born in Vietnam; in the field of economy: since 1986 to present, the living standards of the Vietnamese people have been continuously improved; in the field of international relations: Vietnam becomes an official member of WTO.

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The social change may take place one after another, gradually according to the law of evolution or takes place strongly and suddenly under the impact of the revolutions. The social change from the feudal system to the capitalist is a revolutionary change. The change from the capitalist society to the socialist society is a revolutionary change. The social change may be in the trend of development, progress with the characteristic of next state to reach to a higher perfect level than previous state.

Levels of social change

The previous concepts of change were often focused on the macroscopic level, i.e. the change of mankind societies or only paid attention to a certain level of the social change, for example, a rural or urban region. It is important to find that the concept of social change as mentioned above implies that the social change may take place in each level from the component – microscopic to the whole - macroscopic and the relationship between the components and between the components with the whole, i.e the inter-level change. Specifically as follows:

At the microscopic level, the social change is expressed most clearly on the change in awareness, attitude and behavior of the individuals and small groups. On this level, the change of family in scale, components and the relationships between the generations also takes place.

At the medium-scope level, the social change is expressed most clearly on the change in organization model, structure of organization. For example, the most

clear is the change of organization from basing on the family organization type sentimental structure to basing on the office organization type functional structure (bureaucratic organization).

At the macroscopic level, the social change is expressed most clearly on the change of the social structure systems, for example, the change from the traditional society to the modern society, from the agricultural society to the industrial society, change in labor division structure from basing on the family relationship, family line to basing on functions, tasks.

The sociological researches on the social change often meet with two types of mistake. Namely, *first*, the research focuses on the social change at this level but disregards or ignores the social change at the other levels. This approach can easily create the possibility “Can’t see the wood for the trees”, it means that only see the change in each component but lack view of generality of the social change; *second*, the researches focus much on the change of each component of the social system which at least analyzes the change in the relationship between the components. Even the researches on the change of social structure also focus mainly on the change in components of the structure which at least pays attention to the relationship between the components of the structure. The research on the change is always very complicated because the object is the social change and shall be more complicated when considering the change of relationship between the individuals, groups, social strata and

the whole social system in the specific historical background according to the direction of time.

2. Some trends of social change in Vietnam today

Social change at the microscopic level: attitude towards the work and income

The satisfaction is an experiencing state of individual, reflects the relationship of humans with the certain events of the society. The satisfaction also changes by the time: for example, the satisfaction of the people with their job was increased from 57.5% to 72.1% in 1992-1997. Among the groups of population, the group with the average living standards has the highest change in the rate of satisfaction: from 49.1% to 80%.

The change in rate of satisfaction with the income rate of the people happened rapidly nearly twofold: from 24% in 1992 to 42.9% in 1997. Among five groups of population, the group with average living standards has the most rapid rate of change: more twofold from 18.9% to 49.2% in this same period (2, page 43).

Change of individual value system – internal motivation of the social change

The individual value is what each individual thinks important, necessary and pursuing in order to obtain. The individual value may be the success, wealth, knowledge, education, freedom, creativeness, family, etc ...

The change of individual value system takes place at the microscopic level, expressed that what values the individuals attach much importance, how the individual values are ranked.

On this aspect, we may see a very contradictory picture below: *On one hand*, the individuals, especially the young people more and more attach much importance to the individual success, independence and willingness to do any thing unforbidden by the law in order to have income. This means that there is a great change compared to the generation of ancestors who only wanted to work in the State sector. But *on the other hand*, an individual value “education” is still continued to be maintained and expressed clearly at the continuous increase rate of children going to school, for example, the admission rate of pupils at the secondary education was increased from 32% in the school year 2000-2001 to over 54% in school year 2005-2006 and still increased (see: 3). Moreover, the number of candidates who register for taking the university entrance examination of this year is always higher than that of the previous year, regardless of the policies on section division, flow division of secondary education which have been implemented for many years. Although the rate of population at the age of 15 and over who are trained in the technical profession of Vietnam is still very low and only reaches 13.4% in 2009, this rate has been increased continuously for the past ten years both in the urban and rural areas. In the urban areas, the rate of population at the age from 15 and over who are trained in the technical profession was increased from 17.5% in 1999 to 25.5% year; in the rural areas, this rate was increased from 4% to 8% in the same period. Because the educational level and professional

qualifications of the Vietnamese laborers is increased gradually, although it is still slow and low, the labor productivity of Vietnam is increased, for example: the per capita labor productivity was increased from 11.7 million VND/person in 2000 to 32.9 million VND/person in 2008 (see: 3).

Change in division of labor in the society

From the late 1980s to present, the surveys of social structure, labor-occupation in the rural areas have contributed to the discovering and clarifying the trend of change in the division of labor model according to the market economy. The social structure-occupation includes two basic components such as the collective farmers of the State and the co-operative farmers who characterize for the period of centralized management-administration-order-bureaucracy-subsidy which is switching strongly to the diversified social structure-occupation characterizing for the period of Innovation with the production and business self-controlling farmer households, in which three main outstanding occupation groups such as agriculture, non-agriculture and combination between husbandry and non-husbandry.

On the whole society including the urban and rural areas, a largest social change form in the past time in Vietnam is the change in division of labor according to the economic sector and economic area. The rate of labor was increased rapidly in the foreign invested component, from 0.99% in 2000 to

3.73% in 2008; meanwhile, the rate of labor in the public sector was reduced from 9.31% to 9.07% and non-state sector was reduced from 89.70% to 87.20% in the same period (see:3). The labor structure by industry has been strongly changed within the past ten years: specifically, the rate of labor in agriculture was strongly reduced from 69.4% in 1999 to 51.8% in 2009, the rate of labor in industry and construction was increased from 14.9% to 15.4% and the rate of labor in service was strongly increased from 15.7% to 32.8% in this same period (see: 3). The change in division of labor shall naturally lead to the social change at the macroscopic level: The agricultural society is switched gradually to the industrial – service society and the urban-rural social structure is also changed according to the direction of urbanization. This is expressed clearly that the rate of population in the urban areas was increased from 23.5% in 1999 to 29.6% in 2009 and the rate of population in the rural areas was reduced from 74.5% to 70.4% in 1999-2009 (see: 4).

Change in living standards and social stratum division structure

In consideration by criteria of living standards measured by per capita income, it may be found that the income gap between cities and rural areas is gradually narrowed, for example this gap was reduced from 2.3 times in 1999 to 2.1 times in 2006. The trend of change in the living standards of the areas took place more complicated but all according to the trend of improvement of the per capita income

rate through the years in period 1991 - 2006.

The social stratum division structure was changed rapidly and expressed clearly at the rate of common poverty on the whole country was reduced strongly from 37.4% in 1998 to 13.5% in 2008. In 8 geographical and economic regions of the whole country, the poor regions have the most rapid rate of poverty reduction, for example: in the Central Highland, the rate of poverty was reduced from 52.4% in 1998 to 11.1% in 2008; and in the Northwestern region, the rate of poverty was reduced more than 3.5 times from 73.4% to 19.8% in this same period. This means that the bottom class including the poor people of the social structure model of Vietnam in general and of each region in particular has been strongly reduced for over past ten years. Only this also makes the pyramidal structure model with the very bottom class, including the poor people with low income rate under the common poverty threshold was narrowed and thus, the entire pyramid is changed into the rhomb with the characteristic that the rate of poverty, i.e. the bottom stratum of the model was shrunk (see: 5).

The proposal to implement according to the new poverty standard^(*) of Ministry of Labor – Invalids and Social Affairs, accordingly, the former rural poverty standard which was average income rate of 200,000 VND/person/month was

^(*) The rate of poor households calculated according to the average income of 1 person per month with the new standard of the Government in period 2006-2010, in which 260,000VND in the urban areas; 200,000VND in the rural areas.

increased by 350,000 VND/person/month and the urban poverty standard was increased from the average income rate of 260,000 VND/person/month to 450,000 VND/person/month, this makes the rate of poverty increased up to 20%. But this shall help many people who was living “near poverty”, close to poverty formerly enjoy the support from the poverty reduction policy. This also means that the whole rhombic social structure is improved in the trend of living standards of the social strata from the poorest group to the richest group is increased, although the rate of increase is unequal between the social strata, social groups. The relationship between the social strata, social groups is changed according to the trend of openness, sympathy, cooperation, together directing toward the development, wealthy people, strong country, just, free, democratic, civilized and happy society.

3. Conclusion

the Vietnamese society is changing strongly, widely and deeply according to the comprehensive innovation policy on socio-economic life initiated by Communist Party of Vietnam and State from 1986 to present. One of the clearest expressions of this change is the economic innovation according to the socialist market mechanism. The change in economic structure associated with the change in social structure takes place at all levels from microscopic level such individual, family to the macroscopic level such as the whole society.

The analysis of social change at all levels helps us understand more clearly,

completely the complicatedness and trends of the social change in Vietnam in the past time. Therefore, we can forecast the trend of change in the future.

It may be seen in the social change at the microscopic level that the people find more comfortable with their job and income. The educational level in general and especially the high educational level and qualifications become the important and necessary value for each individual and each community in the society, from the village community to the whole society, and plays the role as the motivation and human capital resources for the development of individual, family and the society community. The social labor structure is changed according to the trend of reduction in agricultural labor and increase in industrial, service labor. The social stratum division structure on the living standards is changed from the tower model at the very high rate of poverty characterizing for the period of old type economic management which was strongly switched to the rhomb model at the very rate of poverty. The gap between the rich and the poor in the social structure was also changed according to the trend of gradually rapid increase in the first years of the innovation period but after that gradually slow increase in the recent years and the speed of increase shall be restrained, coming to reducing gradually in the future.

However, the inter-level approach demands the consideration into the impact trend of the change in policy, institution, i.e. the macroscopic impact trend on the human individual. The social change may create the corollaries which are undesired, but must be accepted in order to control appropriately, for example the social change leads to the gap between the rich and the poor, sex inequality and social inequality between the individuals, family households, regions. As well as there are the undesired changes in value systems and therefore, it is necessary to be patient to struggle and prevent from greed, selfishness, envy and laziness.

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