

**Migrant Working Children in Ho Chi Minh City:
Emerging Trends between Economic Migrant and Runaway Child Workers**

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of *doi moi* on working children in Ho Chi Minh City. *Doi moi*, which was implemented in 1986, drastically changed Vietnamese society, economically, socially and politically. These changes allowed a market economy to emerge, sparked remarkable economic growth, and reduced the overall level of poverty. The living standard of the entire population has improved as a result of these economic developments. Poverty reduction has not occurred equally across all regions of Vietnam. Since 1986, there has been a growing divide between rural and urban areas. Around 10 million children in Vietnam today, 30% of the population, are poor according to the international standard. Many children have migrated from countryside provinces to large cities in Vietnam to work on the streets; many have moved from the rural provinces because their families cannot afford to support them or send them to school. These children, some of whom have moved voluntarily or because of familial pressure, have been left out of *doi moi* economic growth. Since Vietnam's economic opening in the mid-80s, the problem of working children in large cities such as Ho Chi Minh City has become increasingly visible to the international community. The number of working children has increased and the types of children included in the definition of working and street children are changing.

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Introduction

The problem of working children is one of the most pressing social problems in Vietnam, especially in Ho Chi Minh City. Over the past two decades, the number of children working in major cities has dramatically increased. Working children are sprawled across every district in Ho Chi Minh City. The sight of children selling lottery tickets and newspapers, offering shoe-shining services, and children knocking bamboo sticks to sell noodle soup has become familiar. The increase in the number of children has led to the development of new categories of working children and has made the issue of child labor more complex than ever before.

In the past, migrant working children were predominantly runaway children who left home because of social problems. These problems include parental divorce, abandonment, abuse, and neglect. In addition, many children were lured by exciting stories about life in Ho Chi Minh City. However, over the past decade, a new group of migrant working children has emerged and increased very rapidly. These children are economic migrant working children who are working in Ho Chi Minh City to support their families in rural provinces. This group of children developed in response to the great changes in Vietnamese society that occurred in the years following the implementation of *doi moi*.

The Sixth Party Congress of the Communist Party implemented *doi moi*, or renovation, in 1986. *Doi Moi* was a series of economic liberalization policies that altered what previously had been a centrally planned, communist economy. The policy changes allowed a market economy to emerge, sparked remarkable economic growth and consequently reduced poverty across all social classes. *Doi moi* increased the living standard of all provinces, however, its success was not evenly distributed across all provinces. Since the implementation of *doi moi*, there has been a growing divide between rural and urban provinces/cities as a result of resource allocation. Certain policies have led to great unemployment and few income generating opportunities in rural provinces,

prompting millions of people from rural provinces to migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to help their families in rural areas.

Vibrant cities such as Ho Chi Minh City generate new opportunities and demands for jobs like shoe shining and selling petty goods to residents and foreign tourists which urban people are unwilling to perform. Instead, the expectation of cash incomes encourages rural labor to migrate to the city and supply such services. Working on the street may be more dangerous and tiresome than tilling paddy fields in the countryside, but it is more profitable. Rural people come to the cities even though they have to live separately from their families and familiar landscape.

Not only have adults migrated, but also the number of children migrating to help their families has rapidly increased. In the course of the past decade, thousands of children have migrated to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to send back to their families. Families have become increasingly reliant on child labor remittances to cover daily expenses. The pressure for children to leave their rural hometowns to come to Ho Chi Minh City has had a great impact on the nature of child labor in Ho Chi Minh City. Today, there are two distinct and dominant groups of migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City: runaway and economic migrant children. As a result of the co-existence of these two groups, new patterns have emerged that have drastically altered the nature of working children in Ho Chi Minh City.

The aim of this paper is to study the causes of the increase in the number of economic child migrants to Ho Chi Minh City over the past decade, the changing dynamics between runaway and economic migrant children, and the increasing reliance of families on child labor remittances. To achieve this goal, the following sections shall focus on the effects of doi moi and internal migration trends on child labor, the changing nature of child labor from 1992 to 2000, the different causes and emerging patterns of child migration to Ho Chi Minh City between runaway and economic migrant working children, and the emerging patterns of work done by child economic

migrants. Using the findings from these sections, I shall attempt to draw conclusions about the extent to which families rely on child labor remittances.

I shall use the following tools to conduct this study: the Terre des Hommes 1992 “Street Children in Ho Chi Minh” survey, the Terre des Hommes 2000 “A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City” survey, sample group data collected in 2005 by Mrs. Van Ngoc Lan of the Department of Sociology of the Southern Institute of Social Sciences of Vietnam, and data collected from 30 in depth interviews with lottery ticket selling, shoe shining, and noodle soup selling economic migrant children in 2006. In depth interview data for 2006 was collected with the assistance of Mr. Truong Tung Lam, Mr. The Vung Le, Mr. Bui Linh Cuong, and Mr. Ha Thuc Dung of the Southern Institute of Social Sciences. Throughout this study several obstacles were encountered due to the limited literature on working children who are wage earners and who are not engaged in street-based casual activities. There is also no literature available on family reliance on child labor remittances in Vietnam. Thus, this study depended greatly on information collected from children and on data that is indirectly related to these topics.

Doi Moi and its Effects on Internal Migration & Working Children

Child labor is prevalent in most of the world’s poorer countries. As a response to chronic poverty and idiosyncratic shocks, poor children around the world are withdrawn from school, if they are attending, and are required to make an economic contribution to the household. The income generated from their labor allows the household and the children within the household to maintain essential basic consumption in times of real hardship.¹ According to recent studies, the incidence of child labor is negatively correlated with increases in living standards. Alan Krueger, in “International Labor Standards and Trade,” has shown that internationally child labor disappears once a country’s GDP per capita reaches \$5,000. He finds that 80% of the international variation in

¹ Eric Edmonds, “Child Labor in Transition in Vietnam,” World Bank Policy Research Paper #2774, 2004, pp. 508

child labor can be explained by GDP per capita alone.² Vietnam is no exception to this trend as its increasing economic growth led to a rapid decrease in nationwide child labor; however, the failure of this economic prosperity to reach certain households has led to an increasing number of poor children leaving home to work in urban cities to help their families. This section shall demonstrate that the evolving patterns of migrant working children are similar to the changes in overarching internal migration trends of Vietnam in response to the policies of *doi moi* in the past twenty years.

Vietnam has made a remarkable achievement in lifting its large number of poor out of poverty in the last two decades. Over the course of the last two decades, Vietnam has conducted a thorough and entire economic reform. In December 1986, the Sixth Party Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam approved the *doi moi* or renovation policy. *Doi Moi* was a series of economic liberalization policies that altered what previously had been a centrally planned, communist economy. Three important provisions of the new policy were the abolition of fixed prices in favor of an open market economy, the opening to foreign direct investment in 1987 and 1988³, and land reform in 1987, which abolished collectives and gave land use rights to 80% of the population.⁴ Foreign direct investment was legalized and encouraged, and many trade barriers were reduced or eliminated. This new investment gave a boost to Vietnam's struggling economy greatly contributing to its impressive economic development over the past 15 years.⁵ The economic growth increased the overall living standard and reduced poverty.

In the decade following the implementation of *doi moi*, economic growth reached the highest rate of 7% per annum; the GDP was nearly doubled after 10 years.⁶ Economic reforms led

² Alan Krueger, "International Labor Standards and Trade," in Eric Edmonds, "Child Labor in Transition in Vietnam," World Bank Policy Research Paper #2774, Washington, DC, pp.505

³ Adam and Stefan de Vylder Fforde, *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 19

⁴ Ha Huy Thanh, **Economic Development Relating to Hunger Eradication, Poverty Reduction and Social Equality in Vietnam**, pp. 1

⁵ Quan Xuan Dinh, "The State and the Social Sector in Vietnam" *ASEAN Economic Bulletin* Volume 16, no. Issue 3, 1999, pp. 37

⁶ **Poverty Alleviation Strategy 2001-2010**, Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, Hanoi, 2001

to great poverty reduction. Vietnam's poverty rate, which had been above 70% in the 1980s, fell to approximately 29% by 2002.⁷ Having been a country lacking food in the 1980s, Vietnam became the second biggest rice exporter in the world in the 1990s. According to Lillian Forsyth in "Social Welfare Structure in the Post-*Doi Moi* Era," these outstanding socio-economic achievements brought considerable improvements in lives of the population, as evident by important social indicators. The infant mortality rate, a human measure of a country's development declined from 55 to 48 per 1000 live births between 1990-1999. In addition, primary school net enrollment rate increased from 91% in 1993 to 97% in 1997 and has been rising steadily at the rate of about 2.1% per annum since 1985.⁸ The growing prosperity that resulted from the emerging market economy and macroeconomic reforms benefited the people of Vietnam as a whole in terms of decreases in poverty and increases in living standards.

Despite overall economic growth and poverty reduction, not all population segments experienced the growth equally. Many scholars have claimed that *doi moi* reforms and Vietnam's consequent transition to a market economy have resulted in increasing inequities between the rich and poor, and between the urban and rural populations.⁹ Poverty in Vietnam is highly concentrated in rural areas with about 90 percent of the poor living in outside major urban areas. In the 1990s, rural agricultural incomes decreased relative to nonagricultural incomes.¹⁰ Per capita income in rural areas is less than US \$200 per year, while the national average is about US \$400.¹¹ As a result of the low income of rural households compared to urban households, it should not be surprising that the decrease in child labor did not occur evenly across all sections of society. While income is not the only measure of economic growth, it is useful for determining who has benefited

⁷ UNDP, "Vietnam 2004," in *United Nations Development Programme*, ed. UNDP, Hanoi, Vietnam 2004, pp. 13

⁸ UNICEF, **Situation Analysis of Women and Children**, Hanoi, November, 1999, pp. 12

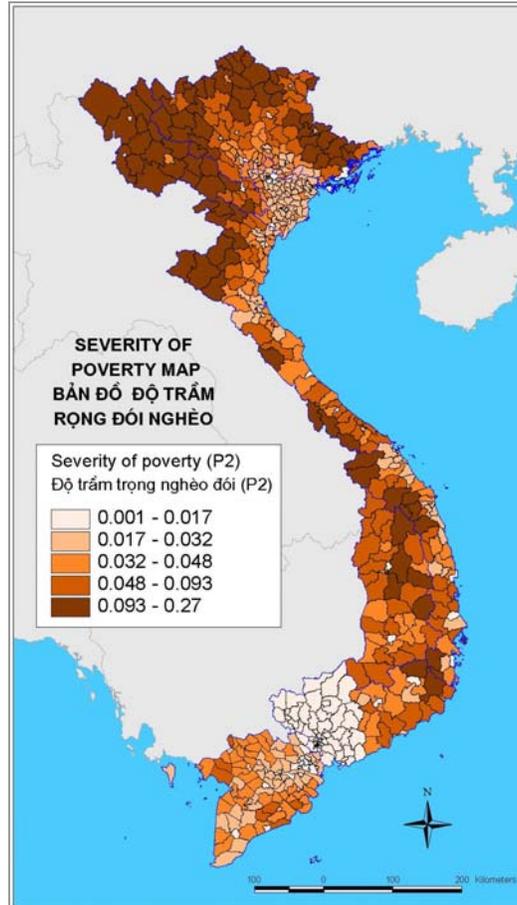
⁹ Lillian Forsyth, "Social Welfare in the Post-*Doi Moi* Era: The Case of Street Children in Vietnam," presented to East Asian Languages and Cultures Department December 12, 2005 pp. 4

¹⁰ Paul Glewwe, Agrawal, Nisha, and Dollar, David, ed., *Economic Growth, Poverty, and Household Welfare in Vietnam*, Washington, DC, World Bank 2004, pp. 82

¹¹ UNDP, "Doi Moi and Human Development in Vietnam" in *National Human Development Report*. The Political Publishing House, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2001, pp. 45

from the growing wealth that is a result of *doi moi* openness policies.¹² It is clear that wealth is concentrated in urban centers—Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, in specific—and urban populations have benefited more than rural populations.

Severity of Poverty Map¹³



As evident from the *severity of poverty map* above, poverty is concentrated in specific rural areas while, the level of poverty in city centers like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi is at a minimum. In addition, those districts of rural provinces that neighbor major urban centers have a lower incidence of poverty than those provinces that are a greater distance away.

¹² Lillian Forsyth, pp. 4

¹³ Map from **Poverty and inequality in Vietnam: Spatial Patterns and Geographic Determinants**, International Food Policy Research Institute and Institute of Development Studies, 2003

Different *doi moi* policies have perpetuated the inequality between rural and urban populations. Firstly, the transition from collective farming to individual land ownership exacerbated the widening gap between rural and urban areas by removing traditional safety nets. Approximately 80% of Vietnam's population lives in rural areas and gain their major subsistence from agriculture. The rural poor tend to have unstable jobs, and have limited off-farm employment opportunities available, thereby limiting their opportunities to earn money. Prior to the disbandment of agricultural collectives and the removal of state subsidies, rural households were provided health, social security, and education services. However, now many of these forms of social assistance have been privatized, thus forcing the rural poor to pay for these services. As a result, the rural poor now have a low level of education, limited professional and business skills, and poor access to credit, physical infrastructure and social services. Consequently, the rural poor have a greater exposure to exogenous shocks; many households are less equipped or receive less support to deal with shocks such as crop failure, natural disasters, or the impact of regional and national financial crises on domestic goods and services.¹⁴

The increasing rates of foreign direct investment in Vietnam have contributed to overall economic growth, but have also exacerbated the widening gap between rural and urban populations. Foreign investments are highly concentrated in major urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Danang. In the post-*doi moi* era, relatively high investments for industrial development have been emphasized at the expense of agriculture, which remains a considerably less important and less prestigious sector.¹⁵ According to the Ministry of Construction and Habitat's joint report, a majority of investments from all sources are invested in several cities and areas that have distinctly higher comparative advantages than others, such as Hanoi and Ho Chi

¹⁴ Lillian Forsyth, pp. 4

¹⁵ Anh Dang, Goldstein, Sidney, and McNally, James, **Internal Migration and Development in Vietnam**, *International Migration Review*, Vol 31, No. 2, 1997, pp. 319

Minh City.¹⁶ In the 1990s, foreign investments in HCM City always accounted for 42 to 48 percent of total investment capital in Vietnam; Ho Chi Minh City had its GDP growing at a rate that was 1.5 to 2 times as high as the average rate of the entire country.¹⁷ This resulted in great income disparities between major urban cities—Ho Chi Minh City, in specific—and the rest of the country. Previous survey results showed that, on average, urban incomes Ho Chi Minh City were as much as seven times higher than the income of farming laborers in rural areas.¹⁸

While Vietnam has achieved great success in ensuring high levels of national economic growth and reducing poverty, major portions of the population have been left out. As data from the 1999 population and housing census shows, economic growth goes hand in hand with important shifts in population distribution and mobility.¹⁹ Since the implementation of *doi moi* in 1986, the population growth rate has grown rapidly in urban areas and decreased significantly in rural areas. In 1990 the population growth rate in urban areas was 2.41% compared with 1.80% in rural areas. By 2003, the yearly population growth rate in urban areas had grown to 4.23% while yearly population growth in rural areas has declined to .55%.²⁰ These changes in population growth rates in rural and urban areas suggest that the rates of migration from rural to urban areas has increased significantly in the intervening years. These disparities also imply that in recent years there must have been more pressing reasons for internal migration than in the past and that the nature of internal migration from rural to urban areas must have changed significantly. An understanding of these changes will allow us to understand how the nature of working child migration has evolved over the course of the past two decades.

¹⁶ Ministry of Construction, UNCHS, UNDP, 1995. *Urban Sector Strategy Study Report*. ADB TA No. 2148-VIE. Hanoi, 1995

¹⁷ Institute of Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City, **Survey of Spontaneous Migration to Ho Chi Minh City**, Vietnam, 1997, pp. 11

¹⁸ UNDP, *The Dynamics of Internal Migration in Viet Nam*, UNDP Discussion Paper I, Hanoi, 1998

¹⁹ General Statistics Office, Vietnam, 2001, from International Organization for Migration, **Migration, Development and Poverty Reduction in Asia**, 2005, pp. 151

²⁰ General Statistics Office of Vietnam, “Average Population by Sex and Urban, Rural,” in *Population and Employment*, Statistics Document Center—General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2005

In the early and mid 1990s, migration from rural to urban areas was a lot easier than in the years preceding the implementation of *doi moi* reforms. The transition from a command economy to market economy led the government to ease the migration restriction policies and residential control system of *ho khau*. As a result, a great number of people began to migrate from rural areas to urban areas, in particular Ho Chi Minh City. According to surveys conducted by the Institute for Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City in the early and mid-1990s, there were two reasons for migration from rural to urban areas in the years immediately following *doi moi*: economic and non-economic. Of the people interviewed, 65 percent of migrants reported they moved for economic reasons, of which nearly two thirds migrated because of a lack of employment in their previous place of residence. While income problems appeared to be a major push factor, people who migrated from rural to urban areas did not appear to have done so for economic survival, but for economic improvement. There is evidence that these migrants were not necessarily the poorest. Landless households did not have a higher probability than the others to send their members to the city. The majority of the migrants did bring along with them some money or assets when moving to the city. A migrant from rural area usually came to Ho Chi Minh City with an average of 2.6 million VND, which was about 56 percent of annual income of a middle class household in rural area.²¹ Thus, it appears as those who came for economic reasons were mainly from the middle class.

The proportion of migrants moving for non-economic reasons accounted for over one third of respondents. The major motive of their migration was family reunions in Ho Chi Minh City. These migrants were often the elderly or children. The data indicates that over 50 percent of children aged less than 15 years and elderly people aged over 60 years moved for family reunion

²¹ Institute of Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City, pp. 33

reasons.²² These migrants came with the assistance of their families and in many cases, were able to migrate because those who already lived in Ho Chi Minh City recognized that although *ho khau* was still in place, people could survive and prosper in the City easily on their own efforts and without significant impacts from *ho khau* policies. In addition, a significant portion of migrants were those who moved for educational purposes or training reason. 28.6 percent of teenage migrants in this age span reported they moved to HCM City to further their education or skill. It must be noted though, that only wealthier family could affordable to pay relatively high costs of education for their children in the city.

While in the past, the people who migrated to major cities were mostly from the middle class, today's migrants are from poorer households. The difficult circumstances of rural provinces, including land pressures, unemployment, and poverty have created "push factors" for migrants. In the early 1990s, landless households did not necessarily have a higher probability than others to send members to Ho Chi Minh City. According to Le Thanh Sang of the Southern Institute of Social Sciences of Vietnam, this was because there was no significant difference between the amounts of land owned among households within the same commune because land was redistricted equally before agricultural cooperatives collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²³ However, the population growth boom that occurred in the early 1990s has had serious consequences for rural households today. The large increase in working age population has caused a serious economic resources imbalance.

For centuries, the economy, especially the rural economy, had been stable with a balance between human and land resources, but the booming population in past decades has made land scarce, and human resources abundant. This, coupled the application of modern technologies in

²² Institute for Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City, **Survey of Spontaneous Migration to Ho Chi Minh City**, September 1997, pp. 37

²³ Le Thanh Sang, *Rural Migration in the Market Economy: A study of Four Communes in Quang Ngai and Long An Provinces, Viet Nam: 1986-2000*, Vietnam, February 2003, pp. 4

agricultural production, has left a large number of people in agricultural occupations underemployed or unemployed.²⁴ In addition, the booming population has increased the density of people living in some areas of the country and has led to great land shortages. For people only relying on farming activities, survival is extremely difficult. Because of these “push factors” millions of people have migrated to Ho Chi Minh City to alleviate overcrowding at home and to find jobs that are not available in rural provinces.

There are also a series of “pull factors” that have influenced the flow of rural to urban migration. In analyzing data from the economic transition period in Vietnam, Dang, Goldstein, and McNally offer a reason for the large number of migrants to Ho Chi Minh City by making a connection between inequity in economic development and rural-urban migration.²⁵ They argue, “Differential development may attract migrants to a specific province or motivate them to choose one over another once they have decided to leave their home province.”²⁶ Thus, the disparities of socio-economic development between HCMC and other provinces and cities throughout the country create a “pull factor” for migrants. As stated in this section already, rapid industrialization has occurred in Vietnam since the second half of the 1990s when Vietnam normalized its relations with foreign countries after which, foreign companies invested billions of dollars. Due to foreign investments the share of industrial and service sector in GDP has been rising in urban cities, while the share of agriculture has been declining steadily. As a result of this industrialization, rapid urbanizations have occurred in major cities like Ho Chi Minh City. Information about the economic prosperity and opportunities in the cities, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, has reached rural areas and sparked large number of voluntary migrants to give up their agricultural lifestyles and move to the cities in search of work and money. As a result, Ho Chi Minh City has become the center of migration activity, being the largest recipient of interprovincial migration.

²⁴ Cu Chi Loi, **Rural To Urban Migration in Vietnam**, pp. 1

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 4

²⁶ Anh Dang, pp. 322

Migration to Ho Chi Minh City is facilitated by the growing establishment of social networks, which connect potential migrants from a rural province to neighbors who have already migrated to the City. Statistics show that migrants' network of relations to their relatives and friends played an important role in providing information of employment opportunities, income level and living conditions in Ho Chi Minh City and thereby influencing their decision to migrate.²⁷ Prior to arriving in Ho Chi Minh City, migrants are prepared for the difficulties they will face; they can rely on their network to ease their transition from their hometown province to Ho Chi Minh City.

Upon arrival to Ho Chi Minh City, these migrants are usually hired in labor-intensive enterprises that involve menial tasks because they do not have the skill to work in high-tech and capital-intensive ones. While in the past, migrants came to Ho Chi Minh City to enhance their education or skill, most rural to urban migrants today are not looking to improve their human capital, but are focused on making money as soon as they arrive. Most migrants to new locations are workers who take simple jobs such as factory work, hired work in shops, or become small traders or street vendors. Due to the lack of experience and strong pressure to make living, migrants are willing to take any job they are able to find so that they can send money back home to help their families.²⁸ This drive to earn money in Ho Chi Minh City and the increasing development of social networks is leading to rapid urbanization and in the future, may lead to over-urbanization, in which case, the City will not be able to meet the labor demands of the tremendous numbers of migrants.

Migration represents a livelihood strategy for most rural households; in many cases some members of a family will migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to send home to the rest of the family. In the early 1990s, remittances of migrant workers were used not necessarily to meet

²⁷ Institute of Economic Research of Ho Chi Minh City, pp. 57

²⁸ Cu Chi Loi, **Rural to Urban Migration in Vietnam**, pp. 135

the most basic needs of families, but for investment. Today, families who still live below the poverty line rely heavily on labor remittances for daily survival. Remittances from members of these impoverished families are usually used to cover daily expenses, education costs for children, and in the cases in which someone is ill, healthcare. Economic migration to urban areas has included not only adults and whole families, but children as well. Children may move to urban areas with or without their family and for purely economic reasons or for reasons of familial strife such as abuse or divorce. As the above statistics show, migration for financial necessity has been the main reason for the increase in the number of people in Ho Chi Minh City. Children are now coming to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to send home. The trends of child migration are synonymous to the patterns of adult migration; in the early 1990s, there were no child migrants in Ho Chi Minh City who were working to support their families. In fact, almost half of the children who came in the early 1990s came for reasons of education or family reunion. There were almost none that migrated alone. New surveys done in the later 1990s show that the number of migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City is now significant. Their numbers also show the increasing reliance of families on child labor remittances. The allure of the prosperous urban centers is a strong pull factor for these children to migrate to the cities to earn money to help their families.

An Analysis of Child Labor in the Past and the Present

The presence of working children on the streets of Vietnam is not a new phenomenon. During the wars with France, the United States, and Cambodia, many Vietnamese children were orphaned or separated from their parents, and had to seek care from relatives, friends, or strangers, or to fend for themselves independently.²⁹ After the wars, society became more stable during the 1980s. With Vietnam's increasing economic development from the 1990s on, the number of

²⁹ Lillian Forsyth, pp. 6

children working on the streets of major cities has grown and the types of children have change. The increase in the number of working children has made them more visible to the government and to an international community that has become more interested in Vietnam for economic and humanitarian reasons.³⁰ Consequently, the government has identified the issue of working children in Vietnam as one of the growing problems of the *doi moi* period.

The government has many policies that attempt to restrict the growing number of working children in Ho Chi Minh City. The Vietnamese child labor law considers all persons below the age of 18 as a minor. Work hours for under-age workers are restricted to seven hours a day and 42 hours a week. Employers are also not allowed to use under-age workers in dangerous and hazardous occupations, which are identified in an attachment to the labor code. Special restrictions and regulations apply to children under 15 who are only allowed to work in a limited number of professions.³¹ Due to the increasing number of working children on the streets of major cities in the 1990s, the government furthered its laws to “strictly prohibit children from begging or doing ‘unhealthy way’ to earn money for adults” thereby, preventing exploitation by adults.³² In an attempt to reduce the number of children working on the streets in Vietnam, the government also instituted laws that prohibited children from sleeping on the streets. The Municipal People’s Committees were given the responsibility of conducting round up campaigns that forced children off the streets and into institutions through which they would be reintegrated into society. However, in recent years the government has found it increasing difficult to prevent children from working on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City.

Doi Moi has had a significant effect on the number and the types of children working on the streets in Vietnam. As seen from the previous section, the different stages of Vietnam’s

³⁰ Lillian Forsyth, pp. 6

³¹ “Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City,” Save the Children UK, Hanoi, September 1998, pp. 13

³² Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children: clause 4, article 16, decree 374—HDBT dated November 14, 1991 by Ministers’ Council

transition from a centrally planned to market economy had varying effects on the lives of Vietnamese people. In the early 1990s, disparities between rural and urban areas were not as grave as the later stages of development. Migration patterns changed dramatically from the early to the late 1990s, especially in regards to the number of people migrating from specific social classes. In the later half of the 1990s, unequal levels of wealth and economic opportunities between rural and urban areas prompted poorer people to move to Ho Chi Minh City. These developments greatly affected the nature of child labor and the types of children working on the streets in Ho Chi Minh City between the early and the late 1990s.

Before analyzing the evolving nature of child labor in Ho Chi Minh City, it is important to understand how the types of children working on the streets have changed. The changes in the types of children in Ho Chi Minh City is best seen in the analysis of two surveys conducted by Terre des Hommes from 1992 and 2000. Terre des Hommes is a Swiss non- governmental organization founded in 1960 with the aim to provide direct support to children in difficult circumstances. In 1992, the organization published a study entitled “Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City,” which studied the effects of the beginning stages of *doi moi* on street children in Ho Chi Minh City. In this survey, Terre des Hommes defined street children as:

“Children under 18 years of age, earning money through casual, street-based activities such as begging, scavenging, peddling, portering, shoe-shining, pick pocketing, petty theft... and who belong to any one of the following categories:

- Category A: children who have run away from home, or who have no home, and who sleep on the street
- Category B: children who sleep on the street with their family or guardian
- Category C: children living at home, but working in an “at risk” situation.”

The study found that the background and living situation of the three categories of children were very different from one another. It is important to give a general overview of the findings of this 1992 study in order to understand the changes that occurred in the following years in the nature of working children. The study concluded that those children who were part of Category C

were, in the vast majority of cases, simply working children living at home, who had to earn money to supplement their family's incomes; these children were working on the street largely because of the poverty of their families. Category C children lived relative stable lives, and were the least likely to be picked up by the police. Category B children had the greatest attachment to their parents as these children lived on the street with their families; they migrated from another part of the country. In most cases, these children and their families came from the Mekong Delta. From a very early age, their families used these children as money-earners. Their mothers carried many of them around when they were babies as a means of soliciting sympathy and money. Over 70% of these children were beggars and scavengers.

Category A children were the street children in the most difficult situation. Almost all of them were runaways from home who had come to Ho Chi Minh City from a neighboring province. Only 14% of these children said that the main reason they were on the street was poverty. A majority of these children came from broken families whose parents were divorced and who had gotten remarried. These children faced the greatest dangers, as they did not have anyone to depend on for assistance. Category A children were the most independent. They managed their lives themselves without any support from their families. Most of these children were involved in pick pocketing and petty theft, whether as a principal earning activity or only on those occasions when the opportunity presented itself or when they were driven to do so by hunger. Runaway children worked the shortest hours and rarely worked as hard as children from the other two categories because they only had themselves to think about. They only needed to earn enough to meet their own needs, rather than the needs of their families. As a result, these children determined their daily schedules and only worked the hours they wanted to.³³

³³ Tim Bond, "Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," Terre Des Hommes Foundation, Hanoi, 1992 from "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 125-149

Eight years after “Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City” was published, Terre des Hommes conducted a follow-up survey, entitled “A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City.” The 2000 report identified very important changes in the types of working children in Ho Chi Minh City. In the years between the two surveys, Terre des Hommes identified the development of a new phenomenon: the migration of children, especially from central and northern provinces, to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to help their families. These children were labeled “economic migrants.” In 2000 the organization’s working definition was expanded to include a fourth category to include these children who did not fit into any of the previous three categories:

- Category D: Migrant child workers engaged in casual street activities, either sleeping on the street or off the street³⁴

These children migrated to Ho Chi Minh City purely for economic reasons with the intentions of earning money to send home to help their poor families.

The development of this new category should not be surprising when considering the increasing inequality between rural and urban areas as a result of the uneven economic development in the later stages of *doi moi*. As noted in the previous section, internal migration trends changed significantly from the early to late 1990s. Many people migrated to Ho Chi Minh City because of the poverty and the lack of economic opportunities available in rural provinces. Children migrated to Ho Chi Minh City for similar reasons. As inequality continued to increase between rural and urban areas, poor children were forced to leave their hometown and migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to make an economic contribution to the household.

The 2000 “A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City” found many developments in the three categories of children who existed during the 1992 study. In Category A, the percentage of girls more than doubled. Similar to 1992, almost all of the children were runaways and the percentage of children who left home due to family poverty decreased to 10%. Only 36% still had

³⁴ “A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City,” National Political Publisher, Hanoi, Terre des Hommes Foundation, 2004, pp. 19

their natural parents living together. 72.5% came from southern or south central provinces, including 22.5% from Ho Chi Minh City; the study estimates that many of the children from Ho Chi Minh City drifted from Category C to Category A in the intervening years between the two studies. Over 80% of these children always slept on the street. The most common occupations of these children were scavenging and pick pocketing/petty theft. These children had the highest rates of delinquency as the police had arrested 62.5% of them. Similar to the 1992 findings, almost all runaway children spent all of the earnings on themselves.

The number of Category B children who lived on the streets with their families decreased significantly since 1992 because of government laws prohibiting people from sleeping on the street. Almost all of these children migrated to Ho Chi Minh City with their families from the southern half of the country. The most common occupation of these children was street vending, the second scavenging, and third was begging. 82% of these children gave all or most of their earnings to their parents. Category C children were mostly working on the street for reasons of poverty, but almost all still lived at home. The most common occupation of these children was lottery ticket selling. 94% of these children gave their earnings to their parents.

An analysis of Category D showed significant differences from the other three categories. In 1992, Terre des Hommes did not account a single Category D child. Their numbers increased rapidly from 1992 to 2000. Over 96% of these children left home because of poverty. Around 73% of these children were from northern or central Vietnam. The ratio of boys to girls was about 3:2 and the number of migrant girl workers was much greater than runaway girls. Almost all were a long way from home, but the emotional focus of their lives remained their families, even though some resented being sent away to work in Ho Chi Minh City. Over 90% had a secure place to sleep and most of these children shared rented rooms with their friends. The most popular jobs for

these children were lottery ticket selling, shoe shining and begging. 84% of these children sent some or all of their earnings to their family.³⁵

As evident by the aforementioned summarized data provide by Terre des Hommes' surveys from 1992 and 2000, the nature of child labor in Ho Chi Minh City has changed dramatically. The profile of working children has evolved as demonstrated by Terre des Hommes need to create a new category for economic migrant working children. This change is the result of the increasing impact of *doi moi* reforms on Vietnamese society. According to government documents, the increase in the number street children in Vietnam is "related to the process of economic renovation and transition to a market economy, especially when considering the reasons that children leave their families and migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to work."³⁶ While in the past, the majority of migrant children working in Ho Chi Minh City were runaway children, a large number of working children are now economic migrants who have moved from the countryside because their families cannot afford to support them or send them to school. These children have been left out of the economic gains of *doi moi*.

The number of economic migrant working children in Terre des Hommes 2000 study is grossly underestimated because many of these children work in non-street based jobs with fixed income. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) in 2003 there are 20,541 street children in Vietnam, 8,521 who are in Ho Chi Minh City. Most organizations that deal with street children, estimate that the number is far greater; these numbers only reflect children engaged in casual, street based activities and does not account for the tremendous number of employed working children who are doing non-street based jobs. No specific numbers of these working children exist because of the clandestine nature of their jobs. Out of the 8,521 street children in Ho Chi Minh City, 6,563 from 29 other

³⁵ "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 111-114

³⁶ Lillian Forsyth, pp. 9

provinces/cities. As shown by data of a survey conducted by the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee in August 2003, Ho Chi Minh City children cover only 17%. The ratio of children who come from other provinces in some districts is rather high—Phu Nhuan: 96%, District 9: 90%, Binh Thanh, Tan Binh and District 1: over 89%.³⁷

The difficulty in measuring the extent to which the number of working children in Ho Chi Minh City has increased is due to the continuing changes in the nature of child labor in Vietnam. The latest research conducted by organizations in Vietnam, most notably Terre des Hommes, stresses that the types of working children that are most prevalent in Vietnam has changed. A report by Patricia Tibbetts for UNICEF in 2002 found that in Ho Chi Minh City, the number of Category A children who leave their families for social reasons, and therefore have little or no support system, has decreased since 1992. In contrast, the number of economic migrant children experienced the *most significant increase*.³⁸ The two most significant groups of working children today are runaway children and economic migrant working children. While runaway and economic migrant children are drastically different, they are both *migrant children* who have come to Ho Chi Minh City to work. A comparison between the two groups can provide an insight into the evolving nature of child labor in Ho Chi Minh City.

In order to understand the changing nature of migrant child labor in Ho Chi Minh City we must understand the diverse reasons for migration, the varying migration patterns, and the different jobs done by both groups of migrant working children. To ensure that all migrant working children are represented, this research included both street working children and children engaged in non-casual, secure working activities. In this paper, working children are defined as:

“Children under the age of 17, earning money through both casual, street based activities such as begging, scavenging, peddling, shoe-shining and regular, secure jobs such as selling noodle soup at a café or market shop.”

³⁷ Decision No. 210/2003/QĐ-UB, HCMC People's Committee, 25 September 2003

³⁸ Patricia Tibbetts, “Project Evaluation: Thao Dan Street Children Program,” Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, UNICEF 2002, pp. 13

Emerging Pattern Differentials Between Runaway Migrant and Economic Migrant Working Children in Ho Chi Minh City

There are two distinct groups of migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City: runaway migrant children and economic migrant children. The former category migrates for social reasons that include the divorce of parents, the lack of time and knowledge on the part of their parents to care for the child's needs, the desire for greater freedom, and the boring lifestyles they lead at home. In contrast, the latter group migrates for purely economic reasons. Almost all of these children are from poor families and migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to make money to send home to help their families cover daily expenses. In the previous section, the summarized data collected by Terre des Hommes in 1992 and 2000 demonstrated that the ratio of economic migrant working children to runaway migrant children has changed with the drastic increase in the number of children coming to Ho Chi Minh City for economic reasons.

This change is due in large part to the changes to Vietnam's economy in the post *doi moi* period. The high level of migration of economic child migrants to Ho Chi Minh City is related to the economic imbalance between rural and urban areas. While expansive economic growth in the 1990s reduced the levels of child labor in Vietnam, there are still a large number of children who are still working because their families are too poor to support the basic needs of the family without the economic contribution of their children.³⁹ Many of these children are not working in their hometown province because of the lack opportunities in rural provinces; they are migrating to Ho Chi Minh City to work because of the potential to earn a greater income in the City. The number of economic migrant children is growing at a much quicker rate than that of runaway migrant children. Not to be mistaken, the number of runaway migrant children is still very

³⁹ Eric Edmonds, pp. 49

significant, but the recent emergence of a large number of economic migrant children on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City forces us to reanalyze the nature of child labor on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City. In light of this recent development, there have been several emerging pattern differentials between economic and runaway migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City.

Probably the greatest difference between runaway and economic migrant children is the role their families play in the children's decisions to migration. Prior to analyzing the emerging pattern differences between the two groups, we must understand the typical familial circumstances of the two groups. A majority of runaway migrant children come from broken families in which parents argue regularly, are separated, or are divorced. Many children left home and came to Ho Chi Minh City to work in order to escape the tension at home. In comparison, a majority of economic migrant child workers in Ho Chi Minh City come from families in which parents are still living together. The Terre des Hommes survey of 2000 showed that less than 30% of the children from Category A still have their natural parents living together. In comparison, the sample group interviews conducted for this research show that 66.1% of the parents of the 121 economic child migrants interviewed still live together; only 13.6% of their parents argue often. Furthermore, the main reason for economic migrant children's parents no longer living together is the death of the father.

The role of the family in children's decisions to migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to work has drastically changed since the emergence of economic migrant working children. In the past, all migrant children who had come to Ho Chi Minh City from another province had done so because they were unsatisfied with their lives at home. Familial opinions were negatively correlated with runaway children migration to Ho Chi Minh City. Their families did not support and did not have much say in the child's decision; it was family inadequacies that led to the child's decision to leave. The emergence of economic migrant children, gave families more agency in children's decisions to migrate. These children come to Ho Chi Minh City to alleviate family poverty by

earning money in the City to send home. Data collected by Terre des Hommes in 2000 demonstrates the great contrast between the roles families play in motivating runaway and economic migrants working children to leave their home province to come to Ho Chi Minh City.

Why did you leave your family?⁴⁰				
Runaway Children (A) versus Economic Migrant Children (B)				
	Girls		Boys	
	A	B	A	B
POVERTY/ TO HELP FAMILY	1	28	7	50
Unhappy/abused/conflict	7	3	34	
Broken home/parent(s) dead	4		16	
Did something wrong			12	
Orphaned/abandoned	1		5	
To have own money	4		3	

As evident from the table above, almost 96.3% of economic migrant working children came to Ho Chi Minh City to help their families, while 92.5% of runaway children came to escape problems at home or to have more freedom.

The increasing impact of families in economic migrant children’s decision to come to Ho Chi Minh City is owed to the increasing acceptance of children as income generators. Ever since the transition from collective to household-based economy families can only depend on the money earned from people within their family. According to Gallina and Masina, today in Vietnam,

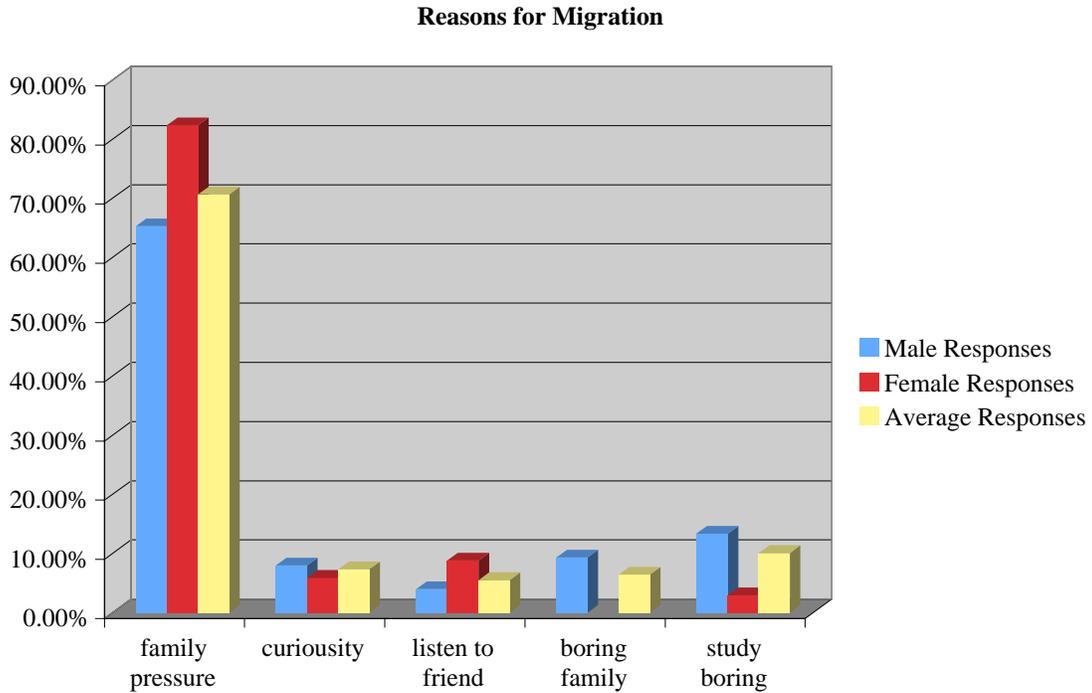
“[...] Children’s work is widely accepted as normal and necessary. A common viewpoint maintains that child labor is good for the family and community, as well as for the child’s own development.”⁴¹ And that “[...] it is largely through work, usually in a family context, that children are socialized into many adult skills and responsibilities. In the best of circumstances, the work of children is an integral part of a healthy family and community life, and a powerful vehicle for their intellectual, emotional and social development.”⁴²

⁴⁰ “Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City,” pp. 45

⁴¹ Theis J. and Hoang Thi Huyen *From Housework to Gold Mining. Child Labor in Rural Vietnam*, Save the Children UK, Hanoi 1997, pp.1

⁴² Bond T. and D. Hayter, *A Review on Child Labor, Street Children, Child Prostitution and Trafficking, Disability, The Family*, a report for UNICEF, May 1998, Hanoi, pp. 17

Today, children are increasingly migrating to Ho Chi Minh City to work with their families' support. In addition, children are increasingly being pressured by their families to move to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to send home. During sample group interviews conducted for this study, 77 out of 109 children responded that they came to Ho Chi Minh City to work because of familial pressure.



Interestingly, while most runaway children came to Ho Chi Minh City because they disliked living with their families, most of the economic migrant children interviewed for this study said that they do not resent their families for pressuring them to come to Ho Chi Minh City to work. The profile of migrant working children shows that with few exceptions, these children are generally willing to work in Ho Chi Minh City to earn money in order to relieve their family's burden of poverty, despite being pressured to come by family members. Of the 121 migrant working children interviewed, only 14.90% said that it was compulsory that they were in Ho Chi

Minh City. Their emotional link with their family is strong. If things were different, many of them would not be in Ho Chi Minh City and would still be in their home province.⁴³

“I miss my parents and my brothers so much that I cannot hold my tears when I see children playing around, taking pictures with their parents here. I usually work from 6.00 am until 8.00 pm. I have to work and try my best; otherwise, we cannot pay our bills. I work all week without taking one day off so I can have money for my family.”

-Shoe Shiner: Dung, 16 years old, from Thanh Hoa

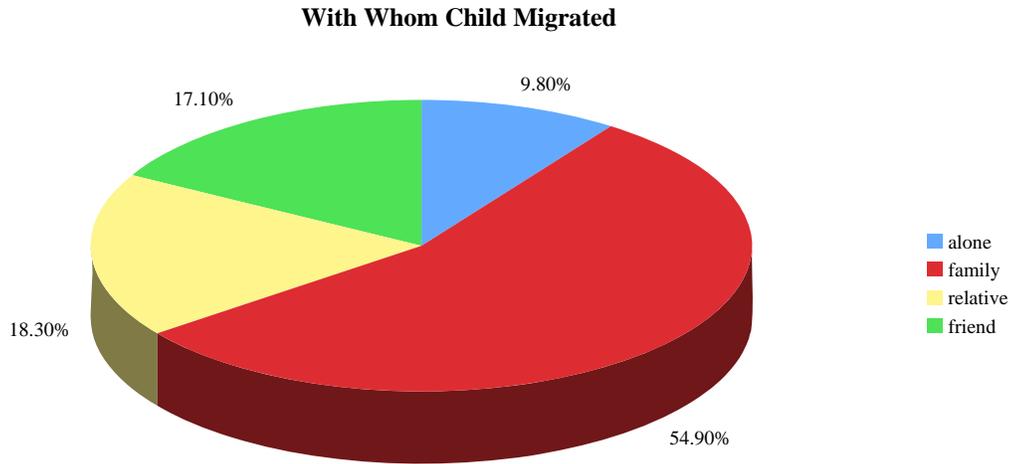
The happiness of the interviewed children with life in their hometown province demonstrates the relative stability of their families and lives prior to coming to Ho Chi Minh City. A majority of these children maintain contact with their families and see their parents as often as possible. Almost all economic migrant children go home regularly, since their family remains the focus of their life. In contrast, most runaway children do not want to go see their parents, as a majority of them prefer living in Ho Chi Minh City more than home; runaway migrant children rarely returned home to visit their families. Many economic migrant children led normal lives prior to migrating—the lived happily with their family and were able to go school. In fact, all children interviewed for this study claimed that they had attended school until they had to come to Ho Chi Minh City. Compared to runaway working children, economic migrant children are much more literate. A majority of children were able to complete primary school, and in some cases able to start secondary school.⁴⁴ 74.5% of the children interviewed from the sample group claimed that they had to drop out of school because their parents couldn't afford to continue paying tuition or that their parents forced them to stop so they could work.

The number of children who are not migrating alone illustrates the increasing impact of family in the number of children migrating to Ho Chi Minh City for economic reasons. This is perhaps one of the greatest disparities between economic migrant working children and runaway

⁴³ “Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City,” 46

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 46

children as a large majority of runaway children do not have any relatives or family in Ho Chi Minh City.



As shown in the above graph, economic migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City either came with a family/relative member, with a friend, or alone. Children who come alone leave home and migrate to Ho Chi Minh City do so mainly for alleviating an overcrowded household and for finding a job in order to supplant the family income. In many instances, only one or two members of the family, such as a sibling, will migrate to Ho Chi Minh City and the money earned while working will be sent back to the hometown province to support the rest of the family. In other cases, children come to Ho Chi Minh City and stay with a relative who has already migrated.

Profile of a Shoe Shiner

Vuong is 15 years old and is originally from Thanh Hoa. Vuong came to Ho Chi Minh City 3 years ago to live with his aunt and uncle who were already living in the City. He lives with his aunt and uncle in a rented house near the train station. Vuong is a shoe-shiner and his aunt and uncle are both peddlers. Vuong works from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm every day. Vuong’s family (his parents, his younger brother and younger still) is still in Thanh Hoa. His parents wanted him to come to Ho Chi Minh City when he finished level 6 in school. Vuong makes 20,000-30,000 VND per day, which he gives to his aunt to keep. When any of his friends go back to Thanh Hoa, Vuong gives them his earnings to send to his parents so that his two younger sisters can go to school.

Economic migrant children have a relative safety net to protect them from the many risks of working in Ho Chi Minh City because a majority has migrated to Ho Chi Minh City with someone from their hometown province. In contrast, runaway children do not have anyone to

depend on in Ho Chi Minh City except for themselves and for the friends they have made while living here. Thus, almost all of these children are forced to sleep on the street and tend to be involved in illegal activities such as petty crimes and drugs because of the lack of a safety net within Ho Chi Minh City to ensure that they are protected. According to Terre des Hommes 2000 survey, only 13% of runaway children had any form of shelter.⁴⁵ Due to government policies to restrict the number of children sleeping on the street, many runaway children have been removed from the streets, put into institutions, and sent back home. As a result, the number of child runaways has decreased, while the number of child workers has increased in the past few years.⁴⁶ The increase in the number of economic migrant children is perhaps due to the fact that they are usually living with someone from their hometown province who can protect them if needed. Most of these children share rented rooms with their friends or relatives and thus, police cannot remove them from the street at nights and force them back to their hometown provinces. In fact, all of the economic migrant children with whom in depth interviews were conducted had a secure place to sleep and never slept on the street.

There are other trends that have emerged in the past two decades beyond the influence of families on children's decisions to migrate. Recent studies show that while the number of migrant children has increased, the average age of a working child has increased. According to the Terre des Hommes 1992 study, the average age of a child worker was 13, but now, as seen in sample group interviews the average age of is around 15 years old. Perhaps the increase in the average age reflects the greater concerns family has with allowing their children to migrate. Families of economic migrant children are concerned with the risks of sending their children to Ho Chi Minh City; they will not allow the child to migrate to Ho Chi Minh City unless the child is old enough to protect him or herself. In addition, the number of migrant girl workers has drastically increased. In

⁴⁵ "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 40

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp.40

the 1990s, it was extremely rare to see a girl coming to Ho Chi Minh City alone as a runaway or as an economic migrant. There are now a relatively large number of girls who have migrated alone or with their families to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to help their families.⁴⁷ In comparison to boys interviewed for this study, the majority of the girls coming to Ho Chi Minh City are 12 years old.

Rosanne Rushing in her study on the migration of young women in Vietnam claims that traditions of filial piety facilitate a female child's migration and her obligation to remain in the city. Rushing argues, "girls in Vietnam are conditioned to believe in obligations towards parents and in their duty to honor and assist their parents. They may also believe that it is the parent's wish for them to remain working in the city, as they have often been asked to migrate by the parents."⁴⁸ It is difficult to say whether this change in the average age and the number of girls migrating is due to the idea of filial piety, a change in gender roles and attitudes, or to increased poverty in rural areas, or to better opportunities and facilities in Ho Chi Minh City for young migrant workers.

Probably the most significant difference between runaway and economic migrant working children is the distance they travel when migrating to Ho Chi Minh City. The rise of economic migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City changed the patterns of working child migration. According to the 1992 survey of Terre des Hommes, 49.5% of the children working on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City came from the Mekong Delta and South Central provinces. Together with children from Ho Chi Minh City itself and its vicinity, a vast majority (86%) were from the southern half of the country. At that time, northern children and north central children were relatively few (7% and 6.5% respectively). Economic child migrants, who first appeared in Ho Chi Minh City in the late 1990s, altered the ratio of working children from the southern half of the country and the rest of Vietnam.

⁴⁷ "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 41

⁴⁸ Rosanne Rushing, **Rural exodus of youth in developing countries**, pp. 1

The hometown provinces of migrant children are now extremely varied, but there is a clear distinction between runaway and economic migrant children. While more than 70% of children who have runaway from home or who have migrated with their families to earn money still come from the south and south central part of the country, more than 60% of economic migrant *street children*, are from the north and north central part. This gap between the distances traveled of runaway and economic migrant children show that former only travels short distances to escape from home, whereas the latter group is willing to travel long distances to Ho Chi Minh City. Economic migrant children are focused on working in areas that offer the greatest opportunities to make money. Between the early 1990s and 2000, the number of children coming from North Central Provinces dramatically increased from 0.5% of the total number of street children in Ho Chi Minh City to 9.8%. In addition, the number of children from Central Provinces almost doubled from 6% of the total number of street children in Ho Chi Minh City to 11.6%.⁴⁹

The interviews with economic migrant children show that for the most part, these children are exclusively from Thanh Hoa and Quang Ngai. These provinces have similar poverty rates, with about 40% of the population living below the poverty line. In addition, these provinces, for the most part are farming and fishing based economies, making the populations vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as typhoons. The average income of households from these provinces is very low. In fact, it has been reported that a working child in Ho Chi Minh City can earn up to three times more than his parents' average monthly income of 100,000 VND in Quang Ngai.⁵⁰ As a result, it is not surprising that many families are pushing their children to go to Ho Chi Minh City to work, where the poverty rate is below 10%. The large number of migrants coming from these two provinces has facilitated the creation of social networks that perpetuate a trend in which children from the same provinces do the same jobs. Children from Thanh Hoa are usually

⁴⁹ Duong Kim Hong and Ohno, Kenichi, **Street Children in Vietnam: Interactions of Old and New Causes in a Growing Economy**, Vietnam, July 2005, pp. 10

⁵⁰ *ibid*, pp. 7

involved in shoe shining and lottery ticket selling, while children from Quang Ngai mostly work as noodle soup sellers for my *go cart* owners who are almost all from Quang Ngai. Because noodle soup sellers are not considered street children, the statistics above about the number of children coming from Central Provinces to Ho Chi Minh City are greatly underestimated.

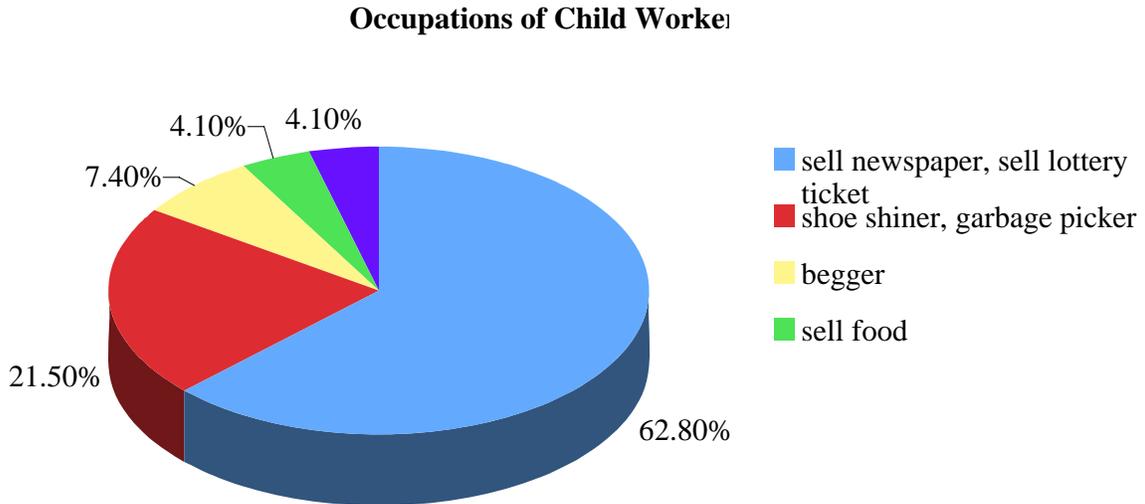
Life and Work on the Street

As seen in the previous section, runaway and economic migrant children are extremely different. They vary in the reasons they came to Ho Chi Minh City, their satisfaction with living in the City, and the distance from home they are willing to migrate. In light of these emerging pattern differentials between runaway and economic migrant working children, it should not be surprising that the work done by the two groups is different. In addition, the emergence of economic child migrants on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City altered the number of children doing certain jobs and also led to the development of new jobs too meet the increase in migrant child labor demands. The nature of these jobs has changed greatly due to the changing balance between runaway and economic migrant child laborers.

Between 1992 and today there has been a major shift in the types of jobs migrant children perform while working in Ho Chi Minh City. According to Terre des Hommes' 1992 survey, most children in the early 1990s were involved in begging and scavenging, while selling lottery tickets and shoe shining did not exist as occupations for working children.⁵¹ In addition, not as many children were working in secure, steady jobs such as noodle soup selling. Most children were involved in small petty jobs that did not require much diligence or any capital. Since 1992, the common jobs done by children has changed as the number of working children who are now focused on earning money to send to their families has increased. From data collected from sample group interviews, migrant working children were most visibly found to be involved in three jobs:

⁵¹ "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 50

lottery ticket selling, shoe-shining and noodle soup selling. In this study, begging was not considered a job, even though a large number of children earn money this way.



There are many different reasons for the popularity of these three jobs. For this research, in depth interviews were conducted with 10 children from each of these categories who had migrated from another province to help their impoverished families. Although there are many similarities for the large number of children in each of these jobs, there is a clear difference between those children who are self-employed as lottery ticket sellers and shoe shiners and those children who are employed by owners of noodle soup carts.

Recent studies show that the popularity of these jobs among economic migrant children is related to the several noticeable patterns of migration and work that exist amongst these children working in Ho Chi Minh City. Many people from the same village come to Ho Chi Minh City together and settle in the same places and do the same work. In Ho Chi Minh City, economic migrant working children come mainly from Quang Ngai and Thanh Hao provinces, with or

without their family.⁵² Through these migratory routes, networks are set up that perpetuate the migration of poor children from rural provinces like Thanh Hoa and Quang Ngai to Ho Chi Minh City; those people who return for a visit to their hometown bring stories from Ho Chi Minh City to the people in the villages thereby spurring curiosity of urban life and opportunities. This trend was extremely apparent in the in depth interviews conducted with economic migrant children for this study. A majority of these children found out about their jobs through these networks.

These friendship and neighborhood connections play an important role in the migration of poor children from rural areas to Ho Chi Minh City. These networks have also facilitated the increasing numbers of families relying on the child's earnings for survival. Personal connections and neighborhood connections are extremely important with regards to the opportunities available to children to work in Ho Chi Minh City. These connections affect the type of job a child does when he or she comes to Ho Chi Minh City. According to surveys conducted by Save the Children UK, the noodle soup sellers from Quang Ngai who migrate to Ho Chi Minh City are an example of how a common origin is used as a basis for business connections. Noodle soup entrepreneurs often return to their home province to recruit children to help in their business. They offer children's parents 'package' deals where the employer provides food, accommodation and salary in return for their child's labor. The arrangement is convenient for less experienced migrants and it saves the employer money and guarantees him a supply of labor for a fixed amount of time.⁵³

For families with few connections in the city, selling lottery tickets and shoe shining are popular jobs for economic migrant children. Recruitment for these jobs is not based on previous connections. These jobs are less steady and less secure than those jobs that are prearranged through neighborhood connections because there is no fixed income on which a family can rely. Because of the increase in the number of migrant child workers, there are limited jobs available

⁵² Andrea Gallina, Masina, Pietro, **Street children in Vietnam: An inquiry into the roots of poverty and survival livelihood strategies**, Federico Caffè Centre Research Report, Denmark 2002

⁵³ "Child Labor in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 24

through neighborhood connections. Most families are unaware of the jobs available in the cities and thus they send their children to Ho Chi Minh City to acquire any job possible. Statistics show that as a result of this lack of preparedness, migrant working children are mostly involved in self-employed peddling jobs.

As a result of these migration patterns, economic migrant working children can be divided into two groups: street-based working children and employed, non-street based working children.

Street-Based Economic Migrant Working Children

Self-employed economic migrant working children are involved in casual, street based activities that are done by all categories of street children. All categories of self-employed children work together, but as evident from the changing nature of child labor in Ho Chi Minh City there are several disparities between self-employed children who work out of economic necessity and those who have runaway from home. These differences are seen in the work done by each group and the way they conduct their lives while working. As evident from the above statistics, a large majority of self-employed economic migrant working children are specifically involved in lottery ticket selling and shoe-shinning. These jobs are very similar and many children actually switch between the two or do both in order to earn extra income. In contrast, runaway migrant children are mostly involved in scavenging and pick-pocketing/theft.⁵⁴

The jobs done by economic migrant working children and runaway migrant children depict the first major difference: the discipline and effort of economic migrant working children. Runaway migrant children have the highest rate of arrest; the Terre des Hommes 2000 survey found that 62.5% of these children had been arrested. Their high rates of delinquency are due to the illegal participation in activities such as theft. They are more likely to get into trouble because of the emotional rootlessness and the lack of purpose of their life. The vast majority of these children

⁵⁴ "A Study on Street Children in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 49

has run away from home and has isolated themselves by severing ties with their families.⁵⁵ They are under no pressure to earn money and have as much free time as they want. On the street, they can do as much or as little as they needed to survive, since the only people they needed to support were themselves.⁵⁶

Economic migrant working children, on the other hand, are extremely disciplined. As evident by the Terre des Hommes survey, these children *rarely* engage in illegal activity, no matter how desperate they may be to earn money. Migrant working children have the least trouble with the authorities, as they tend to keep a low profile. Although there is usually no boss to force them to work, most of these children work seven days a week, even when they are tired. They are dedicated to earning as much money as possible to send home and many have work two jobs at some point to earn extra money to help their families. These children work the longest hours and usually, work seven days a week even though they may be tired or may want to relax with friends. Of the children interviewed for this study, 83.5% of them work all day, with only a few hours of rest in the afternoon.

Typical Working Day of Lottery Ticket Seller

6 a.m.: Work starts

10 a.m.: Short rest, and then continue selling lottery tickets

12:30 p.m.: Child goes to his or her rented room for a rest and meal

2 p.m.: Start work again and try to sell as many tickets by 4:30 pm, when they have their mail meal of the day

5 p.m.: Child gets new batch of lottery tickets, which they try to sell quickly by 8 p.m., when they finish work and go back to their rooms

A majority of economic migrant working children work as shoe-shiners and lottery ticket sellers selected these jobs for a variety of reasons. Consistent with the information provided in this study thus far, the growing popularity of these jobs is owed to the networks that exist between

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 58

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 51

children who have already migrated to Ho Chi Minh City and their friends who still live in their home province. Many children come to Ho Chi Minh City after they and their parents have heard about the possibilities for children to earn money as shoe shiners and lottery ticket sellers from their friends who have already migrated. As a result, many children return with these economic migrant working children to Ho Chi Minh City to begin working as shoe shiners and lottery ticket sellers. These children move into rented rooms with those children who have already been working in Ho Chi Minh City and pick up the same jobs as their friends.

Not all economic migrant children are aware of the jobs available for them in Ho Chi Minh City before they migrate. Amongst the children who did not have friends or family arrange a job for them, shoe shining and lottery ticket selling are still the most common jobs for economic migrant children. Firstly, the popularity of these jobs among these children is owed to the little capital and skill needed to be successful. Economic migrant working children have never received formal training in any job and thus, may only partake in jobs that can be learned from those around them. According to Mr. Nguyen of Save the Children Sweden, “selling lottery tickets and shoe-shining are easy jobs to learn and the greatest skill these children must acquire is in negotiation so that they may receive a fair wage for their services.”⁵⁷ Most children who shine shoes and sell lottery tickets learned how to do these jobs by watching other and learning from their friends. These two jobs require very little starting capital. Children who come from poor families have very little money to invest in materials, especially when many children have their materials stolen when they first begin working because they are unprepared for the ruthless working environment of Ho Chi Minh City. Shoe shiners usually have their tools stolen and lottery ticket sellers often have their tickets or money stolen.

⁵⁷ Personal Interview, Mr. Nguyen, Project Officer, Save the Children Sweden, November 22, 2006

Profile of a Young Lottery Ticket Selling Girl

“My name is Moi. My hometown is in Binh Long, Dong Nai. I am now 7 years old. I came here with my parents. I earn 25000 VND per day and give it to my mom. I have 6 brothers and sisters but nobody goes to school. Five of us sell lottery tickets and one older brother repairs motorbikes. I finished first grade but left school because my family is very poor. My dad drives xe om (motorbike taxi driver) and my mom is a housewife. I am always been beaten when selling lottery ticket and I am often robbed of money on the way home at night.”

Unlike other street based jobs, there are support networks for shoe shiners and lottery ticket sellers to rely on. In order to minimize the risks of being cheated, many of these children work in groups to protect each other. Children from the same province usually work together to support and warn each other of dangers that they may face while working in a specific area. They often go out to a certain locality and then split up to cover all potential customers. These children usually share the costs of food and room expenses. If one child is cheated, the others will contribute their money to make up for losses of the unlucky child.⁵⁸ In addition, some children, mostly lottery ticket sellers, who came to Ho Chi Minh City without their parents will give their earnings to their agents to hold until they are ready to send the money home to their families. Agents find and organize children and are the link between the suppliers of tickets and the children. Selling lottery tickets is organized in the form of a hierarchical pyramid. At the top of the pyramid is the state-owned lottery that sells batches of tickets to agents. These agents then in turn sell smaller batches of tickets to children. Lottery sellers who return unsold tickets to the agents before the deadline are not liable for the costs of these tickets.⁵⁹ Many agents keep a record of the money a child earns per day and returns the money to the child when asked. Rarely do agents cheat these children; only one child who we interviewed said his agent stole one million dong.⁶⁰

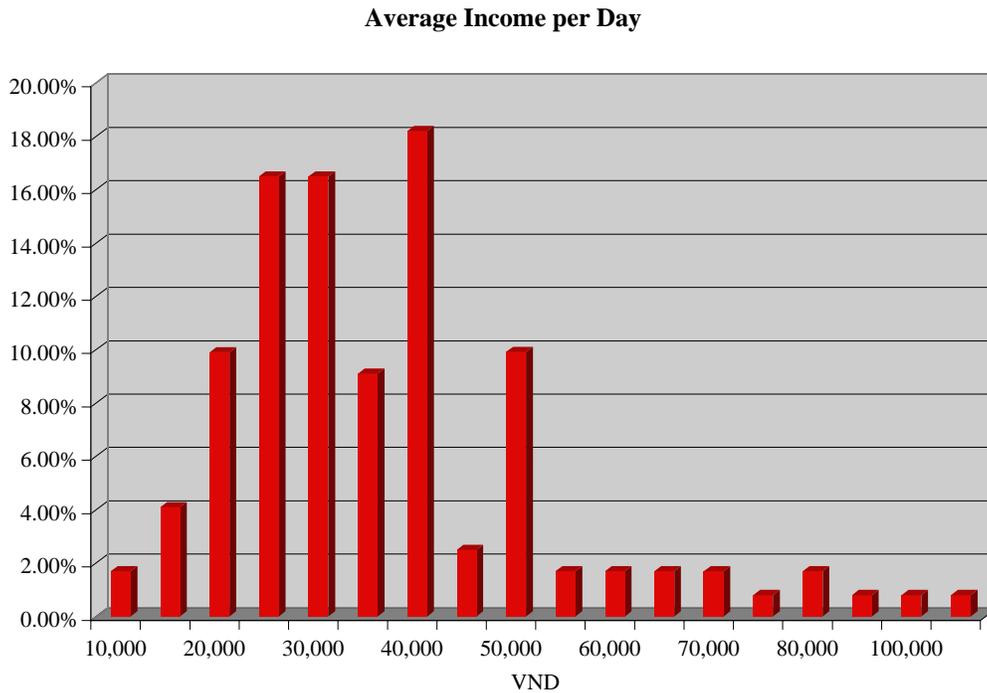
Most importantly, economic migrant working children sell lottery tickets and shine shoes because they are the most profitable activities, apart from illegal activities such as robbery and prostitution. The main advantage of these jobs is that pay is received on a daily basis and there is

⁵⁸ “Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City,” pp. 55

⁵⁹ *ibid*, pp. 32

⁶⁰ Hai, Personal Interview, Lottery Ticket Seller, November 21, 2006

no need to wait for the whole week, as is the case with formal, secure jobs. These children live day to day on the money they earn so it is essential for them to have enough money everyday to cover their daily costs. The salaries of children per day selling lottery tickets, shoe shining or street vending varies by day according to their success in attracting customers. However, the average daily income of a working child is 37,000 VND per day.



While the income of a child appears to be quite high, these statistics do not account for the money children must spend on living expenses, including rent, meals, and material purchases. Taking this into account, the child's income may be 10,000-15,000 VND lower than the above numbers.

According to surveys already conducted, children who work to support their families earn a better income on average than other migrant children who have left home for other reasons than poverty.

In addition, economic migrant working children retain most of their income to send to their families as they rarely spend their money on entertainment. Many runaway migrant children use a

large portion of their income to purchase alcohol or cigarettes or to play billiards. Because they do not have to return money home, they have no reason to save any of their earnings. While many economic migrant working children want to save as much as possible so that they may return home to continue studying, runaway children have no interest in returning to school. In most cases, runaway migrant children do not come from poor families who are in need of their earnings.

Many economic migrant children work as shoe shiners and lottery ticket sellers because of the freedom allotted to them. They like to work in groups of friends rather than under constant adult supervision.⁶¹ However, these self-employed children face many risks that children who work for a boss do not face. Gangs who control specific areas of the city and who determine who may work on the streets of “their” area beat many children, especially newcomers.

“The first time I came to Ho Chi Minh City, I was faced with so many problems like finding the place to polish, because there is one leader in each place. If I polish there without their permission, they will beat me and take my tool-kit. The first time a leader approached me, I did not give them my tool-kit, so they beat me. If I had given them my tool-kit, then I would have nothing to work with to earn money.”

-Tung, 15 years old, shoe shiner from Thanh Hoa

In addition, because these children live on their daily expenses, they do not always have enough money to cover their rent or buy food. These children are under constant pressure to earn money and usually feel guilty using their earnings to support themselves. Mr. Nguyen of Save the Children Sweden best summed up the difference between street working children and children who work off the street. Migrant children working on the street do not come prepared. They do not have someone to guide them and protect them from exploitation and crime. They must learn from painful experiences. Children who work for an employer usually have their work prearranged for them before coming to Ho Chi Minh City and “have a clear picture of what is expected of them.”⁶²

⁶¹ “Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City,” pp. 26

⁶² Personal Interview, Mr. Nguyen, Project Officer, Save the Children Sweden, November 22, 2006

Employed, Non-Street Based Working Children

Employed economic migrant working children are mostly involved in *my go* or noodle soup selling. As stated above, the reason for the large number of child noodle soup sellers is neighborhood connections. According to Save the Children UK, 90% of *my go* sellers are from either Duc Nghia or Duc Trong Districts in Quang Ngai province.⁶³ *My go* appeared in Ho Chi Minh City in the 1990s as migration to the city increased. Today, many *my go* carts can be found in Binh Tan District. The work of a noodle soup seller is laborious. They have to go to the market at 6am or 7am so that they can get fresh, cheap ingredients, followed by three hours work in preparing the broth including meat slicing, cooking, cart preparation, etc. Noodle soup sellers do not usually finish work until 2am or 3am, depending on when they finish their supply of broth because it cannot be left overnight for re-use the next day.

The most fundamental component in creating a successful *my go* business is in the quality of the knockers. Knockers are people who walk around with bamboo tubes and cast iron icebreakers that make loud noises to alert potential customers that *my go* is available for purchase. The success of a noodle soup business is very dependent on the knocker as the business is a door-to-door service.⁶⁴ Thus, noodle soup cart owners usually hire children between the ages of 12 and 16 as knockers. Almost all the knocking children are selected by the cart owners from their home villages in Quang Ngai, thereby facilitating the migration to Ho Chi Minh City. Noodle soup business owners usually hire children from the same hamlet or village that they came from.

Children working for noodle soup businesses are almost exclusively economic migrant children. Unlike self-employed children, these knockers are under contract. Employment contracts are usually written, with commitments made between a cart owner and the children's parents. The contracts usually include the following conditions:

⁶³ "Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 19

⁶⁴ *ibid*, pp. 21

- A specified salary which is paid in lump sum at the beginning of the year directly to the child's parents
- Children get one day off a month and go back to visit their families once a year for about five days
- Accommodations and meals are provided by the cart owner
- Cart owners are to look after the knockers when they have an illness and provide medicine
- If the child quits his or her job, their families have to refund the balance of the child's pay, or in some cases, the full amount.⁶⁵

In most cases, these contracts are vary vague and do not clearly define the children's duties and working conditions. As a result, the nature of the job is entirely dependent upon the individual cart owner. The children's work is extremely hard and they spend their minimum amount of free time sleeping. These children must walk all day knocking to attract customers. They are usually extremely tired because they must work all day from 7:00 AM until at least midnight.

Due to their contracts, noodle soup selling children face many more limitations compared to their self-employed counterparts. These children are forced to work in this job and do not have any right to make their own decisions in regards to their life. According to Mr. Nguyen of Save the Children Sweden, the "greatest difference between lottery ticket selling and shoe shining children an noodle sellers is the amount of freedom they have...Lottery ticket sellers and shoe shiners can leave the job whenever they want. Noodle sellers are in debt bondage."⁶⁶ In addition, similar to those shoe shiners and lottery ticket sellers who work for a boss, noodle soup selling children enjoy almost no free time. They live in fear of their owners and never have time for entertainment. Their boss constantly monitors these children. If a child gets tired, he or she may try to hide for a while to rest. Cart owners limit this by regulating the walking area of each child, whereby the child has to report back to the cart approximately every 10 to 15 minutes. If the children are caught wandering off or stopping to watch someone's television, their employers are quick to return the children to their work and sometimes reprimand the children by reducing their sleeping time or scolding them.

⁶⁵ "Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City," pp. 21

⁶⁶ Personal Interview with Mr. Nguyen, Project Officer, Save the Children Sweden, November 22, 2006

Profile of a Noodle Soup Seller

Binh is 13 years old and from Quang Ngai. He came to Ho Chi Minh City when he was 9 years old to help sell noodles for the brother of his father's friend who owns a *my go* cart and who needed a knocker to help him sell noodle soup. Binh's father and my boss made arrangements for him to come with the boss to Ho Chi Minh City from Quang Ngai. Binh's boss pays for his meals and other living expenses. Everyday Binh works at least 11 hours and usually does not finish working until 11:00 PM, if not later. Binh receives 3,000 dong per day for his work from his boss. He does not know his real salary because all of his money is given to his father. Binh wants to go home and continue studying but he cannot because he must earn money to send his younger brother to school. Binh gets one vacation a year, which is during Tet. His boss often scolds him if he is not working hard enough. Binh is sad because he has no one to play with during his free time.

Most self-employed children live with their friends or relatives; noodle soup children, in contrast, are rarely surrounded by children their own age and must live with their employer. As a consequence, many children face the risk of depression and underdevelopment. Noodle soup selling children almost always have an inferiority complex. Although they are inviting people to order a bowl of soup, they feel that they are beginning most of the time. In their relationship with their employers, the children almost never have the opportunity to fight against any injustice. They have to do everything demanded by their employer as if it was a master-slave relationship. In short, noodle soup selling is a form of bonded labor.

Child Labor Remittances

Research on internal migration indicates that remittances are a major source of income for those who remain in rural areas. Remittances reflect a long Vietnamese tradition of strong family support and play a significant role in the livelihoods of the people. The 1999 Vietnam Living Standards Survey showed that over 23% of households received remittances during the 12 months prior to the survey and that the remittances accounted for 38% of all household expenditures.⁶⁷ A recent study by Luttrell in Vietnam highlights the importance of migration and labor remittances in the livelihood of rural households. According to Luttrell's study, "remittances are a vital and important part of the economies of

⁶⁷ International Organization for Migration, **Migration, Development and Poverty Reduction in Asia, China, 2005**, pp. 14

most households. Agricultural production provides just enough for domestic food, but other purchases often depend on remittance incomes.”⁶⁸

According to the International Organization for Migration, opportunities for agricultural diversification and for non-farm employment in rural areas are limited; thus, remittances are often an important component of household incomes, often pooled with cash farming incomes.⁶⁹ Labor remittances have a great effect on household incomes and in many cases, are key to family survival. Remittances are helpful in repaying debt, covering school tuition fees for children and paying for the health expenses of the ill. Remittances by relatives form a significant part of the income of many rural households. Though by itself this source of cash income may not be sufficient for all family needs, when pooled with the income in cash from their farming activities, a household is more likely to be able to meet its subsistence requirements.⁷⁰

The growing importance of labor remittances is reflected in the great increase in internal migration for economic reasons in the post-*doi moi* era. Migration represents a livelihood strategy for most rural households. It is important to understand the strategies of households as a response to market opportunities. Most migrants are moving from their rural provinces where there is a lack of proper land for farming and unemployment to urban centers where there are far more job opportunities. Remittances from urban employment supplement rural incomes. As seen from this study, decisions to migrate may not simply reflect the goals and needs of individual migrants, but the family’s and household’s decision to maximize family incomes, or minimize family risks. According to the International Organization for Migration, rural families tend to allocate their labor assets over dispersed locations to reduce risk and allow family members to pool and share their incomes. In this way, the flow of remittances is not a

⁶⁸ Luttrell, C., H.V. Son, H.L. Thuan, V.D. Xiem, and D.T.L. Hieu, Thematic Policy Note, “Sustainable livelihood opportunities and resource management in coastline communes facing ‘special difficulties’”, accepted for publication as a working paper by the Government of Viet Nam, from IOM, pp. 40

⁶⁹ IOM, pp. 156

⁷⁰ “Migration and health survey Viet Nam 1997”, Survey Report, Institute of Sociology and Population Studies and Training Centre, Hanoi, 1998

random by-product of individual migration, but an integral part of a family strategy behind migration – a livelihood strategy for poor people.⁷¹

The increasing importance of labor remittances is positively correlated with the growing rate of rural to migration. This relationship also applies to economic child migrants and child labor remittances. From the evidence provided in this study, it should be not surprising that since the emergence of economic migrant working children, families have increasingly relied on their child's labor remittances to meet daily expenses. The change from collective to individual forms of income generation and material possessions in the post-*doi moi* era has contributed to the push of children into the labor market.⁷² Child labor remittances are an important part of rural families' incomes. Due to the dearth of economic opportunities in rural areas, families are struggling to meet daily expenses that were once covered by state subsidies and farming collectives, such as healthcare and education. According to a study conducted by Save the Children UK in 1998, families who are in debt rely heavily on their children's earnings and they have no choice but to send their children to work if they ever want to rid themselves of the heavy debt burden.⁷³ Families in great debt rely greatly on children's incomes to repay loans. Even without debts, most poor simply cannot afford not have their children work especially when the child is the main breadwinner of the family. Families that are most reliant on child labor remittances are families in which there is only one parental caretaker, a sick family member, or in which the child is taken care of by the grandparents.

Profile of a Child as Main Breadwinner of Family

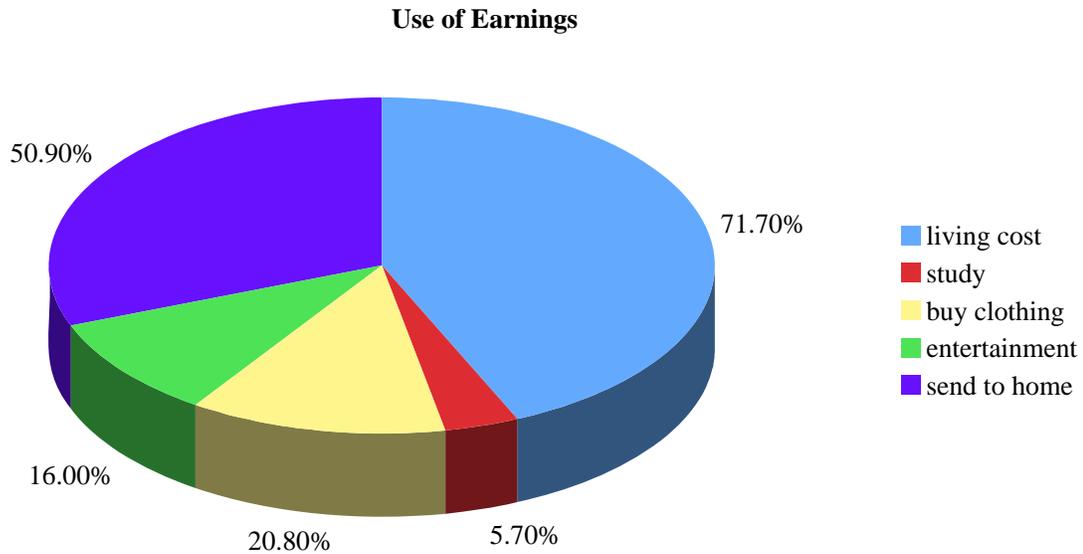
Minh is 13 years old and came to Ho Chi Minh City from Phu Yen 1 year and 7 months ago with his sister. He lives near the train station and works as a lottery ticket seller. His parents work as farmers on another man's land because they cannot afford their own land. When Minh was in level 4, his mother stopped him from going to school and told him to come to Ho Chi Minh City to work. Him and his sister earn about 1.5 million VND per month, of which they only keep enough to cover their living expenses. The rest Minh and his sister send home to their parents. Their parents only earn 25,000 VND per day and thus, Minh and his sister are the main breadwinner of their family. Their parents rely on them for survival.

⁷¹ International Organization for Migration, 155

⁷² Andrea Gallina, Masina, Pietro, **Street children in Vietnam: An inquiry into the roots of poverty and survival livelihood strategies**, Federico Caffè Centre Research Report, Denmark 2002, pp. 23

⁷³ "Child Labour in Ho Chi Minh City," Save the Children UK, 1998, pp. 42

The growth in the number of migrant child workers who have come to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to send home also reflects the *increase in family dependence on child income*. It is extremely difficult to know exactly how much families rely on child labor remittances, as children do not know the specific income of their families. However, from the in-depth interviews conducted with shoe shiners, lottery ticket sellers, and noodle soup sellers, it appears as though child earning's amount to an average of 20-30% of the entire family's income. In some cases, children's income is greater than that of the rest of the family, making the child the main breadwinner. In some cases, a child can earn as much as ten times what his or her parents earn monthly doing rural jobs. In other words, a child working for three months just selling lottery tickets can make a sum comparable to the family's entire rural income for a year.⁷⁴ These children are under the greatest pressure to remit a majority their earnings directly to their families.



⁷⁴ "Information provided at the street children workshop conducted by Vietnam Development Forum in HCMC in August 2004. Dr. Minh confirmed that a child from Duc Pho Commune in Quang Ngai Province, where the average monthly income was about 100,000 VND, could earn as much as 300,000 VND per month by selling lottery tickets in HCMC," in Duong Kim Hong and Ohno, Kenichi, **Street Children in Vietnam: Interactions of Old and New Causes in a Growing Economy**, Vietnam, July 2005, pp.7

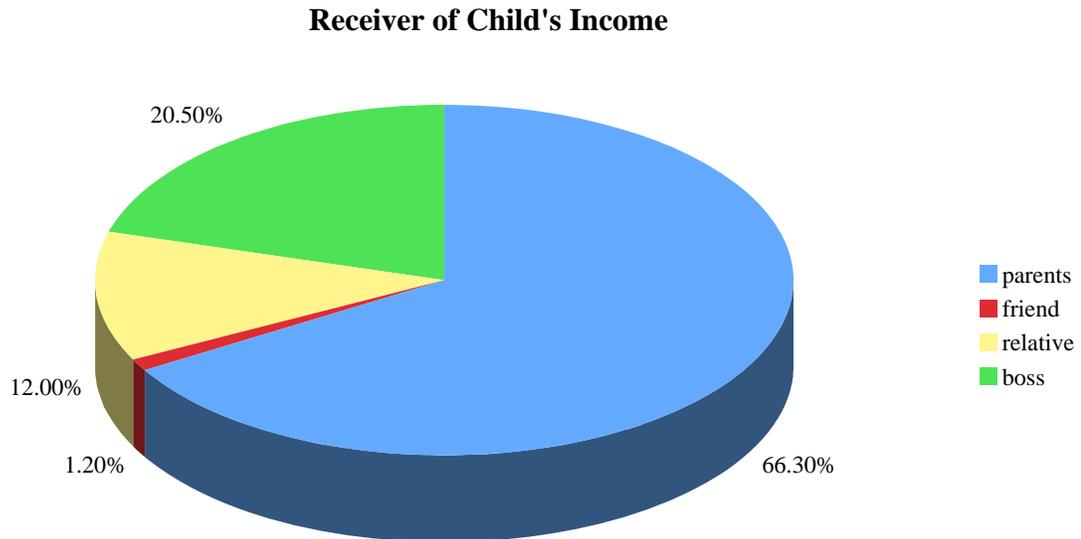
Children who migrated to Ho Chi Minh City alone must pay for their daily expenses out of their salaries. Payments to migrant working children fall into two categories. The first are live-in workers who live with their employer and whose expenses are deducted from their wages. Child migrants who do not live with their employer receive their wages directly and have to manage their own money. These children must allocate a greater portion of their salaries to living expenses, as they must pay for room rental and food. In both cases, as shown in the above graph, most of the children's earnings are being remitted to their families in rural provinces, while very little is being used for education and entertainment.

Child labor remittances fall into two categories: compulsory remittances and voluntary remittances. In the former category, the amount sent to home is chosen by the family, and remitted directly by the employer to the parent; in the latter, the amount remitted is chosen, and sent by the child, his or herself. From the research conducted for this study, a majority of the children involved in casual, street based activities like shoe shining and lottery ticket selling voluntarily remit their earnings to their families. On the other hand, compulsory remittances are most popular among those children with regular, secure jobs, such as noodle soup selling, and who live with their employer.

Compulsory remittances appear to be a new phenomenon of the post-*doi moi* era. In the past, compulsory remittances did not exist as a majority of working children were involved in street based activities and who came from families that did not necessarily depend on the money for survival. In the post-*doi moi* era, social networks between Ho Chi Minh City and specific provinces have been created as a result of the increase of standard internal migration trends. Compulsory remittances are most popular amongst children from Quang Ngai who come to work as knockers for noodle soup carts. As stated in the previous section, children who sell noodle soup are under contracts in which their parents receive their income directly and in return, the child's housing and other living expenses are covered. These children do not know how much money

they earn, but in many cases, their families are severely poor and are willing to sign vague contracts so long as they receive a lump sum of cash.

It is very difficult to determine the proportion of children who voluntarily remit their earnings versus those children who are forced to send their money home. However, statistics on compulsory versus voluntary migration depict the disparity between compulsory and voluntary remittances. Data collected from sample group interviews show that less than 15% of working children were forced to migrate to Ho Chi Minh City. Of these children, their parents forced 84.2% of them. In accordance with the information provided in this study, it should not be surprising that the primary reason parents forced their children to come to Ho Chi Minh City was family poverty and the need for their child to earn money to send home. In addition, the following graph offers a picture of the discrepancy between voluntary and compulsory remittances.



From the above graph, it appears as though voluntary remittances are three times greater than compulsory remittances as evident by the number of children giving their earnings to their boss versus their directly to their families. Children who give their money to their bosses are not able to keep any portion that they earn through their activities as they usually have a fixed income that is

delivered to their parents annually. Consequently, even if a child earns more of than this amount, he or she cannot keep the money as extra spending money.

There is not enough information to make conclusions on the determining characteristics of families that receive compulsory and voluntary child labor remittances. It does appear though that those children with families who have connections to people who run businesses based on child labor are more likely to compulsory remit their salaries, while children who came to Ho Chi Minh City alone usually voluntarily remit their earnings.

Conclusion

The *doi moi* reforms of 1986 have had very different effects on rural and urban areas of Vietnam. Rapid industrialization has allowed major urban cities, Ho Chi Minh City in particular, to develop at an extraordinary rate; rural areas, however, have not witnessed such developments. Although *doi moi* helped reduce poverty and increase the living standard of all regions of Vietnam, rural areas have been negatively affected by some *doi moi* reforms. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing socio-economic divide between rural and urban households. The problems in rural areas—over-population, unemployment, and land pressures—and unequal resource distribution in favor of urban areas have caused important shifts in population. Since the late 1990s, there has been a mass exodus of people from rural to urban areas for economic reasons. The rapid urbanization of Ho Chi Minh City is due to the millions of people moving to Ho Chi Minh City to earn money to help their families meet their daily needs.

Families who rely solely on agricultural activities for income can barely survival. The breakdown of social safety nets in the post-*doi moi* era has had serious consequences on rural families. Education, healthcare, and other social services used to be covered by the government, but now families must cover these expenses. Families who cannot afford to meet their daily expenses are now allowing their children to migrate to Ho Chi Minh City to work to send money

home to help cover basic expenses. Dependence on child labor remittances has increased in the past decade as more families are relying on their children to generate income to help support the family.

Since the late 1990s, the number of economic migrant children has become quite significant and changed the nature of migrant working children in Ho Chi Minh City. In the past, the majority of migrant children in Ho Chi Minh City were runaway children who left home for social reasons or lack of family. In the early 1900s, there were no children in Ho Chi Minh City who migrated for economic reasons. Today, a larger portion of children working in Ho Chi Minh City have left home to earn money rather than for social reasons or a lack of family. A comparison between the two groups show that runaway and economic migrant children are extremely different and have very different experiences while working in Ho Chi Minh City.

The number of children migrating to Ho Chi Minh City for economic reasons increases each year. Families who are living in poverty have very short-time horizons and do not recognize the long-term negative effects of economic migration on children. Child labor diminishes a child's human capital accumulation as the child rarely receives formal training or education after their arrival to Ho Chi Minh City. Without an education or training, children cannot learn new skills to acquire a proper job in the future. These children are exposed to harmful situations that restrict their physical, psychological, and emotional development. As a result these children are caught in an enduring poverty trap. While child labor has extremely awful consequences, it cannot be outlawed. According to Edmonds, such prohibitions, if enforced, can cause severe hardship for households who are barely surviving and drive the economic contributions of children into illegal and exploitative areas of work. At the same time, there is a need to safeguard children from abuses to protect them from the harmful drawbacks of child labor, to ensure their education and to uphold their basic rights as children. The only way to deal with the issue is to tackle the root of the problem: unequal economic growth and socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas.

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