

From fields to cities: Social-economic and ideological transformations in Vietnam's peasant communities

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EDN: PJPTSK

Abstract. Vietnam's rapid rural urbanization has determined complex social-economic, cultural and ideological changes in peasant communities. The article considers these transformations through the economic restructuring of rural labor and land use, cultural adaptation of traditional practices, and evolving ideological representations of the Vietnamese peasantry. The article is based on secondary sources (ethnographic studies, policy documents, and statistical data) and a comparative thematic approach combining rural sociology and critical discourse analysis. The findings reveal that while urbanization contributes to economic diversification and social mobility, it also creates persistent challenges such as land grabbing, growing inequality, and cultural erosion. Contrary to linear modernization theories, the study identifies hybrid rural-urban realities with smallholder farming, kinship networks, and symbolic land relations. Ideologically, rural population combines traditional communal ethics and individualist, market-oriented logics. The comparative analysis of Russian, Chinese and other transitional economies proves the universality of such dilemmas, particularly the tension between modernization and rural continuity. The study concludes with policy recommendations for inclusive and culturally sensitive rural development, emphasizing the need to integrate formal reforms with grassroots agency and local knowledge, which contributes to ongoing debates in rural sociology and peasant studies with relevance for both Vietnamese policymakers and the global agrarian thought.

Key words: cultural adaptation, hybrid rurality, ideological change, land grabbing, peasantry, rural urbanization, Vietnam

Introduction: Rural urbanization and the Vietnamese peasant question

Vietnam's transition from a predominantly agrarian society to a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing nation has profoundly reshaped its rural landscapes and life worlds of its peasant communities (Nguyen, 2023). Since the *Đổi Mới* reforms, rural transformation has been a pillar of the national development strategy, closely connected with the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) model of socialist-oriented modernization (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). While this strategy ensured economic growth, infrastructural development and poverty reduction, it also had complex consequences for rural livelihoods, social relations and cultural continuity (Nguyen et al., 2024a; Nguyen et al., 2021). Recently, Vietnam's development trajectory has been shaped by strategic state responses to intertwined technological, geopolitical and environmental challenges, which further affects policy priorities and governance approaches to rural restructuring and land-use change (Lai et al., 2025). Thus, urbanization is not only a spatial process but a multidimensional transformation that blurs conventional boundaries between rural and urban lifestyles, with far-reaching implications for land use, labor organization, identity formation, and social reproduction (Gillen et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2012).

Despite a growing body of works, social implications of urbanization in Vietnam remain fragmentarily studied, since researchers focus on specific dimensions (land question, migration, livelihood diversification) without integrating economic, cultural and ideological transformations into a single analytical framework, thus ignoring the defining feature of Vietnam — urbanization under socialist land relations management, strong state, and moral, kinship and cultural logics of land and labor relations. As urban infrastructure and industrial zones penetrate into agricultural areas, traditional livelihoods are displaced or reconfigured, often through informal or semi-regulated mechanisms rather than legal dispossession (Fan et al., 2019; Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020). At the same time, peasant households still perceive land as a source of social security, cultural and intergenerational continuity, which produces hybrid rural-urban realities, in which peasant identities coexist with diversified economic practices (Gillen et al., 2019; Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020).

Such transformations affect social values, aspirations and world-views of rural communities. The ideological dimension of urbanization influences how peasants perceive land ownership, education, labor mobility and social mobility, often leading to generational tensions between inherited communal ethics and market-oriented rationalities (Ha et al., 2021; Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). However, the state modernization discourse usually presents rural population as passive beneficiaries or backward peasants in need of reform, thereby underestimating peasant agency, adaptive capacity and resistance potential

(Nguyen et al., 2024a; Phan, 2023). From the philosophical perspective, agrarian labor and land have cultural-symbolic meanings that cannot be reduced to economic functions, which raises fundamental questions about dignity, tradition and collective memory under modernization (Onosov, 2024).

The article presents a critical interpretation of empirical studies, policy analyses and statistical data on urbanization in Vietnam. By systematically integrating principles of rural sociology, agrarian studies and development research, the article moves beyond sectoral or case-specific descriptions to broader understanding of how Vietnamese peasant communities have changed. The central research question is how urbanization in Vietnam has reconfigured peasant livelihoods, identities and worldviews under socialist land relations management and rapid industrialization. To answer this question, first, the article provides an overview of research of economic restructuring in rural Vietnam, focusing on changes in employment patterns, livelihoods, and land use; second, considers cultural transformations associated with urban influence, including changes in rituals, festivals, housing practices and communal life; third, analyzes ideological changes of the peasant class, particularly attitudes toward education, mobility, agriculture and rural future. Together these dimensions show that urbanization in Vietnam does not constitute a linear transition from rural to urban life — it is rather a negotiated process marked by adaptation, sustainability and contradictions. Such an approach emphasizes the need to conceptualize rural change not only in terms of structural modernization but also in relation to enduring social meanings and peasant agency.

Analytical approach and sources

The article presents a thematic and critical overview of existing research to explain how urbanization has reshaped peasant livelihoods, cultural practices and ideological orientations in Vietnam, i.e., what are broader patterns of rural transformation, which are not always visible in case studies or sector-specific analyses. The review focuses on rural and peri-urban Vietnam during the post-*Đổi Mới* period, with particular attention to regions that have experienced rapid urbanization, such as areas around Hanoi and the Mekong Delta. Some comparative cases from other transitional and agrarian contexts are added to situate the Vietnamese experience within general discussion about rural urbanization and peasant transformations.

The review is based on a comprehensive body of secondary sources, including ethnographic studies, scientific articles, official documents, government and institutional reports, and national statistical datasets. These materials were chosen for their empirical depth, analytical rigor and relevance to the key dimensions of rural transfor-

mation (land relations change, livelihood restructuring, rural-urban migration, cultural change, and peasant agency). Sources were selected according to three main criteria: first, clear geographic relevance to rural and peri-urban Vietnam, particularly regions undergoing accelerated urbanization; studies that explicitly address economic, cultural or ideological aspects of rural change rather than consider urbanization as a purely spatial or technical process; methodological transparency and conceptual clarity. Foundational theoretical works, such as Scott's *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1977) and Hall et al.'s *Powers of Exclusion* (2011), were included to provide a conceptual anchor and to connect the Vietnamese case to broader regional and global discussions about land, power and agrarian transformation.

The selected works were subjected to comparative thematic analysis in three interrelated areas: economic restructuring, cultural adaptation, and ideological transformation. This thematic organization allows for a systematic examination of how changes in land use, labor arrangements and income strategies intersect with changes in cultural practices, social values and peasant worldviews. The analysis also included elements of critical discourse analysis to identify how urbanization is framed in policy narratives and academic interpretations. Particular attention was paid to contrasts between the state modernization discourse that often depicts peasants as passive or backward and empirical studies emphasizing peasant agency, adaptation and resistance (Nguyen et al., 2024; Phan, 2023; Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024).

Rural Vietnam before urbanization: Social, economic and cultural indicators

To understand transformations determined by urbanization, we need to consider social, economic and cultural conditions of rural life in Vietnam before the start of large-scale industrialization and urban expansion. Vietnam's countryside was characterized by agrarian livelihoods, dense social relations and deeply embedded moral and cultural frameworks that structured everyday life. These conditions formed the social and ideological "starting point" for rural communities' interpretation and response to urbanization.

For much of the twentieth century and in the early years of the *Đổi Mới* reforms, Vietnam's rural economy consisted mainly of smallholder agriculture, particularly wet-rice cultivation. Farming households typically managed fragmented plots allocated through collective or semi-collective arrangements, relying heavily on family labor rather than hired workers (Nguyen, Tran, 2002; Vu, 1998). Agricultural production was meant primarily for household subsistence, with market playing a supplementary rather than central organizing role for rural livelihoods. This subsistence–market balance was a defining feature of rural economies. While households sold surplus crops or engaged in small trade to

get cash, food security and risk minimization remained priority tasks. Agricultural decisions were determined not so much by profit maximization as by concerns about stability, seasonal uncertainty, and household reproduction (Scott, 1977). This logic fostered a cautious engagement with markets and diversified livelihood strategies, including petty trade, handicrafts, and seasonal off-farm work long before the start of intensive urbanization. Household labor organization reflected both economic necessity and cultural norms, for instance, generational and gender distribution of farming tasks, with women often bearing responsibility for both agricultural production and domestic labor, while men supplemented household income with wage labor or migration (Nguyen et al., 2012). The household functioned as the primary unit of production, consumption and social security, with strong interdependence among family members and limited access to external labor markets.

Land was a key asset in rural Vietnam — not only a productive resource but also a foundation of social identity and moral order. Beyond its economic value, land had symbolic meanings connected to ancestry, lineage continuity and collective memory. Access to land provided households with a sense of security in the face of economic shocks and social marginalization, even when agricultural incomes were low (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020).

Rural communities were organized through dense kinship networks that structured access to land, labor and mutual assistance. Informal arrangements (land sharing, labor exchange and intergenerational transfers) played a crucial role in ensuring livelihoods, particularly during periods of labor shortage. These practices were based on trust, reciprocity and long-term social obligations, reinforcing community cohesion while limiting individual autonomy (Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020).

Village governance combined formal administrative structures and informal moral authority. While state institutions exercised oversight, the daily regulation of social life was often carried out by village elders and kin groups, which reflected what Scott (1977) conceptualizes as a moral economy, in which economic behavior is determined by shared expectations of justice, obligation and social responsibility. Decisions about land use, labor allocation and conflict resolution were evaluated not only in legal or economic terms but also based on moral judgments rooted in communal values.

Culturally, rural Vietnam was characterized by strong communal ethics emphasizing solidarity, mutual support and respect for social hierarchy. Village rituals, festivals and religious practices supported collective identity and connections between the community, ancestors, and land and performed both symbolic and practical functions, ensuring social cohesion and legitimizing established patterns of authority and cooperation (Vu, 1998). Intergenerational continuity was a core ideological principle: families strived to maintain lineage ties by caring for elders and preserving land for future generations. Edu-

cation, although valued, was often treated with caution, since households compared its potential benefits with the current need for labor and future risks of uncertain urban employment. Aspirations for social mobility coexisted with the prevailing ethics of risk aversion due to the historical experience of war, labor shortage and economic instability (Nguyen et al., 2012).

This ideological orientation did not imply passivity or resistance to change but reflected a pragmatic adaptation to structural constraints. Peasant households prioritized security, continuity and collective well-being over rapid accumulation or individual achievements. These cultural and ideological foundations profoundly influenced how rural communities later perceived urbanization, shaping patterns of adaptation, resistance and choice of market-oriented practices.

Taken together, these foundations prove that before urbanization rural Vietnam was not a static or isolated world but rather a socially complex and culturally rich landscape of agrarian livelihoods, moral economies and deeply rooted communal values. It is these foundations that explain why urbanization in Vietnam has led to hybrid results rather than a transition from peasant agriculture to urban life.

International and theoretical context: Rural urbanization in other countries

One influential framework for understanding rural transformation is the concept of the moral economy suggested by Scott (1977): the peasant economic behavior is determined by normative expectations of subsistence security, reciprocity, and social justice. Rather than acting as profit-maximizing agents, peasants prioritize risk minimization and livelihood stability, particularly in conditions of insecurity. This framework has proven especially relevant for analyzing resistance to land grabbing and uneven development results due to its focus on the peasant perception of justice and entitlement under externally imposed changes. In Vietnam, the moral economy perspective helps to explain why rural households continue to value land for its social and symbolic functions despite the decline in its economic returns (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020; Phan, 2023).

In addition to this perspective, Hall, Hirsch and Li's (2011) concept of powers of exclusion offers a political-economic approach for explaining how access to land and resources is restructured under urbanization. This framework highlights four intersecting mechanisms — regulation, force, market, and legitimation, with which rural population may lose land and livelihoods. Unlike the moral economy perspective, which emphasizes normative expectations and resistance, the powers of exclusion framework focuses on institutional arrangements, legal ambiguities and governance practices that allow for land commodification and dispossession. Applied to Southeast Asia, this approach shows how the state development projects and market re-

forms can marginalize rural communities even without open coercion. In Vietnam, this approach provides a critical insight into the land acquisition and compensation disputes associated with peri-urban expansion (Fan et al., 2019; Phan, 2023).

The third influential perspective emphasizes deagrarianization and hybrid rurality, challenging assumptions that urbanization necessarily destroys peasant agriculture: declining agricultural employment does not automatically lead to the dissolution of agrarian identities or land relations. Nguyen, Gillen and Rigg (2020) conceptualize this situation as “an economic transition without agrarian transformation”, highlighting the coexistence of smallholder farming with wage labor and informal economic activities. Similarly, Gillen, Nguyen and Rigg (2025) describe rural–urban relations that produce hybrid social-economic spaces rather than separate rural and urban zones. Such perspectives emphasize continuity, adaptation and negotiated change, offering a more nuanced understanding of urbanization as a multi-level and unpredictable process.

Together, these theoretical approaches provide complementary lenses for interpreting urbanization: moral economy implies normative expectations and ethical tensions, powers of exclusion — institutional and political dynamics, and hybrid rurality — persistence of agrarian practices under urban pressure. Rather than choosing one framework, we combine three to explain Vietnam’s distinctive trajectory.

Comparative studies of other transitional economies prove that urbanization has uneven and context-specific outcomes. In China, land expropriation associated with urban expansion led to the widespread social-economic precarity among landless farmers, despite formal mechanisms of compensation and urban integration (Li et al., 2024). Similar to Vietnam, Chinese rural residents often retain strong land relations as a source of security and identity, challenging state narratives of modernization and urban citizenship (Nguyen et al., 2024a). In Russia, there are additional dimensions of rural transformation, particularly labor shortage, informal employment and the erosion of rural human capital. Shagaida (2024) describes how official statistics often obscure agriculture’s dependence on unregistered migrant labor, masking structural vulnerabilities of the rural economy. Gusakov and Gusakova (2024) further emphasize that rural sustainability depends not only on infrastructural investment but also on the long-term development of human and social capital through education, employment opportunities and community cohesion. Dorofeev et al. (2024) similarly stresses the importance of cultural and leisure infrastructure in preserving rural population and mitigating outmigration, which is similar to the challenges the Vietnamese rural regions face.

Studies in Turkey and other parts of the Global South reveal the same processes of land dispossession, labor precarity and livelihood

diversification. Kavak et al (2025) describe how seasonal migrant farm workers in Turkey navigate the intersection of agricultural production and social reproduction in conditions of insecurity. In Africa and Latin America, rural households respond to urbanization and migration with hybrid strategies that combine agricultural and non-farming activities (Lugo-Espinosa et al., 2024; Moreda, 2025; Ngong et al., 2025). These cases prove the global relevance of hybrid rurality while highlighting the importance of local institutional and cultural contexts.

However, comparative approach has limitations: Vietnam has distinctive features, including collective land ownership, strong state involvement in land relations management and moral-symbolic significance of land for peasant communities. While international cases reveal similar problems (inequality, dispossession and cultural disruption), they cannot fully explain the specific ways in which Vietnamese peasants respond to urbanization under the socialist-oriented governance. Comparative approach serves not as an explanatory but as a contextual reference point for a better understanding of Vietnam's trajectory. Thus, we consider Vietnam's experience within broader theoretical and international debates while analytically focusing on the national context of rural transformation, examining how economic restructuring, cultural adaptation and ideological change unfold in the given institutional and social environment.

Economic restructuring under urbanization

In Vietnam, urbanization has been accompanied by profound economic restructuring that reshapes land relations, labor allocation and class differentiation in peasant communities. Rather than producing uniform economic effects, these changes unfold unevenly across regions and social groups, providing new opportunities for some households and deepening vulnerability for others.

Land conversion constitutes one of the most visible and controversial dimensions of urbanization in Vietnam. Since the acceleration of industrialization and infrastructure development, large areas of agricultural land have been turned into industrial zones, transport networks and suburbs. In Hanoi, farmland conversion accounted for approximately 65% of land-use change from 1990 to 2010, fundamentally altering peri-urban landscapes (Fan et al., 2019). National statistics indicate that hundreds of thousands of hectares of agricultural land ceased to be agricultural during the 2010s, affecting millions of rural residents (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020). These processes were especially significant in peri-urban areas, where rural and urban functions increasingly overlap. In such zones, land conversion is often a part of administrative decisions presented as being "in the interests of society", but their implementation is often char-

acterized by legal ambiguity, limited transparency and unequal bargaining power between local authorities and rural households (Phan, 2023). Compensation mechanisms, although formally mandatory, often fail to reflect the long-term livelihood value of land, especially its symbolic and social security functions for rural households (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020).

The results of land conversion are uneven: some households can reinvest compensation payments into business, housing or education, facilitating upward mobility; others spend compensation funds quickly and face long-term income insecurity, particularly when lacking skills or access to stable non-farm employment (Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020). These diverse trajectories show that land dispossession under urbanization does not merely redistribute space but restructures economic risks and opportunities for rural communities.

In addition to land conversion, urbanization has determined significant changes in labor allocation and livelihood strategies. Vietnam has experienced a steady decline in agricultural labor, as rural workers increasingly move to work in industry, construction and service sector. Once the majority of rural population worked in agriculture, but this share has decreased since the early *Đổi Mới* period due to both push factors (shrinking land allotments and low farming incomes) and pull factors associated with urban labor markets (Ha et al., 2021). However, this transition does not mean a complete abandonment of agriculture — there are many multi-structured households, in which family members are engaged simultaneously in farming, wage labor and informal economic activities in rural and urban areas (Gillen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2012). Smallholder farming often continues despite low profitability, functioning as a form of livelihood insurance given the precarity of urban employment (Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020), i.e., rural households strategically diversify their activities rather than specialize in non-agricultural work.

Labor under urbanization has a gender dimension: men migrate for wage labor, while women increasingly take responsibility for both agricultural production and household care, intensifying their workload and expanding their economic roles (Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020). Although this shift can enhance women's decision-making power in households, it also reinforces gender vulnerabilities, particularly since access to social protection and labor rights protection remains limited.

In general, livelihood diversification under urbanization reflects adaptation rather than linear modernization. Rural households actively navigate new economic landscapes by combining old and new practices, although peasant choices are limited by structural inequalities in labor markets and in access to resources. Economic restructuring has contributed to growing inequality and class differentiation in rural Vietnam. Statistical data indicates widening income gaps both within and between rural regions: differences between the highest and the lowest rural income groups have increased substantial-

ly, with the richest quintile earning more than ten times the income of the poorest in some regions (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2020). These differences are particularly noticeable in areas experiencing rapid urbanization, where access to land compensation, education and non-farm employment varies significantly. There are also regional and ethnic differences: for ethnic minorities and residents of remote or ecologically vulnerable regions, urbanization often comes as land dispossession without adequate alternatives due to limited infrastructure, low education and weaker integration into labor markets (Nguyen, Khuat, 2024; Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). On the contrary, households near major urban centers or transport hubs are more likely to benefit from new economic opportunities, which contributes to spatially uneven development.

These trends determined a phenomenon that can be described as rural precariat — a group of land-poor or landless households dependent on unstable wage labor, informal employment and temporary migration. While officially classified as undergoing urbanization or modernization, these households often lack access to social protection under economic shocks (Ha et al., 2021; Phan, 2023). Comparative studies of China and other transitional economies reveal similar patterns, but Vietnam is characterized by persistent moral and symbolic attachments to land, which exacerbates social consequences of its dispossession (Li et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024a).

Thus, in Vietnam economic restructuring under urbanization has not led to a homogeneous transition toward prosperity but has differentiated outcomes determined by access to land, household strategies, gender relations and regional location. Such uneven effects are essential for understanding the broader social implications of urbanization and for examining how economic changes intersect with cultural adaptation and ideological transformation.

Cultural adaptation and transformation of rural life

Economic restructuring under urbanization is accompanied by far-reaching cultural transformations that reshape everyday practices, symbolic systems and forms of social cohesion in Vietnam's rural communities. These changes do not simply entail cultural loss or replacement but rather adaptation, selective preservation and in some cases commodification.

Traditional rituals and festivals have long played a central role in structuring rural life in Vietnam, supporting communal bonds and connections between land, ancestry and collective identity. Under urbanization, these practices did not disappear but significantly changed. In many localities, rituals linked to agricultural cycles (village festivals, ancestral commemorations and seasonal celebrations) were adapted to new social-economic realities: reduced dependence

on agriculture, time constraints associated with wage labor and mobility have affected participation patterns and ritual meanings (Gillen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2012).

Ethnographic studies identify diverse cultural changes. In some communities, rituals are kept in simplified forms or were rescheduled to urban work rhythms, reflecting adaptive strategies that maintain symbolic continuity under new constraints. In other communities, especially ethnic minority groups, traditional festivals have undergone erosion or commodification for tourism or cultural tasks (Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). Such transformations bring both economic benefits and the risk of rituals losing their social and spiritual functions. Everyday cultural practices are similarly affected: changes in consumption patterns, media exposure and leisure activities coexist with rather than fully replace established norms. While market-oriented values and individual aspirations begin to dominate, they develop within existing moral frameworks, producing hybrid cultural forms rather than simply destroying the previous ones. Therefore, cultural adaptation under urbanization is uneven and controversial, shaped by local histories, generational dynamics and access to resources.

Transformation of rural environment constitutes another visible dimension of cultural change. Traditional houses (built from local materials and adapted to local environmental conditions) have been increasingly replaced by urban architectural forms. Growing incomes, aspirations for better life and state rural development programs have accelerated this transformation, changing village landscapes and everyday spatial practices (Nguyen, Tran, 2002; Vu, 1998). While new housing is often associated with improved living standards and higher social status, there are significant cultural and environmental implications. Nguyen and Khuat (2024) describe the gradual loss of architectural traditions among ethnic minority communities, in which traditional housing embodied collective knowledge, climatic adaptation and social organization. The replacement of traditional housing with standardized construction methods affects intergenerational knowledge transmission and distinctive cultural features of rural settlements. There are efforts to preserve traditional cultural heritage, often through heritage site designation or cultural heritage protection initiatives. However, such efforts often prioritize visual preservation over lived practice, separating architecture from its social context. As a result, preservation is often combined with ongoing cultural transformation, which turns rural environment into a site where modernization aspirations, cultural memory and policy interventions intersect, revealing ambivalent cultural consequences of urbanization.

Cultural participation and leisure activities play an important but often underestimated role in supporting rural social cohesion. Traditional forms of collective action (communal labor, village meetings and celebrations) have historically ensured trust and reciprocity within rural communities. Under migration and livelihood diversification,

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these forms of participation weaken: migration reduces labor and time resources for communal activities, affecting everyday social interactions and collective responsibilities (Gillen et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2012). Recent comparative studies show that cultural and leisure infrastructure is critical for preserving human and social capital in rural areas. Dorofeev et al. (2024) argue that participatory cultural activities in rural Russia contribute to quality of life and help mitigate outmigration by fostering a sense of belonging. Similar trends are evident in Vietnam, where declining cultural participation can exacerbate social fragmentation, particularly among the youth and elderly left behind by migration. Nevertheless, rural communities continue to develop adaptive responses: new forms of association (cultural clubs, religious groups and informal networks) compensate for declining traditional participation. These initiatives demonstrate that social cohesion is not simply eroded by urbanization — it is reconstituted by evolving practices. However, access to such opportunities remains uneven, often reflecting broader inequalities in income, education and regional development (Ha et al., 2021).

Thus, cultural transformation under urbanization in Vietnam is characterized by adaptation rather than uniform decline. Rural rituals, environments and forms of social participation are reshaped through complex negotiations between tradition and modernity, mobility and belonging. Such cultural dynamics are inseparable from economic restructuring and provide essential context for understanding corresponding ideological changes.

Ideological changes and reconfiguration of peasant worldviews

In addition to economic restructuring and cultural transformation, urbanization in Vietnam has led to significant ideological changes in how peasants understand work, land, education and social mobility. These changes are not just additional adaptations to the market but reflect deeper reconfigurations of values, aspirations and morals, and such changes are unevenly distributed among generations and social groups, producing hybrid worldviews in which traditional rural ethics coexists with market-oriented rationalities.

Historically, Vietnam's peasantry worldview was determined by subsistence ethics, emphasizing security, stability and risk minimization rather than accumulation. According to Scott (1977), such orientations develop in contexts of vulnerability, where protection of household reproduction takes priority over profit maximization. In rural Vietnam, this ethics was reinforced by collective memories of war and institutional uncertainty, which determined cautious perception of markets and strong attachment to land as a source of security (Nguyen, Tran, 2002; Vu, 1998). Under urbanization, this ideological orientation has gradually changed: increased engagement in wage la-

bor, market competition and consumer culture has led to more market-rational ideas of work and land use. Farming is increasingly evaluated in terms of economic efficiency rather than moral obligations, and land is sometimes reinterpreted as a tradable asset rather than an inherited trust (Fan et al., 2019; Phan, 2023). Nevertheless, this transformation remains partial, since many rural households keep agricultural land despite low returns — as insurance under the labor market volatility and urban precarity (Nguyen, Gillen, Rigg, 2020).

Attitudes toward risk also changed: although peasants are increasingly engaged in entrepreneurial activities and non-agricultural employment, risk aversion has not disappeared. Instead, households focus on diversification, combining farming, wage labor and informal activities to balance opportunities and security (Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020). This ideological hybridity proves that market rationality supplants rather than supplants subsistence ethics.

Education became a central axis of ideological transformation, particularly in generational aspirations. For younger rural cohorts, schooling is increasingly perceived as the main path of social mobility and escape from agricultural labor to urban employment in industry or services, which reflects broader societal narratives about hardship and limited prospects of agriculture (Ha et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2012). Parents often share these aspirations, investing in education despite economic constraints. However, this investment is ambivalent: education is valued as means of upward mobility, but it also implies symbolic devaluation of farming, contributing to declining intergenerational continuity in agricultural knowledge and practice (Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). Thus, agriculture is increasingly associated with older generations, women and those with limited choices.

However, reluctance to engage in agriculture does not necessarily mean rejection of rural identity. Many educated rural youth maintain emotional and material ties to their home villages by sending remittances, participating in rituals and keeping land rights as a form of security (Gillen et al., 2019). These patterns reveal that aspirations for mobility coexist with enduring attachments to rural places, complicating narratives of irreversible urban assimilation. Ideological transformations associated with urbanization have produced hybrid identities marked by moral tension: on one hand, individualism, self-improvement and financial success have become increasingly important for younger and more mobile population; on the other hand, communal ethics of obligations, reciprocity and respect for ancestry still determines social expectations and moral judgments in rural communities (Nguyen et al., 2012; Vu, 1998). This coexistence of individual aspirations and communal obligations resonates with philosophical ideas of Self in Confucian and communitarian traditions, emphasizing relational identity and moral standards rather than atomistic individualism (Pham et al., 2023).

This moral tension is evident in attitudes toward land. While land commodification and compensation mechanisms encourage instrumental views of land ownership, land retains moral and symbolic significance associated with lineage, dignity and belonging (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020). Land conflicts often reflect not only material considerations but also perceptions of moral injustice and disrespect for peasant identity (Phan, 2023), i.e., cannot be understood solely in economic terms but are shaped the enduring ethical principles through which rural communities interpret social change.

This moral tension was conceptualized as “deagrarianization without depeasantization” — agricultural employment declines while peasant identities and values persist (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020). Rather than indicating ideological inconsistency, this hybridity reflects adaptation to rapidly changing structural conditions. Comparative studies of transitional economies reveal similar patterns, but Vietnam’s experience stands out due the moral centrality of land under socialist-oriented governance (Nguyen et al., 2024a): religious and ethical worldviews, particularly Buddhist understandings of social responsibility and moral conduct, continue to influence how rural actors evaluate land, labor and social justice under market pressures. Onosov (2024) argues that agrarian labor embodies ethical meanings related to dignity and collective memory, suggesting that the erosion of peasant values has implications beyond economic efficiency. While such perspectives may seem idealized, they are supported by empirical findings about the enduring normative significance of rural life under modernization. Together Confucian-communitarian and Buddhist ethical traditions provide a cultural-moral foundation for ideological change in rural Vietnam, shaping both adaptation and resistance patterns.

In general, ideological change under urbanization in Vietnam is not linear transition but complex coexistence. Subsistence ethics and market rationality, communal obligations and individual aspirations, continuity and breaks coexist in peasant worldviews, supplementing economic restructuring with reordering of meanings, identities and moral life.

Discussion: Hybrid rurality and Vietnam’s urbanization path

By integrating economic, cultural and ideological dimensions of change, we showed that rural transformation in Vietnam cannot be adequately understood using linear models of modernization that assume a gradual replacement of agrarian life by urban-industrial systems. Instead, Vietnam’s experience is best characterized by hybrid rurality, in which continuity and transformation coexist in dynamic and often contradictory ways.

Economic restructuring under urbanization has changed land relations and livelihood strategies rather than determined a uniform

abandonment of agriculture: land conversion and compensation processes provide highly uneven outcomes, which means upward mobility for some households and insecurity and precarity for others (Fan et al., 2019; Nguyen, Rigg et al., 2020; Phan, 2023). Livelihood diversification rather than specialization is the dominant adaptive strategy — households combine farming, wage labor and informal activities in rural-urban areas (Gillen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2012).

These economic changes are inseparable from cultural transformation. Rituals, festivals, housing practices and forms of community participation are not simply eroded by urbanization but selectively adapted, simplified or commodified (Nguyen, Khuat, 2024; Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). Cultural change unfolds unevenly, shaped by migration, generational change and unequal access to resources. While some forms of communal life weaken under mobility and time constraints, new associations and practices develop and support social cohesion, albeit in different forms (Dorofeev et al., 2024; Gillen et al., 2025).

At the ideological level, urbanization reconfigures how peasants understand work, land, education and the future. The transition from subsistence ethics to market rationality is partial and negotiated, as households continue to value land for its security and symbolic significance even when agricultural returns decline (Nguyen, Gillen et al., 2020; Scott, 1977). Educational and mobility aspirations coexist with enduring attachment to village life, leading to generational tensions rather than ideological conflicts (Ha et al., 2021; Nguyen, Nguyen, 2024). Together, these dimensions determine rural transformation as a multi-layered process, in which material change, cultural adaptation and ideological negotiation unfold simultaneously.

The Vietnamese case challenges linear rural-to-urban transition models for several reasons. First, socialist-oriented land relations governance sets the rules of urbanization: collective land ownership, state-led allocation and administrative land conversion are what distinguishes Vietnam from economies in which privatized land markets dominate, intensifying the moral and political costs of land loss (Hall et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2024a). In Vietnam, land remains central not only as an economic asset but as a foundation of social identity, security and legitimacy.

Second, strong kinship networks and household-based strategies maintain the interconnectedness between the countryside and the city rather than their spatial separation. Migration does not dissolve village ties but often reinforces them through remittances, ritual participation and land retention, producing multi-structured livelihoods rather than permanent relocation (Gillen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2012). These patterns complicate conventional distinctions between rural and urban populations and undermine assumptions of irreversible rural decline.

Third, Vietnam's rural transformation is deeply embedded in moral, cultural and ideological frameworks that affect responses to eco-

economic change. Moral economy continues to influence perceptions of justice and rights, particularly in land acquisition and compensation disputes (Phan, 2023; Scott, 1977). Confucian-communitarian and Buddhist ethical traditions influence how rural actors evaluate individual success, communal obligations and social responsibility, contributing to ideological hybridity rather than a singular market ethos (Nguyen et al., 2024a; Pham et al., 2023). Thus, urbanization in Vietnam produces deagrarianization without depeasantization due to the interaction of institutional condition, historical experience and cultural continuity.

Moreover, the Vietnamese experience has broader implications for theories of rural change and development. First, it shows the limitations of modernization concept that defines urbanization as social-cultural homogenization, since Vietnam demonstrates hybridity, contingency and negotiated transformation rather than a linear trend (Gillen et al., 2025). Second, the Vietnamese experience highlights the relevance of the moral economy perspective for understanding rural transformation in contemporary conditions, since even under market expansion and industrialization normative expectations in relation to land, labor and social justice remain powerful factors of rural behavior and resistance (Phan, 2023; Scott, 1977). Third, the study contributes to discussion about rural sustainability by focusing on culture and ideology in addition to economic indicators. The Vietnamese case proves that sustainable rural transformation requires attention to social meaning, identity and agency and not simply economic restructuring.

Thus, urbanization in Vietnam represents a special path of transformation determined by hybrid economic practices, adaptive cultural forms and complex ideological change. It is important to recognize this complexity for both empirical studies of Vietnam's peasant communities and theoretical debates in rural sociology and development research. Rather than considering rural areas as transitional spaces destined for disappearance, the Vietnamese case implies reconceptualization of rurality as an evolving, resilient and socially meaningful domain within broader processes of modernization.

Conclusion and policy implications

By moving beyond sectoral or linear interpretations of modernization, the study describes rural transformation in Vietnam as a process of hybridization, and this perspective has some policy implications. First, rural and urban development policies should combine economic indicators with social and cultural dimensions of rural life. Land-use planning and compensation mechanisms should be based on the definition of land not only as a productive asset but also as a foundation of social security, identity and dignity for rural households. Policies

that ignore these meanings risk exacerbating conflict, inequality and social disorientation.

Second, under urbanization livelihood strategies increasingly diversify, which is why policies should support mixed livelihood systems rather than prioritize the complete abandonment of agriculture or rapid urban integration (investing in rural non-agricultural employment, improving access to training, social protection for informal and migrant workers at precarious positions in the rural-urban economy).

Third, cultural sustainability should be considered an integral part of rural development. Support for local cultural practices, traditional heritage and community-based leisure activities can strengthen social cohesion and human capital, especially in the context of high mobility and demographic changes. Such investments directly contribute to the long-term sustainability of rural communities.

Finally, policies should recognize peasant agency and ideological diversity. Rural populations are not passive recipients of modernization but active participants in change, using moral, cultural and kinship resources to adapt to new conditions. Participatory governance mechanisms that include rural voices in land-use decisions, development planning and cultural preservation can increase legitimacy and reduce social tensions associated with urban expansion.

Understanding rural urbanization in Vietnam requires an analytical shift from deterministic modernization model to a more nuanced model of hybrid rurality. By considering simultaneously economic restructuring, cultural adaptation and ideological change, this study contributes to broader discussions about rural transformation in transitional economies. Future research would benefit from empirical studies of intergenerational dynamics, gender differentiation and long-term social consequences of land conversion. For policymakers, the Vietnamese case proves that sustainable and inclusive development depends not only on economic growth but also on social meanings, cultural practices and moral economies of rural life.

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From fields to
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С полей в города: социально-экономические и идеологические трансформации крестьянских общин Вьетнама

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Аннотация. Быстрая урбанизация сельских районов Вьетнама обусловила сложные социально-экономические, культурные и идеологические изменения в крестьянских общинах. В статье эти трансформации рассматриваются через призму экономической реструктуризации сельского труда и землепользования, культурной адаптации традиционных практик и эволюции идеологических представлений вьетнамских крестьян. Статья основана на вторичных источниках (этнографические исследования, правительственные документы и статистические данные) и сравнительно-тематическом подходе, сочетающем сельскую социологию и критический дискурсивный анализ. Согласно результатам исследования, урбанизация способствует экономической диверсификации

и социальной мобильности, но в то же время порождает такие устойчивые проблемы, как захват земель, растущее неравенство и культурная эрозия. В отличие от линейных теорий модернизации, исследование выявило гибридные сельско-городские реалии с элементами мелкого фермерства, родственных сетей и символически нагруженными земельными отношениями. С идеологической точки зрения сельское население сочетает традиционную общинную этику и индивидуалистическую, рыночно-ориентированную логику поведения. Сравнительный анализ российской, китайской и других переходных экономик подтверждает универсальность подобных дилемм, в частности, сохраняющееся напряжение между идеями модернизации и сельской преемственности. Статья завершается рекомендациями в отношении инклюзивного и ориентированного на культуру развития сельских районов, подчеркивая необходимость интеграции формальных реформ с низовыми инициативами и локальным знанием и внося тем самым вклад в продолжающиеся дискуссии представителей сельской социологии и крестьяноведения, которые имеют значение как для вьетнамских политиков, так и для мировой аграрной мысли.

Ключевые слова: культурная адаптация, гибридная сельская жизнь, идеологические изменения, захват земель, крестьянство, урбанизация сельских районов, Вьетнам