

Population Ageing and Sustainable Development of the Hoa Community: The Case of Le Binh Ward, Cai Rang, Can Tho City

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ABSTRACT: Population ageing has become a major challenge for sustainable development, yet it is often examined at national or regional levels while demographic change within urban ethnic communities receives less attention. Le Binh Ward in the Cai Rang area of Can Tho City, historically associated with Cai Rang Market and Hiep Thien Cung, is a long-established Hoa community whose household livelihoods are closely linked to small trade and services. Based on a case-study design, this article combines a household survey of 100 Hoa households comprising 407 individuals with ten in-depth interviews and field observations. It examines how ageing is connected to household livelihood, elder care and cultural transmission. The findings show that the community has entered a clearly aged population structure: people aged 60 and over account for 20.6 percent, exceeding the 0-14 age group at 15.2 percent, while the ageing index reaches approximately 135.5 older persons per 100 children. High rates of non-marriage among adults and older persons, small household size, limited labour out-migration and a livelihood structure centred on trade and services all increase care pressure, narrow the pool of successors in household businesses and weaken channels of cultural transmission. The article argues that population ageing should not be treated only as a demographic phenomenon, but as a community-level issue of sustainable development that requires coordinated attention to elder care, social protection, household livelihoods and the preservation of community-based cultural institutions.

KEYWORDS: population ageing, sustainable development, Hoa community, Cai Rang-Can Tho, household livelihood, cultural transmission.

INTRODUCTION

Population ageing is one of the most important demographic changes of the twenty-first century. It affects economic growth, social protection, family structure and the intergenerational transmission of culture. In Vietnam, studies by the General Statistics Office and UNFPA show a rapid increase in the share of older people after the 2019 Population and Housing Census. By 2021, people aged 60 and over accounted for 12.8 percent of the national population and 13.74 percent of the population in the Mekong Delta (General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021). Ageing, however, does not occur uniformly across regions, ethnic groups or local communities. National statistics provide a broad picture, but they rarely show how population ageing takes shape within specific communities, especially urban ethnic minority communities. A community-level approach is important because ageing is not merely an increase in the number of older persons. It also reorganises livelihoods, care relations, marriage and family patterns, and the capacity to maintain cultural institutions. In communities with a long history of settlement, ageing may have consequences that are deeper than conventional demographic indicators suggest: the pool of successor labour declines, family-based care becomes more demanding, and older people become both a group in need of support and a key source of memory, occupational experience and cultural knowledge.

The Hoa are an ethnic minority community with a long history in southern Vietnam. In Nam Bo, they have been associated with trade, services, handicrafts, assembly halls and community religious institutions. According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the Hoa population in Vietnam was 749,466. The Hoa also had the lowest total fertility rate among the 54 officially recognised ethnic groups, at about 1.53 children per woman (General Statistics Office, 2020). In Can Tho, Hoa communities are concentrated in traditional urban and commercial spaces such as Ninh Kieu, Binh Thuy and Cai Rang. Previous studies on the Hoa in Cai Rang have addressed community formation, everyday life, family rituals, assembly halls and marriage. Le and Vu (2019), for example, explain the high rate of unmarried Chinese-Vietnamese women in Le Binh through historical disruption, migration and shifting marriage norms. These studies are important, but they leave a research gap: population ageing has not yet been examined as a sustainable-development challenge for the Hoa in a specific urban locality. The issue is not simply that the number of older people is increasing. More fundamentally, the relationship between older and younger generations, between labour and dependency, between household livelihoods and social protection, and between cultural transmission and community continuity is changing.

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This article shifts the analytical focus from describing demographic or marital characteristics to examining ageing as a broader social process. It measures the degree of ageing through age structure, but also analyses how marriage, migration, education, occupation and household livelihood contribute to an aged population structure. On this basis, the article discusses the implications of ageing for sustainable development in three interrelated domains: economic life, social care and cultural reproduction. The study addresses three questions: (i) how does the age structure of the Hoa community in Le Binh indicate population ageing; (ii) how do marriage, migration, education and livelihood explain this process; and (iii) how does ageing affect sustainable development in the community?

METHODOLOGY

This research is a case study conducted in 2020. It does not claim statistical representativeness for the Hoa population of Nam Bo as a whole. Instead, it provides a close analysis of an urban Hoa community with a long settlement history, a clear trade-service livelihood profile and visible signs of population ageing. The study uses a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected through a structured household questionnaire to identify household composition, age structure, marriage status, education, labour, health and access to social protection. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and field observations in the areas around Cai Rang Market, Hiep Thien Cung and residential clusters where Hoa households have lived for a long time. Le Binh Ward, Cai Rang District, Can Tho City was selected purposively. Local data indicate that Le Binh had 353 Hoa households with 1,340 people; the market-town area of Cai Rang alone had 109 households with 435 people. Among the 100 households surveyed, the smallest household had one member and the largest had nine, with an average of about 4.4 members per household. The sample size was checked using Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n denotes the required sample size, N is the total number of Hoa households in Le Binh Ward, and e is the acceptable sampling error. With $N = 353$ and $e = 0.085$, the calculation is as follows:

$$n = \frac{353}{1 + 353(0.085)^2} \approx 99.4$$

The study therefore surveyed 100 Hoa households. This sample represents about 28.3 percent of all Hoa households in Le Binh Ward and is appropriate for descriptive and explanatory analysis at the community level. Because the Hoa population in Le Binh is not evenly distributed across the ward, the study did not rely on simple random sampling. Instead, it used purposive sampling combined with residential and livelihood clusters. Priority clusters included the Cai Rang Market area, the area around Hiep Thien Cung and long-established Hoa residential clusters. This strategy made it possible to capture differences in settlement generation, household size, occupation, marital status and community participation. The quantitative unit of analysis was the Hoa household. A household was included if at least one member self-identified or was locally recognised as Hoa, the household was resident in the locality at the time of the survey, members shared a household economy, and an adult respondent could provide information on household members. The 100 household questionnaires generated data on 407 individuals.

For the qualitative component, interviewees were selected by social role and life experience. They included local officials, neighbourhood leaders, community informants, traders, older people, unmarried adults, migrants and people with long-term ties to Cai Rang Market. The interviews focused on settlement history, livelihood, marriage, migration, elder care, intergenerational relations, religious life and the maintenance of cultural practices.

Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and comparison by age group, gender, marital status, household size, education, labour, income, health and access to insurance. The analysis focuses on four age groups: 0-14, 15-29, 30-60 and 60 and over. In addition to the share of people aged 60 and above, the ageing index was calculated as the number of persons aged 60 and over per 100 children aged 0-14. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, with attention to settlement history, community memory, trade-service livelihoods, marriage and singlehood, migration, elder care, assembly-hall activities and cultural transmission. The integration of survey data, interviews, field observations and secondary sources enables cross-checking and explains why population ageing has become a sustainable-development issue in this Hoa community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age structure at the community level

The survey of 100 Hoa households in Le Binh shows that the community has moved strongly towards an aged population structure. Among 407 individuals, 84 people were aged 60 and over, accounting for 20.6 percent. Children aged 0-14 numbered 62, or 15.2 percent. The 15-29 age group accounted for 17.4 percent, while the 30-60 age group accounted for 46.7 percent. If the 15-60 age range is treated as a conventional working-age group, there were 261 persons in this category, equivalent to 64.1 percent of the sample.

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Three indicators are particularly important. First, the ageing index reached 135.5 older persons per 100 children aged 0-14; in the Mekong Delta dataset used for comparison, the corresponding figure was about 54.3. Second, the conventional old-age dependency ratio reached 32.2 older persons per 100 persons aged 15-60, much higher than the Mekong Delta figure of 19.9. Third, the total dependency ratio reached 55.9 dependent persons per 100 persons aged 15-60. These indicators show that the problem is not only the presence of many older people. The relationship among older people, children and the labour force has shifted in a way that increases care pressure and weakens demographic reproduction within the community.

The ageing level of the Hoa in Le Binh is also high in relation to broader benchmarks. The share of persons aged 60 and over in Le Binh, at 20.6 percent, is higher than the national level reported in the 2019 census and higher than both the national and Mekong Delta levels reported in the 2021 ageing profile (General Statistics Office, 2020; General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021). Compared with many ethnic minority groups that still have younger population structures, the urban Hoa community in Le Binh shows earlier and deeper ageing, shaped by low fertility, late marriage or non-marriage and earlier historical migration.

Table 1. Age structure and ageing indicators of the Hoa community in Le Binh compared with the Mekong Delta

Indicator	Hoa in Le Binh	Mekong Delta	Interpretation
0-14 years (%)	15.2	23.4	A smaller child cohort indicates lower fertility and weaker local demographic reproduction
15-29 years (%)	17.4	23.1	A smaller young labour cohort reduces successors in livelihood and culture
30-60 years (%)	46.7	40.7	A larger middle-aged group suggests that the labour force is moving towards old age
60 years and over (%)	20.6	12.7	Population ageing is much higher than the regional context
Ageing index (60+/0-14 x 100)	135.5	54.3	Older persons already outnumber children
Old-age dependency ratio (60+/(15-60) x 100)	32.2	19.9	Care pressure is higher

Source: 2020 survey.

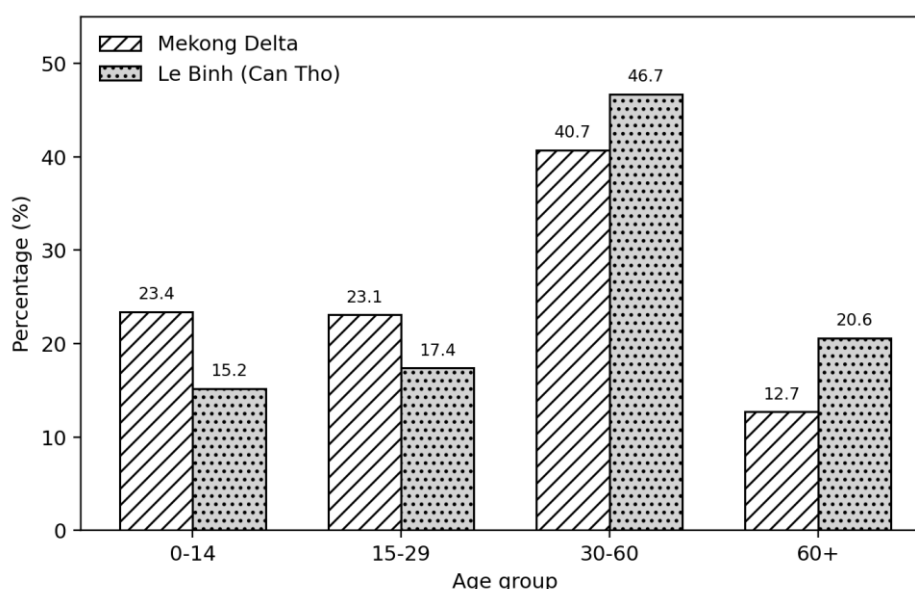


Figure 1. Age structure of the Hoa community in Le Binh compared with the Mekong Delta

Source: 2020 survey.

Marriage, fertility and migration as mechanisms of ageing

Population ageing in the Hoa community of Le Binh is not caused only by the growing proportion of older people. It is also the cumulative result of changes in marriage, fertility and migration. These mechanisms are closely linked. Low marriage rates reduce the formation of nuclear families and the likelihood of childbearing; low fertility reduces the size of younger generations; and historical as well as labour migration thins the local community, especially in age groups capable of demographic reproduction and

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livelihood succession (Goodkind, 1997; General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021). Compared with the Mekong Delta, the Hoa in Le Binh show a distinctive marital structure that helps explain why the community is ageing more deeply than the surrounding region.

Among 345 persons aged 15 and over, 36.5 percent of the Hoa in Le Binh had never married, compared with 22.5 percent in the Mekong Delta dataset. The difference is especially large in the 30-60 age group: 27.4 percent of the Hoa had never married, while the regional figure was only 7.8 percent. Among those over 60, 21.4 percent of the Hoa had never married, more than eight times the regional figure of 2.6 percent. Singlehood in this community is therefore not merely delayed marriage among the young; it extends across the life course. In the 60-and-over group, only 47.6 percent were married or living with a spouse, while the rest were unmarried, widowed, divorced or separated. This increases the likelihood that older people will live without a spouse and rely on siblings, kin or informal community support.

Table 2. Marital status by age group: Hoa in Le Binh and the Mekong Delta

Age group	Marital status	Hoa in Le Binh (%)	Mekong Delta (%)
15-29	Never married	78.9	59.3
15-29	Married/living with spouse	19.7	38.1
15-29	Widowed	0.0	0.1
15-29	Divorced/separated	1.4	2.5
30-60	Never married	27.4	7.8
30-60	Married/living with spouse	62.6	85.7
30-60	Widowed	2.6	3.0
30-60	Divorced/separated	7.4	3.6
60+	Never married	21.4	2.6
60+	Married/living with spouse	47.6	69.0
60+	Widowed	26.2	26.0
60+	Divorced/separated	4.8	2.4
Total	Never married	36.5	22.5
Total	Married/living with spouse	50.1	68.5
Total	Widowed	7.8	5.9
Total	Divorced/separated	5.5	3.0

Source: 2020 survey.

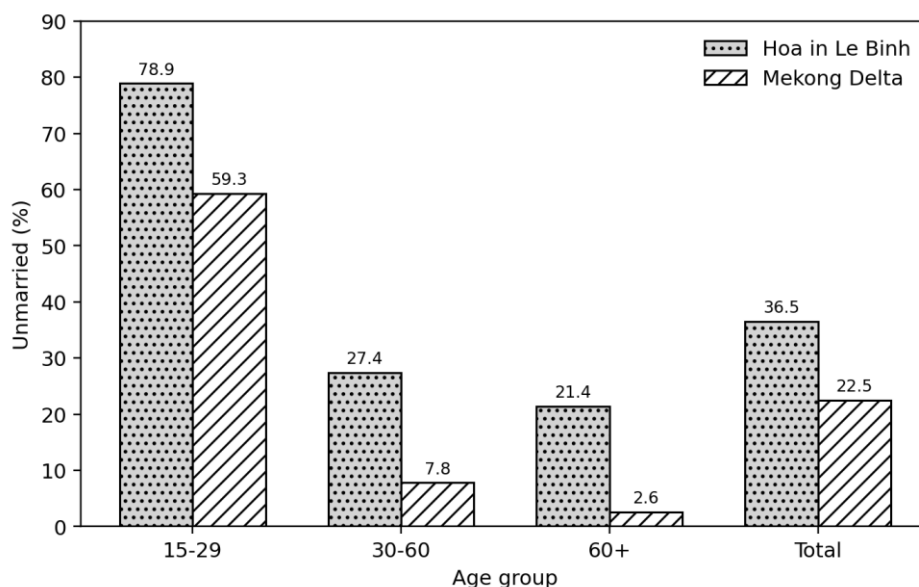


Figure 2. Unmarried rates among the Hoa in Le Binh compared with the Mekong Delta by age group

Source: 2020 survey.

Figure 2 shows that the largest differences occur among people aged 30-60 and 60 and over. These are age groups that have largely passed the conventional age of first marriage. The high unmarried rates in these groups therefore indicate long-term singlehood rather than a temporary delay in youth marriage.

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Le and Vu (2019) explain the high rate of unmarried Chinese-Vietnamese women in Cai Rang through several interlocking mechanisms. First, the household economy creates a relatively closed social space for many women. In the small-trade tradition of Hoa households, family members often contribute labour to the shop or household business, while income is pooled and redistributed according to family needs. Women, especially elder sisters or wives, often manage daily finances and sales, while men take on transport, delivery and heavier tasks. This family economy gives women a recognised position within the household, but it also limits their opportunities to meet potential spouses beyond the home, the market, kin and neighbours (Le & Vu, 2019; Salaff, 1976, 1981). In Chinese-influenced societies, matchmaking was once an important institution through which families managed marriage choices (Jordan, 1997). One female interviewee explained how this mechanism has changed:

"In the past, if the elders from both families knew one another, they would arrange the match. Most people did that. Now it is less common. In the past, most daughters did not go out to work; they stayed at home. Today young people work outside and find partners by themselves. They are freer and more comfortable. But those who do not work outside and stay at home still wait for someone to introduce them or arrange a match." (Banh Kim Loan, in-depth interview)

When traditional matchmaking weakens, women who continue to work in the household economy lose an important mechanism of marital connection. Their singlehood is not necessarily the result of high education or career choice, as in many accounts of single women in industrial societies. It is also the result of narrowed social conditions for meeting, choosing and marrying a spouse. For these women, non-marriage reflects gendered passivity, the decline of matchmaking and limited social interaction.

Marriage norms in the Hoa community also have lasting effects, especially among middle-aged and older generations. Marriage is not only a relationship between two individuals; it is also a relationship between two families, kinship networks and, in many cases, dialect or native-place groups. Criteria such as ethnic similarity, family status, household reputation and continuity of lineage narrow the range of possible spouses for women. Studies of marriage and family among the Hoa in southern Vietnam also note the role of native-place ties, dialect groups, family relations and rules of endogamy and exogamy in shaping marital choices (Nguyen Duy Binh, 2005). A male Hoa informant recalled that families used to be conservative, daughters rarely went out, and marriage usually depended on matchmaking:

"The more open and relaxed attitude to marriage has appeared only recently. In the past, Hoa families were very conservative. Many older people, those now over 60, still think conservatively. Marriage had to be between families of comparable status and within the same ethnic group; daughters should not marry Vietnamese men. Hoa daughters rarely went out; most stayed around the home and married through matchmaking." (male Hoa informant, in-depth interview)

This rule creates a gendered asymmetry in Hoa-Vietnamese intermarriage. Hoa men may marry Vietnamese women more easily because children continue the father's line. By contrast, when Hoa women marry Vietnamese men, they are often viewed as marrying out. They must live with the husband's family and adapt to a different family culture, language and ritual environment. Even when the boundary between Hoa and Vietnamese has become blurred in everyday life, marriage outside the community remains socially and emotionally more difficult for Hoa women. This asymmetry expands intermarriage for men while intensifying a marriage squeeze for Hoa women, consistent with Goodkind's (1997) analysis of migration and marriage-market imbalance in post-war Vietnam.

A further mechanism is the changing value of marriage among young women. Some young Hoa women no longer view marriage as the compulsory goal of life. They evaluate marriage in relation to education, work, personal freedom and quality of life. Compared with earlier generations, they have more opportunities to study and work outside the home. They also have greater autonomy in choosing a spouse, but place stronger emphasis on compatibility and stability. These changes resemble broader discussions of modern Vietnamese women's reflexive attitudes towards the traditional institution of marriage (Ta Thi Tra Mi, 2017). A young Hoa woman described marriage as only one part of life, not the whole of life:

"I think marriage is like one of my jobs. It is something I may have, but it is not everything. I do not think I must marry if I cannot find someone suitable. I would be freer, and my life would be more comfortable because I would not be tied to anyone." (Bui Thi Kim Ngan, in-depth interview)

Another young woman expressed a similar view. For this group, marriage is meaningful only when they can find someone with whom to share and build a long-term life. This does not mean rejecting the family. Rather, it shows that marriage is shifting from a social obligation to a conditional personal choice. As expectations rise, age at marriage lengthens and the number of unmarried adults increases, the demographic consequence is a lower fertility level.

"If I can find someone to build a family with, that is good. If I cannot find someone with whom I can live my whole life, then it is also all right not to marry. Why should I use the reason that a woman must marry to bind myself for the rest of my life?" (Lam Que Ngan, in-depth interview)

Economic caution further shapes marital decisions. Hoa women do not consider only affection; they also consider independence and the possible economic burden of marriage. After 1975, the household economy of the Hoa in Can Tho weakened. The transmission of business from parents to children was disrupted, and many households now operate only small shops or service

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activities. Under these conditions, marriage becomes a decision with significant livelihood risk rather than a relatively secure arrangement between families with strong economic networks.

"In economic terms, both people matter, not only the man. First, each person must be independent and take care of themselves. If he earns money but has a heavy family burden, then marriage will certainly involve arguments about money." (Lam Que Ngan, in-depth interview)

Some women are also reluctant to marry because they have observed unstable marriages around them. A 49-year-old seamstress said that seeing husbands take another wife and families become unsettled after having children made her and her younger sister unwilling to marry. This indicates that non-marriage is not only a matter of limited opportunity, but also a response to perceived risks in married life.

"I see marriages here today. After one or two children, some husbands have another wife. Seeing that, she no longer wants to marry. Many people have asked to marry me, but when I see these things, I feel discouraged." (female informant, 49 years old, seamstress, in-depth interview)

These mechanisms lead directly to low fertility. In the survey sample, children aged 0-14 accounted for only 15.2 percent of the Hoa population, while people aged 60 and over accounted for 20.6 percent. When many women do not marry or marry late, fewer families have children. At the same time, older persons who are unmarried, widowed, divorced or separated have fewer direct sources of support from spouses and children. This pattern is consistent with the national census finding that the Hoa have one of the lowest fertility levels among ethnic groups in Vietnam (General Statistics Office, 2020). Ageing in Le Binh is therefore not simply an increase in older people; it also reflects a weakening of family reproduction.

Migration deepens the process. Among 407 individuals in the sample, 39 had left the locality for the first time, accounting for 9.6 percent. Of these, 20 had returned, equivalent to 51.3 percent of the migrant group and 4.9 percent of the total sample, while 19 were still living elsewhere, equivalent to 48.7 percent of migrants and 4.7 percent of the total sample. The current migration rate is not large, but it matters demographically because out-migration is usually associated with younger and working-age people, while older people are more likely to remain. After 1975, a notable share of the Hoa in Cai Rang left the locality. Some of those who left had capital, business experience and commercial networks, and their departure weakened the community's economic and social leadership. In the urbanisation period after 2000, Cai Rang's overall population grew, but this growth did not necessarily increase the size of the original Hoa community. The Hoa lived more interspersed with the Vietnamese majority, used Chinese less frequently, and maintained community networks mainly through family, market relations, ritual life and memory.

Economic impacts: narrowing successor labour and weakening livelihood innovation

Population ageing affects sustainable development in Le Binh first through economic life. At the macro level, studies of ageing suggest that a rising share of older people tends to reduce the labour force, lower labour-force participation and place additional pressure on household savings and accumulation (Bloom, Canning, & Fink, 2010; General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021). These effects, however, differ by community. Among the Hoa in Le Binh, ageing must be understood within a distinctive livelihood structure: household-based commerce, small trade, services and kinship-community networks. Ageing therefore reduces not only the number of workers but also the mechanisms through which occupations, customers, business experience and social capital are passed on.

The 2020 survey shows that among 352 persons aged 15 and above, 244 participated in labour activity, or 69.3 percent. The non-working group accounted for 30.7 percent, including 9.7 percent still in education, 12.5 percent unable to work because of weak health or disability, 7.4 percent doing domestic work and 1.1 percent unemployed. The share of people not working because of poor health or disability is especially important, as it partly reflects the growth of a population no longer able to participate regularly in production. In a community where livelihoods depend heavily on family labour, small shops, services and long-term customer relations, the declining working capacity of older people affects not only individuals but also the ability of households to maintain economic activity.

The occupational structure of the Hoa in Le Binh has a clear urban-commercial character. Among 244 employed persons, 127 were engaged in trade, accounting for 52.0 percent, and 82 were in services, accounting for 33.6 percent. Together, trade and services made up 85.6 percent of the employed labour force. This differs from many parts of the Mekong Delta, where agriculture, forestry and fishery still play a major role. The Hoa economy is not based primarily on land or seasonal farming. It depends on the market, the town, consumer services, household business and customer relationships.

A local economic official described the Hoa in Le Binh as particularly active in 'the economy, services and buying and selling', concentrated around the market-town area, with relatively stable employment and little prolonged unemployment (T.C.N., in-depth interview, 2016). A cultural-social official also characterised the Hoa as people who knew how to calculate, save and accumulate gradually through trade (B.T.B.P., in-depth interview, 2016). These observations show that the economic strengths of the community remain, but they depend heavily on family labour, trading experience and local social relations. This is a socially embedded livelihood: economic action is inseparable from networks of trust, familiarity and reciprocal obligation (Granovetter, 1985). Social

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capital can generate benefits through family support, social control and resources mediated through networks beyond the household (Portes, 1998).

Yet this network foundation is being challenged by ageing and generational change. Earlier Hoa economic life relied on small household enterprise, the principle of parents passing business to children, and support from kin, lineage and native-place networks. These networks provided capital, production experience, transaction guarantees, agency relationships and mutual protection in market competition. Today, this spirit of economic cohesion and mutual support has weakened. The Hoa no longer have clearly distinctive occupations; people tend to do whatever work is convenient or viable. This weakening is linked not only to current ageing but also to historical disruption after 1975, when the economic capacity of the Hoa in Can Tho declined and many people with resources left. As a result, the continuity of business knowledge and commercial networks was interrupted.

The ageing process therefore occurs in a community that had already experienced discontinuity in capital, networks and occupational transmission. When families become smaller, singlehood is more common, the number of children declines and the share of older persons rises, the family-kinship base of household business also contracts. This creates a paradox. Older people hold business memory, market experience, trust with customers and the skills of small trade. At the same time, old age reduces their capacity to work directly, expand business, use new technologies or adapt to competition in an urban economy. Younger generations have higher educational levels but do not necessarily continue family trading activities. Local interviews suggest that Hoa children in Le Binh value education, many continue to higher levels of study, and school dropout has become rare. This is a positive sign of human capital, but it also indicates that the young may move away from traditional household business.

Household plans for the coming years also reflect caution. Among 100 households, 62.0 percent reported no specific plan, 18.0 percent planned to invest in family members' education, 14.0 percent planned to invest in trade and services, and 10.0 percent planned to invest in non-agricultural production. Very few households intended to move elsewhere for work or study. These figures suggest a preference for stability and education rather than business expansion. From a sustainable-development perspective, this is an important transition. Households may accumulate human capital for the next generation, but they do not automatically create a mechanism through which education can be converted into livelihood innovation within the community.

The average per-capita income in the sample was 25.698 million VND per year, with a median of 24 million VND. Hoa households in Le Binh are not among the extremely poor, but their accumulation is not high when viewed in relation to urban costs, medical expenses, elder care and the need to adapt business activities. Compared with the Mekong Delta as a whole, the Hoa in Le Binh have the advantage of being less dependent on agriculture and less directly exposed to risks from land, seasons and rural environmental change. Yet their concentration in small trade and services also makes them vulnerable to shifts in purchasing power, market competition, urban infrastructure changes and the decline of family labour.

Table 3. Labour, employment sector and income of the Hoa community in Le Binh

Item	Category	N	%/Value
Labour status (aged 15 and above)	Working	244	69.3%
	Not working - studying	34	9.7%
	Not working - weak health/disability	44	12.5%
	Domestic work	26	7.4%
	Unemployed	4	1.1%
Employment sector (among 244 employed persons)	Trade	127	52.0%
	Services	82	33.6%
	Industry and construction	23	9.4%
	State management	10	4.1%
	Agriculture, forestry and fishery	2	0.8%
Per-capita income	Mean	-	25.698 million VND/person/year
	Median	-	24.000 million VND/person/year

Source: Le Binh Ward survey data, 2020.

Population ageing does not cause an immediate collapse of the Hoa economy in Le Binh. Many households still maintain stable livelihoods, employment, trading experience and saving habits. Over the long term, however, ageing weakens development capacity in a quieter way: it reduces successor labour, narrows occupational transmission, thins kin-based economic networks and limits livelihood innovation. Sustainable economic development for this community therefore requires more than maintaining existing

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small trade. It requires intergenerational transfer, new business skills, stronger links between young Hoa and community institutions, and opportunities for educated youth to contribute to local economic renewal.

Socio-cultural impacts: weakening transmission, restructuring social capital and increasing care needs

From the perspective of cultural memory, cultural capital and social capital, the sustainability of a community depends on its capacity to maintain and transmit values through family, education, ritual, symbols and community institutions. When family structures change, social networks contract and younger generations participate less actively in traditional institutions, cultural memory, cultural capital and social capital may be restructured, weakened or interrupted (Assmann, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Older people hold community memory, language, rituals, trading experience, family norms and mutual-support networks. Yet as the proportion of older persons rises and the number of children and young adults declines, cultural transmission no longer occurs as naturally as in the past. Ageing thus creates not only social-care needs but also questions about the reproduction of culture, the renewal of social capital and the maintenance of identity in an urban ethnic minority community.

The survey shows that only 17.7 percent of Hoa respondents could speak their mother tongue very fluently, while 51.5 percent could hardly speak it. Reading and writing skills were even weaker: only 9.1 percent could read the mother tongue very fluently and 6.1 percent could write it very fluently, while 75.2 percent could hardly read it and 76.7 percent could hardly write it. The decline of Chinese language ability is therefore not only an individual matter; it is a structural change in cultural transmission. Field interviews help explain this decline. Hoa families in Cai Rang have lived for a long time among the Vietnamese majority. Children attend Vietnamese-language schools from preschool to university, while Chinese schools and Chinese-language environments no longer play the role they once did. One Hoa woman observed that in everyday life, apart from food and family rituals, the ways many Hoa people live, speak and think are not very different from the Vietnamese majority. A young woman of Hoa origin even said that in her generation she had almost no contact with Hoa men of the same age, and that most of her social relations were with Vietnamese youth; at times, she almost forgot that she was Hoa (author's field notes, 2020).

The decline of Chinese language directly affects cultural transmission. Language is not merely a medium of communication. It also carries kinship terms, ritual texts, prayers, business experience and family norms. When younger generations no longer use Chinese, their reception of culture from grandparents and parents shifts from everyday practice to occasional participation in rituals, festivals or assembly-hall events. Intangible cultural heritage requires continuous community practice and transmission. When the circle of practitioners becomes smaller and younger generations participate less often, heritage can move from everyday life into staged events or nostalgic memory (UNESCO, 2003).

Population ageing also changes the role of community cultural institutions. In the past, the Hoa community of Cai Rang had important institutions such as temples, schools, cemeteries and native-place groups. Today, the bang organisation no longer exists, but Hiep Thien Cung remains a representative institution that connects and supports the community. It no longer manages community members as before, but it still links people through charity, scholarship funds and support for poor families and isolated older persons. This is an important form of community social capital in an ageing context because it shares part of the care responsibility with families and local authorities.

"For more than thirty years, our temple, Hiep Thien Cung, has tried every year to provide charity rice, usually between 15 and 20 tonnes. During the recent Vu Lan festival, we gave nearly 17 tonnes of rice to poor people. When local authorities call for contributions to houses of gratitude, charity houses or solidarity houses, we always contribute. Hoa people have a saying: do good without expecting repayment." (L.Q.T., in-depth interview, 4 October 2020)

Hiep Thien Cung is therefore not only a religious space but also an informal welfare institution. In a setting where many older people do not have spouses, families are smaller and children may not always live nearby, rice distribution, assistance to the poor, support for isolated older persons and contributions to charitable housing become complementary mechanisms of care. This is a form of bonding social capital that produces trust, moral obligation and mutual support within the community (Putnam, 2000). Yet this social capital depends heavily on older people, respected community members and some successful trading households. When these actors decline, the capacity to maintain mutual support may also weaken.

Hoa cultural and religious activities still create occasions for community gathering. Rituals around Ong Temple, Teochew singing, ritual music, lantern events and festivals attract not only local Hoa residents but also Hoa people from Ho Chi Minh City and other places who return and contribute to the locality (T.C.N., in-depth interview, 3 October 2016). These relations are based on tradition, familiarity and community memory rather than simply on economic exchange. At the same time, local officials recognise that younger people now spend more time on study, employment and earning a living, so their participation in community activities is no longer as regular or natural as before. This suggests a shift from a community of everyday practice to a community connected mainly through events.

Ageing increases care needs and changes the family support model. In the over-60 group, only 47.6 percent of Hoa in Le Binh were still married or living with a spouse. More than half were never married, widowed, divorced or separated. When fertility is low and the number of children is small, direct care by children becomes less secure. Many Hoa women live with their family of origin until

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marriage; if their parents die, they may continue to live with siblings. This pattern creates kin-based support but may also increase the number of households or household clusters where older people live alone, with ageing siblings or through informal support. Field observations show that even when siblings have separated their households and no longer share an economy, they may still eat lunch or dinner together and help each other in everyday life. The Hoa family is therefore not only a residential unit but also a flexible care network. However, as the number of children declines, marriage rates fall and the number of older people grows, this kin-based care network may become overloaded.

"Most Hoa people living around Cai Rang Market make a living through trade. They are not rich, but their lives are stable. There are no cases of Hoa leaving because they are too poor to stay; some leave to expand their business or for family reunification. The Hoa are not so poor that they have to leave their homeland." (L.Q.T., in-depth interview, 10 April 2020)

The Hoa in Le Binh tend to remain attached to the locality, the market, the assembly hall, family and kin networks. Residential stability helps maintain mutual-support institutions, but it also makes ageing more visible in place. When older people remain, while youth study, work outside the household economy or participate less in cultural activities, residential stability alone cannot ensure cultural transmission. Ageing therefore contains a paradox: the community remains locally attached, but the mechanisms of intergenerational transfer are weakening.

Urbanisation after 2000 increased the population of Cai Rang, but the Hoa population did not grow correspondingly. The Hoa live more interspersed with the Vietnamese majority, children attend common schools, Vietnamese has become the main language of education and daily communication, and Chinese survives mainly among some older people, in family rituals and in community memory. Cultural capital is being redistributed across generations. Among older people, cultural capital is embedded in Chinese language, migration memory, rituals, trading experience, assembly-hall relations and family norms. Among younger people, it is increasingly expressed through formal education, Vietnamese-language competence, modern occupations and urban integration. This shift is not wholly negative, since it enables young people to adapt to wider society. Yet without mechanisms to connect these two forms of cultural capital, the community may lose the specific knowledge that gives the Hoa of Cai Rang their historical identity.

CONCLUSION

The case of the Hoa community in Le Binh shows that population ageing at the community level is not a mechanical change in age composition. It is a social process that reveals the limits and adaptive capacity of a development model built on the family, the market, trade-service livelihoods and community institutions. When the older population grows faster than the younger generation can reproduce itself, the issue extends beyond elder care. It becomes a question of how a community can sustain successor labour, cultural memory, social capital and livelihood innovation under conditions of urbanisation and deeper social integration.

Economically, the main challenge is not the immediate collapse of livelihoods. Many Hoa households still maintain stable living conditions through trading experience, savings and local customer networks. The deeper issue lies in intergenerational transfer. Older people hold experience, trust and knowledge of the local market, while younger people are more oriented towards education, modern employment and occupational spaces outside the household economy. Sustainable development therefore requires a bridge between these two sets of resources. Livelihood policies for the Hoa community should not only support existing household businesses. They should also encourage skills transition, technology adoption, new services and opportunities for educated youth to participate in renewing the local community economy. Socio-culturally, ageing places the community in a paradox. Older people are the main bearers of memory, language, rituals, moral norms and mutual-support relations. Yet if younger generations no longer receive these values through regular practice, they may shift from lived culture to fragmented memory or event-based performance. Cultural preservation in an ageing Hoa community should therefore not be limited to maintaining festivals, religious sites or charitable activities. Institutions such as Hiep Thien Cung, families, schools, neighbourhood groups and mutual-support networks should be treated as intergenerational spaces where older people are not only cared for but also recognised as transmitters, advisers and cultural actors.

The study suggests a shift from object-based support for older persons towards a life-course and community-development approach. Such an approach would combine health care and social protection for older people, support for households providing long-term care, opportunities for older people to remain active in community life, and investment in youth education, vocational skills, business capacity and cultural practice. When ageing policy is linked to livelihood, culture and youth policy, population ageing can be addressed as a sustainable-development issue rather than only as a welfare burden. This article also points to the need for further research on ageing below the national and regional levels, particularly in urban ethnic minority communities with histories of migration, commerce and cultural interaction. Future studies could compare Hoa communities across southern Vietnam, examine other low-fertility ethnic groups, or contrast urban and rural ageing pathways. From the Le Binh case, however, it is clear that the sustainability of a community should be measured not only by income or infrastructure, but also by its capacity to regenerate generations, maintain care relations, transmit knowledge and renew identity under changing social conditions.

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DATA SOURCES AND INTERVIEW MATERIALS

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