



Women's Roles in Food Culture and Traditions in Vietnam

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Abstract

In Vietnamese society, women play a fundamental role not only within families but also in preserving and developing cultural heritage, particularly through food. Food holds deep cultural and social significance in Vietnam, serving as a medium for expressing identity, fostering community ties, and transmitting tradition across generations. This study highlights how women are central figures in the preparation, innovation, and ritual use of food, making them key agents in sustaining the nation's food culture. By examining everyday practices as well as ceremonial contexts, the research emphasizes the vital connection between gender and cultural continuity. It also explores how women's contributions adapt in response to social and economic changes, demonstrating their enduring importance in both maintaining and reshaping Vietnam's culinary traditions

Keywords: Food Culture, Traditions, Women, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Vietnamese cuisine is known for its incredible flavor, variety of ingredients, and ability to carry cultural identity. At the core of this food system is women—women have influenced and sustained Vietnam's food culture through generations. Across Vietnam women are employed as cooks in kitchens or markets and have traditionally been responsible for preserving food culture by ensuring traditional recipes are being passed down, teaching cooking techniques, and sharing food rituals. Women's contributions to food in Vietnam goes beyond cooking with historic influence to farming, compositing, food production, and having leadership roles in culinary businesses being integral to the restaurant community making women culturally significant in Vietnamese food.

This essay explores the complex roles of women in Vietnam's food culture examining their influence in history, contributions to farming and agricultural food production, roles in owning or working within food business to help lead culinary businesses, and the ways they maintain certain aspects of traditional food. By recognising their contributions into Vietnamese food culture we begin to develop an appreciation of the cultural significance of food and how it shapes society today.

Women are vital in safeguarding traditions and customs and, by extension, culinary practices. Vietnam's food culture is vital to the identity of Vietnamese coastal communities (Trần, 2021). Over generations, women have served as custodians of cherished family recipes, sustaining long-standing culinary skills, taste connections, and unique preparations (Nguyễn, 2020). They play a crucial role in keeping distinct culinary traditions alive while adapting to modern food preferences (Lê, 2019).

Mothers and grandmothers cover the culinary critical path for instructional cooking, continually sharing their spirit recipes for phở, bánh chưng, or nem rán, demonstrating the fluid connections of relationships and cultural identity (Phạm, 2018). Women contribute from households to markets, making fine decisions on fresh ingredients and planning meals around seasonal produce that carry families' cultural traditional flavors (Hoàng, 2022). They are the cultural backbone in festive gatherings and ancestral events, shaping food to suit cultural celebrations while ensuring the spiritual connections of food and practice remain intact (Võ, 2021).

On one hand, women preserve traditions. On the other hand, they also shape culinary innovation through contemporary evolutions of time-honored practices (Đặng, 2020). Many female chefs and food entrepreneurs provide variations of classical food—while grounded in local cuisine, their dishes showcase opportunities for aspects of global influence (Bùi, 2019). Women are responding to the changes required to preserve Vietnam's culinary identity, keeping traditions alive while integrating adaptations into their knowledge and skills (Nguyễn & Trần, 2023).

2. Methodology

To investigate women's roles in food culture and traditions in Vietnam, this study employs secondary data collected through content analysis of cultural media, including Vietnamese cooking shows, social media platforms, and traditional cookbooks, to examine how women's contributions are represented and possibly evolving in the public eye. Data analysis will involve identifying recurring patterns and themes, such as knowledge transmission, ritual practices, and shifting gender roles. Narrative analysis will be used to examine how women construct their identities and social roles through food-related stories. If quantitative support is needed, a small-scale survey may be conducted to gather descriptive statistics on household food responsibilities and generational attitudes, using tools such as Google Forms or Excel. Finally, triangulation will be employed to cross-validate findings from interviews, observations, and content analysis, ensuring a comprehensive and credible interpretation of the data.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Historical Roles of Women in Vietnamese Cuisine

In Vietnamese households, women have traditionally been the primary caretakers of the kitchen, responsible for preparing meals that nourish their families while preserving cultural and ancestral culinary traditions. Cooking was often seen as an essential duty, deeply tied to a woman's role in maintaining family bonds and ensuring the health of loved ones.

Passing Down Recipes and Techniques

Passing down culinary knowledge has generally been a woman's role in Vietnamese families, serving as cultural continuity as well as social bonding. This includes the passing down of recipes and cooking methods using oral traditions and practical experiences. Traditionally, families maintain their recipe records through oral tradition instead of written texts. Women are significant agents, particularly grandmothers and mothers, who ensure that cooking practices are maintained honestly. The opportunity to tell stories while cooking has also allowed recipes to remain in the family despite changes in technology, family dynamics, society, and the economy (Nguyen, 2021). Instead of cooking classes, the younger generation learn from observation and along with family members - reproducing the practice of cooking and reinforcing technique, and they develop tacit understandings of flavours and food's characteristics. Research on intergenerational knowledge transfer indicates that learning food-based skills is most often learned through practice-based learning and repetition (Pham, 2019).

Culinary learning takes place during cultural events like Tết (Lunar New Year) and ceremonies of remembrance for one's ancestors (rituals common to East Asian cultures) when women are teaching their children about the importance of cultural foodways, and food is an especially important marker of culture. Vietnamese culinary systems are built around community activity; indeed, the very idea of a food preparation is often about building relationships with groups of people (Tran, Le, 2020).

Although modernity has altered the transmission of knowledge from parent to child, and anchored traditional knowledge with other means (like the internet and social media), a more efficacious form of culinary inheritance has been supported by technological and digital mediums (Vo, 2022). Other ways of continuing knowledge transfer methods encapsulated by family-centered cooking are still the primary means of culinary education within Vietnam.

Daily Meal Preparation

In Vietnamese families, meal preparation on a daily basis has been traditionally managed by women, influencing family traditions and nutritional balance. Women have shaped Vietnamese culinary practices throughout history, making careful decisions about food selection and ingredient preparations; cooking with a knowledge of balanced flavors; all while maintaining the Vietnamese identity of the food despite changing circumstances. Vietnamese gastronomy is rooted in an essential value of balance, introducing a meal that combines sweet, sour, bitter, spicy and salty flavors without compromise. This culinary principle represents cultural values too, which can create balance in health and tastes (Nguyen, 2018). While women are not the only people cooking, they are typically the ones day to day, where the cooking is completed with the practical application of critical balancing skills across the wide offerings in everyday meals like canh chua (sour soup) and kho (braised meat or fish). The preparation is also guided by the seasonal availability and/or local sourcing of food when it is available. It is still common for women to visit markets every day to select fresh produce,

meats, and seafood, reacting to seasonality and local produce availability unimpeded by packaging or industrial supplies. This daily practice cultivates healthy meals, encourages locals by providing products to consumers who value quality, and sustains integrity given the commitment to the local economy (Tran & Hoang, 2017). Women readily promote sustainability from local economies and crop predictors with the originality of architecture to demonstrate connection to community at all levels of consumption.

Whether steaming, braising, or stir frying food, Vietnamese women have cultivated cooking methods that impart flavor and flavor without compromising nutrition. The dishes in Northern Vietnam are distinguished by subtle flavors while those in Southern Vietnam tend toward bolder flavorings (Le, 2019). Given that women are also mothers and household managers, they need to create flavourful food quickly. Daily cooking creates connections and communities outside of food. Preparing a meal is more than preparation or sustenance; it is an excuse for a family to be together and to share news and storytelling. Studies demonstrate that having a family meal strengthens connections, allows for and strengthens friendships, and helps preserve cultural identity (Vo 2021). Vietnamese women indeed create home, warmth, and hospitality inside and beyond the family mealtime experience.

The problem of invisible labor manifests itself in everyday meal preparation, where Vietnamese women are doing unpaid work more consistently than men. According to ActionAid Vietnam's Unpaid Care Work Time Diary Surveys (2016) women across the age categories do unpaid care work such as meal preparation, cleaning, and caring for others, for significantly more hours than men. The bar chart reports that women aged 30–44 time spent performing unpaid care is the highest. Men in the same age category spend more time performing paid labor in a work context, which reinforces traditional gender norms and roles and constructs women's contributions to unpaid household labor and work in the same invisible form (ActionAid Vietnam, 2016). In addressing these issues, more equal distribution of household responsibilities and work expectations and workplace policies that acknowledge work-life balance can provide women opportunities to reduce the burden of unpaid labor as seen in the context of Vietnamese women's lives and working conditions.

Cooking for Special Occasions

Whether it's a religious ceremony, a family get-together or a national celebration, special events in Vietnam typically involve traditional dishes which are often quite elaborate in their preparation. Tradition continues to preserve the role of women in preparing these meals, ensuring adherence to the culture's customs and respect for ancestry. Tết (the Lunar New Year) is the most significant celebration during the year for Vietnamese people, involving not only elaborate meal preparations but also liberating the sins of the past year. It is at this event that women commonly prepare bánh chưng (the square sticky rice cake) and thịt kho tàu (caramelized pork with eggs and a delicacy), both of which are very different symbolic dishes that must be prepared to usher in prosperity and harmony (Nguyen, 2020). Ancestral worship ceremonies also involve ritualistic cooking, where women prepare food, which may include fruit, boiled chicken, and sticky rice, to present food offerings in remembrance of deceased family members (Pham, 2021).

Vietnamese weddings feature a range of symbolic dishes prepared by women which express oneness and abundance. As with many celebrations, food is usually presented and shared collectively (Tran & Le, 2019), including dishes such as gỏi cuốn (fresh spring roll) and chả giò (fried spring roll), which convey feelings of prosperity and happiness. These activities typically are family celebrations such as birthdays and anniversaries that used to be observed with home-cooked meals served on communal serving platters of cute grilled meats, seafood,

and vegetable dishes, supported by family. Local and folk festivals are characterized by communal feasting, including sharing and often cooking together in significant quantities by women for invited guests and neighboring families. There are variations in traditional dishes by geographic region; people in the south commonly eat *thịt nướng* (grilled pork); and heads of households in the north and centrally are more likely to eat *bún thang* (Hanoi-style noodle soup) (Vo, 2022). These practices reinforce women's traditional role as the heart of the cultural preservation defined by cuisine linked to food preparation and hospitality. Vietnamese cuisine is well-known for its socially constructed meaning (but also has some uniqueness). There are symbolic meanings that accompany particular ingredients or cooking techniques. For example, the process of slow braising, fermenting, and steaming is associated with virtues such as patience, endurance, and respect for traditional culture and awareness (Hoang, 2018). In addition to food culture, women have a huge role to play in drawing cultural components related to the symbolic aspects where they draw from generations of ancestors to ensure they prepare the dish, as defined by that culture.

Culinary Creativity Within Limited Resources

For centuries, Vietnamese women have shown extraordinary creativity cooking a wide range of foods, even during economic hardships. Women's unique ability to create flavorful, healthy dishes from modest ingredients exemplifies both creativity and cooking knowledge. Historically, Vietnamese women have mastered their ability of being resourceful utilizing their ingredients in a wide range of ways. Simple ingredients such as rice, vegetables, or inexpensive proteins like tofu and fish have been creatively and resourcefully made into one of a hundred meals (Nguyen, 2017). They have shown women can be resourceful with their ingredients to develop several and unique dishes from very basic sources of nutrients.

Food preservation methods- including pickling, fermenting and drying-have contributed significantly to how long foods and ingredients last. Women have utilized fermentation to prepare staple condiments - such as *mắm tôm* (fermented shrimp paste) and *dưa cải chua* (pickled mustard greens)- that emphasize flavor and seriousness in everyday meals, while ensuring food sustainability (Tran & Hoang, 2018). Vietnamese home cooking, in particular, embodies the philosophy of waste reduction. For instance, leftover rice is regularly repurposed into dishes like *com chiên* (fried rice); and vegetable scraps are often used to add flavor in prepared broths and soups. This type of sustainability is practical, reflecting financial and environmental considerations (Vo, 2019). Moreover, during difficult financial times and times of scarcity, Vietnamese women have found creative ways to replace more expensive food with more local, affordable ingredients. For example, ground peanuts are used in sauces as a replacement for meat, and vegetable-based foods become staples for women during times of food scarcity. Adaptability like this certainly reflects the creativity, resilience, and practicality of what exists in Vietnamese cooking as a whole (Le, 2021).

Contributions to Farming and Sourcing Fresh Ingredients

Women have played a vital role in Vietnam's agricultural landscape, contributing significantly to the cultivation, harvesting, and sourcing of fresh ingredients. Their contributions ensure food security, sustainability, and the continuation of traditional farming methods that uphold Vietnamese culinary heritage. Vietnamese women have historically been involved in rice cultivation—the backbone of the country's agriculture. They work in all stages of production, from planting seedlings to harvesting crops, often using traditional methods passed down through generations (Nguyen & Pham, 2016). Their knowledge of soil, climate, and irrigation techniques ensures successful yields in diverse farming conditions.

Beyond rice farming, women play a key role in vegetable and herb cultivation, growing essential ingredients such as rau thom (aromatic herbs), luffa, and morning glory. They frequently engage in local markets to sell and source fresh produce, supporting small-scale farming and fostering community-based food distribution (Le & Tran, 2018). Their involvement reinforces the connection between consumers and locally grown food.

In addition to crop farming, many Vietnamese women manage small livestock, such as chickens and pigs, providing families with protein sources while maintaining household food self-sufficiency. Women in coastal regions also contribute to fisheries, helping process and distribute seafood—a critical component of Vietnamese cuisine (Vo, 2020). Their expertise ensures quality and sustainability in seafood sourcing. Modern agricultural challenges, including climate change and urbanization, have impacted traditional farming methods. Women have demonstrated resilience by adopting innovative farming techniques, such as organic farming and hydroponic gardening, to maintain food security (Hoang, 2019). Their adaptability plays a crucial role in ensuring sustainable agricultural practices for future generations.

3.2. Modern Roles of Women in Vietnamese Cuisine

Women in Professional Culinary Careers

Even though professional kitchens have traditionally been male-dominated workplaces, and for many years cooking was performed exclusively by women in private-home settings, many women, including Vietnamese women, have entered the professional culinary workforce in professional kitchens as chefs, owners of restaurants and/or food stalls, and culinary teachers, learning from, alongside, and in some cases, against men, and contributing in ways that have changed the cooking landscape with fresh ideas, and honouring and maintaining the work of their ancestors in Vietnamese food.

For many years, professional kitchens were established with a hierarchical structure, often male-dominated, that made it difficult for women to find opportunities to advance their careers. The things women had to bear in professional kitchens include gender bias, limited opportunities for advancement, and the idea that cooking in professional kitchens was only done by men, while women were to only practice cooking in the comfort of their own homes (Nguyen, 2022). This has not stopped women chefs however from being visible, competent and claiming in the moment- and with persistence, recognition and expertise in both traditional and modern rich preparation. For the restaurant industry in Vietnam, quite a few female chefs are emerging leaders and are successfully developing and running their very own restaurants and traditional Vietnamese domesticated and modern cooking. Some have opened up high-end fine dining restaurants, incorporating traditional aspects of street food (and flavours), and showcasing this essence of cooking alongside modern day presentation (Tran & Le, 2020). Their innovative ability accompanied by cultural integrity has made them known worldwide. The emergence of culinary television shows, food-focused blogs, and social media have given Vietnamese women new avenues to display their cultural culinary gifts. Female chefs and food bloggers operated in digital spaces to share recipes, culture, and cooking techniques, which has assisted in making Vietnamese food globally recognized (Vo, 2019). Women have participated more and more in international culinary competitions to show their talents.

In addition to operating restaurants, many Vietnamese women have established careers in culinary education, mentoring younger chefs, and heritage-based cooking styles. Culinary schools and workshops led by women emphasize the importance of Vietnamese heritage and global shifts (Hoang, 2022). Through mentorship, women are ensuring that future generations

navigate Vietnamese food while adding their twist. Despite the strides made toward gender equality, women working in the professional culinary industry in Vietnam know they are still confronted by issues such as wage disparities, a lack of opportunities for women in executive chef roles, and societal expectations about work-life balance. Ongoing efforts to increase gender equity in the culinary industry gives hope for the future of professional female chefs in Vietnam. As more women enter the professional culinary world, their influence will only strengthen and evolve Vietnamese food in Vietnam and around the world (Nguyen, 2021).

Entrepreneurship and Food Businesses

From small street food stalls to restaurants, women have contributed significantly to the expansion of the Vietnamese food industry. The entrepreneurial vision of Vietnamese women contributed greatly to the growth of Vietnamese food locally and abroad, plus it offered both the opportunity to be creative and keep the integrity of the dishes rooted in traditional cuisine.

Street food is a huge part of the Vietnamese food culture, and women have, for a long time, been an essential part of this food culture. Many businesswomen have small food stalls cooking everyday dishes, such as phở, bánh mì, and bún chả. This not only gives patrons access to affordable meals, but serves another important role as a cultural anchor/preservation for recipes and cooking methods (Nguyen, 2020). Moving beyond street food, many women in Vietnam are opening higher volume restaurants who serve local and international attention. Many female restaurant owners have modernized traditional Vietnamese cuisine, creating fusion menus that combine authenticity and contemporary tastes (Tran & Le, 2019). This combination of culture and innovation has drawn international attention to Vietnamese cuisine.

Women have been very impactful in getting Vietnamese cuisine onto the international plate, as many female chefs and entrepreneurs have opened Vietnamese restaurants internationally, with a range of dishes, including gỏi cuốn (fresh spring rolls) and cà phê sữa đá (Vietnamese iced coffee). These ventures have helped promote the flavors and techniques of Vietnamese cooking to the world (Vo, n.d). The increasing market for the digital platform has allowed Vietnamese women to expand their business online, as many women business owners of food products use social media, food blogs and marketplaces to sell homemade products, share recipes and have client/consumer connections. Their digital experiences allow them to reach a wider audience, and keep up with trends in consumer demand. (Hoang, 2022).

Working in the food industry in Vietnam is difficult in light of women's struggles of access to capital in business, gender bias, and competition in the food industry, but programs intended to support women entrepreneurs—such as funding from microfinance ideas or micro-loans, and mentorship networks—have allowed women space to grow. As long as women continue to enter the food industry, their experience of life through food is a necessary stepping stone for the future of Vietnamese cooking (Nguyen, 2020).

Women are shaping Vietnam's food and beverage (F&B) economy as consumers having an increasing influence on market trends and spending behavior. A study conducted by Decision Lab reported that women's visits to food outlets increased by 5%, from 121 (Q4 2016 – Q3 2017) to 128 (Q4 2017 – Q3 2018) (Decision Lab, 2018).

Women have also increased spending across all major food channels, including:

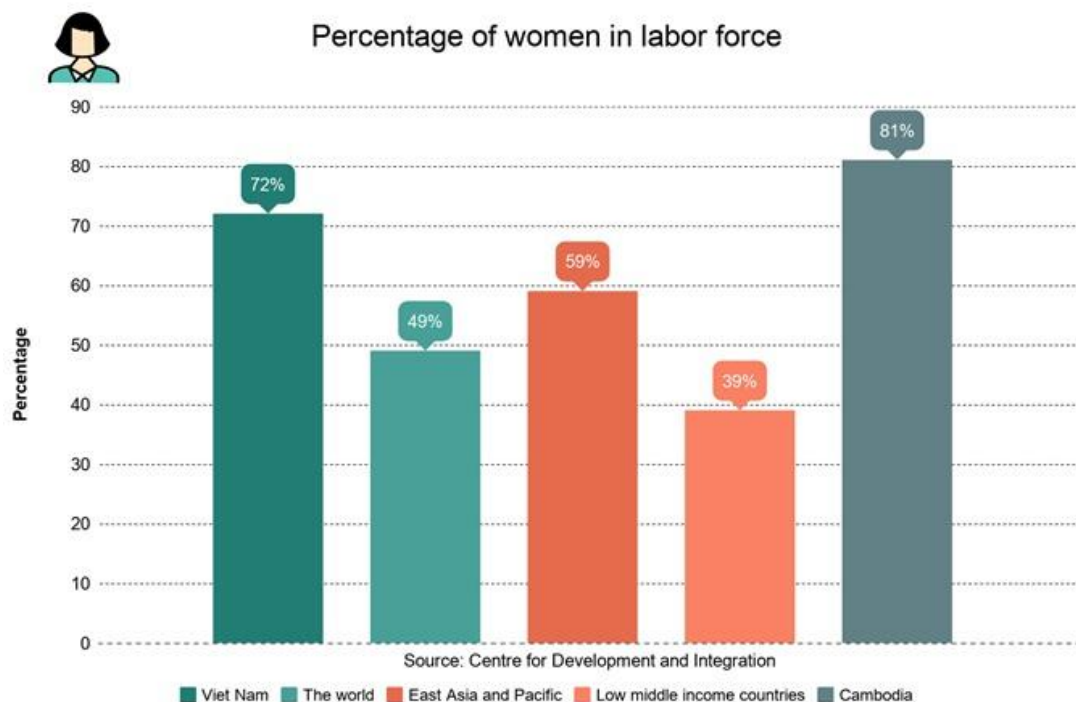
- Full-Service Restaurants (FSR) – Traditional sit-down eateries.
- Quick-Service Restaurants (QSR) – Fast food and street vendors.
- Convenience Stores, Canteens, and Bars – Alternative dining options.

This trend indicates women's increasing significance as decision-makers in Vietnam's dining experience. It is likely that any businesses that accommodate these health concerns—like healthier menus and new fusion-type cuisine—stand a better chance of surviving and expanding in the Marketplace. Female consumers, now and in the future, are directing the dining culture, and the purchasing power these female consumers wield will reflect where future market growth will come from (Decision Lab, 2018).

Gender Disparities in Leadership

Vietnamese women account for a large part of the workforce in several industries, such as hospitality, food production, and retail, but they experience systemic inequality in leadership roles and wages. Female workers in the textiles, electronics, and food industries often have been reported to earn less than their male colleagues, despite performing the same job, further demonstrating wage inequality (Vietnam News, 2018). This wage inequality is a significant example of the cultural attitude about women being limited in their chances to get opportunities for advancements, like executives. Although women capture a large portion of the food and hospitality sectors in Vietnam, they have frequently been underrepresented in managerial roles. Only 20% of general manager positions in these industries are held by women (Chan, 2023). For many women, the social perception of women's domestic duties - rather than women's capacity to seek out positions to lead in - is another clear barrier to women having access to and opportunities to become leaders, preserving stereotypes and promoting traditions. On the other hand, if a woman is mentored or has work inclusiveness when she is mentored, at least the awareness of equal pay is tearing down barriers to women's representation in the food and beverage industry in Vietnam (Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

Figure 1. Percentage of female labourers in the labour force of Việt Nam compared with the world, East Asia-Pacific, low middle income countries and Cambodia



Source: VNS Infographic Khánh Dương

In Vietnam, cultural expectations of women often emphasize their domestic responsibilities primarily tied to "family" and "nurturing." Female chefs in Vietnam face the challenge of balancing family and career; that's why many women ultimately stay in the particular niche rather than becoming executive chefs or contemplating other opportunities (Vo, 2024). Because of this, many women choose smaller food businesses, instead of executive positions in bigger restaurants. Women are in a transitional space, to discuss sex and programming around gender equity in Vietnam's culinary arts, accountability and support for women empowerment is a newly emerging topic. Programs supporting female equal opportunity mentorship structure; female chef leadership; workplace policies about inclusion; and surrounding women with spaces to develop equitable spaces are helping women to create barriers to excellence (Chan, 2023). As effective gender equity continues to grow, a rapidly increasing number of women and female-identifying chefs will seek leadership roles that in turn will give them the opportunity to reshape narratives around food that links to agility, innovation, and sustainability in the industry.

Overcoming Challenges and Future Prospects

Despite the ongoing presence of gender inequities amongst leadership positions in the culinary industry in Vietnam, women are increasingly dismantling barriers through mentorship programs, entrepreneurial endeavors, and advocacy for equitable workplaces. With changing attitudes, female chefs and restaurateurs are being recognized more widely and are increasingly hope-oriented for future offshore generations of women. These increasing efforts to mitigate gender bias and open women's opportunities in professional kitchens have permitted women to occupy numerous increased leadership roles. Leadership programs and mentorship programs have helped female chefs identify their career mode of travel, as well as gain experience to access executive roles (Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Pay equity and career advancement policies for female staff in restaurants and hospitality organizations are also on the rise.

Many Vietnamese women circumvent traditional pathways of hierarchy and oppression by starting their own food businesses. Female ownership of restaurants, catering businesses, or street food operations, gives women an opportunity to fairly manage their careers, while demonstrating their talents, skills, and abilities as producers and chefs (Vo, 2024). Entrepreneurship, as a form of business, is also an alternative route to leadership, allowing women to be innovative, and facilitate the expansion of Vietnamese foods, and their culinary culture, into migrants worldwide. The juggling act of domestic, family obligations and extreme career demands balances exists for many women. Some women are able to succeed, helped by advocacy for flexible work arrangements, policies that are inclusive of personal commitments, and the ability of some restaurant owners to support women's masking of external commitments as professional obligations (Chan, 2023). With businesses respecting the importance of diversity in their workplaces, women are given more opportunities to build their careers and support one another in the process.

As women and their contributions become increasingly recognized, the future is bright for women in Vietnam's culinary industry. More women are entering fine dining, food media, and culinary competitions (Nguyen & Tran, 2024), and they are gaining international and national recognition for their talents and skills. As gender norms continue to evolve, the role of women in the food culture and growth will only strengthen the future potential of Vietnam's food, culinary culture, and create more career opportunities for all, locally and internationally.

3.3. Challenges of Women in the Culinary World

Gender Pay Gap in Vietnam's Culinary Industry

While progress has been made toward gender equality, the reality for Vietnamese women is that they still earn less than men, even within the same sectors that employ many women. Studies show that women in Vietnam, on average, earn 3 million VND less than men annually, which is equal to one month's income (World Bank, 2018).

Key contributing factors to the gender pay gap:

Occupational segregation: Women are not CEOs, very often have the lowest paid jobs in the food and hospitality sector that include serving customers and cooking.

Workplace discrimination: Due to societal norms on gender relations, women place themselves in situations where they are assumed unworthy of leadership positions and on paths that limit their assertive approach for pay increases.

- Work-Life Balance Trade-offs: Many women chose work with flexible hours over higher paying work, to balance all the family responsibilities (World Bank, 2018).

Consequences for the Culinary Industry: The gender pay gap constraints women's abilities to invest in their career advancement, open new businesses and gain financial independence. Addressing wage gaps can help, by promoting equal pay policies, mentorship programs, and leadership opportunities, it fosters creation by women and the diversity of the industry.

Societal Expectations and Work-Life Balance

Women working in Vietnam's culinary sector are faced with challenges that are distinct to feeling trapped between their future aspirations and society's conventions. Confucian values are found in Vietnamese culture in which traditionally women are responsible for the household while men develop their careers (NNRoad, 2023). This expectation imposes challenges making it difficult for women in the food sector and female chefs to undertake regular hours, many do so on their own and build smaller scale businesses to not have to take the path to work as an executive chef at a prominent restaurant (Vietcetera, 2023). A woman's ability to strike a balance is further compounded by the collectivist nature of Vietnam's workplace culture, where loyalty to the employer is often prioritized above work-life balance (NNRoad, 2023). Solutions to challenge the issues that these women face include implementing family-friendly workplace policies about flexible hours, sponsorship or mentorship opportunities, and challenging the status quo within the norm of work culture (NNRoad, 2023) to help women pursue roles in leadership without sacrificing their health and wellbeing.

4. Conclusion

Women in Vietnam are vital contributors to its culinary industry, including traditional home cooking, professional kitchens and commercial food businesses. The inequality within male-dominated leadership structures, economic disparity, and gender specific roles are systemic barriers to women in the industry, yet women continue to innovate, maintain traditions, and showcase Vietnamese food to different parts of the world. Throughout this research, we have discussed the female contributions to the food industry, gained insight on the changing face of women's roles in professional kitchens, ownership of food businesses and their barriers to progressing their careers. Women are not only facing bias against them while getting hired or marginalized within the workplace, but also having to contend with unpaid labor associated

with domestic labor market tasks which place significant obstacles for women in the food industry, given the precarious labor market and socio-economic effects of the pandemic. However, there are overtures towards offering women opportunities for formal mentorship, equal pay, and leadership roles. While gender-specific barriers will remain real in many contexts, there is opportunity for first, second and third generation women to shift the trends. It is essential to remember and celebrate the contribution of women for the survival and authenticity of Vietnamese cuisine. By continuing to celebrate their contributions and encouraging others to be more inclusive, the Vietnamese culinary identity will endure while continuing to unfold in both traditional and innovative ways. As the expectations of society change, women will continue to be a voice for shaping food culture in Vietnam, and succeeding in identifying their legacy well beyond their own existence.

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