



VIETNAM
2020

FAILURE TO LAUNCH

Will the new generation of Vietnamese forgo the tradition of nesting at home to live more independent lives in the future? The answer isn't a simple yes or no as **James Pham** discovers. Photos by **Adam Astley**

AT WHAT POINT DOES A YOUNG person officially transition into an adult? Five milestones often cited by sociologists are: completing school, leaving home, becoming financially independent, marrying and having a child.

However, all too often, Vietnamese youths are bypassing the 'leaving home' stage altogether. While the age of maturity in Vietnam is 18, when one can officially vote and get an automobile licence, it is not uncommon for children, especially girls, to live at home until marriage and sometimes even after.

This "failure to launch" syndrome

is certainly not solely a Vietnamese phenomenon. While terms coined for previous generations focused on chronology or significant events (for example, the Lost Generation of those who fought in World War I or the MTV Generation of the early 1980s amidst the rise of mass media), Generation Y (those now 20 to 34 years old) has been saddled with terms reflecting their unprecedented living arrangements.

Young people who delay the transitions of marriage, mortgage and children have become known as the Peter Pan Generation (youths who refuse to grow up and take on their own financial responsibilities),

Boomerang Kids (those who have moved out but end up moving back in), the Sandwich Generation (young adults with dependent children who also need to take care of ageing parents) and the KIPPERS (Kids in Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings).

Vietnamese youths seem to have it even harder. In addition to global factors such as the worldwide economic crisis and the rising costs of higher education and housing, there just aren't the same socially acceptable or economically possible reasons to move out as with their western counterparts: taking time off after school to travel, move in with a romantic partner or deciding not to get

married at all. There's even a Vietnamese saying foretelling doom for home-leavers, *Sinh nha ra that nghiep*, which translates to "Leave home and become unemployed".

But will all that change by the year 2020? Our experts comprising of a real estate agent, a group of university students, and a psychologist weigh in.

THE REAL ESTATE AGENT

"I definitely think there will be a trend of young people moving out earlier," says Dieu, a sales manager for the Hong Ha Investment Corporation. "In my experience, 70 percent of 20 and 30-somethings buying or renting their own house have financial support from their families. But the future looks good for first-time homebuyers. Interest rates have fallen by 3 to 6 percent compared to last year. Prices are coming down from the real estate boom in 2007 to 2008. And instead of building solely high-end apartment buildings, developers are starting to look at the low-to-middle end of the market, building more affordable residences farther outside the city. That, coupled with plans for six underground metro lines by 2020, means that young people, even without a lot of money, will be able to move out and commute."

THE MILLENNIALS

Quoc, 20, a third year mathematics and computer science student, says, "My friends who live on their own do so because of university. But they're always complaining. The dorms don't allow cooking so they have to buy all their meals. Even toiletries are expensive because the shops know that they're selling to captive students who don't know how to bargain."

Khanh Ha, 20, a third year banking student adds, "It's expensive to live on your own. Just a room costs VND2.5 million to VND3 million. Most of my friends have to share, three or four to a room. It's not worth it if

you're not making a lot of money."

Thien Long, a first year student at the Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology explains that it's simply more comfortable at home. "Young people don't have the skills to live on our own, like knowing how to manage money. We like the protection and convenience of living at home. When you have problems, you need your family. If you're getting advice from people who are only one or two years older than you, that's not good."

Quoc concurs. "My friends spend a huge amount of money on cell phone credit when they first move out. It's lonely living alone."

Even the lure of freedom and independence isn't enough for the average Vietnamese Gen Y-er. When asked if they knew of anyone who had moved out simply because they wanted to, they all shake their heads. "In Vietnam, you'd be considered weird," says Thien Long.

"But that may change by 2020," adds Quoc. "Vietnam is becoming westernised. Lots of my friends speak half Vietnamese, half English, so I think that young Vietnamese will want to be more like their western counterparts who are financially independent." Thien Long clarifies: "Young people may change, but I don't think Vietnamese parents will. I don't think parents will let their children move out. And even if we're financially independent, we'll still need emotional support from our families."

THE COUNSELLOR

"There's a kind of co-dependency between Vietnamese parents and children," says Thy, a psychology lecturer and former counsellor for the Individual and Family Counseling Clinic. "Even when children do move out, they often stay close to home and regularly have meals with their parents. Not counting situations where young people are forced to move out, like for employment, it's still rare

for young people to live on their own because of cultural norms (especially for girls), filial responsibility and convenience. With government salaries so low, and the desire of parents to help out, especially in raising grandkids, it's classic co-dependency."

She adds: "The exceptions are young people who are financially independent and have supportive parents. Those who have experienced independence from study abroad are more likely to leave home. I think in the future, more and more young people will want to live on their own. But whether they'll be able to or not is another issue. A lot depends on the parents and how engaged or immersed they are. When I observe children of foreign residents interacting with Vietnamese children in primary school, I can already see that they're much more independent and confident in how they behave, speak, express themselves and control their emotions. Independence is something Vietnamese parents have yet to nurture in their children."

"I think in the future, more and more young people will want to live on their own. But whether they'll be able to or not is another issue. A lot depends on the parents and how engaged or immersed they are"