

■ The new women in South Vietnam are now invading the areas of men's activities.

## THE VIETNAMESE GIRL TODAY

Sitting in her home, a volume of poetry in her hand and a piano contrasting with her simple pink Ao Dai traditional dress, Hong Khac Kim Mai seems to typify the petite charm and grace of Vietnamese women. She is anything but a typical young girl, however.

The poetry is her own. She teaches piano in order to earn money to publish another volume. She likes to "mix up in politics," and did so this summer with fellow boy and girl students at the Saigon University where she is studying in the Faculty of Letters.

"It must be said," she admitted, "that I am very ambitious."

Mai is one of a new wave of young women in South Vietnam who are overturning the old idea that only young men are entitled to higher education and to careers in public life.

At Saigon University nine years ago, the only Univer-

sity of Vietnam at that time, less than 700 girls were registered, only about 15 per cent of the student body. This past year of the 27,826 students in the various universities of Vietnam nearly 30 per cent are girl students — and the number of girls is expected to increase steadily in coming years.

In the School of Pharmacy, more than half of the 3,000 students are girls. And in the Law Faculty, one out of every five future lawyers is female. This year there are more women students enrolled in the Faculty of Law than there are practicing attorneys in the entire country. One out of ten in the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Science are girls. In Mai's school, equivalent to the Arts and Sciences College of an American university, 36 per cent of the 8,000 students are young girls.

Mai does not want to go abroad to complete her studies, a common move for

children of wealthier Vietnamese families. At present, about 15 per cent of Vietnamese students abroad are girls, some working in such difficult fields as chemistry and electronics. For Mai, too many important and exciting things are happening in Vietnam today for her to leave the country at this time.

"I must finish higher studies at the Faculty of Letters," she declares. She is deputy chairman for public relations of the Executive Committee at the Faculty's student body organization.

She studied at Marie Curie high school in Saigon, a French girls' school, and believes her French is better than her Vietnamese. "I've been preparing for my Vietnamese license although I am not very strong in Vietnamese, but I like my mother tongue," he said.

Like many strongly nationalistic Vietnamese, Mai approves the current movement to require Vietnamese in all schooling. "The use of Vietnamese as a vehicle language is very necessary", she declared, "It will give the universities a national character."

"However," she added quickly, "students must be strong in foreign languages, too."

In 1965, Mai wrote and published with her own funds a book of poetry entitled "The Brown Yes." This year she teaches piano lessons to private students in order to earn money to publish her next collection of verses.

Fortunately, Mai comes from a well-to-do family and she does not need to work to pay for her education. Other girls must work hard to further their studies and earn a living. Many tutor other students privately, for children often prefer female to male tutors. The bright young girls also are in demand as shop assistants and office clerks. Many are able to live a self-sufficient life while studying at the University, even though they are far from their houses. Mai, for example, comes from Hue, the ancient capital city of Vietnam far to the north of Saigon.

Despite their handicap, for many Vietnamese still cling to the old idea that women must not enter the fields of

man, girls are excelling in scholarship and social action.

Miss Nguyen thi Binh topped all other students graduating in the year-end examinations at the Faculty of Science. In the 1965 entrance examination for the Faculty of Pharmacy, the six top students were girls, except for a lone boy who ranked fourth.

Girl students from the university are active in social relief duties. A number of girls went to Central Vietnam with the Relief Committees during the 1965 flood and again this year to the western provinces to aid flood victims.

The traditional view that daughters simply studied household duties and, when married, followed their husbands faithfully in whatever directions he led, is breaking down. Mai was quick to defend the new woman, saying: "I don't think modern Vietnamese women neglect their duty as housewives. They should not."

And Mai knows something of the domestic arts. In addition to playing piano, she makes a hobby of cooking. (And admits to being an es-

pionage movie fan.)

What does she want to do after completing university studies? "I don't want to teach school," she declared certainly.

"I really want to do something else. I like to live an active life; to tell the truth, I want to mix up in political activities."

Last summer, during the Buddhist crisis, Mai was among Saigon University students who were vocal about their position in the situation. But her activities go beyond such directly political things.

With their new-found liberty, the girls appear to be using careful restraint in order not to go too far. They are careful in social contacts with boys and few scandals have sullied their integrity.

For the older observers, they represent something new and almost mystical. They combine the soft charm of the ancient orient with the fiery zeal of the western woman.

A new force today in the universities, they will be a vital new power in the Vietnam of tomorrow. — *Mekong Features.*