have lost favor among present day Vietnamese women, however, it is safe to say that many an old belief and practice is no longer followed and has gradually become "strange" to succeeding generations.

**Gifts to Mothers.** In both rural and urban areas there is a custom, rather closely observed, for relatives and close friends to send to the mother of a newborn child a small gift usually consisting of some nourishing food items (lean pork pie, hog leg, high quality fish sauce, glutinous rice, chicken eggs) in rural areas and fancier or more luxurious articles in urban areas.

**Celebrations.** The most widely observed celebration held after the birth of a baby is the "full month" celebration which involves an offering presented to the "Holy Godmother" who is believed to grant protection to the newborn child. It usually is held on the 30th day after the birth (in some regions on the 29th day for a boy baby, the 28th for a girl).

The offering may consist of the following items: a pot of flowers, a cup of tea, joss sticks, candles, votive papers, a tray of foods including boiled chickens, cooked glutinous rice, rice soup, sugared bean soup, fruit and cakes of various kinds. The rite involves many steps: (1) prayer during
which the conductor of the ceremony (usually the child's mother, father or grandparent) lights the incense sticks and asks the Holy Godmother to grant protection to the mother and the baby, to secure their health and intelligence. (It is believed that the Holy Godmother teaches the baby how to smile and that crying is an indication the child is being punished for his stubborness); (2) holding over the baby's mouth a flower wet with the water contained in the cup on the altar and allowing the water to drip into his mouth in the expectation that the baby will learn to speak in sweet scented words; (3) serving tea to the Holy Godmother by pouring the liquid into small cups and placing them on the food tray. At this stage, the prayers are to be repeated. The rite ends with the burning of votive papers.

At the close of the rituals, relatives and close friends are usually invited to attend a social gathering at which a meal including most of the edible items of the offering, is served.

Celebrations also are held on the first birthday and, more rarely, on the third, sixth and twelfth birthdays.

The first birthday is widely considered as quite important but ensuing ones are often neglected in present day households. One consultant pointed out, however, that in his
native area (a province of South Viet Nam) both the first and twelfth birthdays are given a special significance.

An interesting rite is often performed during the first birthday celebration. At the completion of worship before the altar, the child is placed before an array of implements symbolizing occupational or professional categories. A penholder, for example, symbolizes intellectual activities, a pair of scissors the tailoring trade, a pair of pliers the skill for manual labor and so on. If the baby happens to pick up the penholder first, his parents would anticipate his future career to be that of a learned man, one who lives by his intellect; if he grabs the pair of scissors first, it would be indicative of a career as a good tailor.

The significance of the birthday celebration is roughly the same as that of the "full month" observance; it lies in the desire to obtain protection and favor from invisible powers to benefit the child's health and intelligence during his infancy and childhood.

It can be said, in terms of the general impression gained from the pattern sketched above, that the desire to have many children and especially male descendants is strong in present Vietnamese society which still is, in spite of modern trends, heavily patriarchal and paternalistic.
Pregnancy and childbirth have always been regarded as important stages in human life and women bearing children receive much attention and care from all family members.

However, the traditional practices pertaining to childbearing have gradually changed during the last 50 years, especially in urban areas. What has been described in this section should not be regarded as a stagnant pattern, characteristic of any particular geographical location or social category but as a rather vague picture of behavior observable in a changing society.

New life conditions, for instance, have greatly altered attitudes toward health practices and western medical techniques. The celebration of birthdays has been losing its importance among the low economic classes of the urban society and its significance among people in higher brackets. The western culture has had its impact on local methods and ways of life. Many traditional ritual processes are no longer carried out.

Compared to the celebration of weddings and funerals, people of all geographic and social categories in Viet Nam seemingly are less concerned with observing the ritual customs and beliefs surrounding childbirth and more inclined toward the change and innovation brought about by western medical practice.
IV. DEATH AND FUNERAL CEREMONIES

There is a strong belief among the Vietnamese that a man or woman should die at home surrounded by his family. One who dies outside his family's house is considered struck by the most undesirable final events. Bringing a corpse home is also avoided for fear that evil spirits will follow it and bring bad luck and bad health to the living. When a person is sick, he may be taken to a hospital—a practice of only the past thirty years or so—but if or when he is beyond help or it is evident that he is dying, he is always carried back home in all haste so that he might still be alive on arrival at his house.

If a deceased person's eyes are open, a close relative will gently brush the eyelids down. The face is always covered with a white piece of paper, sometimes a kerchief as a symbolic barrier between the dead and the living and to shield unrelated visitors from emotional shock.

In the past, wealthier families sent death notices to all relatives, neighbors and acquaintances but in recent times the practice of publishing death notices in the daily newspapers has become common. The notice generally bears the full name, age, title, occupation, honorific title and distinction of the deceased, followed by a fairly complete
enumeration of his closest relatives: parents, sons, daughters, sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchildren, sometimes mentioning their titles and occupations. In recent years, most public notices end with a brief request not to bring funeral gifts.

Poorer people and those from rural areas inform relatives, neighbors and acquaintances of a death by word of mouth.

Upon hearing the bad news, relatives and friends rush to the deceased person's house to express condolences to the family and pay last respects to the deceased by bowing or kneeling before an improvised altar set up in the parlor.

In traditional families, the corpse is generally laid on a bed under a mosquito net. A wedge is placed between the jaws to keep the mouth open so that uncooked grains of rice and a few coins (gold coins in wealthy families) can be introduced into it. A closed mouth would be opened with a comb.

In some areas of the South a bunch of bananas is placed on the abdomen of the deceased in the belief that this food will distract the devil from devouring the dead person's bowels.

While one or two relatives are busy applying to the
civil status officer for a certificate of death and eventually to other officials for permission to keep the corpse in the household for a few days, other members of the immediate family wash the body with a scented lotion and dress it in the person's best clothes. The lotion commonly used is ngu vi huong, a fragrant decoction made of five or less kinds of wood, bark and leaves. Nails are cut and trimmed and the pieces of nail put in small packages and attached to the proper hand and foot. This permits recognition of the hand and foot bone when, three years later, the body is exhumed and the bones transferred from the wooden coffin to a earthenware box for a final burial.

Old persons from certain rural areas and of traditional nature, may procure their coffins some years before their deaths and store them, not in the household (except in the highlands of North Viet Nam where the coffin is used as a bench and is usually placed on the veranda of the house), but in one of the communal rest shelters located somewhere by the side of the road leading to the rice fields or surrounding the residential area. The practice of procuring a coffin beforehand is no longer followed in towns and neighboring areas.

In the North the coffin is of a long parallelepiped
form with two equal ends. In South Viet Nam, it usually has two unequal ends and the lid is barrel-shaped. With both types of coffin the body is wedged in with reed branches, rolls of paper or other objects.

Before being laid in the coffin, the body is bound with strips of cloth and wrapped in a white silk shroud. The coffin containing the corpse may be kept in the house for a few days, or as was sometimes done in the past, a few months. Also in the old days, the coffin may have been buried temporarily in the household's garden until the flesh partially decomposed. This discouraged grave desecrators from stealing the gold, jewels and precious stones placed in the coffin along with the body. Only wealthy families kept coffins in their houses for a lengthy period of time; the practice required much care and caution and usually meant that the coffin had to be made of hard wood and insulated with many coats of paint and glue or pitch.

A bowl of uncooked rice is sometimes placed on the lid of a coffin in the belief that the grains of rice will hinder the dead body from rising up. If the deceased person is an elder or important member of the family, the coffin is set in front of the household altar; in other cases it is placed before a side altar.
When this preparation has been completed, members of the family gather before the altar to bring an offering of food to the deceased person's soul. The offering usually consists of three bowls of cooked rice, three cups of tea and a few other dishes. In the North, it would probably be one bowl of cooked rice, a cup of water and a boiled egg; a bundle of jossticks is planted in a bowl of uncooked rice, surrounded by many lit candles in candlesticks. The ceremony is supposed to be repeated three times a day during the entire mourning period but simplifications of recent years have reduced the time in which it must be carried out to one hundred days.

The distribution of mourning garb is another step preceding burial; it takes place when the body has been placed in the coffin. Before this stage, women who customarily wear turbans of one type or another remove them and carelessly roll up their hair so as to appear very upset and too busy to put their turbans on correctly. Between the time of the death and the time mourning clothes are put on, a wedding may be held if some member of the family is engaged and the family does not want him to wait until the end of the mourning period to marry. A wedding on the eve of a funeral should be celebrated in a very
In wealthier families, the ritual of distributing mourning garb is carried out by a religious priest. Mourning garb is divided into many categories depending on the degree of kinship of the deceased person to the mourners. The longest mourning period, in principle, lasts three years but is actually observed only 27 months by the wife, the children, daughters-in-law and adopted children of the deceased. A shorter period, lasting only 12 months, is observed by a deceased person's husband, sons-in-law, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces and grandchildren. Nine months of mourning is observed by cousins on the father's side and five months by cousins on the mother's side. The shortest mourning period is kept by grandnephews and grandnieces.

To be in mourning means to abstain from visiting temples and pagodas, attending festivals, parties and entertainments of all kinds, to delay marriage and avoid wearing bright colored clothing.

Mourning garb consists of a robe made of very low quality white gauze, rough trousers left ungirdled and a white turban to be wound around the head with a length hanging down the back. Men in the long and middle length
mourning periods wear, in addition to the headgear mentioned above, a straw crown and a hemp string "sash". They use a walking stick made of bamboo and should appear to be groping their way along, leaning on the stick. Those mourning for shorter periods wear only the white gauze robe and turban.

One of the main portions of the garb distribution ceremony is carried out by the eldest son of the deceased who leads the rite and kneels down for long hours before the improvised altar and coffin. He offers wine three times along with all kinds of food and delicacies displayed on the altar: tea, fruits, rice, rice wine, other foodstuffs and votive papers.

It is only after the distribution of mourning garb that the presentation of condolences begins. This can be done day or night indiscriminately since the dead body is to be watched over at all times under the light of a multitude of candles. The long vigil watch has many objectives: It is an opportunity for the children and other descendants of the deceased to pay final respects; it is also to keep dogs, cats and other animals from approaching or jumping over a corpse as it is commonly believed that an animal jumping over a corpse will revive it momentarily, make it sit or stand up, scratch, bite and frighten the living and
Along with the presentation of condolences, or sometimes just before the start of the funeral procession, friends and acquaintances may bring or send gifts to the deceased's family. The gift is understood as an offering to the deceased and may consist of wine, incense sticks, votive papers, wax candles and pairs of scrolls, the last being vertical sentences written on black and white silk or cotton material.

In many cases, both in rural and urban areas, these contributions of friends to the funeral consist of money but it is highly improbable that this is common among the upper economic classes.

More recently there has been a growing tendency, especially in urban areas to send a wreath which bears on a silk or paper ribbon a brief statement of sympathy followed by the name of the person or group of persons who offer the wreath as testimony esteem for the deceased.

The wreaths first are to be laid on and around the coffin, then carried in front of the burial procession to the cemetery, either by individual marchers or on vehicles. Later they are heaped over the grave.

For the burial ceremony, special funeral accouterments
are usually necessary for people of some social or economic standing. These items are either borrowed from some communal benevolent or mutual assistance association, which generally exist in rural areas, or hired from undertakers operating in most cities. Palanquin carriers and funeral service attendants are either volunteers from the community as is often the case in rural areas or persons employed through undertaking establishments.

Musicians play many kinds of wind and string instruments at funerals, the most striking of them being a funeral trumpet producing heart rending airs which are sometimes accompanied by the cries and lamentations of the dead person's children and relatives. The words either eulogize the dead and express the regrets of the living or are stereotyped songs appropriate to the circumstances. For example, a song may accompany the cries of sons and daughters on their father's or mother's death, another is for grandchildren at the death of a grandparent, a wife for her husband and so on. It is up to the musicians to choose the appropriate music.

For a non-catholic family, the service of funeral musicians is almost a necessity because it is believed, as said in an old popular saying:
"Living people need the light of oil lamps; Dead people need the trumpets and drums."

The funeral of a Buddhist would also require the services of a monk, formerly carried in a hammock, to lead the procession. He is sometimes followed by a group of old women carrying long pieces of cloth above their heads. On each side of the women and behind them are banner carriers who recite prayers as they move slowly along.

After the banner carriers comes the altar which has on it a tablet carrying the name of the deceased person and his picture, two peanut oil lamps, a couple of candlesticks, an incense burner and a couple of pots of flowers.

Next comes one or more tables on which are displayed offerings consisting of roasted pig, sugar cakes, cooked glutinous rice and wine in big porcelain urns.

The coffin borne in a hearse, which may be of several descriptions, is next. The hearse is pulled by four or eight persons, depending on wealth, or a two or four-horse carriage borrowed from a benevolent association or hired from undertakers. In the old days, the coffin usually was covered completely by a house made of votive papers.

The children, relatives, friends and acquaintances of
the deceased follow the hearse. Members of the family and relatives cry, sometimes loudly, lament in tearful voices and praise the deceased person's virtues and achievements. Friends walk in silence behind the cortege, wear sad looks and exchange a few words about the life of the deceased.

The coffin is sometimes buried in a rice field if the dead person lived in a rural area. If he was a Catholic burial is in the churchyard, if he was from an urban area, it is in the town cemetery, if he is a resident of a highland village, it is on the slope of a hill.

At the burial spot, on the order of the procession leader, the palanquin bearers lower the coffin into the grave, which is generally six to eight feet deep.

At this moment the wailing usually grows more heartrending and, many close relatives rush to the coffin and fight madly against the attendants and bearers to prevent them from burying their beloved companion.

To begin the burial, the procession attendants usually throw a symbolic handful of earth into the hole. Then, they withdraw and receive thanks from a few people who are closest to the deceased person: the eldest son, widow or widower, grandsons, brothers or sisters. At the gate
of the cemetery all close relatives wait until the grave is filled with earth.

In some rural areas, people still adhere to the tradition of serving a meal to all friends and acquaintances and who have participated in the funeral or sent a gift to the family.

After burial, a special altar is set up in the family's home for the veneration of the deceased. It is kept for at least one hundred days during which time incense sticks are burned continuously and rice is offered two or three times a day. At the end of this period, the incense urn may be moved to the ancestral altar and worshipping becomes less diligent. Still, a solemn ceremony is held at least on every death anniversary, on the lunar calendar New Year's days, and sometimes on the 1st and 15th days of each lunar month.

In rural areas and among more traditional families of urban societies, it has been a custom to invite a limited circle of relatives and friends to a meal on the 49th and 100th days following the death and on the first anniversary, sometimes on every ensuing anniversary of the death.
Three years after death, the body is usually exhumed and the bones, after cleaning and arranging them in proper order, are buried again in a smaller earthenware coffin. This rite is generally carried out without elaborate preparation and involves only relatives and the family's closest friends. It rarely implies a social gathering.
V. ANNIVERSARIES OF DEATH

Ancestor veneration, for a very long time, has been a widespread practice, almost religious in character. In the old days and at present, it is considered the most important filial duty to be performed after the death of a father, mother and grandparent. People generally commemorate the death of ascendants up to the fourth generation, i.e., the great grandfather and great grandmother.

After the burial of a parent, a succession of rituals takes place intended to pay respect to the deceased and to commemorate the date of his departure from the material world. He is offered two or three meals a day on a regular basis for many months, sometimes for a couple of years. His spirit is worshipped at an altar set up especially for the purpose. It must hold a tablet bearing his name and eventually his honorific title, a jossstick or incense bowl, an oil lamp constantly kept lighted and a few cups of water or alcohol. In many families, one or more framed photographs of dead parents are hung on the wall near or above the altar. There are among these daily rituals many much more important celebrations such as those occurring on the 7th, 14th, 21st, 49th, and 100th days following death and especially on the first and second anniversaries of death.
These ceremonies are celebrated with more or less substantial offerings, depending on the economic status of the family, but the ones on the 49th and 100th days and at the end of the first and second years are generally held with wide participation of the extended family and oftentimes friends and acquaintances as well. Usually the second year anniversary is called the "end of mourning" ceremony, since it marks the conclusion of the mourning period.

From the third anniversary on, the ceremony is held as an occasion for descendants and relatives to remember the deceased person and to offer him food and clothing so that he has not to live in the other world as a wandering and begging ghost.

In North and Central Viet Nam, before the last couple of decades, there was kept in each family a register in which the dates of death of all family members were recorded and descendents relied on these records to remind them of the anniversaries of death. In the South, family registers also existed but probably among more conservative families in rural areas rather than the less traditional social classes.

In North Viet Nam and the upper part of Central Viet Nam, anniversaries of death are celebrated by the eldest son who generally receives the largest share of the
inheritance, is responsible for the family worship house and keeps the ancestral worship land (dat huong hoa).

In the southern part of the country this duty is likely to be performed by the youngest son who receives the largest share of the inheritance, the family worship house where the anniversary observances are expected to take place and the ancestral worship land which is to yield the income necessary to defray the ceremonial expenses.

Preparations for the anniversary begin one or two days before the celebration with the cleaning of house and furniture, polishing of brass and copper ritual pieces and their arrangement in proper order on the altars and the purchase and gathering of ingredients for food preparation.

All this preliminary work and the ensuing duties are to be performed by members of the family in charge of the ritual duty--that of the eldest or youngest son. They may be assisted eventually by brothers, sisters and in-laws.

All expenses are to be paid by the holder of the ancestral worship land but, in most cases, brothers, sisters and other relatives try to bring a symbolic contribution of some kind. This can be ordinary or glutinous rice, rice wine, chicken, pork pie, cakes and candies of various kinds, wax candles, incense sticks, votive papers and
sometimes money. Neighbors, friends and acquaintances who are invited to attend the ceremony and the lunch or dinner which follows usually bring less substantial offerings. A token of their respect to the spirit of the deceased rather than a material gift to the living, these may consist of rice wine, fruit, votive papers, incense sticks or wax candles.

On the eve of the anniversary, a simple ceremony is held for the direct descendants and closest relatives of the deceased person. A meal, not very elaborate, is prepared and served to this limited circle of people who take the opportunity to remember the life, moral virtues and achievements of their ancestor.

The next day, a very large meal is prepared and neighbors, distant relatives, friends and acquaintances are invited to partake. One or more family members are expected to welcome these visitors who are invited to sit on flat beds or around tables where they may converse on the life of the deceased person.

An additional table may be placed in front of the altar on which to display various food items in bowls and on plates.

When all preparations are complete, the eldest son,
wearing his best clothing, approaches the altar and issues his formal invitation to his deceased parent's spirit to come back home to receive the offering and accept the respect paid by the living. In this ritual, the son usually kneels four times and bows deeply three times with his hands joined before his chest. A prayer, lasting five or ten minutes, is sometimes uttered. It is made up of a somewhat stylized eulogy to the deceased, a request that he accept the offering and a plea for protection of descendants from sickness and misfortune.

It may be interesting to note here that the Household God's altar also is cleaned on this occasion and its incense bowls, candlesticks, and oil lamps burned and lighted. The head of the household never fails to pay respect to the Household God, as if for permission to issue the invitation to the deceased parent's spirit.

After the eldest or youngest son has made his obeisances and repeated prayers, others of lower familial rank and indirect kinship ties, beginning with direct descendants and ending with distant relatives and sometimes friends, take their turn. But only the head of the household must kneel before the altar of the Household God.

The ceremony ends after the burning up of two successive
sets of incense sticks. The first set is lighted when foods are displayed and the spirit of the deceased is invoked; the second set when cooked rice is scooped out of the pot and displayed on the table. When the second set is half burned, tea is poured and fruit is peeled and served in small morsels. When the second set is completely burned down, the meal offering is considered over and a third set of incense sticks is lighted. Now the food delicacies are set about the room to be served to the family and its visitors.

At the moment that the third set of incense sticks burns out, sometimes not until the end of the day, votive papers, representing paper money, gold and silver ingots, clothing, and more rarely, furniture, houses, concubines and servants, are burned at a clean spot outside the house and thus sent to the deceased.

All these ritual practices are replicas of real life actions. The attitude, behavior and demeanor of family members and invited guests reflect their eagerness to pay respect and gratitude to the deceased ancestor and to give the ceremony an atmosphere of solemnity by refraining from loud talking and laughing and by appearing before the altar in tidy dress. However, in recent times, such rites as the offering and burning of votive papers have been gradually eliminated.
After the meal, all the invited guests leave the family house and return to their homes, bearing in mind the good impression they expected of the social and familial behavior of the person whose filial duty it was to celebrate the anniversary.

Anniversaries of death are still the family celebrations most cherished by people of all classes, almost regardless of their social or economic status, their degree of sophistication and their attitude toward western cultural patterns. There is, however, one interesting point to note here: if Catholic families have given up the practice of observing death anniversaries by venerating ancestors at the altar, most of them continue to prepare a meal to be served to a more or less restricted circle of relatives and friends after a mass held at the church and attended by the descendants, relatives, neighbors and friends of the deceased. The only significant difference probably is that there is no kneeling and incense burning at an ancestral altar which is rarely found in a Catholic household.

Unlike other rites such as New Year, childbirth and marriage celebrations which have undergone considerable change especially during the last decades, veneration of ancestors through observance of death anniversaries probably
has not suffered many detractions by the Vietnamese people, despite the effect of Western culture on traditional ways of thinking and living. The Catholic people, as pointed out above, would be an exception.

Many people are inclined to give the death anniversary one more significance. They look on it as an occasion for a family and social gathering which should tighten the family bond among the living and consolidate the family as the foundation of the society that it is in every Eastern country. In the old days, even descendants who lived a long way from the paternal or family worship house, tried their best to join their kin under the paternal roof. They looked on it as a very important duty toward their ancestors. For some wealthier classes in both rural and urban areas, the celebration often turns out to be an opportunity to show off a family's high financial status or to return courtesies received. But generally speaking, the anniversary of death has retained its original significance as a ritual in which homage is paid to founders of the family.