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The Economic Development and the Quality of Life in S. Korea and Vietnam*

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I. Introduction

Korea has achieved unprecedented quantitative economic development in the period of thirty-years of industrialization. Korea's outstanding economic growth has become a model for the nations which seek economic boost, and so-called Korean model is recorded as the most successful case of late twentieth century industrialization (Amsden, 1989). However, despite of all the praises on Korean economics, it is not an exaggeration to say that there is almost no study on what are influences of such rapid growth on the quality of life. In fact, studies on Korea's industrialization thus far has only interested in aggregated statistical achievement (in other words, only in

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quantitative respect), but showed not much concern on how this quantitative growth has changed quality of peoples life. In this regard, reports from the Bureau of Statistics of Korea (1995) and other international research institutes (UNDP, 1994; World Bank, 1994) show that Korea is among the last group if compared with twenty-five Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations in areas such as health, welfare, education, culture, and, environment which are good indicatives of the quality of life.

The quantitative economic development that has ignored qualitative aspects of life now reaches the point to reconsider its objectives. The ultimate goal of economic development should be the quality of peoples life, not the statistical growth. Growth without quality is the result of forgetting its original objectives. The goal of economic development should obviously set on improvement of people's quality of life, and it is now time to turn Koreas development model from quantitative to qualitative one. This shift requires a comprehensive review on the evaluation of current people's quality of life, as well as the existing model of development.

In the West, the effect of economic development on the quality of life has been at the center of concern for scholars and officials (Inkeles, 1993; Inglehart, 1990; Johnston, 1988; Zapf, 1987). In the case of Korea, on the other hand, this issue rose only after the civilian administration usurped the government in the early 1990s (KJ Kim, 1993; Korea Institute for Health and Societal Affairs, 1995). GNP per capita reached over US\$10,000 in 1995, but the question how socio-political changes due to economic growth have influenced on peoples quality of life is still unanswered. No comprehensive study on this topic has yet appeared. From the view of policy-makers and researchers, such situation is rather bewildering because the basis for new development strategy and policy-making is not founded yet. Thus, it would be a meaningful work to re-examine Koreas development model by focusing on quality of life, which is expected to break the

myth of quantitative development. Such work, of course, is necessary to formulate new Korean development strategy for the up-coming twenty-first century. This work will also become a good model for Vietnam which has energetically been seeking economic boost since *Doi-moi* policy in 1986.

To achieve the above tasks, we find that the following three research steps are necessary. First stage examines how aggregate economic growth has influenced on peoples quality of life, both comprehensively and systematically. The focus of this stage is summarizing quantitative statistics related to the quality of life and studying how these have changed by economic growth. In the second stage, subjective perception of individual quality of life will be systematically studied. Finally, third stage aims at formulating a basis for social development strategy for the twenty-first century by finding out how objective quality of life and subjective one are related to economic change. This paper deals only with the first stage of the above three steps of work. Although this paper primarily concerns with Korea, for the purpose of comparison, Vietnamese situation will also be considered as far the data is available, thus may be a reference to make Vietnamese development strategy.

II. Definition and Measurement of the Quality of Life

Definition of quality of life, after all, cannot be separated from the problem of how to measure. They are two sides of the same coin. The concept of quality of life in general can be divided into two dimensions. One is a dimension that reflects objective conditions of the quality of life, and the other dimension is subjective evaluation of various objective conditions. Studies thus far have approached the issue of conceptualization and measurement in these two dimensions at the

same time (Inkeles, 1993).

The objective indicator of the quality of life means any statistics that is measurable by external observers, without biases of subjects internal conditions. Objective indicators include those which can be measured by concrete quantification, such as per capita GNP, and those which reflect social, cultural, or political conditions, such as freedom of press. Foods, housing, drainage and water supplies, medical care and health, individual physical safety, individual social safety, environmental and ecological conditions, and other types of goods and services are some examples of the first type of objective indicators. For instance, health indicators include infant mortality, number of patients per doctor, and calories consumed per day. These kinds of indicators are mutually interrelated, representing physical quality of life, and can be measured with relative easiness. Next, socio-cultural and politico-economic indicators can be obtained from the measurement of the operation of legal system and related political actions. Freedom of residence, freedom of religion, freedom of assemblage, freedom of political choice, freedom of economic activities, and freedom from discrimination are some of the examples. However, these indicators are relatively difficult to quantify because it involves qualitative evaluation of social system.

Subjective indicators, on the other hand, can only be measured by asking people for their evaluation and beliefs on their conditions. Topics can be asked for satisfaction include work, marriage, family life, education, health, economics, housing, leisure, community, and the state. Evaluation based on subjective satisfaction, however, raises an issue that it by itself is not a fact, but perception and feeling. Another things to consider, regarding the subjective indicators, are that they involve personal psychological conditions or attributes. A good example of this aspect will be the concept of anxiety. Trust, individual efficacy, fatalism, self-evaluation, cognitive reflexivity, and self-control also belong to this category. However, the down side of

the subjective indicators is that it is impossible to derive a consensus beyond individual level from this kind of indicators.

The discussion up to this point leads a concept of quality of life to a rather complex definition, which involves general objective and specific subjective dimensions simultaneously. These two dimensions, conditions and evaluations, interact with each other, form a cause-and-effect chain, and construct a persons over-all quality of life. For this reason, we will also dichotomize the definition and method of measurement into objective and subjective aspects. Because of the limited time and budget, nevertheless, this paper puts subjective aspect aside, and concentrates only on general survey of objective conditions that influence the quality of life.

III. Development of Social Indicators System

To define objective conditions that determine quality of life and set measurable social indicators of it has to deal with many difficult problems. Since each society has different system, ideology, and culture, setting up criteria for national level of comparison is not an easy task. Therefore, literature review on this topic is crucial before taking any comprehensive studies. Studies on the quality of life from the advanced countries have started from normative and practical purposes aiming at providing a positive foundation for policy-making and social development. Thus, most studies have concerned with the issue of how social quality of life can be accurately and objectively measured, and such concern primarily focused on the derivation of objectively measurable quantitative indicators, i.e. a social indicators system (Bauer, 1966).

UN and other international organizations have also been attempting quantitative comparative studies on the quality of life.

These international organizations have developed a system of social indicators for cross-national studies, and attempts to compare various aspects of life have been strenuously proceeded. First attempt to construct objectively comparable measures for studies on the quality of life was done by UNs Research Institute for Social Development (RISD) which created The Level of Living Index and The Level of Welfare Index in 1966 (Drewnowski, 1970). In 1973, OECD attempted to integrate indicators from eight aspects of basic social life (OECD, 1973). The UNs report in 1975, Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics, quantified a total of eleven aspects of life (UN, 1975).

As social indicators continuously develop and data are accumulated, studies on the quality of life have expanded from measuring mere economic or demographic indicators to specific domains of life such as culture (UNESCO), welfare (OECD), women (Basu, 1992), values (Inglehart, 1990), human capital development (UNDP, 1994), environment (UN), and the quality of working life (Levine, Taylor, and Davis, 1984). Such development of indicators, on the one hand, raises a need to integrate particularized studies and bring consistency. Constructing unified and consistent indicators and concepts for comparison at the international level has become a critical issue (Johnston, 1988).

Quantitative studies on the quality of life by social indicators, on the other hand, raises a need for qualitative evaluation. The biggest reason why subjective evaluation is important is objectively high conditions of life does not necessarily guarantee subjective satisfactions of the people. A study on the quality of Europeans life points that there is no correlation between objectively good conditions of urban life and residents perception of welfare (Davis & Fine-Davis, 1991). This issue has brought the importance of subjective evaluation and satisfaction of people back into the study of the quality of life. This perspective starts from the assumption that individual evaluation is the

ultimate criteria of public well-being rather than objective social conditions. Thus, such studies are centered around the subjective evaluation while objective social indicators are less emphasized. They became prosperous during the similar period of time when social indicators system began to develop, and have been putting great efforts to measure personal satisfaction, happiness, and well-being (Campell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

They, however, are also facing many problems due to inconsistent use of concepts, and have not fruited a model which incorporates subjective evaluation and objective conditions. Most studies are confined to one of either objective or subjective variables, and tend to concentrate on only one aspect. For this reason, illuminating the relationship between objective indicators and subjective evaluation becomes the primary task in this field of study (Lin, 1991). Connecting objective conditions and subjective satisfaction, however, is not an easy work. If the mechanism of material conditions on peoples perception is found, it will be a great leap forward in policy-making. The reason why this task takes so much time to accomplish is that the subjective feelings of human beings are more influenced by personal experiences in specific historical context than the general objective conditions.

Studies on the quality of life in Korea are showing a very similar pattern to the Western trend. The difference is that because quantitative economic growth has been a predominant ideology in Korea, the concern on quality of life rose above the surface only after 1990s. Since the civilian administration preempted in 1992, issues such as class conflict, poverty, pollution, welfare, labor, discrimination against women, and regional gap, which have been put behind the scene of economic growth, are now on the stage. With these issues at stake, the quality of life has become an essential point which both policy-makers and citizens cannot ignore, and the factor that cannot be

disregarded in the formulation of development strategies. As the problems of industrialization are paid attention to, so is the issue of the quality of life; as a result, number of studies on this topic has drastically been increasing (B Jeon, 1994; Choo, et al., 1987; Choo & Kim, 1984; Yoon 1983; Shin et al., 1983; Kwon et al., 1981; Korea Development Research Institute, 1987), but these studies still failed to embrace a view point that sets the ultimate goal of development on improvement of the quality of life.

IV. Selected Indicators of the Quality of Life in S. Korea and Vietnam

The task emphasized the most in this paper is comprehensively re-examining how the conditions that shape quality of life have been changed in terms of objective indicators. Thus, the main aim of this task is to collect basic data and systematization of it. To achieve this goal, changes in indicators that form the quality of life will be scrutinized as much as possible, and database it. The reason why data collection and organization are so emphasized here is that we share a sense of utmost importance in founding a long-term data basis for this area of study. Another reason is we feel available data are very few, and, even if partial data are found, they are not useful in most of cases because of their chronological inconsistency and unorganized nature.

Criteria of indicators to describe objective conditions of the quality of life have always been an issue in their selection. If selected indicators and related measures are simple or reasonably few number of them can explain the phenomena, criteria will never be the issue. In practice, the selection process are always limited by the availability of data and the researchers subjective values. It seems that to produce

persuasive criteria that determine the objectivity of selection is an almost impossible task.

With regard to this issue, we set normative criteria for the selection in order to bring a consensus as much as we can. The selected indicators should: first, well represent changes in the quality of life; second, be meaningfully comparable at the international level; third, cover time range as wide as possible; four, preserve importance for both short-term and long-term change of the quality of life. However, the single most important criterion adopted in this paper to select indicators is the availability of data, applicable to both Korea and Vietnam simultaneously. It is so regrettable that theoretically as well as empirically important indicators are omitted here due to the lack of data accessibility.

V. Selected Aspects of the Quality of Life in S. Korea and Vietnam

1. Aspects of Economic Development in Korea and Vietnam

Although Korea and Vietnam are different in many respects, recently they share a common feature as far as the economic growth is concerned. Both of them now belong to the fastest growing economy in the world. It is well known that the Korean economy has been marking one of the world highest record. The average annual growth rate from 1965 to 1992 has been 8.9%, and it continues to be like that in recent years. In the meantime, the Vietnamese economy has become very similar to the Korean economy in terms of growth. The Vietnamese economy marked a growth rate of 9.5% in 1995 and the average growth rate for the 1988-93 period has been 6.8 %, which is almost identical to the Korean performance for the same period (see

Table 1).

<Table 1: Aspects of Economic Development>

Aspects of Economic Development	Vietnam ¹⁾	Korea(S) ²⁾
Average GDP growth rate (1988-93)	6.8	7.8
GDP growth rate	8.8(94)	5.5(93)
GDP per capita	\$213(94)	\$7,513(93)
GDP share by industrial origin(%)		
primary	28.7(94)	7.1(93)
secondary	29.6(94)	43.3(93)
tertiary	41.7(94)	49.6(93)
Employment share by industrial origin (%) (1993)		
primary	73.0	14.7
secondary	10.8	24.4
tertiary	16.3	60.9
Trade		
per capita export (93)	\$42	\$1,867
per capita import (93)	\$48	\$1,902

Source: 1) Bureau of Statistics, Korea. 1996. Socio-Economic Indicators of Vietnam.

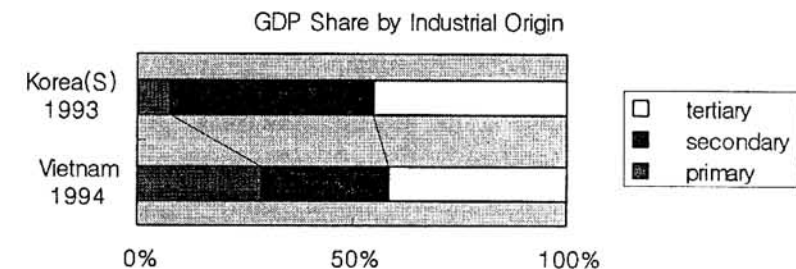
2) Bank of Korea. 1994. Economic Statistic Yearbook.

Thanks to the rapid growth in recent years, the structure of the Vietnamese economy has also been changing. As shown in Figure 1, in 1994, the share of the secondary sector, which includes manufacturing, mining, construction, and utilities, started to exceed the share of the primary sector, which includes agriculture, forestry, and fishery; and it had composed almost one third of the gross domestic production. Although almost three quarters of the total employment of Vietnam still remained in the primary sector, the employment share of the secondary sector has also been expanding due to the high growth in industry (Figure 2).

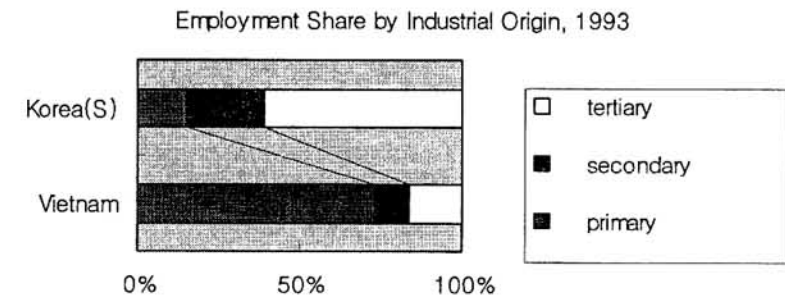
However, the Vietnamese economy in general is still belonging to the underdeveloped category in comparative perspective. Per capita GDP or trade amount of Vietnam are extremely low, while Korean

counterpart statistics shows a relatively high record. As mentioned above, the employment structure of the economy is also carrying an underdeveloped pattern. Despite the rapid growth of the Vietnamese economy in the 1990s, it seems a little premature to consider the quality of Vietnamese life at this point. Nevertheless, if the Vietnamese policy-makers take the issue of quality of life seriously from now on, it will surely benefit the people in the future.

<Figure 1>



<Figure 2>



2. Selected Aspects of the Quality of Life in Korea and Vietnam

Although statistical data do not give you the detailed pictures, they are certainly useful in describing the general states. We have

picked some of the available indicators in order to compare the objective quality of life in Vietnam and S. Korea: population, education, health, and transportation and communication.

If you first look at the population section of Table 2, you will notice a significant difference in natural increase rate for recent years. Korea has a lower crude birth and death rates per thousand population (15.3 and 5.8) than the Vietnamese (31.8 and 9.5). The net increase of population is, thus, 22.3 for Vietnam and 9.5 for Korea, respectively (Figure 3). The Vietnamese pattern is closer to those of underdeveloped nations, while Korean pattern shows a similarity with those of developed nations. This pattern of natural increase is reflected in the average population growth rate. Vietnamese population grew 2.1% from 1985 to 1992 annually, while Korean population grew only 1% annually during the same period.

Life expectancies also show a similar pattern of difference with the natural increase rates. Koreans, both male and female, live longer than the Vietnamese (Figure 4). Particularly, Korean females live almost ten years longer than the Vietnamese women. In terms of the age structure of population (Figure 5), the concentration level in the age between 15 and 65, which is economically active age, is significantly higher in Korea (71.1%) than Vietnam (58.4%). These structures result a higher dependency ratio in Vietnam (72%) than Korea (40.6%).

<Table 2: Selected Indicators of the Quality of Life >

Selected Indicators	Vietnam	Korea(S)
Population¹⁾		
crude birth rate (0/00)	31.8(85-90)	15.3(93)
crude death rate (0/00)	9.5(85-90)	5.8(93)
natural increase rate (0/00)	22.3(85-90)	9.5(93)
life expectancy(male) 61.6 (90-95)	67.7(91)	
life expectancy(female) 66.0 (90-95)	75.7(91)	

average population growth rate(85-92)	2.1	1.0
age structure of population (95)		
under 15	37.0	23.2
15-65	58.4	71.1
over 65	4.9	5.7
dependency ratio (95)	72.0	40.6
urban population ratio (%)	20.6(92)	74.4(90)
Education²⁾		
school enrollment ratio(%)		
primary school	108(92)	102(93)
secondary school	33(92)	93(93)
college & university	na	46(93)
adult literacy (%)	84.0(79)	96.3(90)
Health³⁾		
safe water supply rate (89)	24.5	97.0
physicians per 100 thousand habitant	405(91)	117(93)
persons per hospital bed(94)	379	315
health expenditure per capita(90)	\$3	\$365
% of health expenditure to GDP	2.11	6.61
Energy consumption per capita (92) ⁴⁾	84kg	2,231kg
Transportation and Communication		
automobiles per 1000 habitant(92) ⁵⁾	0.0	12
paved road ratio ⁶⁾	8.5(94)	84.7(93)
telephone supply per 1000 habitant(92) ⁷⁾	2.9	357.1
newsprint consumption per 1000 habitant(92) ²⁾	147	13,423
TV sets per 1000 habitant(92) ²⁾	42	211
Radio sets per 1000 habitant(92) ²⁾	104	1,002

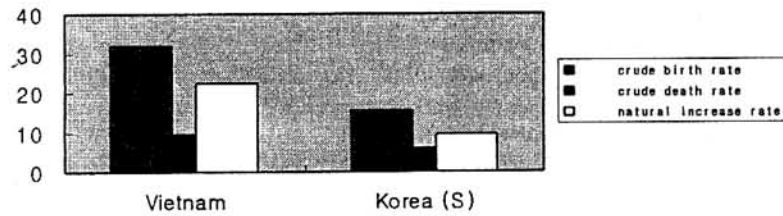
Source: 1) UN. 1994. Demographic Yearbook.
 2) UNESCO. 1994. Statistical Yearbook.
 3) WHO. 1994. World Health Statistics.
 4) UN. 1994. Statistical Yearbook. No. 39.
 5) World Automotive Market Report. 1994/95.
 6) International Road Federation. 1993. World Road Statistics
 7) ITU. 1993. World Telecommunication Development Report.

While almost all Vietnamese and Korean children attend primary schools (Figure 6), more Korean teenagers attend secondary schools

(93%) than the Vietnamese (33%). It is rather surprising, since many socialist nations are known to have relatively high secondary school enrollment ratios. Despite we lack empirical data of Vietnam, Korea seems to have an absolutely higher ratio of college/university enrollment ratio than Vietnam does. These statistics of education partially explains the difference of the population growth pattern between two countries. It is generally known that one is likely to have a less number of children as his/her years of formal education is longer.

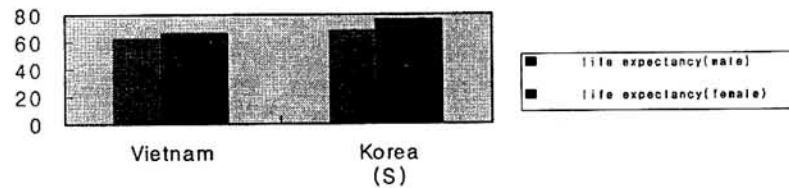
<Figure 3>

Component of Population Growth



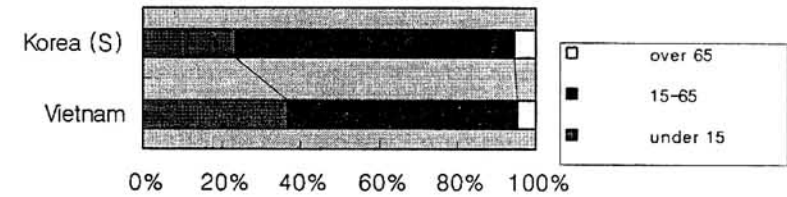
<Figure 4>

Life Expectancy



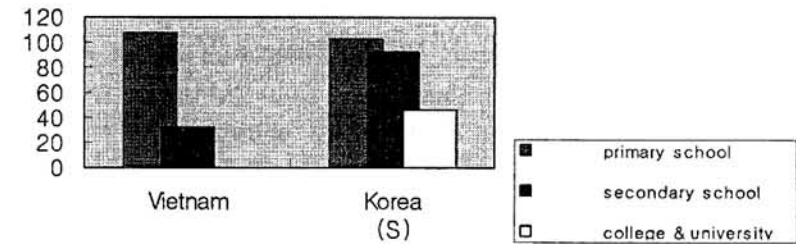
<Figure 5>

Age Structure



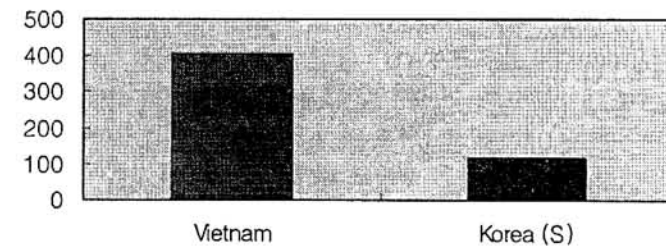
<Figure 6>

School Enrollment Ratio



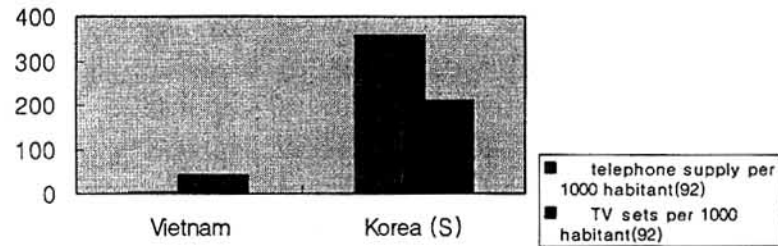
<Figure 7>

Physicians per 100 Thousands Habitants



<Figure 8>

Telephone and TV per 1000 Habitants



From Table 2, health is the only area in which Vietnam excels Korea. And the difference is quite significant. The number of physicians per 100 thousand habitants is 405 in Vietnam, 1991, compared to 117 in Korea, 1993 (Figure 7). The number of persons per hospital bed is also more in Vietnam, despite of Korea's economic wealth. Koreans spend 121 times more than Vietnamese for health. Here, factors, such as lower environmental pollution in Vietnam and Korea's relatively higher economic affluence to care more about their health, might have influenced the statistical figures, but the gap is still significantly big. These indicators should be cautiously interpreted, since they do not indicate the actual *quality* of health service. For instance, the low rate of safe water supply in Vietnam (24.5%) shows a poor health condition. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to conclude that the health service is more available and accessible to the Vietnamese than the Koreans.

An average amount of energy that a Korean consumes in 1992 is 2,231kg, which far exceeds 84kg of a Vietnamese. This suggests two possibilities. One is that, Korea is more developed with infrastructure; the other is that, Koreans are more affluent thus spend more energy. Paved road ratio of Korea and Vietnam, 84.7km and 8.5km, supports the first point. Several other indicators in Table 2 confirm the latter. Whereas an average number of automobiles owned by 1,000

Vietnamese is almost none, 1,000 Koreans own 12 cars. Per 1,000 habitant telephone supplies in Korea is 357.1, which dramatically contrasts with 2.9 in Vietnam (Figure 8). Numbers of TV and radio sets owned per 1,000 habitants, again, show huge gaps: every 1,000 Koreans own 211 TV sets and 1,002 radio sets, while Vietnamese own 42 and 104 sets, respectively. Thus, these indicators suggest that the Koreans live in more affluent conditions than the Vietnamese do.

We will not make any definite conclusion, such as which country has better quality of life, here. As we have repeatedly emphasized thus far, qualitative indicators can only give the general sense of life conditions. Table 2 shows Korea's life quality is generally better than the Vietnam's. Nevertheless, it does not lead us to raise Korea's hand. Although Koreans live in better infrastructure, with more affluence, as we have seen from the above, Vietnamese have better and cheaper health care service. Because availability and accessibility of health service are so important, people may value them higher than any other life conditions, such as owning TV sets. Also, urban population ratio is much higher in Korea, 71.1% compared to 58.4% of Vietnam, indicating that Koreans live in a much more crowded condition.

VI. Conclusion

We have briefly discussed on theoretical backgrounds of study on quality of life. We also discussed about advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative approaches. As we can see in this paper, quantitative indicators provide objective grounds which make comparative studies possible. At the same time, they are superior in portraying big pictures of society. The comparison of economic development between Vietnam and Korea show Korea's stronger economy in every category. Korean economy is not only bigger in

size, but also presents a more advanced pattern.

In comparison of quality of life, Koreans live with better infrastructure and more affluence. Koreans also have more education, but spend more money on health care, and live in more crowded conditions than the Vietnamese do. Nevertheless, we avoided to make a definite conclusion in this paper. As we have discussed, quantitative indicators are limited only in delineating general conditions, but the subjective sense of satisfaction cannot be derived. For some people, accessibility of health service is more important than any other things, but for some, economic affluence may be more important.

This paper suggests that although economic development influences quality of life, it does not guarantee the improvement of quality of life. Korea is economically much more prosperous than Vietnam, and many objective indicators imply its higher quality of life. However, as could be seen in the case of health, Vietnam has more accessible health care service despite of its poor economy. Subjective qualitative studies may have provided a fuller insight on this relationship between economic development and the quality of life. We leave this for the future studies.

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