

CHAPTER THREE:
VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

1. Organizational Structure, Scope of Operation, and Funding Sources

1.1. Organizational Structure

As for registered associations (e.g. clubs and associations operating in the fields of education, culture, and sports in Dong Quang) , the establishment of a management body is a must. Just as the proposal for the establishment of the association is made, the leader of the association should provide for a board lobbying for the establishment of the association and a certain number of members. According to Decree No. 88/2003 on the organization, operation and management of associations, after the approval decision is made for the establishment of an association (issued by responsible bodies; in this case, this is the commune authorities), within 90 days, the association has to convene a congress or general meeting to form a new board of management to replace the lobbying board and develop the association's regulations. Also according to this Decree, every association is obliged to organize tenure-based association's congress or meeting (maximum 5 years per tenure), from which a new leadership is selected and the vision and agenda for the coming tenure is developed, etc.

Thus, under this principle, these associations are supposed to have a fixed organizational structure. However, the reality in Dong Quang has shown that all the registered voluntary associations have their formal organizational structure working rather loosely. They do have a leadership, commonly composed of one chairman or president, one or two vice chairmen or vice presidents, one secretary and/or accountant. The leadership is composed of 3-4 people, but in practice, only the chairman/president and accountant cum cashier are active. It is

common that the chairman/president does not know exactly the number of his/her association's members or regulations of his/her association either. We are often redirected to their secretaries (cum accountants and in many cases cum cashiers) by chairmen of associations to collect specific information. Meetings of the associations are also scheduled or stipulated very loosely. For example, in the case of the Binh Ha village's Former Servicemen Club, though not many activities are regularly carried out by the club, it still organizes 6-month and annual review meetings. The chairman of the club revealed that they have to do so because the regulations approved by the commune stated that way. Thus, those meetings have to be organized though there is nothing worthwhile to report.

Every registered association has its own regulations in either written or verbal form adopted on the basis of consensus of the majority of members in the first meeting since the decision of establishment of the association is made. The regulation must be approved by local authorities. In principle, any revisions or amendments to the regulation must be undertaken and approved during congresses of that association. However, in practice, the association often has only one regulation, which seems to be an administrative procedure that needs to be fulfilled rather than a reference framework for the operations of the association. A common observed practice is, for associations established for more than 3 years, most of representatives of those associations do not remember the contents of their associations' regulations or do not know who are keeping the regulations either. Some representatives are even not sure if their associations have any decision of establishment or regulations or not.

For unregistered associations, the management of activities is even looser. Members are not even aware of the establishment of their associations, no documents on the establishment are made and filed; no written regulations are available; no offices are provided; and there are even no lists of members. All principles applied are made verbally, not in written form, but are strictly abided by. In many cases, the only document that those associations have is a list of

members with names and contact numbers just for communication. According to a list of 26 members of a schoolfellow association (association of people, who used to study in the same school or class) in Dong Ky village, most of members have telephone numbers. However, in practice, members prefer direct contact. The chairman of this association said that if there is any event, he shall go to every member's house for notification.

Same-age associations in Dong Quang are united in performing their in-turn responsibilities among members. Each year, a member plays a role as a host (holding meetings and feasts at his/her house) and is responsible for his/her association's spending in one year period. An association summary meeting is usually held in the last gathering of a year. Before or after the meal, members are to be briefed by the host on the association's spending, debts and financial status etc. Also at this meeting, the association's record notebook is handed over to the next host. This is the only occasion in a year that members are officially informed of the association's activities. Communication in the meeting is done directly. Notetaking, if necessary, is to be done by the new host.

Association members do not doubt the transparency of financial statistics, which is mainly because of both the in-turn fund management mechanism and the invisible control supported by rumours. One would lose others' respect once his cheating is revealed. The in-turn hosting, managing and recording, once not familiar to rural people, has showed the principle of equality that is decided by the association's regulation.

Further investigation into the organizational structure and operation of voluntary associations, either registered or non-registered, in the two communes also reveals the unwritten feature of those associations' operations. These associations do not have any offices or premises, but often use either houses of chairmans or any members, providing they are large enough for activities. An association's chairman is the one either selected on a yearly basis or remaining as that since its establishment, which is dependent on its members' agreement. The member in

charge of note-taking should usually be a well-educated person, who is familiar with paperworks and calculating. People of such a kind are not many in rural areas. Thus, he is often in charge of notetaking for one or several associations, which he applies for membership.

With a notebook, he can record activities of all associations he is in charge of. Receipts and expenditures is the most important part of the notebook. However, the notebook is a “secret” for outsiders because it does not set a clear separation between activities of one association to another and between private and public businesses. (In a notebook that we observed, costs for hiring workers and for construction materials for repair of kitchen’s roof are also recorded by the keeper.) Only the book keeper is able to understand what has been written inside and he is responsible for reporting all revenues and expenditures incurred in a year. When we asked to have a look at the notebook, the chairman of a Trang Liet village’s association denied and explained that book keeping is a job of the secretary and he did not want to intervene. He was reluctant to do so as he thought that it might hurt his secretary who would feel that his chairman does not trust him.

1.2. Scope of Operation of Voluntary associations

Activities of voluntary associations mainly take place at village, hamlet or even at neighbour level. We found that there are numerous activities of associations taking place at village level. Village is a place, where traditional and long-established associations originate from traditional social practices (e.g. Same-age association [*Hội đồng niên*]) or from the need for entertainment and other common practices (e.g. Fighting cock guilds [*Phường gà chọi*], Buffalo guilds [*Phường trâu*], Singing bird-raising guilds [*Phường chim*], etc.). Village is also a place, where new types of social associations for example, associations or clubs, are established. Many associations do not have their membership at higher level but at village level or even below. Among three villages of the same commune, the associations’ nature can be the same but the way they are organized and even their names are significantly different from one to another. A

same-age association in Dong Ky is called *Đông canh*; while in Trang Liet and Binh Ha, it is called *Đông niên*. In addition to differences in names, these associations are also different in terms of the way they are organized, ruled, and practiced.

Even within a village's boundary, associations of similar structure might have different scopes of operations. Take a same-age association in Dong Ky village for example, practices of this association can be observed at village and hamlet levels. And there are both village and hamlet-based associations. A hamlet-based association is a kind of long-established, group-based social practices (until now, no one knows since when it was dated); but a hamlet-level same-age association have recently come into being. Interviewees differentiated between village-level and hamlet-level same-age associations as follows: "*A hamlet-level same-age association is a voluntary association meanwhile a village-level one is established to take care of common works and it is kind of compulsory*" (DQ25, 2007).

At hamlet level, there are Neighbour Groups [*Tổ liên gia*], or locally called as Grave-caring Neighbourhood [*Hàng xóm tri huyệt*] in Dong Quang. A Neighbour Group includes of households living nearby each other (approximately 15-20 households), sharing the same alley or a boundary marker stone (e.g. a bamboo pole- then it is called a Bamboo pole hamlet [*Xóm khoảnh tre*] according to the dialect of Giao Tan).

Group members are to help each other on special occasions such as funerals, weddings or house-warming ceremonies etc. These groups share one common regulation in case of funerals, in which other households have to send people over to help with grave digging. This is the greatest responsibility of the groups, showing solidarity and respect towards the pass-away.

Besides, many people also have membership at associations with larger scope of operation, at provincial or inter-provincial levels, for example: veteran associations (associations of veterans, who used to fight together in the same regiments during war time).

However, associations' scope of operation is always narrowed at commune or village levels. For example, as veterans who fought in the same regiment, people in a commune or a district normally gather and take part in activities conducted dependently from bigger associations, in which, due to the fact that members are scattered, meetings are normally held once a year. And as for these newly arising associations (associations of veterans from the same communes or districts), meetings are held more regularly and members get to know each other better.

1.3. Funding sources

Generally, an association need a stable source of funding to operate. As associations operating mainly on members' consensus, contributions shall be made entirely based on decision of a majority of members and their common living standard. As for associations of better-off groups, members are asked to contribute even some millions VND and these amounts are then used to lend to earn interests which are to finance the association's operations. Sometimes these associations ask for contributions on an ad-hoc basis; or if any contribution is made, the amount of contributed money then is not significant.

Regardless of how much money is contributed, chairmen of associations all confirmed that: applying for membership is a costly practice since it is common that local people do not apply for membership of only one association but for several associations. The aggregated amount of various contributions to different associations makes the idea of "costly" a different meaning depending on members' economic status:

An art club in Binh Ha village has 14 members, each of whom contributed 50.000 dong since the club's establishment. Besides, they could improve funding by saving their practicing and performing costs. Prior to each performance, the club mobilizes its members to contribute from 20 to 50 thousand dongs. The club's current fund balance is about 2 million dongs.

An association of former youth officials in Giao Tan has 22 members, each of whom contributed 50.000 dong since the club's establishment for common expenses. However, in annual meetings, members are called to contribute more from 50 to 100 thousand dongs. The club now has a few millions in its current fund balance. Feasting events are financed separately and mainly through contributions.

A badminton club in Dong Ky is among the most active associations and its members are mostly well-off people. Therefore, their contributions are quite big. According to the association's regulation, new members only have to contribute once. In its early days of establishment, there were 90 members and all agreed to pay in 100.000 dongs. The amount was then used to lend to earn interest. So far, each member's share has reached 200.000 dongs on average. The number of members has also doubled. So at this time, new members have to pay in 200.000 dongs each. Of 200.000 dongs, half is saved as a member's share. Members will get their shares back as soon as their membership is terminated. The other half is used to lend and for expenses of such activities as visiting sick members or exchanging etc.

Now matter how big the fund of an association is or how it is raised, it has an important role to play to keep an association active. *"An association cannot operate without a fund"* (GT32, 2009). There are various ways for an association to mobilize funding, among which the most popular one is through periodic contribution of members. Some even accept contributions of rice with equivalent value. The fund is used to lend and spend on activities.

For associations recognized by local authorities (privately or publicly), funding for their activities comes from the sponsor of villages and hamlets:

"An association's operations depend on how much funding it is provided. For example, the recent Congress of the Former Servicemen Club is financed by the village's Party

Cell. Sometimes, the association asks for funding just to maintain its operation in a year”
(GT26, 2009).

Also in this group, one association even asked for an ownership of a pond , so that its members can promote production and raise fund. Its chairman noted that: *“It was the local authority who established the association; so they should have paid more attention to running and developing it. When the association was established, members had to pay in 30.000 dong. At the end of the association’s tenure, the local authority sponsored 1.5 million dong. That amount was then not enough to pay for the tenure-end feast. So the rest was taken from the association’s fund”* (DQ49, 2008).

In Giao Tan, in various cases, social voluntary associations try to mobilize members to sponsor for the associations’ enrichment:

“Within an association, well-off members are encouraged to contribute more and support poor members who don’t have income to pay for such activities as feasting events and meetings. By doing this, the association can maintain its operation and membership” (GT40, 2008).

Many chairmen of voluntary associations also highlighted the importance of sponsored money as a source of encouragement: *“An association that has successful and well-off members is to have more bustling activities”* (GT26, 2009). Therefore, mobilizing for sponsor within members is considered as a vital leadership skill to an association chairman in Giao Tan. Nevertheless, not all associations are in favour of this practice due to the conception that the associations should be operated on the unbiased and non profit-making basis: *“Well-off members are welcomed to help if they are really integrating into the association’s activities. If not, they just make others feel self-pity”* (GT6, 2008).

Meanwhile, for more voluntary associations in Dong Quang, the mobilization of funding does not exist. Even members' good will is not encouraged. It is commonly perceived in these associations that all members have equal rights and responsibilities. And contributing is for common purposes and does not depend on any particular person.

Basically, when one applies for membership, he or she is willing to contribute. A chairman once stressed that: "*People may ignore making their contributions in official organizations, but not in voluntary ones*" (DQ42, 2008). In fact, there have been many cases being expelled or boycotted because of not contributing to or paying debts from association funds. According to a questioned informant, there are associations in which funds are used to lend their members. However, at times of difficulties, these members spend all the money and are unable to pay back, though they still actively participate in all activities. Also, there are some, who are members of the management body, spending all their associations' funding but then resigning their membership. Another informant points out one example in which a sister of a commune's official refuses to contribute her share. The association's chairman then warns that commune official of expelling his sister from the association. These cases receive from bad reputation not only within their associations but the whole village.

2. Main activities

Regardless of having been registred or unregistred, every association has its own regulation on operation. These regulations can either be in written or non-written form (verbal consent).

As far as unregistred associations are concerned, activities are discussed and agreed upon in general meetings. Normally, activities are not initially shared among members. They are then gradually adjusted to suit all members. Being documented or not is not an indicator of how

strict an organization is or how respectable its members become. They are the direct contact among members, scope of operation and relations that speak louder than than papers.

There are associations established or restored to maintain traditional practices such as (Chess Guild, Cock Fighting Guild or Wrestling Guild etc.) There are associations formed just to satisfy social needs of their members (Schoolfellow Associations, Servicemen Associatons etc.) There are also associations founded due to newly arising needs (Badminton Club, Ping Pong Club, Tai Chi Club etc.) Therefore, it can be said that activities of voluntary associations aim to meet members' entertainment needs or serve community practices.

Friendship associations' activities aim at connecting members based on one common feature (Schoolfellow Associations). Associations of members who do the same job often conduct such activities as information exchange or capital circulation. However, these differences are just relative. In fact, although their different features can be found in their names, voluntary associations normally have the above-mentioned activities (entertainment, support, social exchange etc.). In general, activities of voluntary associations include: (i) functional activities (as in associations' names), (ii) visiting and supporting members, and (iii) feasting. With such activities, voluntary associations performing the functions that will be analyzed below will help answer the research question: why do people want to join voluntary associations?

2.1. "Functional" Activities

These activities are most obviously shown in interest-based associations organized in form of sport club. Sport clubs operate on daily basis. The badminton club in Dong Ky was founded in 1994 with 90 members. By 1999, its number of members increased to 183. At first, the club operated loosely. Soon, it became stronger since people realized that playing the sport was "*very useful, improving their health and fostering relationships*" (DQ43, 2008). Apart from

daily practices, on special occasions, the club holds competition and invites clubs from nearby communes to join.

There is a hamlet ping pong club that practices daily. It has 30 members, but only 15 exercise regularly since there are only 2 tables. At times, when there are too many members, they have to move and play in other members' houses. There is also a Tai Chi club practicing every evening, but not all members can join. Practicing Tai Chi has its nature as a free exercise for everybody, not only for members. The club arranges time and venue, and it is not obligatory for members to take part in.

Therefore, people can hardly distinguish between daily exercises and club activities. There is a hamlet art club which was founded in 2005. The club practices twice a year to prepare for festivals or whenever requested. In addition, established in 2004, a hamlet club of former soldiers had a busy year in 2007 with various activities. They paid visit and presented gifts to the hamlet's new recruits (about 2-3 per year). At the end of the year, the club members joined a veteran association to plant trees around the hamlet's cultural house, which was considered as a typical activity that year. This club, though not having many activities, always holds annual preliminary and summary meetings. According to the club's chairman, the organization of such meetings is decided by its regulation; therefore it is practiced even when there's not much to report.

In addition to sport activities, interest-based voluntary associations also serve public festivals and practices. Many of the associations only operate for a few festive days. A chess guild normally holds a chess tournament every March (on the occasion of the village festival 8th March). Two days prior to the festival, the guild prepares and buys anything necessary. And on the 12th, when the festival finishes, the guild has a feast hosted by the tournament organizer. Noticeably, the guild's members do not compete in the tournament. They only join matches in periodic get-togethers, normally after meals along with other activities such as playing cards.

In a chess guild, there is no rank hierarchy among its members since those admitted to the guild are not necessarily good at playing chess. Functional activities seem to be even looser in other guilds. Wrestling guilds, cork fighting guilds or bird-raising guilds only hold functional activities in festive days. They hold various entertaining activities for local people to enjoy. Their members are not necessarily excelled at wrestling, cork-fighting or bird-raising either. All they need is just a little interest. With such loose operational criteria, anyone could become a guild's member. And it seems that people choose to join an association or a guild not because of its advantages. It is simply because they would have the feeling of being a part of an organization.

Professional associations – associations for people doing the same job, though classified into a different categories, have the least functional activities. The existence of such associations in a commune of underdeveloped trade and services like Giao Tan has weakened the link among members. The associations of grinding service providers and shop-keepers contact each other mainly to discuss and set prices. These rare activities are often accidentally conducted in informal meetings in which a group of members, not all, are discussing something else (gas prices).

Popular gold and money guilds in Giao Tan play a role as funding guilds, serving local people's needs at times of difficulties. Most of the questioned informants are members of at least one gold or money guild. Members are from same neighbourhood or workplace. To admit a new member, heads of guilds need to consider how long he or she could retain their membership. And vice versa, those who want to join a guild need to put into account its head's prestige and financial capability.

For rural people, gold and money guilds are like loan funds that do not operate on legally binding rules, but on which that is locally called as "village relationships". Gold and money

guilds are flexibly organized credit organizations, in which members can negotiate to withdraw their shares at any time with less procedures and suitable interest rates.

The turn-taking interest paying mechanism and the fact that only well-off people (*“the poor dare not join the guilds”* (GT12-2007)) can join gold guilds have created a common sense among members. Therefore, once becoming members, people forever stay with the guild. Each guild decides different amount of share, but hardly does any one find people leave one and then join another for better benefits.

Operations of funding guilds in Giao Tan are of no difference compared to those recorded by Nguyen Dong Chi (1978b) or Nguyen-Marshall (2004) in the pre-1945 period. According to Nguyen Dong Chi, this form of support deeply bore the remnants of an underdeveloped and self-supplied agriculture-based society. Such remnants are now still popular and favoured in Giao Tan, where the existing agriculture hinders the development of cash transactions.

2.2. Visiting and supporting members

Visiting members and their family (husband/wife, children and parents) is one popular activity in almost all of voluntary associations. These associations spend their funds in supporting members and families. Visits are paid to sick members or on special occasions like funerals, weddings, house-warming ceremonies, longevity or full-month celebrations etc. It is based on an association's financial status that its members decide on whether to include family members in this activities, support amount and forms (cash or gifts).

For example, there is a hamlet former servicemen association, in which hospitalized members and their family (including his wife and children) are visited and presented with 1 kilo of sugar and 1 milk can. The association also pays visit when its members' parents (excluding parents-in-law) pass away. Offerings value at 70-80 thousand dongs including a wreath, incense,

candles. These activities, together with regulations on gifts and offerings, are quite popular in all other voluntary social associations.

Participating in such activities is how local people maintain their relationships in villages. A family with more visits paid is considered as the one in which its members have good relationships with others or hold high social positions. Therefore, on special occasions, being visited by other members is a value that voluntary associations bring to their members: *“The club always send representatives from the standing board to visit and present gifts to members’ families in special occasions”* (DQ43, 2008).

The fact that an individual joins many associations, clubs and guilds helps ensure the prestige of his and his family’s in the eye of others. *“When his parents are hospitalized, the hamlet bonsai and schoolfellow associations have to pay a visit”* (GT6, 2007). And he is evaluated by others to have good relationships (having more visitors means he is really “somebody” (having high social status) in the village). At times of difficulties, if one receives no support or encouragement, he will be isolated or questioned on his behaviour and morality. *“While people gather and support each other, he is left alone. That certainly makes him feel self-pity”* (DQ55, 2008). Hence, people participate in visiting activities to bolster their social relationships with others.

In the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan in particular, and other rural areas in the Red River Delta in general, visiting (relatives, schoolfellows...) not only is a common practice of rural life but also has become a man’s moral standard. The way people talk about those who have no relationship or connection with anybody bears obvious critical implications. They place their own interests above all and do not care for others. So they should be ashamed of themselves. *“It is very important to be respected by others, even those from other villages and communes. There are many high-ranking officials whose names are little heard. It’s good to be known by old people”* (DQ18, 2007). A prestigious and influential man is the one who has

good relationships in his family and neighbourhood. He has to participate in every business, both family and public ones. He has to be present, discuss and decide important matters of his family (funerals, weddings, house-building etc.)

However, too much participation in such activities of voluntary associations can sometimes lead to troubles. Normally, one is member of more than one association. So performing duties of an association that has a wide visit scope can become a burden to its members. For example, the provincial retiree's association has 20 members from Tu Son District. These members established a separate association for closer and better operations. Besides joining the provincial association's program, this association also holds different activities like visiting members' parents or going to their children's weddings.

Based on a simple calculation, one member of this association (taking into account activities of other associations that he is part of) have to attend several activities such as visiting, mourning, celebrating every month. Even, one might have to attend up to ten events, which cost him about one million dong (one hundred thousand dong each). Therefore, to participate in these associations, members have to prepare a reserved fund that is available to use when needed. At times when spending exceeds the reserve fund, members might have to sell rice, which is not rare in rural areas .

The interdependent and mutual support nature of such activities has always been considered as an important value by members of voluntary associations. According to the 2009-2010 Vietnamese Rural People Survey (Bui Quang Dung; Dang Thi Viet Phuong, 2011), it was confirmed that the majority of rural people recognize the importance of voluntary associations as they have such activities as visiting, encouraging, and celebrating on special occasions (funerals, wedding etc.)

Woodside (1971), in his study on voluntary associations in urban Vietnam in the colonial period, highlighted that these associations, while performing their functions of supporting their members, were once so familiar to the fact that there was some kind of protection from the “Great Family”. We believe that it was not by accident that voluntary associations were established or restored since the Doi Moi. The collapse of the state-centered planned economy and the restoration of household economy revived the “hierachy” which had long been the basis of families and other social institutions in Vietnam (Kervliet, 1995, p.404-05). Since then, association-based social relationships have become a real mainstay for rural people. Association members need the protection as part of a group.

2.3. Feasting

As usual, practices of voluntary associations are often associated with feasting. Feasting is compulsory to all voluntary associations and their members. It is often linked with the practice of deploying or summarizing activities of an association in a year. Feasting helps connect members. Feasting is regarded as an important activity to maintain practices of associations, without feasting, it can not be an association:

“Feasting is required by members in all associations. Members would complain if there is no such an activity as feasting. A few days ago, the association for former youth officials decided not to hold feasting events; but the decision was objected by its members. So the standing board had to withdraw its decision and held a feast” (GT25, 2008).

Feasting time is often decided by associations in advance. Bird raising guilds offer feasting on occasion of releasing birds, fighting cock guilds offer feasting at the end of spring festival. Chess guilds, bonsai associations, badminton clubs, pingpong clubs, volleyball clubs, Chinese chess clubs, etc. often offer feasting once or twice a year, normally in spring and at the end of

the year. Feasting is so significant that it is naturally associated with the names of associations or clubs, for example: fighting cock guild feasting, schoolfellow association feasting, same-age association feasting, etc. As for some associations, feasting is even their only activity. Dong Ky fighting buffalo guild used to be a guild of buffalo traders. Though this profession no longer exists, old buffalo traders and their descendents still assemble themselves in a guild. Every year, during festivals, they organize and celebrate a feasting event, which offers meals with buffalo's meats.

However, deciding a certain feasting day is the host's responsibility. To prepare for the feast, there is often a preparatory meeting held by all members. For a feast to be fully attended, the host has to decide the date and then consult all members about their attendance possibility. One or two days prior to the feast, the host invites other members to his house and discuss programs. At this meeting, members together build the list of invitees. Some associations only allow members to attend the event, while others expand their invitation lists to members' husbands and wives. Local authorities are invited by some. This matter is often discussed carefully since it directly affects members' contributions.

Except some associations which have abundant funding, generally, expenses for feasting are paid equally among members. The more people are invited, the more members have to pay. Therefore, inviting more people is often agreed by all members in years of special occasions (such as the 5th or 10th founding anniversary). At preparatory meetings, the number of feasting tables and dishes are also discussed and decided basing on available funding. If the host wants to offer more dishes to the menu, he needs to "have a word" with other members officially. People have to learn to "have a word" or "express an idea" in a standard norm. In many cases, the host's good will is refused since he does not "have a word" in the way he is supposed to do. The importance of "learning to have a word" is described as follow"

“Learning to make a speech or to reply to others’ speeches is important to everybody, since one may be asked to do so during a feast. Besides, people also have to learn by heart prayers, both at home or in temple” (DQ69, 2009).

In each association or guild, feasting is often offered on a turn-taking basis and held in its member’s houses. One member offers feasting in his/her house for a year and then another one will take over this responsibility in the following year. Chess guilds also prefer to organize turn-taking gatherings. A round starts from the oldest member in order to ensure that every member has a chance to offer feasting in his/her house at least once in his/her life. For example, this year, a feast is held in the house of a 71-year-old member and in the following year the event will be held in the house of a 70-year-old member and so on. As for same-age associations, because all members are at the same age, therefore feasting events are held through a lucky drawing. Or members can apply for organizing the event voluntarily as for some guilds or associations. In whatever form feasting events will be, every member of an association or guild will have at least a chance to offer one event in his/her house. A new round starts when the first round finishes.

Thanks to this turn-taking nature of feasting, all members share the same feeling during their turns: offering the best feast for all. It is widely perceived by many people that offering a feasting event in his/her house is an honour. Therefore, if a member refuses to host the event, giving such reasons as his wife is not home so no one is in charge of cooking, his turn will be immediately passed on to another member. *“It is costly for the host but everyone wants to do it instead of being reluctant or feeling uneasy” (DQ54, 2008).*

People carefully prepare for the feast and are eager for the day. *“Some even bury wine for years in preparation for his turn. It is an honour for members to host the event” (DQ62, 2009).* Therefore, while the cost for each stands at 100.000 dongs, the host only takes 20.000 dongs from other members. This symbolic amount is for face-saving purposes only.

In the past, the size of a feasting event used to be up to the hosting family. *“Thus, the next hosting family tends to offer at least the same size or even a bigger feasting event than the previous hosting family”* (DQ54, 2008). A questioned informant told us a story of a feast hosted by his father after Tet Holiday (Vietnamese Traditional New Year). During the Tet, his family did not make square cakes, but waited until the feast. *“It is often not as easy for the host as one may see in a feast’s size since he and his family has to tighten their budget to save money for the event”* (DQ54, 2008).

Afterwards, in order to avoid competition or envy, many guilds or associations set a rule on contribution since establishment or discuss a common way to organize a feasting event before it takes place. Nowadays, prior to the day the feast is offered, members organize a meeting to discuss how to organize and how much each member should contribute to the feast. People discuss and agree about the number and kinds of dishes and funding for each dish. Financial contribution shall be made by members and based on the real value of the feast. Some guilds or associations, which have big budgets, can lend money to earn interests and then use earned interests to cover the costs of their practices, including those of feasting. The average value of a feasting dish for 4 or 5 people in 2008 in Dong Quang village cost about 100-250,000 VND (varying from village to village).

Associations often set a norm for contribution to a feast. As for same-age associations of old people in Dong Ky village (over 51 years of age), contribution to a feast per person varies between 25-30 thousand VND; meanwhile as for those of younger group (below 51 years of age), contribution to a feast per person can be higher, from 30-50 thousand VND. As regard to a chess guild of Trang Liet village, a kilogram of pork is considered as a contribution norm. That means the hosting family is free to decide how to organize the feast but a total cost for a feasting dish per person is only equivalent to one kilo of fresh pork at the market price. For example, last year 1 kg of pork cost 30,000 VND, then people contributed an amount of 30,000

VND; but this year, 1 kg of pork increases to 50,000 VND, then they shall pay 50,000 VND to the host.

As for some associations, if the hosting family is a better-off one, they can offer a feast at a higher cost than required (for example, a required contribution norm for a feast is 30 thousand VND per person, they can offer a feast, which costs up to 50 thousand VND per person) but still ask invited members to pay for the agreed amount only. This good will is to express the hosting family's prestige towards other members – the witnesses responsible for the confirmation of the family reputation in the village community. This goodwill is sometimes not encouraged because some associations want to promote equality among members. They do not want to be treated “unfairly” with the hosting family but to have the share they contribute. In other associations, this act is up to the hosting family, ie. if he/she wishes to offer, they would be welcomed. *“So it is up to the hosting family to decide to offer good cakes, imported wines or canned beer for the feast. But we shall only make contribution up to the agreed amount”* (DQ54, 2008). However, even with such goodwill, the hosting family should “have a word” [có lời] to other members in advance if he/she wants to offer the feast that costs more than the required amount. *“If the hosting family wants to offer some boxes of canned beer, he/she needs to consult with us in advance. If we agree [when the feast is served, the hosting family] shall say that “today the feast is served at my house, so I have something here to offer you”. If the hosting family does not say that in advance, then we shall drink wines bought by the money we contributed”* (DQ54, 2008).

In Dong Quang, when a feast is organized at the hosting family, no matter big or small, it is usual that a feasting meal is reserved for the hosting family. This practice is a must. Costs for this feasting meal are shared among members of the association. Family members of the hosting family never enjoy the meal at the same time with other association members but shall eat after others finish their dishes. This is because they have to take care of food while others

are eating, or they are afraid that there might be not enough food for their guests. Children of the hosting family must be available to serve, for example, giving tissues and toothpicks to the guests, bringing cigarettes and tea, etc. Until others finish their meal, then the hosting family members can start enjoying feasting. In many cases, the day of the feast often coincides with the day, on which the hosting family organizes a party to invite relatives and closed friends to join. The host family can organize the feasting event at noon and then continue holding a party with their relatives or friends in the afternoon. On that day the whole hosting family shall try their best to show and demonstrate their hospitality. This is the time people build the image of theirs and their family in the eyes of their fellow villagers. The prestige of the whole family increases with number of guests visiting the host family on that day.

Meanwhile, in Giao Tan, an association's feast is often timed to coincide with the hosting family's party. The feast is a chance for members to exchange and build stronger connection, not only among members but also between their family members. Though each association has a norm of contribution for a feast (normally a minimum amount), the hosting family takes the money to buy food that is not available in the house. The host can contribute more to the feast with his/her homegrown food (chickens and vegetables). Besides, cost for drink is often paid by the host. Home-cooked wine is not as highly appreciated by others as bottled beer or softdrinks (products of modern social life). Therefore, to please the guests, the hosting family has to spend a certain amount of money for drinks. Other members, who are good at cooking, can offer a hand to the hosting family. Wives of members can also come and help the hosting family. Also, if a member is busy, then her husband can come and join the feast in stead. Prior to the feast, the hosting family offers the dishes to worship the family's ancestors. Members consider the feast as a family matter, not an official ritual of their association.

A feasting event of a same-age association in Dong Quang is typical for its ritual and religious nature. In Dong Ky village, a feast often starts with a ceremony, which is for the introduction

of the association before the village's tutelary genius [*Lễ trình Đổng canh*]. The ceremony is a big banquet, which often include a piece of boiled pork /chicken, sticky rice, and fruits. Depending on each association, the feasting event can either be big or small. Offering is brought or carried by the hosting member, elders (e.g. father or relatives of the hosting member) and some other members (on a voluntary basis) to a temple for ritual practices. At the temple, offering dishes are presented to the sacred altar, the temple's keeper and elders of the hosting member shall do ritual practices for offering (in Dong Ky, people, who are below an "elder" age, are not allowed to do offering practices), and others shall stand behind and pray. After having finished all practices, a part of offering dishes is given to the temple's keeper and the remaining shall be brought home. After that, the feast starts.

The performing of this ritual is not only important to same-age associations but also highly appreciated by their members. During such events, if a member is absent, his family member has to come to the hosting family to contribute his share (the money for the meal and offering). And "fortune" (offering left after worshipping ceremony and shared equally among members) is considered sacred by all.

"If he remembers, people will spare him "fortune". People will enjoy feasting only when all shares for absent members are set. It is regulated by same-age associations that offerings are to be ready by 10 a.m. The feast can start later, one or two hours afterwards" (DQ49, 2008).

It can be said that same-age associations in Dong Quang are characterized by the religious nature. Nguyen Van Huyen (1995) once noted the similar situation when talking about hierarchy in villages in North Vietnam: In order to build a strong hierarchy basis for an association, people make it an religious one. Whoever can satisfy material and financial requirements, he has to first hold a worshipping ceremony to the village's tutelary genius. His social status is then religious-oriented. This event is important if we may recall that one of the

most important functions of the village-based traditional practices and ceremonies (which do not belong to any spiritual practices of Buddhism or Christian) is the social protection and social control towards their villagers.

Comparing the importance and differences in a same-age association feast in particular and in the whole association in general with the almost non-existence of this association in Giao Tan , we shall realize that the compliance of principles of these ritual practices is the way to claim oneself to the village's community.

A feasting event is the time people meet and sit together for talking and exchanging information that has happened in their village. It is also the time people to learn about standards and maintain hierachy. The way people arrange seats in a feasting event has many implications rather than filling empty stomachs. *"Looking at the way people are arranged to seat around a feasting table, we can recognize positions of those people"* (DQ54, 2008).

For example, in a feasting table, one person shall sit in the middle while four others sit on both sides. The person sitting in the middle is the most important person at the feasting table. He can be the eldest person or a person of a higher family's branch of the eldest one at the feasting table. Sometimes the younger person might sit in the middle while the elders sit on the sides, which means there must be a blood relationship among them. This relationship arranges the way they sit. Otherwise it is believed that people do not respect the rule. *"If I sit in a wrong seat, people will not criticize me immediately but silently look down on me. Later on, this story will go around among people and I do not know. People think that I am impolite or rude, that I am just a junior but dare to take a senior's seat"* (DQ54, 2008).

True, feasting behaviour (or seating arrangement) has another function of reproducing hiererchy in the village community, in which age and blood relationship are criteria to classify one's position in an association. Seating arragement in such activities also reflect the status-

based arrangement once noticed by Jamieson (2000) "*The specific characteristics of these feasting activities are diverse and obvious symbol for hierarchy (...). Seating arrangement and dishes available to one serve as an undeniable evidence that he is the most respectful man in a village*" (p.266-67)

Many questioned informants claimed that "feasting now is different from what it used to be in the past. In recent 5-7 years, an ordinary meal is not significantly different from a feast". A research on the Vietnamese Northern rural society describes that villagers' living standard has considerably increased since the reform took place, especially emphasizing on the better quality of foodstuffs that are used by villagers during ordinary meals and special feasts (Luong Van Hy, 1993). Besides feasting events, feasting behaviour in general is regarded by villagers nowadays as a form of social participation. "*Friends often meet and invite each others for meals in restaurants. Eating and enjoying there. It is costly but it is the way I can be a part of the society*" (DQ25, 2007). Feasting is the time people meet, talk and exchange information about what has happened in their village. Feasting is an indispensable practice of an association for a number of reasons: relaxation, information exchange, hierarchy promotion etc. Feasting is the confirmation of the existence of a "community life". The fact that voluntary associations organize feasts on special occasions (festival, religious ceremonies etc) may help strengthen community spirit which is vital to a community life.

3. Participants

No survey has been done to list the exact number of voluntary associations in these two communes. However, basing on the above classification, the number of voluntary associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan is estimated to reach up to a three-digit number. Take same-age associations in Dong Quang for example. According to the local customs, these associations

are organized only when men reach the age of 18 (the age of adulthood and community duties). And they can join the associations until they are 49 or 51 (depending on each village). Therefore, each village can have an average number of 33 same-age associations for men who are eligible and wish to join. However, nowadays same-age associations are joined by local men since the age of 15. After finishing their community duties (usually at the age of 49 or 51), members of same-age associations can continue their membership until they reach 60 or even 70. Many 75 year old members still join the associations' activities and meet annually. Even, some members who cannot join activities due to age-related weakness refuse to leave the associations and ask their children to go instead.

These same-age associations, once for men only, now tend to be for women also who are over 35 so that they can with men shoulder the village's responsibilities. So at a certain age, usually from 35, there are one same-age association for men and one for women in a village. Since the early 2000s, there have found similar same-age associations in hamlets, which accept both men and women. To sum up, same-age associations are joined by both men and women ranging from 17 to 70 years of age or more in both village level and hamlet level. In fact, there are up to hundreds of same-age associations operating in a village. Similarly, if taking enlistment year or graduation year into account, in those two communes there are dozens of servicemen or schoolfellow associations. That is not to mention the vast number of associations of those who share the same interests, do the same job, or shared the same situation in the past. Besides, upon the establishment of an association, it is regulated that women can take part in the association's activities when their husbands are not able to attend. This means the association is for both men and women. Being asked about their membership status, women in Giao Tan claim their membership to the associations of which their husbands are members. In many interviews conducted in Giao Tan, when being questioned about reasons for joining an association, many said the husband-wife concensus was part of their decision (if either husband

or wife disagrees, then that family will not join). Unlike Giao Tan, Dong Ky sees a clear distinction between men and women.

It can be said that the quantity and the diversity of voluntary associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan enable every member to find him an association when needed. During our study in these two communes, it is not difficult to find a representative or a member of voluntary associations. According to most informants, they join at least one association. And the total number of associations that 103 surveyed informateurs join is 311. So on average each is a member of 3 associations. In the two communes, there are some that are members of 7 different associations, not to mention their membership in other political and social ones. Even when we try to reach those who are non members (to portrait their life), many of them still affirm that they are part of some associations (while others say they are not). It can be said that, the participation into voluntary associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan is popular.

Members of voluntary associations are very various and diverse. The diversity can be seen from the gender perspective. Most of members are male; however, women also take part in practices of associations and groups at village level. Same-age associations used to be the ones for male adults but now its membership has extended to female members. During village festivals, same-age associations for male members practice in a temple while their peer female ones practice in a pagoda. At the age of 30 onwards, after same-age associations organize a lot drawing event to distribute required contribution to social works, then two male and female associations of a village can join practices with each other. Besides, women also apply for membership of other voluntary associations like schoolfellow associations, friendship associations, Tai Chi club etc. *“Women now join many associations. There is at least one or two members of badminton club and ping pong club”* (DQ50, 2008).

The age range is very wide, from youth to elder. There are some age-based associations (e.g. same-age associations, schoolfellow associations, colleague associations, etc.). There are also

some associations that accept application for membership of everyone without any age limits (e.g. pingpong clubs, badminton clubs, fighting cock guilds, chess guilds, etc.). In the past, application for membership of same-age associations at the age of 18 (according to the lunar calendar) was regarded as early. But at present, with a better living condition, associations even accept application for membership at earlier ages. At present, many schoolfellow associations in Dong Quang are even established when members are still at school, and every year they organize feasting events and set up an organizational hierarchy. There are many associations, whose members are village's elders, for example, a chess guild of one village has half of its members at the ages ranging from 70 to 80. A village's cycling club has 87 members and most of them are elders, even an 87-year-old elder is still a member of this club.

In the following part, we shall portrait members and non-members of voluntary associations in the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan through studying and analyzing their reasons for joining.

3.1. Members

The diversity of voluntary associations attracts the participation of people from various residential groups. Becoming a member of an association (not to mention its activities) bears great significance: *"It is unacceptable for one not to join any association. He will be isolated and feel lonely"* (DQ12, 2007). However, an association's membership is so costly that not everybody can afford. Besides their periodic contributions, they have to participate in other important events of other members' families (funerals, weddings, etc.). Therefore, members of these associations must be "capable" ones. The term "capable" not only refers financial capability but also time and willingness one might have to participate in activities. "Members' living standard has been improved, so financial commitment is no longer a problem. Being a member of a group can help one relax and enjoy life better." (DQ36, 2008). In Giao Tan, "being capable" means having a stable source of income, which is specially important in the local

current socio-economic context. Therefore, pension receivers and even policy beneficiaries (invalids, sick soldiers, Orange Agent victims, etc.) who receive monthly allowances are often mentioned as enthusiastic members of voluntary associations. Others may have to run some kind of businesses or services if they don't want to miss out on their membership. *"I'm now a member of 4 or 5 associations. If I didn't have a stable income, I would quit. But if I can live for another 10 years, I think I have to quit since I will no longer be able to make money by then."* (GT20, 2008).

Many often talk about joining an association as an honour that is not always achieved by all: *"A member of an association will have a uniform and a member card to wear, which makes him proud when going out"* (DQ42, 2008). For many, joining an association is also to show off. *"Many people joining various associations and guilds just to show off (...). Some once told me that he was a member of 5 different guilds, becoming the most honourable man in his village. (...)"* (DQ18, 2007).

It is more honourable for a member if he or she becomes a head of an association: *"Leading an association has affirmed a member's status in the village community"* (DQ18, 2007). A head of a same-age association once told us that at times his job could be as hard as that of a local official: *"There was a time I worked very hard, even harder than the commune's people committee chairman. There were 113 men under my management"* (DQ36, 2008). If one cannot make it to the head of an association, having a member card is also honourable.

"One may not have bonsai in his house, still wants to join the province's bonsai association since he will be granted with a member card, which is to be worn during meetings. Owning the card makes him loved by others" (DQ42, 2008)

In a family of four children, who are all soldiers, if three of them join former soldier associations, the last one must try to find his. When their parents are sick, members of their

associations shall pay visits. That's rural life. Having visitors on special occasions is such an honour. *"One might feel self-pity if he or his family is not visited by any"* (GT29, 2009).

Social linkage and exchange are among the reasons for joining voluntary associations. People apply for membership to share social stories. Playgrounds are where daily information is updated, especially in rural environment. Therefore, a chairman of a badminton club, who is also a businessman in Dong Ky, highlighted the importance of inviting persons of high social reputation to join his club.

"There are valuable pieces of information. One may not know if he is not a regular member. Joining regular exercises can help one get updated on social and market information, which is also one reason why people meet" (DQ43, 2008).

Joining a playground, members stand to benefit from expanded relationships. It is costly but brings about more opportunities for members to foster their social relationships. Sometimes, members can find business partners while playing badminton. A chairman of an same-age association cum a commune official said that being members of associations have helped him meet and work with many others. *"As an official, my work is more favourable when I join associations. I have more opportunities to meet people and they offer me great help"* (GT18, 2007).

In addition to the above explanations, some join voluntary associations in both Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes for no specific reason. A bonsai association has 100 members, out of which about one third know about bonsai (as told by one member). Members of associations are diverse, including all kinds of people, people with or without knowledge about bonsai also apply for membership. Or those who are not interested in wrestling or chess also apply for membership of these respective associations. Hence, a membership of an association does not require people to share a common feature or interest. The matter here is *"just to apply for a*

membership of an association. (...) Most of people do this just because they want to be a part of an association. Feasting events are organized twice a year (...) and these events are central to most members" (DQ18, 2007). Or for example, people apply for membership of an association of classical drama *"I do not know how to sing classical drama but if there is a feast, I will join and I am willing to pay in"* (DQ58, 2009). In some other cases, people apply for membership of an association because their parents are or used to be members of that association. So, what matters to members is not which associations they are members of, but being a part of a group. *"They feel that they cannot live or exist without integrating into the community"* (DQ65, 2009).

3.2. Non-Members

Despite the variety of voluntary associations that serve different needs of rural people, there are cases that are not members of any associations. According to current members of voluntary associations, in these two communes the number of people who does not apply for membership of any association is very small, which is generally not wanted. Non-members are often farmers of lower social status, who are impoverished, have poor relationships and not many friends. They are often described as: *"Poor people have to work very early in the morning. They do not have time to join bonsai or cycling associations"* (DQ42, 2008).

They may face with financial difficulties and are not "capable" of applying for membership: *"They are usually farmers who live in extreme dificulties. Sometimes they don't even have enough rice to eat"* (GT11, 2009). Poor people are unable to join not only because they are not financially capable, but also because they don't have time for activities. There are some who used to members but decided to quit since they could not afford all activities held in their associations. *"They can not afford such activities. Whether in big or small events, they need to contribute"* (GT34, 2009).

Not participating in association could be possibly because one are not willing to integrate into his surrounding environment. There are some cases that *“people do not want to be in a crowded place with many other people. Some people only want to go back home with their families as soon as they finish their daily works and therefore they do not want to apply for membership of any associations”* (DQ42, 2008). In such a case, personal characteristics of people in question are referred to explain their behaviours and actions: *“when he was a child, he did not play with other children. (...) He only works and goes home after business hours. (...) He can not communicate well with other people”* (DQ42, 2008). Or because *“he is so shy and does not want to get involved”* (DQ12, 2007). Generally, this kind of people is often regarded by the current members as not-well-educated.

“Some are not well educated, while some are not integrating. They normally do not know how to talk or contribute to conversations. Such cases are not rare in our society” (DQ69, 2009).

Or it may be because he refuses to make their contributions so he is expelled from the association. Many questioned informants told us a story about a man who lives so isolatedly that he is not considered as a neighbour¹ by others . He is a highschool graduate and a retiree. He relies so vaingloriously on his friend who is an influential district official that he refuses to take part in any association. The neighbour group mobilized its members to contribute to building a road, but he rejected, explaining that he saw no point in building the road since his house is right at the alley gate. *“That means he publicly opposes the whole group. He will be boycotted”* (DQ54, 2008). Life will be very hard to those being isolated by other villagers. They will never be invited to any event and considered as neighbours. Without any written

¹ Note that neighbourhood group is also a voluntary associations, it also requires its members to respect regulations and obligations as well as assures them certain favours as membership.

announcement, his story will be silently passed on from one to another across the village. Therefore, the isolation of an individual may push him into the situation of “extreme loneliness”

The above-mentioned situation is related to a special perception of farmers about levels of social relationship of the real society: family/kinship/village/commune. According to informants’ comments, it is perceived that there is a clear separation between family and society. Those people in question, who are not members of any associations, are classified into a group of people “*who do not know how to get involved in society’s works*”, “*not contact with the rest of the society*”, or in summary “*not integrate into the society*” (DQ42, 2008). People emphasized the weaknesses in terms of capacity and resources (ability for communication and money) of people, who refuse to get involved in society’s works but prefer to enjoy life within their own families. Meanwhile, the society is a place, where educated and better-off people want to be a part of. “*Only by getting involved in social practices does one learn more about the social cultural environment*” (DQ43, 2008). This separation between family and society can be attributed to a difference between a social space of family, kinship, village, and commune. A study in rural areas of both the Red River and Mekong River delta regions (Bui Quang Dung, 2002) reveals a completely-contrastive imitation of this spirit. In which, as for a farmer, “commune” means society (“*applying for membership of other associations means being a villager of another village or citizen of another society. Going out of the commune is joining into a society, I think*”- (Bui Quang Dung, 2002: p. 47). Commune or society, is a social and political space, which is different from that of village; especially where farmers feel unsecured or unprotected. A difference in attitude of rural people, when he assigns the society (which is opposite to the village) a positive meaning, with regard to the above-mentioned topic, has a significant importance and implications about the origin and nature of “civil forces” in Vietnam at present.

4. Sub-conclusion

The flexibility in organizational structure of voluntary associations has brought about the feeling of closeness, familiarity and less constraint. Members also take turn to host and shoulder their association's works in a year, which makes a voluntary association not only a place where rural people can meet, support and exchange with one another, but also a place where they learn and practice principles of a community life. Voluntary associations are where people find or at least feel that they are part of a crowd and members of a group.

Guilds and associations try to maintain and promote an equal relationship regarding benefits and duties among members. Therefore, an voluntary association's operation mainly depends on the financial status of its members. No matter how their operation funds are mobilized, voluntary social associations are quite united in the organization of such activities as visiting, encouraging, celebrating different events in their members' life. This feature gives voluntary association an advantage over official ones. Rural people have to take part in various activities to foster their relationships with others. This fact not only reflects the support among members, but also helps them avoid being judged by others for not participating in the community life.

Feasting is the most popular and important activity to most of the voluntary associations. This activity is greatly supported by members. In Giao Tan, a feast is normally held at home with less rituals, whereas in Dong Quang, this activity is more religious and has become an integral part of a village's customs. Feasting offers people opportunities to learn about standards and maintain hierarchy. And following these principles is how people affirm their participation in village community life.

The interest in collective life within a village and the establishment of exchanges among members have limited rural residents' activities within guilds or associations at village level, or even hamlet and neighbour levels. The distinction between spaces within and outside a

village is consistently reflected via social behaviors of rural residents. Social identification space of the rural population, along with their primary relationships, has yet to go beyond the bounds of a village.

CHAPTER FOUR:

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SPACE

1. Social order

Social order reproduction is clearly demonstrated through activities and principles of voluntary associations, especially the same-age associations.

1.1. Maintaining village regulations

Under various forms, rural villagers associate themselves by their distinctive roles and functions to contribute to the operation of the village. These activities are mainly among male members. When a boy reaches his maturity, (17-18 years old), on a certain day as stipulated by the village regulations, he has to give offerings to the village to be officially registered in the village register book. This registration, accordingly, enables him to get public land distribution and perform community services such as dam embankment, guarding, ritual services, tax duties, labour duties and military services (Nguyen Duc Nghinh, 1978). Long-held organizations, like ones with hereditary nature or ones that serve ritual festivities in Dong Quang, often set certain principles in maintaining the village's traditional activities.

In Dong Ky village, every 18-year-old or older male members shall join the same-age association divided into different same-age groups. Only native villagers are admitted to these associations, or they must be the village member in-law for at least three generations or more. Outsiders are not entitled. People "*must participate [in the same-age association] because it is regulated by the village*" (DQ18, 2007). It is regulated that you as one of its members are obliged to perform village activities. Holding the same-age association membership an establishment for its participants to bear and fulfill the obligation to the people. "*Taking part*

in the same-age association is a must no matter you like it or not. (...) Without joining the association will make you alienated. It will be weird if you don't while others do" (DQ18, 2007). Taking part in the association is considered as a preparatory process for social integration in the village. You have to get used to the code of conduct, the order and hierarchy in the village which are sometimes inconsistent with the administrative regulations at the commune level.

The pressure of public opinion prevents members from leaving the association. If someone did, he would get bad reputation for the rest of his life. He will be judged either on the money issue (if he does not belong to the affluent class) or contemptuous attitude (if he belongs to the affluent class). That bad reputation does not go with him only but with his family, his relatives and his descendants as well. *"There was a guy who just went to the America but still had to send his son to attend in his place. It must be like that. The association is really powerful because it represents social norms; you will be in big trouble if you do not follow"* (DQ18, 2007).

The criteria for a person to become a member of the same-age association are based on whether he is one of the villagers and how correctly he identifies his real age. Such self-evident criteria (whoever lives in the village is a villager and there is barely anyone living without knowing his age¹) allow the association to admit to it a broad spectrum of members from the same village, born in the same but varying in their *"social engagement."* For those who are less socially engaged, becoming a member of the same-age association (the association is closely linked to the collective obligations within the village) is an honour, a chance for them to fulfill their responsibility and have a say in the village. And for those with broader social networks, they

¹ Such standards seem to be so simple, but in fact there were certain tensions over identifying whether a person is a native villager or not. In addition, misidentifying the age (due to the differences between the solar and lunar calendars, or simply not remembering the date of birth) caused troubles to individuals and plunged them into the state of "no social position." We will provide details about this event another section.

are not interested in the association or their involvement is somehow cursory. However, “*each region has its own customs and traditions*” [*dat le que thoi- When in Rome, do as the Romans do*]. When being a member of the community, an individual himself is to adhere to the provisions of that community.

In Dong Quang village, that social pressure spares no one, even incumbent officials. It is reasoned like this, He may be an official everywhere he goes, but when he comes back to the village, he is a villager. He works as an official, but still has to live “*among the people*” (DQ36, 2008). This attitude prevails not only in the same-age association, the organization inherent in the traditional society, but also among many other different types of voluntary associations. Still according to the aforementioned informant, the incumbent officials participating in associations and other voluntary organizations (alumni association, former youth volunteer association, cycling club, etc.) behave quite “reasonably”, none of them show the self-centeredness or disrespect for the organization’s customs.

From the perspective of “pressure” from the village on the participation of the members, the same-age association is a special case. The association differs from other voluntary associations by its long history in the village society. In the name of preserving and promoting the old traditions and cultural values of the village², it keeps on maintaining the organization that serves every member of the community. Like all other social institutions existing within the village, the same-age association is to “reinforce” dimensions of the rural society. For newer organizations formed after the *Doi Moi*- Renovation, their members do not experience such obvious social pressures (in the name of village regulations). However, field observations indicate another attitude hidden behind the “voluntary” participation of the people, which

² Overall, the informants in Dong Quang all feel proud that their village still manages to preserve the same-age association, a product of the history. People in the northern rural areas tend to take pride in their village’s long-standing traditional values (Dong Quang commune) and seem to be unhappy to acknowledge that their commune has just been recently established (Giao Tan).

drives the insiders to take part in the social organizations. It is not totally coincident that the thought of participating to “catch up with friends” was implied in many conversations. Maintaining individual dignities (face-saving) in the community must also be a social pressure. In extreme cases, the so-called “dignities” can be attached with greater importance; they can help shape the group’s identities and traits of its participants.

This can be seen from the observation of several associations such as badminton, bonsai associations, etc. The characteristics of such associations (in Dong Quang) are that their members are mostly influential and economically well-off people. In fact, these groups are mostly related to the households in the furniture manufacturing business, the more economically successful population in the commune. Besides the officials, part of the political “elites” in rural areas, there exists another section rising from power (or wealth) that is shaping itself as the social elites here. For this group, taking part in the badminton and bonsai clubs, etc. (those that require the participants to be ‘affordable’ to the high costs and the way they are played is somehow alienated to the rural lifestyle) is a way to build the group’s identities and personal traits; their associations are “*distinctive playgrounds*” - an implied comparison with those of the commune officials (DQ43, 2008). They may speak much about the “benefits” from the participation in and the organization of friendly matches with other clubs (information exchange, business partner search, etc.), but in fact, the shaping of group identities (as part of rural elites) is the essence in the inner mind of members. A club member (the owner of a household timber business), after sharing about the “benefits,” revealed that in reality the organization of friendly matches with neighbouring communes (assumed to expand the social contacts) is just intermittently conducted.

The two following events in Giao Tan commune further illustrate the recent comment from another angle. In this commune there are associations and unions related to all occupations and rituals, but there is no same-age association (as in the case of Dong Quang). This may be traced

back to the history of the village: the area originally belonged to a new coastal strip between Nam Dinh and Thai Binh provinces, established by the land reclamation activities of Nguyen Cong Tru in the early years of the 19th century. The same-age association, an organization associated with the tradition of the old village deep into the delta, due to various reasons, had no time to be re-established in this new land. The difference among associations in these two research sites is that in Dong Quang, criteria for participation are simplified to the baseline (to encourage more participants); then in Giao Tan, candidates must meet very specific and unique criteria. For example, at least applicants have to finish the secondary school to be able to join the secondary school student association; or they must have joined the army to be admitted to the former serviceman association; or stricter, people must be officials to be members of the official/cadre association, etc. These strict criteria have led to the situation that some people do not fall into any group, or there are too few criteria for participation in more than one association³. Therefore, they had to set up for themselves a new organization. The case of “the herdsmen association” and “the cat association” founded in Giao Tan according to the age group model of the same-age association are the results of this fact. The herdsmen association includes members who took care of buffalos and cows together in their childhood; a person can be 1-2 years older or younger than the others. The cat association gathers members who were born in 1951 (the year of cat in the lunar calendar) (GT20, 2008; GT07, 2007).⁴

The second event is related to the “official/cadre association” in Giao Tan. According to analysis of voluntary associations and organizations in the two communes, in Giao Tan commune alone, there are 12 associations of former officials/cadres (among 35 associations), e.g. the medical staff association, land administration staff association, women official

3 Membership is fully determined when a person become member of more associations rather than of a particular association.

4 From the perspective of the others in the village, the nature of this association is very funny because members do not have adequate schooling; they cannot join the association of secondary and high school students. This leads them to the establishment of the association for people born on the same zodiacs. In some villagers’ opinions, they are not in favor of these associations because their criteria are not consistent.

association, key commune official association, commune secretary association, deputy party secretary association, commune military officer association, commune youth union official association, etc. (See list in Chapter 2). This is one of the clearest differences between the two study sites. In Dong Quang, there are no such associations for officials. Further study on the case of Dong Quang also confirms there is no tendency that the local officials mainly concentrate in some associations. The question is whether the existence of a vast array of associations in Giao Tan is the legacy of the class division principle in the old time between rural managers (10-scale hierarchy) and normal villagers (Nguyen Van Huyen, 1995, pp. 349, 409); or more recently, of the distinction among social classes, in which peasants are at the lowest bottom and officials (leaders) at the top (Do Thien Kinh, 2011).

In comparing this event with the participation of business people into the voluntary associations in Dong Quang, we can see evidence for the differences related to the level of development of these two communes: The purely agricultural economy in Giao Tan still serves as a pretty solid foundation for the existence of organizational stereotypes and traditional social institutions. Moreover, many officials at Giao Tan while interviewed stressed that their participation in voluntary associations comes from the management reasons as well. When joining voluntary organizations, there are many things (indicating the policies and resolutions of the commune) that can be exchanged in an easier and more efficient way thanks to the brotherhood in the same association. They also find it easier to communicate the policies and decisions to the people through such organizations, thus gaining more support and consensus from the people (GT01, 2009; GT06, 2007; GT11, 2009; GT45, 2009).

1.2. Equality and in-turn service

Voluntary associations (based on willingness of members) are in compliance with the following paradigm: registration book (or simply a piece of paper listing names of members, addresses, telephone numbers (if any)); the role of the annual host and annual rotation of the

person in charge are based on the order of registration, or lot-drawing, or the negotiation among members; there are several parties each year with equal contribution from members, etc. Such rules of voluntary associations, including the same-age association⁵, express faithfully the principle of “equality” of the association life today in rural communes in northern Viet Nam⁶. We will look at how this equality of these activities is shaped.

Firstly, throwing feasts is the basic activity of voluntary associations, which is paid much attention of their members. This activity has been mentioned quite thoroughly in Chapter 3. Regarding the relevance of the current topic, we will only take the example of the same-age association (in Dong Ky village) because of its distinctive features. As a rule, feasts are usually prepared twice a year, depending on the young or the elderly same-age groups. The same-age group of the elderly (52 years old or more) often throw feasts in lunar February and September, at the same time with the festive activities of the village. The young same-age group (from 18 to 50 years old⁷) usually holds feasts in the lunar January and August, also on festive associations of the village. Normally, the first feast is held with the presence of the elderly members as honour guests (often members that deeply understand the village regulations). The honour guests will divide members of the same-age group into different *Giap*(s), which is the form of classification of men in line with the clans in the village.⁸

5 In Dong Quang, the same-age association holds lot-drawing twice a year. The first is to identify the people who will be responsible for the village affairs. This drawing is usually done when the members are about 35 years old. The person in charge is selected from this draw. The second drawing is conducted immediately after the first feast that marks the registration of a new member (usually when he is 18). This drawing is to identify the sequence of number that decides who will host the feast of the same-age group and be responsible for the activities of the group in the following year.

6 Nguyen Tu Chi (1980) considers this “equality” as an aspect of the “village democracy” in traditional society.

7 When reaching 51, the first stage of the old age (festive period), these elder members are responsible for activities in festivals, taking care of ritual practices in the village temple and pagodas. In that year, they do not host the feast; instead, the group will use the common fund to treat the whole village, inviting senior villagers and inform them about the plans in the coming year.

8 By the village convention, Dong Ky is divided into 4 “Giaps” namely Doai, Dong, Thuong, Tien. Each “giap” corresponds to some certain clans. At the early establishment of the village, based on the number of male members in the clans, they divided the clans equally into 4 areas (initially, there were 36-37 males/ area). This way of division is kept unchanged today, but there are big differences in the number of males in each “giap.” Currently, Giap Doai of the Duong clan is the biggest in the village.

The ritual of the first feast begins with the offerings. These include salty and plain foods such as a piece of pork/ a boiled chicken, steamed rice, flowers and fruit. The food depends on each same-age group. The offerings then are carried to the village communal house by the host, the elderly (fathers, uncles or relatives) and others. Here, the offerings are presented on the holy altar then the communal house keeper and the elderly in the family of the offering givers will conduct the ceremony (in Dong Ky, when the ceremony finishes, part of the offerings is given to the communal house keeper; the rest is taken by the same-age group for partying). The ritual ceremony in the communal house only takes place within the morning. By rules, members are to join hands in preparing the feast; however, due to the current availability of catering service, the host often takes the whole responsibility for the feast, and some close members in the group may come to help. The host may also ask his relatives for support. These supporters will stay by and share the party with the group. Also at the first feast, a lot-drawing is held. This is solely to identify the host for the next time, having nothing to do with the appointing officials of the association. The ceremony of presenting offerings of the same-age group is considered a significant stage to inform the villagers about the existence of the group. Since then, the group is formally acknowledged by the villagers. Also by then, the members of the group are called King's Chariot Support men.

Before the first feast, people often hold a meeting at the host house (which usually takes place on the evening before). The participants of this meeting are not fixed, mainly based on voluntary participation. In the meeting, people often consider the number of guests, procedures, votive offerings, food, and financial contribution (if any). Depending on the form of fund contribution, people will decide whether to make new contribution or take out some money already in the fund to pay for the feast. For associations with large fund (typically tens of millions Viet Nam dong), members may agree that part of the fund should be used for the feast. For those with modest funds, this meeting will decide on the amount of money per

serving. The host will base on that to prepare the food for the feast. For members of the same-age association, to be the host is a great honour, it is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. Therefore, many hosts tend to prepare more food than agreed though they still collect the right amount of money as announced. For example, the host will spend VND 50 thousand per serving although it is agreed in the meeting that each serving costs VND 30 thousand and the host will still just charge each serving VND 30 thousand; the additional spending on food is paid by the host. However, this is not always encouraged by same-age groups. People assume that when they go for the feast, they eat on their money and do not expect anyone to pay for their eating. In an informant's words, "*I pay for my food and do not want other guys to pay for me. That is my viewpoint.*" (DQ50, 2008). Another respondent, also in Dong Quang, said more about the spirit of "equality" in this financial contribution:

We have regulations to prevent the race among members. It is ok if you are affordable, but what if you are not. It'll be a huge problem. If we allow the race, some will serve the feast with unlimited Western or Eastern famous drinks. For those who cannot do that, they feel very upset. So, it is best to place this issue under control. Due to such control, now if we want some cans of beer⁹, we have to discuss that before with other members. If it's ok, the host will say, "I am the host today, please let me prepare beer." If the host does not say so in advance, other members will not use the beer. They will only drink what they agree at the meeting the night before. That is the way we control the race." (DQ54, 2008)

The group does not encourage the host to pay more money than usual for the feast, which means spending more than the contribution of other members. It should be noted that people

⁹ In rural areas, due to the popularity of the self-supply production and the scarcity of cash, things bought in money are more appreciated than home-made ones. In this case, canned beer is considered better than alcohol made by villagers. The treating of beer (instead of alcohol) shows the host's respect for the same-age association. But it can also be interpreted as the host is upstaging. In many cases, this is not recommended. Similarly, eating-out is more appreciated because it is paid in cash.

here are very proficient in market prices. Looking at the food on the table, they can quickly estimate the value. For some punctilious members, although the host has had the words before, they will automatically calculate the real value of the feast and make contribution on equal shares. For example, when they find that its costs VND 50 thousand per serving while it is previously agreed at VND 30 thousand per serving, they will contribute VND 50 thousand. If the host does not take the money, they'll put that in to the fund. Moreover, the organization of the feast with more money than agreed may cause difficulties for the next host if that person is not economically well-off. People try to put a limit on financial contribution in order to encourage the participation of all members, regardless the rich or the poor. A poor person, if cannot participate in the feast (because they are not affordable), will get bad reputation for the rest of his life; this bad name even goes to his descendants which goes as *"he cannot even treat the same-age group a meal."* (DQ42, 2008). In case the same-age group agrees with the overspending for the feast, the host must still "have a word" with the group members in advance. This reality is common among most of voluntary associations in Dong Quang commune, not just the same-age association. The principle is priority is paid to economically needier members and the upstaging is not encouraged!

While the principle of "equality" is common in Dong Quang commune where the income from furniture business makes people financially-secure, it is not as popular in Giao Tan, an agricultural commune with relatively-low per capita income (according to official statistics) compared to the average in the Red River Delta. Here, contrary to the attitude of the people in Dong Quang, if the host wants to spend more on the feast of voluntary associations (in Giao Tan there is no real same-age association like in Dong Quang), others will not raise any opposition; they even encourage that.

Competing to sponsor the feast does not exist here. At the meeting, we raise the issue that everyone is free to sponsor more for the feast. The group will accept the support.

If not we should suggest. We know who have money. For guys who don't, it is impossible to make more suggestion. (GT26, 2009)

It should be noted that the living standard in Giao Tan is lower than in Dong Quang, and the eating-out (including reception meals of committee officials) is rare. While the researchers were in this commune, sometimes they were invited to have dinner with the locals; and the meals were always at the hosts' houses. Meanwhile, "eating out" is usual in Dong Quang. They get together quite regularly, sometimes for no special occasion, and the participants are related to various kinds of social relations such as friends, neighbours, receptions, etc.

Under various forms, rural residents associate together by their individual roles, functions to contribute to the operation of the village. The rotated responsibility and community services make the prime principle of almost all institutions of the village including the neighbourhood, relatives, ancestors, voluntary groups and associations. Organizations that have long history, like the hereditary organizations, or the ones that serve festive activities in Dong Quang, often set certain principles for its members in maintaining traditional activities of village. There are quite many festivals and other ritual systems in the village and all voluntary associations are involved in these activities. In Giao Tan, due to its young history, community activities and festive rituals are fewer and they do not put any pressure of contribution on participants in the name of villager. Voluntary associations are set up instead to enrich the cultural events and festivals. Thanh Tam dance group, for example, consisting of young women, is led by a dedicated person with festive activities collecting other local dances then teaching them to members of the group. Annually, on the occasion of the village festival, the group comes and hosts the performance in order to maintain the cultural and festive activities of the village.

Many voluntary associations even operate for just some days during the village festivals. The chess club organizes competitions for villagers in lunar March every year. Two days before that, members of the club are assigned with different tasks for the competition such as sweeping

the yard or purchasing things. Members of the club do not compete in the festival; they just host the event as an entertainment activity for the people. When the festival ends, the club throws a party and the host is responsible for this party. Other associations like wrestling guild, cockfighting club, bird association, etc. operate on the same basis. They consider their participation in the village festivals and successfully fulfill their responsibility to serve the people as an honour a way to fulfill their responsibility to the village.

1.3. "Position removal" [Số ngôi]

The uniqueness of the same-age association deserves a separate thorough analysis, for this association shows special features concerning the in-turn collective services mentioned above. Joining the same-age association is considered as the preparation for individuals to join the village life. In broader sense, according to the village convention, men when reaching 18 years old start to join the three-level same-age association consisting of "Ban Cha", "Ban Truong", and "Ban Khanh tiet." "Ban Cha" is the group to include the youngest same-age members; therefore, it is often responsible for labour jobs when required such as carrying the coffin, digging the grave in a funeral in the village, or doing chores in other events. "Ban Truong" is responsible for specific activities of an area in the village, for example a residential area or a production team. Reaching the age of 49 (in Trang Liet and Binh Ha) or 51 (in Dong Ky), the most important time in life of a man, same-age association members are entitled to joining "Ban Khanh tiet" (Festive Board). At the age of 52 (in Dong Ky village) and 50 (in the villages of Trang Liet and Binh Ha), the men there are recognized "senior," i.e. belonging to the group of the elderly, who, according to village customs, are respectfully referred to as "top people." As a member of the "Top people," a man is free of all "collective services" of the village and can participate in village meetings to discuss "village important affairs." It should be further noted that only when recognized as "senior" can a man participate in the worship activities held at the village temple and communal house. Before that, if they want to worship at these holy

places, the worshipers must ask the temple keeper to help with the rituals. Therefore, the same-age association is an organization showing the process of “advancement” of the male members in the village. In this organization, members have to get familiar with the code of conduct, the order and hierarchy of the village life and join the in-turn collective service activities¹⁰.

There is slight difference in the system (groups of men of the same age) mentioned above among the three villages of Dong Ky, Trang Liet and Binh Ha (Trang Liet and Binh Ha used to be one village; therefore, they have the same name and the regulations for this association). In Dong Ky village, in practice, young men begin to join the same-age association when 18 years old and end the membership at the age of 51 as they reach the “Khanh tiet” (festive) age, recognized as “senior” and no longer have to shoulder collective services in the village. However, in Trang Liet and Binh Ha, men join the same-age association when 25 and end the membership earlier than in Dong Ky. In these two villages, a 50 year-old man is counted as “senior.” However, in practice, in all these villages, men often join the association earlier and end much later than the prescribed ages. The number of same-age groups (sub-associations) is various, amounting to the hundreds. And the number in Dong Ky village is higher due to its high population in the commune (Dong Quang commune has the population of more than 18,000 people; Dong Ky village alone accounts for more than 13,000 people; the rest (5,000 people) are divided among the two villages of Binh Ha and Trang Liet). Normally, the number of members of a same-age group in Dong Ky village is around 100 people. Meanwhile, in Trang Liet, the number is just 20-25 people. In Binh Ha village, with the population of about 1,000 people, some same-age groups do not have any or only 5-7 members. Due to the high number of members, in Dong Ky village, it is not necessary to form subcommittees (Ban Cha,

10 Nguyen Tu Chi (1996) when discussing traditional society also saw that the society is “bound by this particular friendship among people of the same social conditions. This same age friendship, in many localities, led to the formation of Hoi dong nien (same-age association), whose members mostly gather to have fun.” (pp. 56-57)

Ban Truong, Ban Khanh tiet) as in Trang Liet or Binh Ha villages. Each same-age group in Dong Ky village is responsible for all the jobs assigned by the village without having to share the responsibility with other same-age groups.

Same-age groups are classified into the primary and secondary groups, shouldering the *village jobs* by drawing the lots, often conducted when the members are 35-40 years old. The lot-drawing is also conducted from higher to lower levels. In Dong Ky village, due to the large number of same-age groups, the village still maintains the lot-drawing according to “Giap,” (classification of men in line with the clans in the village). In Dong Ky, there are now 4 “Giaps”: “*Giap Doai*,” “*Giap Tien*,” “*Giap Thuong*,” and “*Giap Dong*.” This method of classification may have been formed based on areas where the clans were previously distributed more evenly in the village areas and ensured the equal number of men. Now, the clans intermingle in different areas of the village while the classification still takes effect; therefore, Giap at present does not depend on the areas nor the equal number of men. The lot-drawing conducted among Giaps, therefore, must ensure that all clans have their representatives in village activities. Currently, there exist large Giaps (like Giap Doai of the Duong Clan, Giap Tien of the Vu Clan) and also very small Giaps (such as Giap Dong and Giap Thuong including smaller clans). These Giaps, when the drawing the lots, still select four equally important chiefs for the village events. Therefore, regardless of the big or small clans, they all have their representatives and are equally responsible for the village services. Once more, this fact reflects the principle of equality and in-turn service in the organization of collective activities.

During the lot-drawing ceremony, same-age groups are to invite most “senior” people in the village to supervise the drawing. There are two rounds of lot-drawing. The first round is conducted among Giaps to find out the four chiefs of the Giaps. Then, 12 people are selected including the first, second, and third people of each Giap. These 12 people are the “Quan Dam Noi,” or Interior Affairs Board (to distinguish it from “Quan Dam Ngoai,” aka “Quan Dam

Den” (the Black Group), including people ranking the 13th downwards in same-age groups when they reach the “Khanh tiet” (festive) age. After selecting the 12 “Quan Dam Noi”, same-age groups continue to draw the lots to classify the members into First, Second, Third, and Fourth boards. He who picks No. 1 is classified into the First Board (Head of Khanh tiet, or festive, Board); those who picks No. 2 are in the Second Board (Deputy Head of Khanh tiet Board); No. 3 and No. 4 are in the Third and Fourth Boards. When reaching festive age, the four heads of the Giaps are the Red Board members (wearing red from head to toe when discussing village affairs or joining village events). The four up-runners of the Giaps are the Blue Board members, in charge of the incense offering at the temple. The four third people of the Giaps are the Purple Board members, in charge of carrying the offering to the altar. When reaching the festive age, they will be in charge of the whole Khanh tiet (festive) Board, responsible for the entire rituals and the expenditure and financial allocation for activities related to the temple, communal house, and pagodas in a year. When reaching the age 51, the whole same-age members make the Khanh tiet (festive) Board (as a result, the age 51 is also called the “Khanh tiet” age). The twelve “Quan Dam Noi” members are now the permanent members of the Khanh tiet (festive) Board, in charge of the village events throughout a year. This lot-drawing event is recognized as a social promotion for all members of same-age groups, sometimes at economic expense:

*Everyone wants to get this social promotion. The promotion also costs a great deal [...].
[My family] is not so spacious, so it was rather tough. Then I had to break that wall and
two pantries to have space for the 2 crackers. (DQ36, 2008)*

The “social promotion” of the same-age association members as described shows that a member has to perform a series of responsibilities to “serve” the village from the “labour jobs,” to the participation in rituals held at the village temple and communal house and holding festive activities for the villagers until getting recognized as “senior” (i.e. without having to undertake

collective obligations). Each stage is marked by a series of strict rules that members must abide by. If not, they will be punished. The punishment in the same-age association (in Dong Quang) is called “position removal.”

Failing to join or neglecting activities of the same-age association will result in a fine. Previously, people had to prepare a tray of betel and areca to apologize to the villagers. Now, the practice has been abandoned, but the person concerned is announced on the loudspeakers of the village. The person will be given first and second warnings. The third warning will result in the removal of the position in the same-age association¹¹.

Removal of position means the name is no longer in any records of the village (not in any same-age groups). The person has no place in the village events. In short, he is no longer the village man! When the position is removed, he is not allowed to join village activities held at the communal house, temple, etc. In short, he will be the person without any position in the village. (DQ36, 2008).

Being isolated when living in the village is an unpleasant prospect for rural people. It is even regarded as the most severe punishment for villagers. It is the same in traditional villages. For villagers, removal of the name from the village records, which means they are no longer recognized as a member of the village with full rights and obligations, is the heaviest punishment (Nguyen Duc Nghinh, 1978, p. 420).

11 In some cases, individuals are exempted. For example, those who left the village for their jobs were removed from the same-age association right from the beginning. Those who work as officials at the district or provincial levels, hard to follow the obligations, are also in the list of exemption. However, those people, if still wishing to enter same-age association, must ask for permission to come back, be accepted by same-age members, and volunteer to undertake collective obligations.

1.4. Villagers and outsiders

The same-age association in Dong Quang is the organization for men living in the village born in the same year (lunar calendar). The original villagers are automatically included in the association when reaching the eligible age. The same-age association call-up goes as follows: A representative person when reaching the age of 18 (in Dong Ky) or 25 (in Trang Liet and Binh Ha), meets the legal officials of the commune to get the correct number of people in the village reaching the age 18 or 25 that year. In Trang Liet and Binh Ha, people all know one another well, for there are fewer same-agers. In Dong Ky, due to the big number of same-agers and the fact that they are divided into many different neighbourhoods, they do not all know one another. Therefore, the household record book of the commune must be employed¹². The same-agers are then called upon to join the association. The called-up people have the right to refuse to participate in the association, but, according to the informants in Dong Quang, there have never been any cases like this occurring.

Due to the fact that same-age association is for those living in the same village, people would not invite sons-in-law, immigrants, or those whose families had people working as “Mo” (the village herald)¹³. The set rule for those who do not originate from the village to join the association is that the household has had three generations or more living in the village and paying full responsibilities to the village. These people are to comply with the “rules” set out by the village. If they want to participate in the activities of the same-age association, they have to ask the head of the same-age group for agreement. The suggestion may be accepted or not,

12 According to informants, previously the village also had a record book, like the household record book now, but only bore names of the males. When a family gave birth to a son, it had to inform the village so that the name was entered into that book. The registration of the date of birth of the sons was not necessarily precise like today. For example, if the family has two brothers both giving to sons, the son of the older brother might have its name registered first even though in fact the son of the younger brother was born before the other.

13 “Mo” is a word referring to a musical instrument made of bamboo or wood (bamboo/wooden bell), used to keep the tempo or to signal an order. In the past, to communicate information to people, the village tasked a person with going through the village to send information when needed. This person used a “mo” to attract everyone's attention. “Mo” was then associated with the person (village herald), who do this work. The job was considered inferior, so usually only immigrants or the poorest did that job and they were often looked down on.

but even when accepted to the association, these people are still not allowed to get involved in the activities of the village community. The hierarchy of members in a same-age group is made based on the age of the members' fathers. Therefore, though born in the same age, those who have senior fathers are higher in ranks, being older brothers. Particularly, sons-in-law of the village must always be the youngest, lowest in ranks, regardless of their fathers' ages. The youngest, or the lowest, in the hierarchy of same-agers means something unimportant and other members can send them on small errands. For the same-age association, the advantage of age fails to alleviate the position of those without origin from the village.

Not all same-agers of a group are counted as official members. For example, a same-age group has 42 people, including 2 sons-in-law of the village joining the group, when reporting to the village, the representative of that group must say as follows: In our same-age group, there are 40 same-agers and 2 followers. That is to distinguish between "same-agers of the village" and those "following the group," the two different statuses involving the villagers and the outsiders. Villager same-agers and outsider same-agers are different in that villagers can discuss village affairs while outsiders can only join feasts or other activities held by that same-age group. Absolutely, outsiders cannot participate in Khanh tiet (festive) Board as reaching the age.

Only those who were born here, in this village, can be members of the Khanh tiet (festive) Board. Other people such as sons-in-law or those who follow their parents here are not eligible. (DQ69, 2009)

The issue of "immigrants" was just strictly reviewed back in the late 1980s as the village underwent several prominent events. According to informants (DQ18, 2007), the story of the village goes like this: A son of a farmer once working as a "Mo" (village herald) was going to be a "senior" citizen, highest in the hierarchical order of the village. Local people then questioned that fact. If that one had become the village's senior citizen, then the village would have all had to consult a "Mo"! Therefore, the whole village decided to tighten regulation for

immigrants, regulating that immigrants, especially those originating from the “Mo” families, are never eligible to discuss village affairs, let alone to become the senior citizen of the village, the one that all villagers turn to when making important decisions.

To explain for the discrimination between “villagers and “outsiders” in the same-age association, the informants clarified that it is because this village (Dong Ky) is allergic of outsiders climbing high in social advancement. Age is a form of free social advancement (randomness) for everyone, so the village does not accept an outsider to have the same opportunities for social promotion as villagers. From an insider’s perspective, when an outsider is officially recognized as successful and become a member of “Quan Dam,” or even the “senior” citizens of the village (the ones to be respected in the village), then it is not good. And this “village of pride” (referring to Dong Ky) cannot accept that.

If outsiders are accepted to the Khanh tiet (festive) Board, when they get older, they will become the highest ones in the village. Then, the hierarchical order of village will die away. The most “senior” citizen of the village is honourable and most respected; he makes judgments and people will follow. There are nearly 14,000 people in this village, so that senior person is very respectable. No one could challenge what he says. (DQ69, 2009)

Thus, the same-age association itself already serves as the “checkpoint” to screen outsiders from the village. This association reviews those qualified to join same-age groups. If a same-age group admits an outsider, people will find out and rule him out, saying that *“It is wrong for this same-age group to admit that guy.”* (DQ69, 2009).

The discrimination between villagers and outsiders asserts an invisible pressure, causing the outsiders wishing to be recognized by the village to find another way. For example, some

outsiders in Dong Ky, wishing to join the village affairs, have sought to be adopted by a family in the village.

There is an outsider living in this village for a long time now. He was enlisted in the Vu clan [the second largest clan in the village], of which a member is the village temple keeper here. Very reputable! However, he has yet to be allowed to discuss official affairs of the village, even though he has financially supported the temple a lot. (DQ18, 2007)

According to an informant in Trang Liet village (DQ52, 2008), his father is a son-in-law in the village. His father was not admitted to the village's same-age association. Considered as "an outsider [immigrant], my father still actively joined all the jobs in the village. For some guilds, he joined from the start." As for him, the second generation living in the village, he can only join feasts of the same-age association. To make up for the position, he actively participates in other voluntary associations such as wrestling guild, neighbourhood association, etc. His father often encouraged him to participate in local government's work. He is currently a member of the village security board. Living on the edge of the village, close to the field, every day he goes to the office of the village's security board for work. When asked for an interview, other than meeting the interviewers at home like other cases, he asked the interviewers to come to the village's cultural house, where there is a small duty office of the village's security board. He also encouraged his son to actively participate in collective activities in the locality. The son confided that he was being promoted to the executive board of the commune's youth union. Another case is a businessman in Dong Ky (DQ20, 2007). He said his father originated from Dong Ky village, but got married to his mother in Phu Khe village¹⁴ nearby, then moved to live there. When the wood craft developed, like many others, together with his family, he returned to the village and got married to a villager. He has tried hard to prove his origin to the

14 Phu Khe village also specializes in wood craft. His family in Phu Luu also worked with wood previously.

villagers, but the village people just see him as a son-in-law and do not admit him to the same-age association. Set aside by the association, he invited some other people to setting up their own association. His art association, gathering “giants” of Dong Ky village (bankers, successful businessmen, etc.), bought modern sound systems and tents to hold free monthly cultural activities for everyone in the village. Everyone can participate in the events and the association also sponsors cultural activities of the village.

The discrimination between villagers and outsiders has been pushed to the extreme when some people even believe that *“It is truly reputable to get married to villagers. (...) Kind families only get their children married to villagers”* (DQ18, 2007). Hence, they called those getting married to people other than villagers *“wives of outsiders”* with negative implication. That discrimination may be the reason for the formation of the association for those getting married to outsiders found not only in Dong Quang or Giao Tan, but also in other rural areas in the Red River Delta.

Even Dong Ky villagers, when buying land in the industrial area¹⁵ and moved there to live, still maintain a house in the village, saying that *“I am a Dong Ky villager; I move here just to do business.”* (DQ72, 2009). The word “Dong Ky” in this case reminds people of not only a place, a valuable trademark, but also an “identity.” It should be noted that since the late 1990s, when the wood craft started to develop, Dong Ky villagers have never gone out to “make a living.” They make their living in the village and people from other places come to Dong Ky to work for them. People may come to do business in Dong Ky village (as employees or employers), even get registered in the commune’s family record book. However, it is not easy to become villagers.

¹⁵ The industrial area, located right on the inter-commune traffic road, is planned into lots for sale. This is where almost all large wood craft businesses of the commune gather. As households buying land are all better-off, they build modern houses here. Dong Ky village is located behind this industrial area, with narrow and degraded roads, limited land, big population and is heavily polluted.

It is impossible to try to become villagers. Anyway, it is ok to lead a good life regardless of places. In general, people all plant rice, produce furniture, and enjoy the same rights. The only difference is that outsiders cannot participate in activities held at the temple and communal house. (DQ18, 2007)

Thus, it is easy to see a clear distinction between villagers and outsiders in the same-age association. There is also a separation between the State law and village practices when *“it is ok for a person to register to the village family record book just for everyday life. But it is not allowed for him to do so to join activities under official practices of the village.”* (DQ18, 2007). *“The immigrants coming here are not allowed to join official activities of the village.”* (DQ35, 2008). All in all, the outsiders are accepted as legitimate “citizens” of the commune, but still not members of the village!

2. Hobbies-oriented relations

The popularity and diversity of voluntary associations largely satisfy the need of many people. While fellowship associations set certain criteria (same age, school, joining the army in the same year, colleagues, etc.) for those who wish to join, associations of the same hobbies can meet the need of anyone who want to join, for they are based on “preferences.” “Hobby” associations make up almost a quarter of the number of associations that the informants are holding membership. These associations are mainly related to cultural, arts, physical, sports and religious activities in localities. In the village, it seems that there are enough groups and guilds meeting the diverse preferences of the people, regardless of their age or genders. For those who prefer traditional cultural and art activities, they can join rowing, chess, pet, bird guilds, etc. The guilds mainly mobilize the participation of male elderly, participating in the activities with the wish to return to village festivals in the past, reliving activities that they

participated in or witnessed in their childhood. Newer associations in the form of clubs are more attractive to the youth or middle-aged people. These associations include ornamental, art, badminton, poetry clubs, etc. The clubs primarily gathering lovers of cultural, art, gymnastics, and modern sports activities attract both men and women. During the field study in the locality, in the early morning or in the late afternoon, at public venues such as communal house court, it is easy to spot people doing fitness and sports activities. The group of associations sharing the same religious hobby often operates in a more discreet manner. They often organize activities at a member's house or at the courtyard of temples and pagodas. They together train the holy dances and the rituals used for different occasions.

Hobbies make a popular reason for people to participate in a voluntary association. Many say that they join this guild or that group because of their "hobbies" and enthusiasm for the locality's social activities. Those with hobby of playing or watching cockfighting join the cockfighting guild; others preferring sports or physical activities may join table tennis club, etc. In short, the guilds they join depend on their preferences. *"People just join the guilds and clubs for fun, no other purposes."* (DQ50, 2008) *"It depends on preferences. I join this guild or that club to play."* (DQ54, 2008).

"In general, these [voluntary] associations meet the need of the people with similar hobbies. For example, cockfighting guild, chess or volleyball clubs, etc. satisfy people's preferences, so though without any support, they still hold activities relatively regularly. They may meet once every three months or so." (DQ65, 2009).

Hobby is a "legitimate" and also big reason for those who wish to join village activities. People join an association because they like these activities or others. However, the story of the associations of the same hobbies in Dong Quang shows that the situation is not quite so simple. For hobbies? Yes, but little. Much is due to the fact that people here need to be in an association because they themselves need a safety net. While they are not eligible to joining other

associations, joining hobby associations is the widest choice. People just need to cite hobbies to join any hobby associations without the fear of rejection due to criteria. *"A hobby has nothing to bind people. They just voluntarily come together."* (DQ61, 2009). These hobby associations help maintain village activities (festive services) and help local governments better manage community activities. At the same time, they serve as the tool to gather all the remaining members of the village in an organization without paying much attention to criteria. Notably, associations related to hobbies were only mentioned by informants in Dong Quang as a reason for participating festivals. And the informants joining hobby associations are mainly from Dong Quang (69 associations in Dong Quang compared to 6 in Giao Tan), accounting for nearly two fifths of the informants in Dong Quang. Meanwhile, in Giao Tan, the number of hobby associations that informants participate in is fewer than 5% of all the associations.

In many cases, it is quite clear to see the spontaneity of the people when joining voluntary associations. An association may be formed from only the opinion of someone who has become "free" since married. *"We are all free now, so we go hanging out with one another."* (DQ39, 2008). So an association may be set up just for members to go to temples and pagodas several times a year. In another case, a person may not be much interested in a sport game, but he still joins the association just for fun. *"One fellow invites another to join, and so on. So even though a person may not be interested in badminton, when invited, he would join."* (DQ26, 2009). Another example is that, from a simple physical activity, when more people join it, people form a club out of it:

"Jogging together for some time, we decided to buy a ball to play for fun. We self-train one another. Just playing in the morning and we find it better and more fun than jogging. Gradually more people have come to join us." (DQ70, 2009).

Preferences are also hereditary in the sense that the father hands down the hobby and membership to the child. The child feels it is his responsibility to continue the father's hobby. For example, in a chess guild, there are some cases when the fathers joined the guild and the son also applied to the guild. Even in some families, all the three father and sons join the guild.

“A person, as a member of a chess guild, before passing away told the son to join the guild. The son is not so interested in chess and just knows how to play, but because his father told him so, he had to join the chess guild.” (DQ54, 2008).

With the reason of preferences, associations may admit to them those not very good in the hobbies. It is evident in that many people in a hobby association do not even know anything about the functions of the association. According to an informant, participants in a bonsai club *“include all kinds of people, who may know or not know anything about plants.”* (DQ18, 2007). According to this informant, among the 100 members of the bonsai club, only about one third know about bonsai; the rest join the club just for fun and for the membership in an association. Or as in the traditional opera guild, many members do not know how to sing nor perform. However, people still join the guild. *“It's just a hobby and people join just for fun, not to indulge in it.”* (DQ74, 2009). Some people cannot sing; they have also never got on a stage before. However, they still have their names enlisted in the traditional opera guild. *“I cannot sing, but I can join feasts and financially contribute to the guild.”* (DQ58, 2009). The head of a poetry club of the village said that *“It is difficult for poetry to thrive in this land because people are always busy and they also do not like [poems]”* (DQ61, 2009). Still, there are many applying to the poetry club under the reason of hobby.

Many traditional associations have even changed their “principles and objectives” to meet the need of the people. Dong Ky village buffalo guild is a typical example. The buffalo guild was formerly established for buffalo traders only. Then, when cooperatives were formed, the trade went extinct and the guild changed its membership criteria that include buffalo traders and their

descendants, then even those who use buffalos to plow and more. Currently, when buffaloes are not common in farming anymore, the buffalo guild also admits those who like buffalo meat and organizes annual buffalo barbecue festival.

The diversity of the associations is to meet different preferences. However, in reality, not everyone can join the associations that they like. Like is one thing, economic condition is another. A bicycle club member talked about the fun for the elderly of the club activities and noted that the participants often *“do not have to worry about economic life anymore.”* (DQ42, 2008). *“Now my economic condition is better and I don’t have to worry about other things. Then, I join the club for relaxation.”* (DQ26, 2009). The bicycle club is supposedly the club of the elderly, with 87 members among more than 1,000 elderly people in Dong Ky village. The reason why the number of participants is not high is that it depends on economic conditions while most of the elderly mainly live on their children and do not want to bother the children (their children often have to financially support them if they join the club).

The antique collection association also admits members based on hobbies. However, not every can join the association, for to do so they need to be free from everyday economic worries. *“Of course, people joining this association must be wealthy and have a wide network of cultural exchange. If you cannot make both ends meet, then how can you follow the hobbies? Members need to be financially well-off.”* (DQ72, 2009).

Generally, voluntary associations meet the aspiration of the people in their hobbies. However, the important thing is not to know something (citing “hobby” as a reason for the formation of associations and clubs of this type), but the “friendship” arising among members (now friends) in the associations. The language that people use to colour the friendship in voluntary associations includes the words that they address one another such as “people of the same group” or “brothers of the same guild.” Studies of the events in lifecycle rituals will further confirm the situation which have just been mentioned.

3. Lifecycle rituals

The lifecycle rituals are in fact the rituals of solidarity and part of the gift and feast exchange (Kleinen, 2012). Visits to the sick, condolence offerings at funerals, joy sharing at weddings, housewarming parties, etc. are how people participate in and/or maintain social relations in the village. For villagers, it is the honour when people visit and offer congratulations or condolences. In fact, the more associations and people visit the family, especially when some members of the family are sick, the higher the family's prestige is. That is because it shows the network of relations of the family and family members, which brings the respect from the outsiders. A wide network of ties means the high prestige for the family: *"It is the great honour for the family to have senior citizens or guilds of the village visit and share the joys or sorrows."* (DQ54, 2008). *"When people visit the family of the event, it shows how wide the family's network of relations is."* (GT18, 2007). *"It is honourable for the family to have relatives and acquaintances visit. For example, when my parents were sick, we had delegations come to visit; it's our honour."* (GT29, 2009)¹⁶.

In the Red River Delta, people make clear-cut distinction between the sad and the joyful events. People only go to the weddings when invited while for funerals, all villagers go when they learn the news. People consider that "death is the end of everything." Therefore, when a person dies, everyone come to offer incense and pay the final tribute to the deceased. In both surveyed sites, people present to the families of both weddings and funerals a certain amount of money and the families carefully keep the information in their books¹⁷. The information kept consists

16 According to Nguyen Van Huyen, the traditional society of Viet Nam still "lays focus on social expenses." For many occasions such as giving birth to a son (not daughter), daughter's or son's weddings, death of father or mother, it all requires people to hold parties for the whole village, sometimes for the whole commune or district, etc." (Nguyen Van Huyen, 1995, p. 30).

17 A survey into social exchange (gift presentation) was conducted by a group of Viet Namese researchers in a joint study project of Viet Nam and France on "Social network in rural areas: Construction and Employment of the network in a transforming economy" in two communes of Dong Quang (Bac Ninh province) and Giao Tan

of the names and addresses of the gift presenters (in some cases, people also note down the relation between of the presenters and the receivers) and the amount of money presented. The amount of money depends on the relations between the presenters and the receivers. In general, if the amount is VND 50,000, it means they are neighbours; from VND 100,000 to 300,000, they are friends, depending on how close they are. For relatives, the amount may vary from VND 500,000 to several million Viet Nam dong, depending on the economic situation of the presenters and the blood relations to the receivers.

A prestigious senior citizen in Dong Quang commune revealed that the book is kept by the eldest son of the family. He is also the one to hold the money presented by the villagers and be responsible for the funeral expenses and return the “gifts” later to other families. The second-born son can also keep another book, but is not allowed to keep the money (DQ16, 2007). In Giao Tan commune, the “host” of the event is not a fix person. In each household, there exist different relations including those of the husband and wife and the children (sons, sons-in-law, daughters, and daughters-in-law), etc. In an event of the family (such as funeral), each member of the family can be a “host” to the extent of his/her own relations. Each family member keeps his/her own book for each event. Thus, each family member keep a book besides the common one which records the money that people offer to the family in general, not to any individual family member. When visiting the family, people have to determine their relations with the “host” by noting down their amount of offering and relations with the “host” in the family right at the desk where visitors’ books are kept. Each book has one person in charge, responsible for

(Nam Dinh province). The group collected 209 journals of events related to the lifecycle rituals and events with gift presentation. The journals keep the names, addresses and the relations (just for clarification) of the people who gave the gifts and the amount of money that those people give. A local collaborator are to copy the journals and then work with the people holding that journals to learn about the relations of the gift presenters. The analysis of the statistics has just been conducte with the journals of Giao Tan commune (187 journals). Those of Dong Quang commune, due to the small number of the collected journals (22 ones), it is not sufficient for comparision and; therefore, the analysis was halted. The data used in this dissertation rooted from the analysis of 187 journals of Giao Tan commune.

noting down the amount each individual “offers”. At each desk, the visitor give an amount of money and register his/her name (and relations with the host if needed) to the recorder (as an individual), or the name of the delegation for the recorder to announce on the loud speakers (as a group).

Marcel Mauss (1954) groups these activities into what his calls “gift exchange”. The author asserted that the aim of the exchange is to fasten social solidarity and that, at a first glance, it seems that the “gift” presentation is *voluntary* and *spontaneous*, but in fact it is an *obligation* and *universal*. This point of view is confirmed with evidence from different sources. For example, the study of Baker (1999) on mutual support associations in France discovered that one of the roles of these associations is to connect members through the participation in the lifecycle rituals. Yan (1996), in a study on “the flow of gifts” in a village in China, also found the same situation when everyone is responsible for participating in the gift exchange network and that is the way people set up and develop social cohesion at the village level.

From observation, a *sense of obligation* associated with the visits was found. In the two surveyed sites, the return of the amount of money (in kind previously) is an obligation and no one can evade it. The significance of this “obligation” is denoted by different words of the locality such as “*repay*”, “*to pay in-turn debt*”, or “*the in-turn gifts*” (DQ55, 2008; DQ50, 2008; GT32, 2009). Another respondent explained the situation in more details as follows: “*In general, it is suitable to use the word ‘repay.’ This time I invite people to my children’s weddings. The other times they invite me. We are both to come and to congratulate one another.*” (DQ54, 2008).

The principle of “paying in-turn debt” not only means sending “gifts,” but also proposes very close assignment of jobs needed to be done among members of the same association. Take “Ban Cha” (a group of village men divided into three different age groups responsible for chores in events) for example. Younger same-age members, according to the regulations, are

responsible for errands of the group. At a funeral, neighbours and family members are assigned to digging the grave and “Ban Cha” is responsible for carrying the coffin (working as undertakers) or other chores. Traditionally, only a “Ban Cha” member with disabilities is exempted from the chores. Those working away from the village are not free from the obligation. They have to hire others to do the jobs instead. A respondent in Dong Quang commune told more details about the “in-turn debt” related to funerals as follows: *“Today I carry [the coffin off] his father, then tomorrow he is to carry [the coffin off] my father. If a person does not do that, then no one carries [the coffin off] his father.”* (DQ54, 2008). The funeral “in-turn obligation” is strictly regulated in Trang Liet. If a person has well conducted the jobs of “Ban Cha” and made good contributions to the village, he can write a “*Notification*” to *require* “Ban Cha” share the chores at the funeral with his family. For those who have not worked wholeheartedly in “Ban Cha,” or have not made good contribution, when a family member dies, he is only entitled to writing a “*Petition*” to “Ban Cha” for support. For the “*Petition*,” “Ban Cha” can refuse to help because they do not have to pay back to those not seriously taking the “in-turn obligation.”

The “budget” for visits and offerings accounts for a considerable proportion of each household’s income. For a funeral in Giao Tan, a person may spend up to VND 500,000 (equivalent to the amount of a close relative) to pay the “in-turn debt.” That VND 500,000 will go to different books at the funeral depending on the relations of the person with the family of the deceased. If the deceased is the neighbour of the person, the person spends VND 50,000 and this amount is recorded in the common book of the wife or husband of the deceased. In case the person is the classmate or schoolmate of the daughter of the deceased, he can spend another VND 100,000 recorded to the book of the daughter. Supposing the person did the military service together with the eldest son of the deceased, he may add another VND 100,000 to the book of the eldest son. If the person is now also the workmate of the second son of the

deceased, another VND 100,000 should be added to the book of the second son. The person's wife is in the same Dancing Club with the wife of the deceased's eldest son; then, another VND 100,000 may be spent to the book of the eldest son. At the same time, the person's wife is also the classmate of the wife of the deceased's second son, another VND 100,000 is spent to the book of the second son. Eventually, for the neighbouring relations alone, the person has to spend as much as VND 550,000 for the funeral, not to mention any kinship with the deceased's family, for which the person needs to spend at least another VND 300,000 to several VND millions. It should be noted that at the time of the survey, the average income (based on the total income of the household, including the amount sent home by the people working away from the village) in Giao Tan was approximately VND eight million/person/year. When compared, the "gift" for the funeral accounts for a significant proportion of the household's budget, especially when it must be spent entirely in cash.

Although the primary purpose of the *gift exchange* is to create (or reinforce) social links, that does not mean that the "in-turn" money is absolutely of no significance. This is clearly expressed in the way the villagers consider the "current prices" when they repay the "in-turn debt." Usually the amount of money returned must be higher than, or at least equal to, the amount received before. A respondent said in more details of the value of the return as follows, "*The return must be higher than, or at least equal to, the amount received before. For example, I brought you a dish of pork last time. Now the thing you bring should be equal to that dish.*" (DQ54, 2008).

There are a lot of dialect words related to lifecycle rituals are used. Attending an event and presenting money as "gift" is called "contributing tontine money" [*dong phuong*], or "paying tontine money" [*nop tien phuong*], or, more briefly, "going" [*di*]. The word "tontine" [*phuong*] denotes an organization where credit is rotated among local participants like money guilds or

gold guilds. Finally, the word “*make collapsed a tontine*” [*do phuong*] is used in the sense that the event will bring to the “host” an amount of money.

“Going tontining means we financially support an event. Last time, our grandmother’s funeral brought over VND 20 million. Excluding the cost, we still had VND 15-16 million left. However, we need to pay later. The act only brings prestige to the family. For the money, later we have to return in other events.” (GT40, 2009).

Villagers highly appreciate the money gained after each ceremonial event. This can be understood if one notices the amount of money collected, which sometimes amounts to several tens of million VND, a huge sum now in the rural areas of the Red river delta, especially for Giao Tan, which is a poor commune¹⁸.

The idea of earning an amount of “credit” from such rituals, absolutely does not exist in Dong Quang commune in the same events. In addition to the fact that the money is never seen as the financial contribution, the sharing of sentiment (happiness or sadness) with the host family is more evident. In the context of the liberalization of the economy after the *Doi Moi*-Renovation, the difference between the two surveyed sites can be understood. Luong Van Hy proves that there has been more political space for religious activities and rituals and emphasizes the link between development and the “increase in ritual practicing” (Hy, 1994). John Kleinen (1999)

18 Many scholars have discussed the form of “social assistance” for needy peasants from social organizations. Woodside (1971), for example, discussed the visits and support to sick members, the financial lend to needy members, offering to a member’s funeral, or training for members. He noted that even in the time of extremely loose social link (post-colonial period), the association taking care of members’ family businesses still experience strong and steady operation. The association aimed to partly cover the funeral or wedding expenses for the members in the village. Another author, Nguyen-Marshall (2004), also agrees to that point of view when emphasizing the link between the poverty in the rural life and the role of associations and unions. When considering the function and significance of the mutual support associations under the French colonial period in Viet Nam, the author believes that that the mutual support associations have an important role to play in the life of ordinary peasants. It is because these associations not only provided means to earn money for these families, but also helped maintain and strengthen cultural identity, local customs and practices, and social relations. For the middle-class peasants to low-income people, mutual support associations make a form of insurance and guarantee. Peasants can seek support for their important lifecycle anniversaries (Ibid, pp. 282-283). As a survival strategy and community building organization, mutual support associations provide important capabilities to solve a number of contemporary issues related to poverty (Ibid, p. 277).

considers reputation as a function of the economic position through rituals and emphasizes that peasants started to pay attention to lifecycle rituals with the advent of the lump sum production contract system introduced in 1981 (Kleinen, 2007; 2012).

The participation of voluntary associations in lifecycle rituals is only one part of gift and feast exchange among families, relatives, neighbours, etc. However, the data gathered in Giao Tan show that there is a significant number of visits of voluntary associations apart from other organizations. The data analysis of the record books provided by families shows that voluntary associations account for 6.2% while other official socio-political organizations account for 3% of the visits.

The activities of visiting, congratulation and homage as well as the regulations on gifts are quite similar among voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang communes. Usually, associations have their own funds, which are used to visit members and their families in case of illness or accidents. Gifts are normally a kilo of sugar and a milk tin, valuing at about VND 20,000. In case of a member's father or mother's death, offerings are incense, candles and a *black offering*¹⁹. The offerings are symbolic and small in value, which are expected by association members in ceremonial events.

Take a funeral in Giao Tan for example. According to village's customs, the more mourners come and the longer the funeral lasts, the more prestigious the host feels. "*First, the number of mourners is bigger if they come in group. Second, it is more honourable to receive groups than individuals*" (GT29, 2009). A lasting funeral often receives more associations since only associations can pay the deceased the last respect, not individuals. The rituals include the calling of the association's name, the placing of offerings, the walk around the coffin and the paying of condolences. It takes about 5 minutes for each group to complete all rituals. A

¹⁹ Black Offering is the amount of money given together with other offering with the aim to help the family hold the funeral. The amount of the offering varies depending on different specific associations.

respondent reported on his parents' funerals as follows: *"At my parents' funerals, 4 associations came to pay their last respects. Also there were groups from my father's and my mother's sides. How honourable we felt."* (GT26, 2009)

Individuals often share their condolences by supporting "money" and noted their names to the funeral books of whom they have relations with (These books are usually placed on the desks located by the doorway). Different from what is imagined, the atmosphere in a funeral here hardly excites the feelings of sadness from mourners. What important to them is to get to the desk and have their names noted down in the books. Funeral books are usually as many as the number of family members. Therefore, for a large family, it often gets crowded and chaotic at these desks as people queue and push to find the right notebooks. Sometimes, they argue and barge, asking to withdraw from the wrong book or adding more money.

As mentioned earlier, there are two types of books, a common book and individual books for each family member. Mourners are to get their names written down in the book of whom they know, and they will wait and be paid perhaps with the same amount on the same events. Money noted in the common book will not have to be paid back. According to our observation, people tend to use individual books. It means that the "money" is expected to be returned to mourners. If the deceased's family is in difficulty, mourners use the family notebook, which means the money is voluntarily "supported" without being returned.

During our study, when attending a funeral of a man died in an electricity accident, the author was instructed to put the money in the common book and explained that his family is very poor and that the author has no relation with the dead. Though attending as an individual, the author was introduced as a cadre in charge of culture so that the author could pay homage to him. The name of the author's workplace was announced so that people would know *"there is a representative from Hanoi attending the funeral"*. To make it a delegation, a guide and a representative of the commune people's committee accompanied me to the altar and offered

the *black offering*. Also, they instructed the author to write the workplace's name instead of individual's name.

In an association's visit, each member's money is noted carefully, and all is put in one envelop named the association. This shared money is called "black offering". "Black offering" is placed on the altar and then received by the host. All contributions are then noted down in their respective books. The association's name is often announced on loudspeakers so that all villagers would know (GT40, 2009). The association's representative's name is also introduced. The solemnity of an association's house visit is described in details in the following extract:

"An association's shared money is written down in the "black offering", not funeral books. There is a reception desk outside for mourners to register their comings. Information about the association's name, relations and offerings is all noted down. Prior to the rituals, the associations' names are called. Each association is to complete all rituals in about 5 minutes. When my grandmother died, there were about 70 associations of whom my parents and relatives are members. The funeral lasted from 3pm until 9pm, but some still had to wait." (GT40, 2009).

4. Sub-conclusion

Under many forms, villagers gather to form associations with specific roles and functions that contribute to the village's general operation. These activities are generally conducted by male associations. The participation into associations dating back to ages ago and from generation to generation is considered as the basis for individuals to prepare for their integration into the village community.

A same-age association, a traditional and typical type of association in the Northern rural areas, is an organization that marks the growth of male members in a village. In this association, members have to get used to the shared code-of-conduct, orders and hierarchy in an organization. The growth of each member reflects the process in which he performs a variety of responsibilities to serve his association. This type of association also portrays the “self-governance” principle of a traditional village. An outsider can be “naturalized” and accepted to be a legal citizen of a village, but not a member.

Voluntary associations all follow these regulations: enrollment, community services, members’ rotating responsibility in organizing the village’s festivals (which is based on enrollment order), regular meetings, contributions, etc. These regulations faithfully depict the principle of equality in the association life in many rural areas in the North.

Different from other forms of hamlet and alley that develops localism, voluntary associations offer members an opportunity to reach further. The limits of geographical groups (hamlet or alley) clearly show the openness of the “hobby-based” links in the context that Vietnamese rural areas still bear many pre-capitalism features.

Lifecycle rituals are the rituals of solidarity, a part of the exchange system of gifts and feast. At the two surveyed communes, the participation of voluntary associations in lifecycle rituals is only part of the bigger gift and feast exchange system. Activities such as visits, weddings, funerals, house-warming parties, etc. are the means of participation and/or maintenance of relations within a village community.

The analysis has shown the existence of the “sense of responsibility” attached to the activities that form the “get and give” relation among members. No member can neglect the “duty” of visiting (with gifts) or returning what they get from others. This exchange principle is

performed not only in terms of gifts, but also in terms of assigned jobs and chores among members.

“Budget” for visits and gifts accounts for a considerable proportion in each household’s income, especially when all expenses are in cash. Although the main purpose of gift exchange is to build or maintain social relations, it does not mean that the returned money is totally valueless. Normally, the return is bigger than or at least as much as the received.

There is a certain difference in social rituals and exchange of citizens in the two surveyed communes. This difference shows the particularity in economic development and social structure: the relatively closed agriculture community in Giao Tan commune compared to the considerable developed monetary relations in agriculture and craft industry in Dong Quang commune.

Despite a number variants in the two surveyed locations, there found one common natural feature: social rituals and exchange activities are closely attached to voluntary associations. That is the efforts of a new social space, besides traditional villages. How far these efforts form a “civil” space in the rural areas nowadays? The question will not be satisfactorily answered without a comprehensive look at the relation between voluntary associations and the State, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Central government towards voluntary associations

Looking back upon the history of the research topic, it can be seen that the relationship between the state and local social associations have been more or less taken into consideration of scholars (Nguyen Dong Chi, 1987a, 1987b; Nguyen-Marshall, 2004). They believe that in feudalism, the state encouraged the formation of support and relief links among rural residents, considering it a form to reduce the social welfare burden of the central state, passing it on to local communities (Nguyen Dong Chi, 1978b). Those associations are even believed to help support the central government in security and defense when their quality of operation was improved. However, due to the nature of those associations, no feudal dynasty could fully take advantage of their roles (Ibid., p. 229).

Studying the Viet Nam society in the early twentieth century, Nguyen-Marshall (2004) notice the existence of mutual aid societies¹ in the north of Viet Nam. However, French government did not consider these association the same as those in France in terms of solidarity and interdependence. In this period, apart from the associations formally registered to local authorities, there were also small scale associations, too small in size to officially register, or their activities were completely beyond the management of the government (Nguyen - Marshall, 2004, p. 277). These might include the kite-flying club, bird guild, servicemen group, coeval club or classmate club that Jamieson (1993) mentioned in his studies. According to his

¹ The concept is coined by Nguyen-Marshall (2004) from the definition of Baker (1999), limiting to only one type of volunteer association which is defined as “the non-profit and non-governmental private groups, in which individuals choose to participate in; members are not born to participate in these associations nor participate in the organization like the military and they are not forced to participate in these associations for a living” (Baker, 1999, p. 49). This definition is similar to how we define voluntary association in this study.

research, voluntary associations of these types did not attract the attention of the state, and also were not regulated by both the law and cultural practices (p. 33).

After Viet Nam gained independence, Decree 102 - an important document, and so far still the highest legal document regulating social associations, issued on May 20th 1957 by the State President sets the legal basis for citizens to form associations. This legal document shows the importance of social associations and demonstrates the efforts of the central government in the management over the establishment and operation of the associations. Accordingly, all citizens have the right to form associations and the state must respect and guarantee that right. Each individual who wishes to form an association needs to hold the ratification of the responsible authorities (Ministry of Internal Affairs and corresponding provincial authorities). However, in Decree 258-TTg dated June 14th 1957 only provides the legal guidance for the implementation of Decree N^o102-SL/L004 to include only associations with the operation held in an inter-region or a city/ province level or higher, excluding the voluntary associations having been long in existence in rural communities. The voluntary associations in rural villages are beyond the management and concern of the central state.

The advent of *Doi Moi* in 1986 marked the introduction of a series of legal documents regulating voluntary associations. Directive 01, issued on May 1st 1989 on the management over the organization and operation of public associations, is a timely policy then when the state agreed on the establishment of 100 public associations in science and technology, arts, healthcare, socio-culture, education, sports, etc. The Directive was issued with the aim of ensuring the socialist democratic right in forming public associations while enhancing state management over the organization and operation of public associations. Accordingly, perhaps it was the first time since 1945, the Government of Viet Nam issued a legal document regulating public associations with support and social welfare activities in wards, villages and hamlets such as life assurance association, school sponsor association, etc. This Directive

assigns the ratification of the establishment of associations to the chairman of the commune people's committee, but at the same time, the commune people's committee chairman has to report to the Chairman of the district people's committee about the associations. It requires the in-charge agency to provide favorable conditions for associations to grasp the policies and laws of the State, encouraging association members to strictly observe the policies of the Party and State, collecting opinions of the members to contribute to state agencies in the formulation and implementation of policies and tasks of sectors localities. The directive also requires the agency in charge to respect the autonomy of public associations and help the associations operate effectively in accordance with the laws.

Nearly 10 years after the advent of the directive, as summarized in Directive 42-CT/TW dated October 6th 1998 by the Central Party Committee on strengthening the leadership of the Party over the organization and operation of public associations, the association enjoyed fast developments in both the central and local levels. This Directive requires party cells and party committees have to pay attention to the operation of the association and have the responsibility to strengthen the leadership over the association at the same level through the direction of organization and operation of the association.

In pursuance to the directive of the Party Central Committee, the Government issued Decree 88/2003/ND-CP², replacing Decree 258-TTg in governing the organization, operation and management of associations. The socio-political organizations³ and religious institution are not governed by this new legal document. Local governments are required to exercise the responsibility to provide favorable conditions for associations to effectively operate pursuant

2 Decree 88/2003/ND-CP issued on July 30, 2003 by the Government providing regulations on the organization, operation and management of associations replaced Decree 258-TTg dated- July 14th 1957. The Government then issued Decree 45/2010/ND-CP on 21/4/2010 to replace Decree 88. Given the fact that this study was conducted from 2007 to 2009, in this article, we refer to Decree 88 as the legal basis for associations.

3 Including Viet Nam Fatherland Front, the General Confederation of Labour of Viet Nam, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Viet Nam Farmers' Association, Viet Nam Veterans, and Viet Nam Women's Union.

to their regulations. The establishment of associations is also defined in the Civil Code 2005, under which an entity (including social associations) can be established due to the initiative of an individual⁴. Mutual support associations at local communities are no longer mentioned in the legal documents governing associations and related issues.

2. Local Government and Voluntary Associations

2.1. Local Government and the Establishment of Voluntary Associations

According to Decree 88/2003, the management of the local associations, including the commune level, is governed by the provincial people's committee. Chairman of the provincial People's Committee is responsible for the establishment, separation, mergence, dissolution and regulation approval for associations operating within the province. That is for formal associations of which establishment is registered and agreed by the Provincial People's Committee in written documents. Other voluntary associations going without registering in written registration and decision of establishment operating within the commune level, or even at village level are beyond the reach of this administrative system.

The absence of a written document to manage the grassroots voluntary associations does not mean that local governments leave these associations aside. Giao Tan Commune government considers the advocacy or encouragement of the establishment of local associations as the mass mobilization activities outlined in Resolution 8B of the Party⁵. Accordingly, the job of mass mobilization is seen as the responsibility of the whole political system, the staff, party members, officials, employees, union members, and members of the mass organizations. For social associations in Giao Tan, the commune conducts mass mobilization toward associations

⁴ Chapter 4, Section 1, Article 15 of the Civil Code.

⁵ Resolution 8B-NQ/TW (Tenure VI) dated March 27th 1990 on "Renewing the mass mobilization of the Party and strengthening the relation between the Party and the people."

within its management. For associations operating under the “decree of the state”, the local government sends its staff joining their activities. For example, when the former teacher association holds a meeting, the commune party Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and people’s committee chairman must attend and encourage members to continue with the teaching tradition, contributing to developing the homeland. *“For such social associations, the governments need to pay care and attention so as to gather them and give them a common form of operation, so they do not create difficulties for locality”* (GT32, 2009).

Former servicemen clubs are defined by the superior veteran association as the social groups that need mobilizing to operate in the systematic organization, though there have been no official documents on the establishment of these clubs. First, the commune government establishes a special task group responsible for mobilizing people in compliance with the set procedures. The veteran association then transfers the mobilization team to the village leadership to establish the former servicemen clubs in their neighbourhood. Then, the hamlet party secretary holds meetings with former servicemen in the neighbourhood, suggesting that those joining the army together should gather in one association to stick together for mutual support. The commune is to encourage those demobees to build up associations. The servicemen should also organize their associations. First members are those who live in the locality and do not work far from home, then the head of the hamlet; each village builds its own association. Associations then come into being one after another and all are voluntarily established. The commune only encourages without regular financial support, no representative and also no written document.

“When learning that the association/ club is set up under the commune direction and patroned by the veterans association, we feel more assured. We feel that the commune and the state pay attention to us, feeling a bit of honour, and acting more enthusiastically. It’s totally different from being self-established” (GT29, 2009).

For non-registered voluntary associations but of high prestige in the community, such as the 40-50 years of party membership association, the government also advocates the gathering of the associations for better management. The association members are reputable Party members, so each time the members hold meetings, there must be encouragement, support and backup from the local government.

“The senior party members are like our fathers. If we do not work well in the ideological tasks, or let them disagree with us, they’ll disturb us in congress and election, they’ll hate us and not introduce us to the congress saying that: “Oh, that guy is not OK, incompetent at work!” They are also prestigious in party cells. If they ask the cells not to vote for us, the cells won’t introduce us” (GT11, 2007).

In Giao Tan, before the establishment of an association, the board of representatives often reports verbally to the commune government on the establishment of the association. The report to the local government is considered a critical procedure marking the formation of the association. Commune officials receive the information and do not have any further reaction.

“For an association to be formed, there must be reports. Reported but the authority does not issue the decision of establishment. The association only orally reports to the commune party secretary and people’s committee chairman. I myself on behalf of the association reported to them that the association was to be established that day, including the names of the members, inviting them to the establishment ceremony, but they also did not come” (GT21, 2008).

The government does not attend the founding ceremony and also gives no idea about the existence of the voluntary associations of that type. A former Youth Union official association was set up in the commune, commune authority as well as the Father Front have had no idea, because they deem that the formation is due to the need of the members. The leader of this

association, who is at the same time member of the district-level former Youth Union official association, came to the district suggesting that there should be direction from the district and the provincial administration. *“The district replied that it was just a spontaneous association, even at district or commune levels, because the state does not advocate the formal formation of the association like that of the former teachers.”* (GT25, 2008).

In the same legal framework and institutions, Dong Quang commune shows a complete different way of management over voluntary associations⁶.

During the study in Dong Quang commune, we notice two distinct trends in the defining of voluntary associations based on the time of their establishment. There are associations which came into existence since the feudal age and still exist for hundreds of years now. They are called “traditional guilds” such as the classical Vietnamese opera (*Tuong*) guild or cock-fighting (*chọi gà*) guild, martial arts (*vật*) guild, pigeon (*chim*) guild, etc. These guilds (now naming clubs), coming into being long before, still work now. These types of voluntary associations are recognized by default without any written permission of the authority.

In addition to associations that have been identified as having been in practice since the feudal age, the commune government also issues decisions to permit the establishment of sports and culture associations. For an association to be established, there must be written application to the authority. This application must be ratified by the village chief (if it is the association operating at the village level) and the commune official in charge of culture, information, and sports. The application is then introduced to the commune president by this people for the issuance of decision of establishment. Once the association is established, the culture official will manage and monitor the activities of the association.

⁶ It should be note that Dong Quang enjoys much higher economic development than Giao Tan. While Dong Quang GDP significantly contributes to the state budget, for Giao Tan, the state has to regulate 100% of the budget for the locality annually. In 2007, the GDP of Dong Quang (excluding services) reached 270.21 billion dongs, contributing 13 billion dongs to the state budget and the spending was 10.8 billion dongs.

Dong Quang commune officials believe that if due attention is paid to the associations, then the activities of the voluntary associations not only are typical for a few people, but also assert positive effects on the community activities of sports, culture and arts. Therefore, in 2006 alone, the chairman of the People's Committee of Dong Quang commune issued decisions to establish a series of associations (under names of association or clubs) operating in the field of sports, culture, and arts. The associations established are listed as follows⁷:

Table 2: List of decisions of recognition of voluntary associations by Dong Quang commune

Id.	Decision Number	Date of Issuance	Content of decision
1.	31/QD-UB	28/3/2006	Recognition of the Formation of the Executive Committee of Dong Ky Quan Ho Folk singing club
2.	06/QD-UB	25/4/2006	Recognition of the Formation of the Executive Committee of Trang Liet Poetry club tenure 2006-2008
3.	43/QD-CT	16/5/2006	Recognition of the Formation of the Executive Committee of Dong Quang Commune Ornamental Pets and Bonsai Association Tenure 2006-2008
4.	08/QD-UB	16/5/2006	Establishment Permission for Dong Tam Bonsai Club and recognition of the formation of the Club Provisional Executive Board
5.	17/QD-UB	22/10/2006	Establishment Permission for Binh Ha Arts and Literature Club and recognition of the formation of the Club Executive Board
6.	18/QD-UB	30/10/2006	Establishment Permission for Trang Liet Table-tennis Club and recognition of the Club Executive Board

⁷ The statistics may not be complete because we gathered the decisions from representatives of voluntary associations we interviewed. Many associations said they were granted with the decisions of establishment by commune People's Committees, but either lost or unable to find the decisions.

The establishment of the folk song (*Quan ho*) singing club in Dong Ky village (2005) gives us an example of the mobilization from the local government as well as from voluntary associations. The representative of Dong Ky folk song singing Club said they started operation of the association before the establishment decision was issued. They voluntarily gathered together to sing without the intention to create an association or club. But then the commune cultural official came to encourage that the group should be developed into a guild, a club or something of the kind.

“Ms. A. [commune cultural official] turned a “green light” to us during our morning sport activity, suggesting that: ‘the ancient Cheo singing no longer exists, so now if you can set up a club, the commune government will support’” (DQ41, 2008).

The establishment of the Quan Ho club then started with the set procedures, under the guidance of the commune cultural official. They also made the statement and report and requested the recognition for the club. The Commune People’s Committee (via the cultural official) conducted a review of the purpose of the association operation. If their operation was suitable and contributing to further developing sports and culture of the local commune, then the association received the decision of recognition. This review, in fact, had been executed by the cultural official before the club was established. Once established, the club self-operates, without any support from the local government. In major holidays’ celebrations and festivals, the people’s committee may assign the Youth Union to hold cultural activities and mobilize the participation of those associations.

The reason why the cultural officials encourage the establishment of culture and sports associations is due to the specialized direction from the district cultural office on the development of grassroots cultural and sports activities. It is certain that the district only offers general guidelines. In practice, the local officials would like to have an impact on influential activities in the locality for better control. When the associations are already established, the

local government may support by encouraging, by operation orientation, or by linking to various associations to join in local activities, but never by financial support.

In Dong Quang Commune, for voluntary associations in the village to be established, there must be the ratification of village heads. Although encouraged by commune government, the establishment of these associations and organizing into a system recognized by the commune government must be agreed by the village.

Thus, in terms of the administrative management over the voluntary associations, we find two different ways of political practice in two different localities. In Giao Tan, the local government demonstrates the compliance with all policies and guidelines of the central government in the management of the associations that are permitted by governmental agencies. For voluntary associations, the local government wants to maintain the status quo. They do not put themselves in the responsibility for administrative management over these associations (e.g. the grant of establishment license), because they are not in the system under state management. The commune government expresses an indifferent attitude towards the vibrant development of voluntary associations taking place locally in recent years. No license, no administrative management (overtly), no restrictions to any voluntary associations if their activities are not unlawful or contrary to local practices. Although the local government does not advocate the interference with the establishment of voluntary associations, when they come into operation, different management practices are exercised for different voluntary associations.

The situation in Dong Quang provides a different picture of the commune government's intervention in the formation of a series of voluntary associations in the past few years. The local government actively issues decisions for the establishment of voluntary associations, even proactively mobilizes the grassroots to establish associations when seeing that their voluntary operation is strong enough to influent a certain social group. That practice has created a wave of association establishment in the commune during the years 2004-2006.

It is notable that according to Decree 88 on the organization, operation and management of associations, only the chairman of the provincial people's committee is authorized with the ratification of the establishment of associations operating in the province (including the commune), but most of the voluntary associations launched in recent years are ratified with the decisions by the president of Dong Quang commune people's committee⁸. The promulgation of these decisions does not take Decree 88 as its legal foundation, but bases on the Law on the organization of People's Councils and People's Committees⁹. It is clear that local governments show a flexibility in the application of national policy documents in handling local situations.

2.2. Local Government and the Management of Voluntary Associations

For social organizations, local governments perform their management through annual meetings and operation summation reports. For voluntary associations, the governments cannot perform administrative management, for the informal nature of the associations and because there are too many of such associations in the society.

The governments cannot exercise its management or pay interest [to voluntary associations]. The governments cannot reach all those associations. In this commune, there are already up to several hundred associations as such. Particularly, in this hamlet there are a few dozen; just go attending the meetings of these associations alone requires a few vice chairmen. When put them under management, some attention should also be paid to them. If we come to their annual meetings, we should bring some envelopes.
(GT1, 2009).

⁸ Even the Elderly Association of Dong Quang commune also released the decision to recognize the Elderly Health Exercise Club of Ha Binh village on September 21st 2007.

⁹ Law on the Organization of the People's Council and People's Committee (Chapter 4, Section 3, Article 114, Paragraph 4) defines that commune people's committees hold the duties and responsibilities for education, health, social, cultural and sports activities as follows: "Building movements and organizing cultural and sports activities, organizing traditional festivals, protecting and promoting the values of the historical and cultural relics and beauty spots of the localities in accordance with the law."

There have been voluntary associations wishing to invite local government representatives to attend their activities, but usually the governments do not dispatch officials to the associations.

Nominally as unregistered associations invite the authorities, they do not come. For those operating under the state management, they have to come; it is compulsory. But not for other unregistered associations. This association has no official direction, so whether they come or not, it doesn't matter. Last year we also invited the government, but they did not come. They told us that there were many associations as such now. If coming when invited, they must spend some money. They are not comfortable to spend their own money on this. (GT21, 2008).

The concern over the “envelope” from commune leaders when attending the activities of voluntary associations in Giao Tan makes us think of the *compadrazgo* relationship. In the form of this relationship, the presence of the government and the envelope become the symbol of the patronage of the local government for an association which is “spontaneous” in the thinking of both parties. What concerns the associations is not the fact that they do not have a legal framework to run their associations. They care about whether the government pay attention to them, whether they are placed under the government management or not.

From the perspective of local officials, there are even associations organizing useless activities. This view is also shared by Nguyen-Marshall (2004) when studying voluntary associations in the early twentieth century, observing that the French government and the Viet Nam mandarin circle saw these associations under the mixture of distrust and suspicion (p. 277).

For associations such as dancing, outwork, or play acting associations, the government cannot exercise management over them. The governments cannot do their jobs for the state and the people if all day managing those odd things [management over voluntary associations]! For example, the associations tend to hold meetings from the 4th or 5th to

the 10th or 15th of Lunar January. With that long duration, we are able to organize countless local jobs, not so free to attend those meetings! (GT1, 2009).

Basically, the local government has no basis to manage the voluntary associations, for they voluntarily contribute finance to the associations and voluntarily build up operation regulations. These regulation are built up by the members themselves; the government has no way to direct people into doing what it wants. Some associations, for example, are set up just for emotional purpose consisting of only three or four people while some others have thirty or forty members. The governments has no way to regulate the number of members for such associations.

In the old days, soldiers laying down a lot during wars, so in the whole district there were only some 30 members in the former servicemen association. For this association, every year one commune hosts the meeting on April 30th to exchange experience and learn from each other. Liaison boards are set up so that members can visit ill parents of other members. But now, in peacetime, there are not many fallen soldier, the association becomes too crowded. In a village alone there are already more than 20 members, and some 50 members in the whole commune. It takes a lot of time just to visit ill parents of members, so they split up and operate within the villages, which is closer for members and not as hard in operation. *“They voluntarily establish and also voluntarily dissolve, separate or merge when needed. The government cannot manage in such conditions”* (GT1, 2009).

The names of the voluntary associations alone also make it difficult for management then. For example, in February 1983, several people in the neighbourhood enlisted to the army. When they are demobilized, they set up the 1983 former servicemen club in the village. In other neighbourhoods, there are also people enlisted in 1983; then the 1983 comrade-in-arms association came into being operating within the commune. *“They themselves voluntarily gather together to form a voluntary association, then the government cannot manage. They are*

harmless, for they voluntarily hold meetings and never deviate from the common guidelines” (GT1, 2009).

Thus, the voluntary associations (or the “spontaneous unregistered” associations as referred to by the local authorities) are considered by local governments as sideline associations, not significant in social management. These associations cannot make any change to or reverse the *statu quo*.

“No farmers dare to conduct peaceful evolution, no one dares to falsely disseminate the policies of the Party, and no one dares to gather forces to object the government at all. From the ancient time to now, the commons only practice a little violence some time and then are easy to be suppressed. Peaceful evolution comes from retrogressive officials, the commons cannot think of it” (GT37, 2009).

“They are the spiritual associations encouraging their members only; for the society, they are harmless. For there are no official directions, the central government does not pay much attention and the local government also pays not much interest” (GT21, 2008).

Theoretically, the government can easily get hold of the voluntary associations in the village. The list of associations can be made by the Vice Chairman in charge of cultural affairs or by the heads of associations. The government only needs to contact the heads of the associations or groups, who can be summoned immediately when needed. In Giao Tan, the government can get hold of the associations via the neighbourhoods because each neighbourhood has a police staff in charge of this work. Normally, the government does not interfere with the operation of these associations. *“It is also not necessary to manage these associations. Socio-political institutions do not require summary reports. They do not pay much attention, so we also do not care”* (GT25, 2008). The government only takes its role when an association violates the law.

Moreover, due to the popularity of these associations in everyday life, especially among prestigious rural residents in the village, these associations attract the participation of party members, village officials, and the staff of other socio-political organizations. Therefore, the operation of these associations, in a certain sense, are placed under control of the local government and Party cells.

“There’ll never be any problem at all, for every association has party members as its members. An individual often finds himself/ herself in this association or another, whether it is the Farmers Association, Women’s Union, Youth Union, or the Elderly association. The majority of the members of the former servicemen club are from the Former Soldiers Association or the Veterans Association. Unofficially these associations are placed under the management of political organizations, so who dare to do wrong?” (GT1, 2009).

Even for some voluntary associations under the management of the government, such as the former servicemen association, commune authority assigns village leaders to direct the association to keep regular operation.

“Like it or not, the village authority has to keep the association’s operation active. For example, it’s strange if a member’s relative passes away without any member from the former servicemen association coming to offer incense. We cannot leave it as such. They have regulations for their members to pay tribute or visit when members’ parents die or get ill. So if no one comes, it is likely that the association may dissolve, so we need to consolidate it. If the chairman is too incompetent, then replace him. This is the policy from the superiors” (GT26, 2009).

For associations not assigned to the management of the local governments, the establishment and dissolution of them are not the concerns of the local governments.

“These associations are “spontaneous and unregistered.” No leadership is assigned. And it doesn’t matter. For example, the schoolmate association is set up by the schoolmates themselves; no leadership needed. Or for the former servicemen association, now there are many former servicemen not joining any activities. People gather together and call it association. No one pay much care how the associations are formed or how they dissolve. All are spontaneous” (DQ65, 2009).

With such a view of voluntary associations, the management over these associations has become redundant for the local government, because:

Now there are much more associations, and these associations are all voluntarily set up such as same age association, student association, etc. The government cannot manage them because they do not report. And these associations only seasonally operate in such occasions as weddings and funerals, illness and visiting each other. It is nothing illegal. (GT45, 2009).

These “unregistered” associations do not exercise much influence on the society, for they are the voluntary associations based on affection, working on the basis of visiting members when being sick, not against the guidelines and policies of the Party, not affecting the operation of the local government. (GT11, 2009).

Meanwhile, a number of voluntary associations want to express their role in contributing to the overall operation of the locality:

“We have to understand our rights and when participating in the mass organizations or fatherland front executive committee, we must support the police and the village and commune governments to handle incidents. If we do not solve the incidents, then we should also give advice so that people respect us. Otherwise, it’s so bad when saying that

it's not our responsibility when the locality is in troubles and saying that it's our duty when election is called, festivals are held and rewards are received" (DQ14, 2007).

Voluntary associations in rural areas, especially in Giao Tan, normally want local government to be patron. They wish there will be policies to formalize their associations, looking forward to the attention of the Party and government.

"If the association is formalized, then there will be policies from above, and the Party's and government's direction for it. As patroned by the government, if organized by the State, then the association will be a member of the Fatherland Front. For now, they are just spontaneous associations, self-establishing and operating; the state does not manage the operation. The associations are free, without leadership. It's so relaxing to be free in dining. Nonetheless, it is still better to have a system of management from the central to the grassroots" (GT21, 2008).

Thus, the problem for these associations is not an open mechanism for them to freely and independently conduct their activities. The problem is they need to be managed and directed by the authorities in their activities. In other words, they need the patronage from the state, or they need the dependency.

Some representatives think that the government has no right to interfere with such voluntary associations. Other voluntary associations are established by the people themselves, so they are entitled to the operation within the regulation of the laws. For those created solely for the purpose of affection exchange such as schoolmate association, there is no need to formalize it. Members are free to hold activities, until they get old and are unable to participate, no need to manage or exercise whatever mechanisms (Male, 1943 Association Representative, Giao Tan). A rather common thinking is that when the government does not have a move towards the

establishment of the association, especially when without any financial support, they also cannot manage the associations.

“It [the government] cannot manage us, for it does not give us anything. It’s our right to organize activities. We have money for activities and feasting. It’s our self-financial contribution; no one gives us” (GT21, 2008).

Another trend is that people believe that the government operates under the guidelines and laws of the state, but the government members are also the villagers (the village has its own practices), so they should be responsible for protecting the people. Last year, on the occasion of the New Year festival in Dong Ky village, the Reception Board- *Ban Khanh tier*¹⁰ received some fireworks (which is prohibited by state law). Both the association members and the authorities dared not openly receive; no one dared to sign, but saying that “if you can do, then you do it.” When the fireworks came to the locality, commune authorities did not have a word and let the fireworks be seized by the district police. Local people then blamed the authorities for not protecting the people.

“Local government must pay respect to people and must follow the common practices of the localities. It’s impossible for the government to not protect local people. The government must work for the people because people is what makes up the government” (DQ36, 2008).

The commune officials themselves have come to realize that they must know how to live with, how to behave, and how to stay close to local people. However prestigious an official is in the commune authorities, he is bound to be affected if not knowing how to conduct.

¹⁰ Belongs to the 1957 same-age club.

3. Sub-conclusion

As the conduct between local authorities and the voluntary associations is considered, it can be seen that that an individual builds a network of social relations for himself/ herself implies a certain dependence on the village and the traditional institutions of the village when only those who do not have the opportunity to leave the village or want to work there seek to expand the network in the village in the form of joining associations.

The study on the relationship between the local government and voluntary associations in the two communes of Giao Tan and Dong Quang also shows the difference in conduct of the two governments when handling the work related to these associations. In Giao Tan, people can hardly find the opposition between the government and the people. Few people question the legality of the conduct of the local officials. They, however, demand officials to ensure their social security and create jobs for them. In other words, the voluntary associations wish to be patroned, paid attention to and encouraged by the local government, considering it as an honour for the associations. Meanwhile, the government cannot play the patron role for these associations due to the diversity and popularity of them in the locality. Operating on the basis of seasonal events and irregular activities, voluntary associations make it hard for the government to manage, even when it wants to. However, for some certain sensitive associations, the government manages to gather them in one system for management. Thus, members are managed by the association and also the local government. For Giao Tan commune government, and part of Dong Quang commune government, the emergence of “harmless” associations makes the management unnecessary. Dong Quang is slightly different from Giao Tan in that the government is not concerned about the trend of association establishment, but advocates the trend to formalize some groups instead. Some associations were initially spontaneous; after some time, the commune suggested and mobilized members to officially become “registered” associations and received the establishment licenses of the

local government. The flexible application of legal framework helps local governments in the management over voluntary associations.

From the review of conducts between local governments and voluntary associations, it can be seen that the creation of a social network within individuals implies a certain dependence on villages and other traditional institutions. That network of relationships within villagers is often built when members have no chance to escape the village life or they wish to work in the village.

Understanding the relationship between local governments and voluntary associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan also reveals different ways of behavior of governments when dealing with these associations. In Giao Tan, the opposition between local governments and people is hardly mentioned. People rarely question the legality of local officials' conducts. But they require from them qualities of a servant who ensures security and creates employment for local residents. In other words, voluntary associations want to become protégés in their relations with local authorities. Receiving attention from local authorities such as visits or encouragement is regarded as an honour to an association. Meanwhile, governments cannot function as a sponsor of these associations due to their diversity and availability in the area. The simple nature and irregular operation of voluntary associations make it hard for governments to manage them even when they wish to do so. However, for some associations with a certain sensibility, local governments seek to put them under their management. Thus, individuals are under the management of associations and governments simultaneously. To authorities in Giao Tan, and some parts of Dong Quang, the emergence of associations is "harmless", hence, managing them becomes unnecessary. Dong Quang is slightly different from Giao Tan because its government is not concerned about the trend of association establishment, they, even, advocate the formalizing of these associations. Initially, some operated spontaneously, but after the consultation of communal officials they become official

associations in the sense that their activities are registered, and their establishments are granted by local governments. Applying the legal basis in a flexible way, governments can make it possible to manage voluntary associations.

CONCLUSION

Socio-economic changes in Viet Nam since the Doi Moi (1986) mark a substantial change in the associational life in Viet Nam. Social organizations have been consecutively established at national, provincial, district, commune and even grass-root levels. Voluntary associations of which most are running without legal status are also part of this social process. The 1990s in Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes witnessed the coming into life of not only clubs operating for need of rural residents, but also the revival of associational practices that have been formed since the old days.

In this study, I attempt to get to grips with the nature of the participation in voluntary associations by Northern rural residents. This theme is not easy to figure out, particularly in the current context when there is still an absence of systematic studies thereon. Within the scope of this study, I first and foremost focus in clarification of legal basis in establishment of associations in Viet Nam and facets of relating policies. Secondly, an effort is also made for the identification and classification of these associations in the context of northern rural area nowadays. Thirdly, I try to describe the “associational life” of rural residents as well as manners rural inhabitants create their “social space” by getting involved in these associations. Studying on voluntary associations, though interesting, but cannot be seen as an independent event in the broader context. I, therefore aim at the apprehension the reciprocal relationship between voluntary associations in rural areas and local governments, in order to assessing the prospect of these associations in shaping up a civil space of rural residents.

The identification of voluntary associations helps make a portrait of collective life of Northern rural residents at the moment. The formation of voluntary associations is based on the

voluntariness of rural residents who share the same interests or characteristics. These associations are operating independently to local authorities, not under any umbrella agencies, and mainly serve the need of members and their families. Voluntary associations are attractive to local residents because they are compact, simple and close and familiar to the majority. Despite a relative differences in names, but Associations, Guild and Club so far have been three most popular names implying social associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang communes. Names of voluntary associations often describe their activities or their targeted clients, therefore, calling names of certain associations means also introducing about their activities or targeted clients. Based on the nature of operation of these associations, I have classified voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang in groups including: i) Friendship Association; ii) Same-interest Association; iii) Occupational Association; and iv) Mutual help Associations. The study recorded a difference with regards to allocation of associations in the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan; whereas those same-interest associations are mainly prevail in Dong Quang, meanwhile in Giao Tan, the other associations are more popular. However, despite being classified into aforementioned groups, the basic function of the social associations is affection sharing and support each other among members.

Putting in sharp focus on the expressions of "associational life" of voluntary associations, I found that voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang operates mainly within the village sphere with flexible organizational structure. The nature of in-turn responsibility is the prevalent characteristics in those associations, when members one after another register to take the responsibility for their own associations' joint activities. This not only demonstrates personal responsibility towards the community life, but by doing so, rural residents learn and practise principles of collective life. Through this in-turn responsibility, voluntary associations are places where one find or at least feel him/herself part of the majority, a member of a community. Equality is a principle grasped thoroughly by voluntary associations throughout

their activities. Participation in a voluntary association, one assumes both the obligation to serve the community and the interest of being served by the community. Functional activities, often expressed through the name of the associations (e.g. a badminton club is organized for people who play badminton), actually are not of the highest importance to members. More important for them is when their own families need some help, there is a source of help from voluntary associations in place. Therefore, these associations are highly appreciated by their family visits, encouraging acts, exchange of congratulations and regards in events in the lifecycle events of their members. Even in this kind of activity, the principle of equality is stringently applied, reflected in specific number of visits and scope of the visit as prescribed in the regulations, with an aim to ensure that members are entitled to the equal benefit. A key point in engaging in these visiting, exchanging regards and congratulations is the opportunity for people to develop or strengthen social relations with the surrounding community. This activity not only reflects the mutual affection among members, but also prevents people from moral judgments without placing themselves in the collective life of village.

Feasting is the most popular and important to almost voluntary associations. The role of meals has been mentioned by scholars when talking about voluntary associations in rural areas. Feast, not for filling up stomach, but is a tie connecting members together. Through meals, stories of daily life are shared, information is exchanged, and new social relations are connected, etc. This dining also reveals the difference in nature of meals perceived by residents in the two communes. For Giao Tan residents, meal is for tying up members, consolidate links within a group. Conversely, ritual nature associated with feasting activities in Dong Quang creates a religious nature for voluntary associations and making it become an integral part of the village's institutions. Feasting is an opportunity for Dong Quang residents to learn about their villages' norms and maintain the hierarchy and order therein. Sketching portraits of people who

participate in associations and who don't also shows the remarkable points in "associational life" of rural residents.

Though joining to voluntary association is based on voluntariness, not everyone can participate in this association life. The portraits of those non-participant people are not much positively viewed by members: they are poor people with few social relationships, afraid of confrontation, no idea about communication. Or it could also be people who deliberately delay collective contributions and consequently are excluded. In general, rural residents like participating in association activities. There are many reasons explaining their participation in voluntary associations. Many people say to join guilds is an honour, even they find themselves more imposing being members of a certain associations. Besides, participation in voluntary associations is also aimed at establishing links and social exchange, to help rural residents expand their network of social relationships. The distinction between participants and non-participants in association activities in the local is explained by the distinction between village and communal space. There, the village is a familiar place, the space close to family and neighbourhood relations. Whereas, communal space is a not very familiar with the farmers, where they feel unprotected.

We believe that the variety of voluntary associations in rural areas across Red river delta more or less shows differentiation among rural residents. In a certain extent, the association's life is a "playground" of the rural elite. Becoming a member of association allows people to participate in village's affairs, involve in political and social activities in or outside village. Here, besides the rural elite groups, marginalized groups also appear, who in one way or another, are excluded or sidelined off from village activities. In between these two groups is a wide spectrum of individuals whose participation in the association life is the only way for not being marginalized, but not strong enough to help them engage more deeply into the life of the village. As such, in consideration of the participation in associations in the village, we can see

a Vietnamese village heterogeneous. There, a mixture of social relationship classes of the different population groups is creating a more diverse society than what we are often described about a Vietnamese village homogeneous.

The involvement of rural people in voluntary associations might also tell us how important the collective life is to them. The sense of belonging to a group and a community plays the role of social protection for their lives. The fact that rural people get involved (sometimes by chance) in voluntary associations is an act to protect themselves (form of self-protection) and ensure against risks. On the other hand, joining an association may allow him to have a voice or power of decision. In this context, participation in voluntary associations can help building up one's social status in rural society.

Study the tectonics of "social space" by rural residents will help to clarify the distinction between external and internal space in a village. In many forms, rural residents get-together with distinctive role, functions to contribute to the operation of village. There are voluntary associations whose function is to strengthen local cohesion within the village, or even neighbourhood such as same-age association or neighbour groups. Joining a same-age association, farmers must get on with its code of conduct, the order and hierarchy of collective life. That is a process that they have to perform a series of different responsibilities in "serving the community". Local coherence is further strengthened as the principle of "autonomy" of the traditional village is highlighted through setting criteria for those who can participate in this association: only the villagers (or come from a family having at least three generations living in the village) can join this association. Therefore, people outside the village can be accepted as a legitimate citizen of the commune, but still not a member of the village! Besides, there are voluntary associations have a trend to orient people to the relations outside the ambit of the locality, such as associations of people with the same interests. Attention needs to be paid to the limitation of the local space (hamlet, lane) to overview all the "opening" of the linkage-

based on interests as well as positive meaning in a context of changing rural life nowadays. There is a certain difference in the behaviour of residents in two studied sites with regards to ceremonial activities and social exchanges. That difference demonstrates the differences in economic development and social structure: between one side who is rather closed the agricultural economy of Giao Tan and the other, in Dong Quang who is a significant development of monetary relations in agriculture and handicraft industry.

Reviewing legal basis for the establishment and operation of the associations in Viet Nam reveals that Doi Moi policy has boosted citizens' demand of citizens for association establishment. In terms of legislation, there is even a certain delay compared to the real vibrant practice of association establishment in Vietnam. By 2010 as many as some 15,000 associations are operating across all provinces and cities in Vietnam, not to mention countless associations of district and commune operational sphere or active in small communities who are not reckoned exactly as they do not register themselves. The provisions of the Decree on associations, operation and management of the voluntary associations set forth strict criteria for the association establishment that even those that are willing to register for establishment can hardly meet. Even legal documents relating to associations do not provide for state management of community based voluntary associations who do not register for their legal entity. This created a rift in the management of grassroots associations. The central government does not know the quantity as well as the operations of the association at the local level. Even the local authority do not put the reckoning the number of locally active associations as their task, because lots of Voluntary associations are in operation without notifying local authorities. Getting to grips with relationship between local authority and voluntary associations in the 2 communes Giao Tan and Dong Quang reveals very different behaviours of the authorities in handling affairs related to these associations. In Giao Tan, it is hardly to hear people mention about the opposition between the authority and people. People do not care much about the

legality in conduct of officials. But they expect from officers the behaviour of government representative, who can ensure security and seeking jobs for people. In other words, voluntary associations want to become a sponsored entity in their relation with the government. Being paid attention, visits, encouraged by the government is regarded an honour. Meanwhile, the government cannot play as a sponsor to these associations due to their diversity and prevalence in the locality. Event-based and irregular operation is challenging the management of the authorities even when they want the management. For the Giao Tan and to some extent, Dong Quang authorities, the emergence of the associations is "harmless", and therefore direct management measures for these associations are unnecessary.

Dong Quang commune authorities, instead of being concerned about the tendency of the establishment of associations of their residents promulgates a policy on formalization groups and associations by issuing decisions recognizing the existence of the voluntary association within communes boundary (although legally, only district authorities are competent for this decision). Applying the legal basis in a flexible way is the approach of the local authority in performing their management of the voluntary associations. No matter how local authority practices its management to voluntary associations, these associations are recognized by their activities with nature of support, mediation, advocacy, maintains the neighbourhood ties etc. These associations also help members to expand their social networks and building social connections with community members.

In examining the interaction between local governments and voluntary associations, we can see that the construction of social network of an individual implies a certain dependence in the village and concerning traditional institutions, when, in many cases, members of voluntary associations are those who could not seek for a better life outside the village. Therefore they made efforts to extend their own social relations in the locality. In another dimension, the efforts for organizing an associational life beyond the boundary of a village (often found in the

group of same-interest associations) also show up a local society who is trying to assert its identity. In the present social context, it is still quite early to assess the prospects of the voluntary associations in shaping up civil space of rural residents.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF CODED INFORMANTS IN GIAO TAN AND DONG QUANG COMMUNES

LIST OF CODED INFORMANTS IN GIAO TAN COMMUNE

Id.	Code	Sex M=Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
1.	GT1	M	1962	High school	Commune official	Quarter 2, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	21/6/2007 21/3/2009
2.	GT2	F	1961	High school	Commune official	Quarter 1, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	21/6/2007
3.	GT3	M	1944	Middle school	Not working	Quarter 1, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	22/6/2007
4.	GT4	M	1945	High school	Retired	Quarter 8, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	22/6/2007
5.	GT5	M	1934	Middle school	Retired	Quarter 1, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	22/6/2007
6.	GT6	M	1965	High school	Commune official	Quarter 4, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	23/6/2007 21/3/2009
7.	GT7	M	1951	Middle school	Peasant	Quarter 2, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	24/6/2007
8.	GT8	M	1966	High school	Paysan	Quarter 9, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	24/6/2007
9.	GT9	M	1954	High school	Commune official	Quarter 8, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	24/6/2007

10.	GT10	M	1965	High school	Cooperative Direction board	Quarter 6, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	24/6/2007
11.	GT11	M	1950	High school	Commune official	Quarter 7, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	21/8/2007
12.	GT12	F	1955	Elementary school	Peasant	Quarter 2, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	21/8/2007
13.	GT13	F	1958	Elementary school	Peasant	Quarter 9, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	22/8/2007
14.	GT14	M	1954	Middle school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 4, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	22/8/2007
15.	GT15	M	1934	Elementary school	Peasant	Quarter 12, Hiet Cu, Giao Tan	23/8/2007
16.	GT16	M	1954	High school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 6, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	23/8/2007
17.	GT17	F	1965	Middle school	Peasant	Quarter 1, Duy Tac, Giao Tan	24/8/2007
18.	GT18	M	1962	High school	Commune official	Quarter 7, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	24/8/2007
19.	GT19	M	1952	Middle school	Retired	Quarter 9, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	25/8/2007
20.	GT20	M	1945	Middle school	Funeral service provider	Quarter 8, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	25/8/2007 16/9/2008
21.	GT21	M	1838	Dropped out of middle school	Retired	Quarter 11, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	15/9/2008
22.	GT23	M	1949	Dropped out of middle school	Retired	Quarter 2, Duy Tac Giao Tan	16/9/2008
23.	GT26	M	1945	Middle school	Funeral service provider	Quarter 8, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	16/9/2008

24.	GT24	M	1947	Dropped out of elementary school	Peasant	Quarter 4, Dich Giao Giao Tan	17/9/2008
25.	GT25	M	1959	High school	Commune official	Quarter 1, Duy Tac Giao Tan	17/9/2008
26.	GT26	M	1962	Middle school	Agricultural service provider	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	19/3/2009
27.	GT27	F	1947	Dropped out of elementary school	Peasant	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	19/3/2009
28.	GT28	M	1951	Dropped out of elementary school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	20/3/2009
29.	GT29	M	1966	Middle school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 12, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	20/3/2009
30.	GT32	M	1950	Middle school	Commune official	Quarter 7, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	21/3/2009 24/3/2009
31.	GT33	M	1940	Middle school	Retired	Quarter 4, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	22/3/2009
32.	GT34	M	1965	High school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 4, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	22/3/2009
33.	GT35	M	1943	Middle school	Retired	Quarter 11, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	23/3/2009
34.	GT36	F	1959	High school	Tailor	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	23/3/2009
35.	GT37	M	1946	Middle school	Retired	Quarter 9, Quan Loi, Giao Tan	24/3/2009
36.	GT38	M	1940	High school	Retired	Quarter 12, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	25/3/2009

37.	GT39	M	1952	High school	Chairman of mass organization	Quarter 11, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	25/3/2009
38.	GT40	M	1984	High school	Veterinarian	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	26/3/2009 15/12/2009
39.	GT41	F	1970	Dropped out of middle school	Peasant	Quarter 5, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	26/3/2009
40.	GT42	F	1971	High school	Small trader	Quarter 11, Hiet Cu, Giao Tân	12/12/2009
41.	GT43	F	1971	Middle school	Mechanical service provider	Quarter 9, Quan Loi, Giao Tân	12/12/2009
42.	GT44	M	1959	Middle school	Peasant (large farm land)	Quarter 10, Hiet Cu Giao Tan	13/12/2009
43.	GT45	M	1960	Bachelor	Commune official	Quarter 11, Hiet Cu, Giao Tân	13/12/2009
44.	GT46	M	1959	Bachelor	Provincial official	Quarter 7, Quan Loi, Giao Tân	13/12/2009
45.	GT47	M	1961	High school	Cooperative Direction board	Quarter 7, Quan Loi, Giao Tân	14/12/2009
46.	GT49	F	1971	Bachelor	Teacher	Quarter 4, Dich Giao, Giao Tan	15/12/2009
47.	GT50	F	1959	Bachelor	Official (Provincial Fatherland Front)	Nam Dinh city	16/12/2009
48.	GT51	F	1960	Bachelor	Official (Provincial People's Assembly)	Nam Dinh city	16/12/2009

LIST OF CODED INFORMANTS IN DONG QUANG COMMUNE

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
1.	DQ1	M	1966	High school	Commune official	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	20/4/2007 10/8/2009
2.	DQ2	M	1962	High school	Commune official	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	21/4/2007
3.	DQ6	F	1961	High school	Chairwoman of mass organization	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	22/4/2007
4.	DQ7	M	1957	Middle school	Manual worker	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	22/4/2007
5.	DQ8	M	1950	Elementary school	Chairman of mass organization	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	22/4/2007
6.	DQ9	M	1932	Elementary school	Not working	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	22/4/2007
7.	DQ10	M	1934	Literacy	Peasant	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	23/4/2007
8.	DQ11	M	1943	Elementary school	Not working	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	23/4/2007
9.	DQ12	F	1943	High school	Retired	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	23/4/2007
10.	DQ13	M	1973	High school	Peasant (large farm land)	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	24/4/2007
11.	DQ14	M	1968	Middle school	Mason	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	25/4/2007
12.	DQ15	M	1938	Elementary school	Peasant	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	25/4/2007

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
13.	DQ16	M	1921	Elementary school	Businessman	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	3/10/2007
14.	DQ17	M	1956	Middle school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	4/10/2007
15.	DQ18	M	1962	Dropped out of high school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	5/10/2007
16.	DQ19	M	1961	High school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	5/10/2007
17.	DQ20	M	1968	Dropped out of high school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	6/10/2007
18.	DQ21	M	1958	Dropped out of high school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	6/10/2007
19.	DQ22	M	1936	Literacy	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	7/10/2007
20.	DQ23	F	1961	High school	Commune official	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	7/10/2007
21.	DQ24	M	1947	Literacy	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	8/10/2007
22.	DQ25	M	1967	High school	Commune official	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	9/10/2007
23.	DQ26	M	1959	Elementary school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	10/10/2007
24.	DQ27	M	1965	High school	Commune official	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	10/10/2007
25.	DQ35	M	1941	Middle school	Retired	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	23/06/2008

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
26.	DQ36	M	1958	Middle school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	24/6/2008
27.	DQ37	M	1940	Literacy	Guardian of village temple	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	24/6/2008
28.	DQ38	M	1967	Middle school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	25/6/2008
29.	DQ39	F	1970	Dropped out of high school	Housewife	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	25/6/2008
30.	DQ40	M	1943	Cannot read or write	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	25/6/2008
31.	DQ41	M	1951	Dropped out of high school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	26/6/2008
32.	DQ42	M	1942	High school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	27/6/2008
33.	DQ43	M	1962	Dropped out of middle school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	28/6/2008
34.	DQ44	M	1932	Literacy	Not working	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	28/6/2008
35.	DQ45	M	1937	Middle school	Not working	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	16/8/2008
36.	DQ46	M	1938	High school	Retired	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	16/8/2008
37.	DQ47	F	1941	High school	Nurse	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	1/8/2008
38.	DQ48	M	1965	High school	Small trader	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	16/8/2008

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
39.	DQ49	M	1971	High school	Village policeman	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	17/8/2008
40.	DQ50	M	1965	High school	Agricultural service provider	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	17/8/2008
41.	DQ51	M	1946	Bachelor	Retired	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	18/8/2008
42.	DQ52	M	1962	Middle school	Village policeman	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	18/8/2008
43.	DQ53	M	1958	Middle school	Chairman of mass organization	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	19/8/2008 8/3/2009
44.	DQ54	M	1955	High school	Peasant (large farmland)	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	20/8/2008
45.	DQ55	M	1955	High school	Small trader	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	21/8/2008
46.	DQ56	M	1938	High school	Retired	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	22/8/2008
47.	DQ57	M	1982	High school	Woodworker	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	22/8/2008
48.	DQ58	M	1958	Middle school	Wooden service provider	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	13/4/2009 10/8/2009
49.	DQ59	F	1974	Dropped out of middle school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	14/4/2009
50.	DQ60	M	1947	High school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	14/4/2009
51.	DQ61	M	1951	Dropped out of high school	Small trader	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	15/4/2009

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
52.	DQ62	M	1965	High school	Commune official	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	16/4/2009
53.	DQ63	F	1952	High school	Business woman	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	16/4/2009
54.	DQ64	M	1956	Middle school	Commune official	Binh Ha, Dong Quang	17/4/2009
55.	DQ65	M	1945	Bachelor	Commune official	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	23/6/2008 18/4/2009
56.	DQ66	F	1953	Middle school	Retired	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	18/4/2009
57.	DQ67	M	1927	Literacy	Not working	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	19/4/2009
58.	DQ68	F	1940	Middle school	Housewife	Trang Liet, Dong Quang	19/4/2009
59.	DQ69	M	1951	Middle school	Retired	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	10/8/2009
60.	DQ70	F	1959	Elementary school	Business woman	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	11/8/2009
61.	DQ71	M	1979	High school	Woodwork service provider	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	11/8/2009
62.	DQ72	M	1977	High school	Business man	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	13/8/2009
63.	DQ73	M	1973	Dropped out of middle school	Woodwork service provider	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	14/8/2009
64.	DQ74	M	1959	High school	Commune official	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	10/10/2007 15/8/2009

Id.	Code	Sex M= Male F=Female	Year of birth	Education	Occupation	Residence	Date of interview
65.	DQ75	F	1959	High school	Commune official	Dong Ky, Dong Quang	7/10/2007 15/8/2009

APPENDIX 2: LEGAL DOCUMENTS ON ASSOCIATIONS

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Law	101-SL/L003	20/5/1957	Prescribing the people's right to freedom of assembly
Law	102-SL/L004	20/5/1957	Defining the right to freedom of association
Decree	258-TTg	14/6/1957	Defining to implement the Act No102-SL/I004 dated 20-05-1957 on the right of association
Instruction	53-CT/TW	28/11/1984	Secretariat's instruction to strengthen the Party's mass works
Instruction	82-CT/TW	15/4/1986	Secretariat's instruction on ideology works in 1986
Instruction	01/CT	05/1/1989	Chairman of the Ministerial Council's Instruction on the management of the organization and activities of the mass organizations
Circular	07/TCCP	06/1/1989	Instruction on implementing the Chairman of the Ministerial Council's Instruction 01/CT dated 05/1/1989 on the management of organization and activities of the mass organizations
Instruction	202/CT	05/6/1990	Chairman of the Ministerial Council's Instruction on implementing the State regulations on forming associations
Decree	35-HDBT	28/1/1992	Decree 35-HDBT dated 28/2/1992 on the management of science and technology activities
Circular	195/LB	13/11/1992	Instructions on registering for researching and developing science and technology for organizations
Circular	23/TT-LB	22/3/1993	Instructions on the implementation of mechanism managing the economic units of the CPV and political organizations
Report	52/TCCP-TC	03/04/1995	Committee of Organization and Personnel's report on the organization and operations of Associations and NGOs

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Report	64/TCCP-TC	13/04/1995	Committee of Organization and Personnel's Report on drafting the Law on Associations and proposing to continue funding for law drafting in 1995
Instruction	323/TTg	27/5/1995	On reviewing the sectors and authoritative organs in implementing the Central Party Committee's Resolution 8B (tenure VI) "Innovating the Party's mass works and enhancing the relationship between the Party and the people."
Instruction	62/CT-TW	8/11/1995	The instruction of the Secretariat (tenure VII) on enhancing the Chinese in the new context (1995-2005)
Statement	100/TCCP-TC	07/06/1997	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's statement to the Prime Minister about the Government's decree regulating the organization, operations, and management of the associations
Instruction	42 CT/TW	06/10/1998	The Politburo's Instruction on enhancing the Party's leadership over the organization and operations of the associations
Official dispatch	5582/VPCP-TCCB	6/2/1999	The Prime Minister entrusts the Committee of Organization and Personnel with building the organization, operations, and management of associations.
Statement	73/TTr-BTCCBCP	13/10/1999	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's Statement to the Government on the drafting of the Government's Decree on the organization, operations, and management of associations
Report	23/BC-BTCCBCP	01/03/2000	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's report on the organization, operations, and management of associations in 1999
Decision	24/QĐ-BTCCBCP	02/03/2000	The Minister – Head of the Committee of Organization and Personnel on the establishing of the Board of reviewing the topics of the organization, methods, and effectiveness of the mass organizations
Statement	200/TTr-BTCCBCP	17/08/2000	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's Statement to the Prime Minister on the

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
			management of NGOs in Viet Nam (<i>The Committee of Organization and Personnel's asking the Prime Minister to entrust the Minister of Foreign Affairs to manage the INGOs</i>)
Decision	88/QĐ-BTCCBCP	23/08/2000	The Minister – Head of the Committee of Organization and Personnel on the setting up of the Board of drafting the association establishment
Report	11/BC-BTCCBCP	14/03/2001	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's report on the organization, operations, and management of associations in 2000
Decision	64/2001/QĐ-TTg	26/4/2001	The Prime Minister issues the regulations on managing and using the internal non – governmental aids
Instruction	28/CT-TTg	28/11/2001	The instruction on creating favorable conditions for enterprises (<i>entrusted for the Committee of Organization and Personnel to study and report to the Prime Minister on the organization, operation of professional associations</i>)
Law	32/2001	25/12/2001	The Government organization law
Report	02/BC-BTCCBCP	04/02/2002	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's report on the organization, operations, and management of the associations in 2001
Report	27/BC-BTCCBCP	15/04/2002	The Committee of Organization and Personnel's report on the building of legal documents on associations
Official dispatch	2407/VPVP-TCCB	9/5/2002	The Government's Office announces the Prime Minister's ideas entrusting the Ministry of Home Affairs in coordination with other organs in completing the drafted decree on associations to present to the Government
Decree	81/NĐ-CP	17/10/2002	Regulating the law on science and technology
Official dispatch	561/BNV-TCPCP	23/10/2002	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch on reviewing the works on associations in 2002 (<i>to associations on the contents/timing of reporting the operations of associations in 2002</i>)

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Statement	869/TTr-BNV	28/11/2002	The Ministry of Home Affairs' statement to the Government on the decree regulating the organization, operations, and management of associations
Decision	21/2003/QĐ-TTg	29/1/2003	The Prime Minister's decision on using the state budget to support socio-political – professional associations, social organizations, socio – professional organizations in implementing the tasks entrusted by the Government
Decree	88/2003/NĐ-CP	30/07/2003	The Government's Decree regulates the organization, operations, and management of associations
Circular	123/2003/TT-BTC	16/12/2003	Instructing the using of the state budget to support socio-political – professional associations, social organizations, socio – professional organizations in implementing the tasks entrusted by the Government
Circular	01/2004/TT-BNV	15/1/2004	Instructing the implementation of some articles in the Decree 88/2003
Decision	24/2004/QĐ-BNV	09/04/2004	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on allowing the establishment of the Viet Nam Former religious officials Association
Decision	61/2004/QĐ-BNV	07/09/2004	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on approving the regulations of the Viet Nam Former religious officials Association
Decision	64/2004/QĐ-BNV	21/09/2004	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on allowing the establishment of the Viet Nam Former Youth Volunteer Association
Official dispatch	2010/BNV-TCPCP	09/08/2005	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch on reviewing the mass associations and organizations in the Chinese community
Report	2117/BC-BNV	18/08/2005	The Ministry of Home Affairs' report in asking for the halt of adjusting some articles of the Government's Decree 88/2003/NĐ-CP dated 30/7/2003 regulating the organization, operations, and management of associations

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Circular	10/2005/TT-BKHCHN	24/8/2005	Instructing the requirements for establishment and registration of scientific and technological associations
Ordinance	27/2005/PL-UBTVQH11	07/10/2005	Veterans Ordinance
Report	3096/BC-BNV	19/10/2005	The Ministry of Home Affairs' report on the operations of mass organizations in the Chinese community following the Secretariat's Instruction 62/CT – TW, dated 08/11/1995 on enhancing the works on the Chinese in the new context (1995 – 2005)
Statement	3644/TTr-BNV	14/12/2005	The Ministry of Home Affairs to the Government on the draft law on associations
Statement	302/TTr-BNV	10/02/2006	Presenting the Prime Minister on the Draft law on associations
Official dispatch	853/VPCP-XDPL	17/2/2006	Notifying the Prime Minister's ideas on "approving the draft law on associations to the Standing Committee of National Assembly for discussions"
Statement	18/CP-XDPL	27/2/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs presents the draft law on associations to the National Assembly
Report	832/BC-BNV	03/04/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs' report on the implementation of the Government's Decree 88/2003/NĐ-CP dated 30/7/2003 regulating the organization, operations, and management of associations
Report	996/BC-BNV	14/04/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs' report on receiving and addressing the Standing Committee of National Assembly's ideas on the association law
Statement	38/TTr-CP	17/4/2006	The statement of draft law on associations presented to the National Assembly
Decree	53/2006/NĐ-CP	25/5/2006	The Government's decree on the policy to encourage, develop the service providers for private sectors and instructing documents

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Official dispatch	2628/BNV-TCPCP	03/07/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch on the listing of association records
Statement	3134/TTr-BNV	17/08/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs presents to the Party Personnel Commission on the Draft law on associations
Decision	247/2006/QĐ-TTg	30/10/2006	Amending, supplementing some articles of the Government's decision 21/2003/QĐ-TTg dated 29/01/2003 on the using of the state budget to support socio-political – professional associations, social organizations, socio – professional organizations in implementing the tasks entrusted by the Government
Official dispatch	4258/BNV-TCPCP	30/11/2006	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch on instructing the reviewing the association works and budgets in 2006
Official dispatch	447/BNV-TCPCP	14/02/2007	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch in responding the issue of establishing no – legal – person associations
Ordinance	34/2007/PL-UBTVQH11	20/4/2007	Ordinance on the grassroots democracy in communes, wards...
Official dispatch	1635/BNV-TCPCP	07/06/2007	The Ministry of Home Affairs' official dispatch to Da Nang provincial department of home affairs in instructing the establishment of associations (<i>for the cases not regulated in the decree 88</i>)
Decree	148/2007/NĐ-CP	25/09/2007	The Government's decree on the organization, operations of Social Fund, Charity Funds.
Report	3628/BC-BNV	17/12/2007	The Ministry of Home Affairs' report on reviewing the implementation of the Government's Decree 88/2003/NĐ-CP, dated 30/7/2003 regulating the organization, operations, and management of associations and guidelines for supplementing, and adjusting the decree
Decision	97/2009/QĐ-TTg	24/7/2009	Decision on the listing of areas which individuals can establish scientific and technological organizations

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Decision	389/QĐ-BNV	20/04/2010	The Minister of Home Affairs approving the (amended, supplemented) Regulations of the Viet Nam Former Volunteer Youth Association
Decree	45/2010/NĐ-CP	21/04/2010	The Government's decree on the organization, operations, and management of associations
Decision	68/2010/QĐ-TTg	01/11/2010	The Prime Minister's decision on defining specific associations
Circular	11/2010/TT-BNV	26/11/2010	The Ministry of Home Affairs' circular regulating the implementation of the Government's decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP dated 21/4/2010 on the organization, operations, management of associations
Decision	71/2011/QĐ-TTg	20/12/2011	The decision on ensuring and using the state budget to financially support the specific associations
Decree	30/2012/NĐ-CP	12/04/2012	The Government's decree on the organization, operations of social fund, charity funds
Decree	33/2012/NĐ-CP	13/04/2012	The Government's decree on amending, supplementing some articles of the Government's decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP dated 21/4/2010 on the organization, operations, and management of associations
Decision	345/QĐ-BNV	17/04/2012	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on the establishment of the Committee of composing the book "The list of associations"
Decision	458/QĐ-BNV	24/05/2012	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on issuing the list the forms, information ticket of the association and NGOs database
Instruction	17-CT/TW	28/8/2012	Instruction on continuing innovating and enhancing the Party's leadership over the mass organizations
Decision	113/QĐ-BNV	05/02/2013	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision issuing the regulations of management and using the information of the association and NGOs database

Type of document	Documentation	Date of issuance	Descriptions
Circular	02/2013/TT-BNV	10/04/2013	The Ministry of Home Affairs regulating and guiding the implementation of some articles of the Government's decree 30/2012/NĐ-CP dated 12/4/2012 on the organization, operation of social funds, charity funds
Circular	03/2013/TT-BNV	16/04/2013	The Ministry of Home Affairs' circular regulating the implementation of the Government's decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP dated 21/4/2010 on the organization, operations, and management of associations; and the Government's decree 33/2012/NĐ-CP dated 13/4 /2012 amending, supplementing some articles of the decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP.
Conclusion of the CPC	64-KL/TW	28/5/2013	Conclusion 64-KL/TW, the 7 th Convention of the Central Party Committee (tenure XI) dated 28/5/2013 on some issues of continuing innovating, perfecting the political system from central to local level.
Resolution	25-NQ/TW	3/6/2013	Continuing enhancing and innovating the Party's leadership over the mass mobilization in the new context
Decision	858/QĐ-BNV	30/07/2013	The Minister of Home Affairs' decision on approving the proposal of replacing the Government's decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP dated 21/4/2010 on the organization, operations, and management of associations and the Government's decree 33/2012/NĐ-CP dated 13/4/2012 amended and supplemented from decree 45/2010/NĐ-CP

APPENDIX 3: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN VIETNAM

Organization/Grouping	Type of Relation to the State	Level: Central-Local	Membership
1. Mass Organizations			
Fatherland Front	Socio-political	All	Umbrella for 29 organizations
Women's Union	Socio-political Fatherland Front	All	12 million
Farmers' Association	Socio-political Fatherland Front	All	8 million
Trade Union- VGCL	Socio-political	All	4,25 million
HCM Communist Youth Union	Socio-political Fatherland Front	All	5,1 million
Veterans' Association	Socio-political Fatherland Front	All	1,92 million
2. Umbrella Organizations			
Red Cross	Fatherland Front	All	4,85 million members 3,5 million Red Cross Youth and Pioneers 14800 Red Cross ward and commune organizations 12700 schools have Red Cross organizations 1900 offices and enterprises have Red Cross organizations
VUSTA- Union for Science and Technology	Fatherland Front	Mainly cities, but some organizations working also in rural areas	Central associations: 56 in various disciplines Cities and provinces: 37 local VUSTA associations with 540 membership organizations and 350,000 members.

			Total 1.15 million members in the whole country
Business associations	Chamber of Commerce which is under the Fatherland Front	Mainly city based	200 associations 6700 members
VUALL-Union of arts and Literature	Fatherland Front	Mainly city based	10 central associations and 60 at provincial level
Old Age Association	Fatherland Front	Locality – all country	6,4 million
VUFU - Union of Friendship Associations	Fatherland Front	Cities	47 member associations
Vietnam Cooperative Alliance	Fatherland Front	All levels, mainly based in rural areas	300,000 cooperative groups; 17,000 cooperatives Total 10.5 million members
3. Professional Associations, VNGOs (Science & Technology)			
Professional associations; professional and business organizations (this category overlaps some of the others)	Ministries, VUSTA and People's Committees	Different levels	320 nationwide and 2,150 local associations
Student Unions Ex "Summer culture light" in Ho Chi Minh City		Cities	ca. 400.000 annual volunteers work voluntarily in the countryside during summer
4. VNGOs			
VNGOs or issues based organizations; Funds for support of the poor, handicapped, ill persons (this category overlaps some of the others)	VUSTA, ministries, provincial people's committees	City based, but many work in rural areas	322 organizations identified in 2000 survey in Hanoi and HCMC 200 social funds 800 Science and Technology organizations
5. Informal Groups			
Micro-credits, credit cooperatives, Credit and saving's groups	Various organizations; Women's and	Rural areas	About 100.000 credit Cooperatives

	Farmers' Unions contribution from abroad; banks		11,6 million borrowers from all credit schemes
Informal groupings (agricultural activities, neighbourhood, dancing, sports, festivals and celebrations)	Not-registered but known to administration	Locality based in all country	Millions (no documents)
6. Faith-based organizations			
Faith-based organizations	Fatherland Front Some not registered	All, but mainly in provinces and localities	Buddhist: 7- 9 million Catholiques: 6-8 million Hoa Hao: 1.5 million Cao Dai: 1.1 million Protestant 600,000q Muslims 90,000
7. International NGOs			
INGOs through PACCOM	Funded from abroad and supporting government and CSO		530 INGOs operating in Vietnam, 150 have offices

(Norlund, 2007: 32-33)