

SENSHU UNIVERSITY

Department of Sociology

**SOCIOLOGICAL MONOGRAPH ON VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS
IN NORTH VIETNAMESE RURAL AREAS**

Dissertation in sociology

by

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PREFACE

Social associations are a significant field of research in social sciences. It is also a hot topic for discussion on policy due to the increasing importance of civil sector in the social-economic development in general. These types of social associations are also parts of the diversity in political and social life in Viet Nam today.

The time that Viet Nam embarked on the Doi Moi (the Renovation) may be marked as the milestone for the research history on civil society in general and social associations in particular. For many reasons, either academic or political and social context, articles on social associations in the co-operative period were not documented in the concerning bibliography. It was not until years after the Doi Moi, along with changes in many aspects of Viet Nam's society, that social associations officially became the concern of academic researchers and policy makers in the country. The other side of the situation was that discussion around this issue was restricted mainly within the urban context, with studies on legitimate associations, such as socio-political associations, professional associations, NGOs, etc. There were few studies addressing this topic in rural areas.

Sociology in Viet Nam, which is originally set for the task of understanding the current social processes pertaining to economic change, tends to lay its focus on social institutions that are deemed important, such as: families, villages, political system, social welfare system, etc. to identify the trends of social change towards modernization. Hence, studies on voluntary associations, regrettably, do not receive due attention from contemporary sociologists. The situation is same for other social sciences. Apart from the classic work of Gourou on peasants in the Northern delta which was written in the 1930s and translated and republished in 2000 (it is the first work to discover the tendency of Delta peasants' preference to join voluntary

associations); later publications on the issues were not many and mostly talk about voluntary associations in rural society since 1954 backward. The voluntary associations in the contemporary context of social development in Viet Nam can be considered as an uncultivated land that needs an in-depth and systematic research.

The idea for the study on voluntary associations in rural areas, the content of this book, was developed in a special circumstance. In 2007, I received a scholarship for postgraduate studies funded by the Project of the French Fund for Prioritized Solidarity that supports for research on socio-economic transition in Viet Nam- a cooperation program between Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences and the Embassy of France in Viet Nam, and then I participated in a research project consisting of Vietnamese and French researchers on the social network in rural areas of North Viet Nam. Initially, my study was on a different issue, but then I discovered the existence of voluntary associations in Dong Quang commune in my exchanges with the local people. I was particularly fascinated to witness the fact that it is these associations that contribute to shape the social life of local residents within the village which is approaching modernization (two years after our first field trip, the rural commune of Dong Quang became an urban ward). The exchanges and discussions with senior colleagues during the field trip reinforced my determination to go forward with the issue and search for relevant reference books.

In rural Viet Nam, especially in the Red River delta, voluntary associations appeared in vast number and various forms. The research question is whether the existence of today voluntary associations was the restoration of traditions in Viet Nam society before 1954; and to what extent, this event reflects the economic and social change in Vietnamese rural society today. The answers to these research questions become more urgent given the fact that in rural areas of the Mekong Delta, such voluntary associations hardly exist. Instead, there are social cohesions that are apparently civic in nature, reflected in the role of middle-class benefactors in support for agriculture and rural development.

From such statement of the research problem, the study is conducted with two aims: identification and explanation. I try to understand the nature of voluntary associations, a typical phenomenon of rural society after the Doi Moi, but receive little attention so far. The study first focuses on clarifying the legal basis for the establishment of associations in Viet Nam and related policy dimensions. A bigger effort is aimed at identifying and classifying the voluntary associations; describing "associational life" through their activities; and trying to find the causes (or functions) that led Northern peasants to engage in local voluntary associations. Attaching the emergence and development of voluntary associations with the "restoration" of rural society since the Doi Moi, I also try to map out the most significant traits in the formation of "social space" of these associations. The relationship between voluntary associations with the state under the perspectives of policy and reality is another highlight of the study. I try to point out that there is an interaction between the local state that continues to play the patron's role to the people and a local society that is trying to assert its identity.

There are many new things when I embark on the mission to conduct such an independent research. Only one familiar thing that becomes my torchlight is methodology. I try to link all events regarding voluntary associations with the context of socio-economic change in rural society. If such a shortage of previous studies on the issue caused quite a lot of difficulties to the research, then the author learns so much when making reference from materials on related fields (such as economics, history and anthropology) on the foundation for economic and social changes in Viet Nam in general and rural society in particular.

Field work for the study was conducted in two communes of Dong Quang (Bac Ninh province) and Giao Tan (Nam Dinh province) in the Red river delta of Viet Nam. The choice was deliberate: the former is a commune in the former lands of the Delta with a long history of settlement and thriving commercial economy, the latter is located in the coastal newly reclaimed area of Nam Dinh, with agriculture-led economy. Field trips were conducted

continuously for almost three years, from 2007 to 2009, and home-stay living with local people in the village offered me the opportunity to experience the rural life and to do the work of a researcher: collecting and accumulating impressions and data through interviews and observations. During the later years, I did return to the two communes to conduct more field trips and clarify what was unclear.

Undoubtedly, there remain a lot of things to do for the study on voluntary associations in rural areas in Viet Nam. The presentation of the dissertation in its current status is to invite those who are interested in it to share their ideas and open up new avenues for the research topic.

Ha Noi, June 3, 2015

Dang Thi Viet Phuong

INTRODUCTION

1. Research on social organizations in Viet Nam: towards a definition of voluntary associations

The impacts of Doi Moi- Renovation policies have been resulted in not only economic growth, but also social transformations. Vietnamese society has changed from a previously quite homogenous and egalitarian to social differentiation. Various social groups with different interests and value systems are emerging. The birth of social organizations in Viet Nam meets this social differentiation.

The rapid development of social organizations in Viet Nam since the beginning of Doi Moi was noticed by domestic as well as foreign scholars. Since the early 1990s, several studies were conducted on social organizations (Mulla and Boothroyd, 1993; Beaulieu, 1994; Giao, 1994; Kervliet and Marr, 1994; Marr, 1994; Nguyen Viet Vuong, 1994; Nguyen Khac Mai 1996; Sidel, 1997a; Gray, 1999; Kervliet, 2001; Pedersen, 2002; Wischermann, 2003; Dang Thi Viet Phuong, 2004; Bui The Cuong 2005; Kervliet et al., 2005; CIVICUS, 2005, Fforde, 2006; Hannah, 2006; Norlund, 2007; Sidel, 2008; Wischermann, 2010). Most of these studies focus on the social organizations which were registered with local authorities or the umbrella institutions (*co quan chu quan*) such as the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), etc.

The diversity of social organizations in Viet Nam is considered an implication of a civil society [*xa hoi dan su*]¹ (Le Bach Duong et al., 2002; Wischermann et al., 2003; Norlund, 2007; Sidel, 2008). Many authors have tried to define civil society and its “components” in Viet Nam. A

¹ However, the question is whether the emergence of social organizations and their diversity mean the existence of a vibrant civil society in Viet Nam or not. This is one aspect that we will discuss later in this dissertation.

group of Vietnamese researchers (Le Bach Duong et al., 2002) argue that civil society has a long tradition in Vietnamese villages, and that the diversity of social organizations is part of this civil society. They believe that the contemporary civil society includes not only Vietnamese NGOs but also the mass organizations (*Doan the quan chung*), professional associations (*Hoi nghe nghiep*) and community organizations (*to chuc cong dong*), as well as Funds (*Quy*), Charities (*Hoi tu thien*) and Aid centres (*Trung tam ho tro*). Wischermann, Bui The Cuong and Nguyen Quang Vinh (2003) call them civic organizations and divide them into four groups: mass organizations, professional associations, issue-oriented organizations (mostly NGOs, see also Wischermann, 2003) and business associations. Norlund (2007) uses the term civil society organizations and offers a table of classification in which she distinguishes seven groups of different organizations operating in Viet Nam's territory: mass organizations, umbrella organizations, professional associations, VNGOs, informal groups, faith-based organizations, and international NGOs. Sidel (2008) meanwhile seeks for a broader term as voluntary sector to include Party-related mass organizations, business, trade and professional associations, policy research groups, social activist and social service groups, religious groups, clans, charities, private or semi-private universities, social and charitable funds and other institutions (p. 141).

The Ministry of Home Affairs, who is in charge of managing social organizations at the central level, focuses only on organizations having legal entities. The Ministry distinguishes social organizations operating in Viet Nam today into two main groups: i) the mass organizations, or socio-political organizations (*to chuc chinh tri-xa hoi*, such as Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Youth Union, Farmers Association, Veterans Association and Trade Union) that are managed in a distinct manner and not subject to legislative documents on associations issued by the Government (normally they have their own laws); and ii) the group of non-governmental organizations (*to chuc phi chinh phu*) which includes all other social organizations having legal

entities. They include: 1) associations and federations of associations (*Hoi, Lien hiep hoi, Doan the*); 2) funds and foundations (*Quy*), 3) scientific and technological organizations (*To chuc khoa hoc va cong nghe*), 4) aid organizations and protections (*To chuc ho tro/bao tro*), 5) legal advice organizations (*To chuc tu van phap ly*).

It can be seen that the classification social organizations in Viet Nam proposed by researchers and specialists manifests an exclusion or inclusion of the three main groups of organizations: 1) the mass organizations; 2) organizations with legal entity (such as professional associations, NGOs and funds, etc.); 3) organizations without legal entity. The first two groups were the subject of many studies, while the third group is still very little known. To date we have little information on this type of organization.

This study aims at the above-mentioned third group, the social organization without legal entity (or with semi-legal entity, which I will discuss further in this book). Those organizations of the first and second groups, with written registration documents, have their own proper names. But for the third group, since they are mostly not registered, their names also vary. They can be informal organizations (*to chuc phi chinh thuc*) as Tran Tu (1984) put it, community-based organizations (*To chuc cong dong*) (Norlund, 2007), self-managed organizations (*To chuc tu quan*) (Nguyen Thi Viet Huong, 2009), voluntary associations (*Hoi tu nguyen*) (Luong, 2010), etc. In this book, I call them "voluntary associations" (*Hoi tu nguyen*) as voluntariness is the first condition for the establishment and membership these organizations.

The presence of voluntary associations in several reference books on the Vietnamese rural society (Gourou, 1936; Nguyen Dong Chi, 1978b; Tran Tu, 1984; Nguyen Van Ky, 1995; Jamieson, 1993; Nguyen Tung, 2003; Nguyen-Marshall, 2004; Luong, 2010) reflects its importance to village life in particular and the Vietnamese people in general. These authors notice a vivid social life in the Northern rural areas through the presence of a large number of associations since the early twentieth century. In the works of Gourou (1936), Tran Tu (1984),

Jamieson (1993), Nguyen Van Ky (1995), Nguyen Tung (2003), the authors reported the presence of voluntary associations as part of the rural society structure. Some other studied the functions of these organizations to provide mutual help for their members (Nguyen Dong Chi, 1978b; Nguyen-Marshall, 2004); or even mentioned these organizations as secret associations (Coulet, 1926). Gourou believes that the tendency of peasants to form groups is "the most striking feature in the social life of the Tonkin's village"² (p. 268). As for Tran Tu, he considers the fact that the villagers participate in various social organizations, reflects the "peasant character" that "allows the creation and existence of organizations whose participation is based on the voluntary adhesion of each individual" (p. 83). Village organizations such as *Phe*, *Giap*, *Phuong*, and *Hoi* operate in rural areas in various forms and with different activities. *Phe*, *Giap*³ are related to the public life of the village, even in an indirect way. *Phuong* (guild) is the name to call professional associations, bringing together the people doing the same job, usually craft traders. As for *Hoi* (*association*), it is a reserved space for its members, it has no relationship with the village public life. Some associations was organized for the purpose of mutual help (e.g. Money guild- *Phuong tien*, Gold guild- *Phuong vang*, etc.) or for recreational purpose (such as Wrestling guild- *Phuong vat*, *Cheo* Traditional opera guild- *Phuong cheo*, etc.). Others are gender-based oriented (such as Association of Buddhism practitioners- *Hoi Chu ba*, Ceremonial association- *Hoi te*), etc.

In contemporary Vietnamese rural society the situation is always remarkable. Besides those associations that have existed since early twentieth century, many voluntary associations have emerged together with the development of social organizations since the beginning of Doi Moi-Renovation. Luong (2010) recently acknowledges the fact that individuals try to expand their social networks within the village by participation in local social organizations. In his surveys

² "le trait le plus marquant de la vie sociale du village tonkinois" (p. 268).

³ These terms indicate voluntary organizations in the old time that we now cannot find the appropriate English words. In the work of Nguyen Tu Chi (1980) in French, he also left them untranslated.

conducted from 1988 to 2004, Luong finds that there are many voluntary associations that are not under local government's umbrella, for example, Association of school fellows- *Hoi ban hoc*, Same-age association(s)- *Hoi dong nien*, Association of social policy beneficiary families- *Hoi gia dinh chinh sach*, etc. Norlund (2007) acknowledges the existence of a large amount of these organizations (that she names community-based organizations, including Service and development or livelihoods-oriented, Faith-based organizations, Neighbourhood groups, Family clans, Recreational groups). The creation of these organizations is motivated by various objectives related to people's daily life. An organization can bring together people of the same socio-demographic characteristics as in the case of the Association of the elderly- *Hoi bao tho*, or the Association of Buddhism Female Practitioners- *Hoi chu ba*, etc. An association can gather people of the same professions, such as the Vet Association- *Hoi thay thuoc thu y*, or Association of Small Traders- *Hoi nhung nguoi di buon*, etc. An association may also bring together people with a common interests or hobbies, such as the Dance and Singing Club- *Cau lac bo van nghe* or Fighting cock Guild- *Phuong ga*, etc. These are small organizations that primarily operate at local level and their members are mostly villagers. In general, these groups do not fall within the government's umbrella and are not regulated by existing legal documents on associations. Most of these associations did not register with the local authorities.

Before coming to a definition of voluntary association, it would be necessary to make a brief summary of the concerning terms. In existing works, "social organization" is the general term to distinguish the institutions that are socially oriented from economic organizations. It denotes all kind of organizations that are not for profit, whereas voluntary association is one among them. Social organizations, in general, and voluntary associations, in particular, can appear in various appellations, such as union, federation, association, club, society, ect. Then the term "association" is the common name to call social organizations.

Based on what was studied about voluntary associations, in this dissertation, I define voluntary associations as non-governmental organizations that are created on the basis of voluntary participation of individuals who share common characteristics (i.e. doing the same job, having similar interests/hobbies, or sharing the same socio-demographic characteristics, etc.). A voluntary association does not pursue profit. It normally does not have legal entity. It essentially operates in villages and communes and do not have a vertical structure from central to local level. Kinship-based and faith-based organizations are not the object of our study.

2. Problematic

The authors studying voluntary associations in Northern Viet Nam note that rural people sought for establishing voluntary associations (*Hoi, Phe, Phuong*, etc.) within the village. Tran Tu (1984) mentions associations in the Tonkin delta before 1954 as an expression of “village democracy”, where there were free and private small-scale agricultural producers living in the village that is more or less autonomous with the monarchical power. Gourou (1936) also notices that the participation in voluntary associations allows young peasants get familiar with public life, practise their role in the village and to learn how to speak before public. In his study of rural sociology in North Viet Nam, Houtart (2001) discovered that about twenty years after the collectivization, the village continues to be part of social identity for rural inhabitants. In the era of Doi Moi- Renovation, the village is always present in peasants’ mentality. The model of near-by residence, face to face exchange and interaction, the meaning of neighbourhood, etc. establishes protection mechanism among villagers. That model in turn makes rural people dependent on the residential-based relations. Therefore, the way rural people continue to keep the associative relationships at village level allows to assume an expansion by dependency.

The study of voluntary associations of rural Red River Delta also helps formulate hypothesis about the structure of a rural society in transformation. From an organizational perspective, it is essential to ask about the time of establishment of voluntary associations in rural areas. If the Vietnamese peasants are actually a "*highly social creature*" as Jamieson puts it (1993, p. 23), why we have almost no evidence of their associations during the collectivist period? It was not until indeed the Doi Moi to see the boom of these associations everywhere. At this time, we see the re-birth of voluntary associations whose existence is attested before 1954 (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1980; Nguyen Thanh Nha, 2013; Nguyen-Marshall, 2004); and see also the emergence of a new type of voluntary associations. The (re)birth of such associations is linked to a change in the social structure, beginning with the changes in social relations in rural areas.

The participation of villagers in voluntary associations might put forward a hypothesis on the existence of the associational life in rural areas, which helps reveal the social universe of the rural population. In participating in these associations, rural people move from the universe of intimate insiders (villagers- *nguai lang*) to a social and functional one. This movement helps distinguish a voluntary association from a primary group such as family or kinship.

Of course, whether the movement is more or less profound would depend on various social groups. The participation of certain social groups into certain associations (but not others) would reveal social differentiation among rural population. For this group, participating in a voluntary association can be translated into village hood (*tin lang nghia xom*), village customs (*le lang*), or habit. For another group, this can manifest social cohesion and social exchanges. The traditional ties and social relations interact to encourage or discourage people to participate in voluntary associations. An individual can actively participate in one (or more) voluntary association to expand his/her social networks; or maybe he/she suffers from a hereditary membership or the burden of village customs that pushes him/her to join this association but not others.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: i) What are voluntary associations like? ii) How do they function in rural people's life? iii) Who participate in these associations? iv) Why rural people participate in the voluntary associations? and v) What are the relationships between the local states and voluntary associations? From such statement of the research problem, the study is conducted with two aims: identification and explanation. I try to understand the nature of voluntary associations, a typical phenomenon of rural society after the Doi Moi, but receive little attention so far. The study first focuses on clarifying the legal basis for the establishment of associations in Vietnam and related policy dimensions. A bigger effort is aimed at identifying and classifying the voluntary associations; describing "associational life" through their activities; and trying to find the causes (or functions) that led Northern peasants to engage in local voluntary associations. Attaching the emergence and development of voluntary associations with the "restoration" of rural society since the Doi Moi, I also try to map out the most significant traits in the formation of "social space" of these associations. The relationship between voluntary associations and the state under the perspectives of policy and reality is another highlight of the study. I try to point out that there is an interaction between the local state that continues to play the patron's role to its people and a local society that is trying to assert its identity.

3. Research methods and techniques

3.1. Fieldwork

Studies on social organizations are essentially made in the urban context with a quantitative approach using questionnaires. These questionnaires are structured in a rigorous way and embrace all aspects of an organization such as the date of foundation, headquarters, status, number of members, the objective and operation, etc. (Gordon and Babchuk 1959; Perry, 2003). While the quantitative method may be appropriate to study the social organization in

urban areas, using the questionnaire to study the voluntary associations in rural Viet Nam presents difficulties for the following reasons.

First, as a type of social organization, these associations are blurred entities both in written documents and everyday speech. Due to their informal nature (most associations are not registered and do not have authorization of operation), we cannot identify the exact number of these associations as well as their appellations (in her research, Norlund (2007) has made an estimate from 100,000 to 200,000 community-based organizations!). When addressing the issue of social organizations or voluntary associations, the informants- representatives of voluntary associations themselves- tend to mention the mass organizations such as the Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Farmers Association, the Association of Veterans and Youth Union.

Secondly, the terms normally used in research on the social organizations such as "organization" (*tổ chức*), "participation" (*tham gia*), "operation" (*hoạt động*), etc. are generally unfamiliar to rural people because they do not use those words in their everyday life. In our interviews, some say they "do not participate" (*không tham gia*) in the association, they are just "enter" [*vào*] the association. In their minds, "participate in" in an association means directing, while "enter" an association means that we are just a member of the association. So if we take a questionnaire to survey the situation of association participation of rural people in community life, one can have varying results because the terms might be understood differently.

The sociological study of Vietnamese rural areas must therefore pay particular attention to the gap between the administrative discourse and everyday language of the people. In the countryside, there was apprehension (prevents) administrative procedures and communication by written texts (Ngo Huy Van, 1941; Bui Quang Dung, 2007). Even a high level of education does not mean that the obstacle of the written and administrative communication is lifted. Being aware of these limitations and constraints, we opted from the start for a qualitative approach.

The qualitative approach requires spending much time for the fieldwork. *"To stay as close as possible to the realities of the villagers, the researcher has to go back and forth between his/her ideas and those of the people he/she studies"* (Culas, 2008: 27). So we have developed working hypotheses and then try to test them in the fieldwork. The in-depth interviews and particular observations were carried out during the fieldwork and then finally being used for generalizing events.

Fieldwork *"is meant as close to natural situations of the research subjects- everyday life, conversations in a context that allows prolonging interactions between the researcher in person and local people, in order to produce in-situ knowledge, in order to realize the "point of view of the actor," ordinary representations, customary practices and their indigenous meanings"* (De Sardan, 2003: 31). The researcher becomes the data producer right directly on the field, *"what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to"* (Geertz, 1973: 9, quoted by Hannah, 2007).

The fieldwork research techniques were used for the duration of thirty two months from April 2007 to December 2009⁴. The fieldworks were held alternately at two research sites: Dong Quang commune (Bac Ninh province) and Giao Tan commune (Nam Dinh province). The choice of the two research sites was deliberate: the former is a commune in the former lands of the Delta with a long history of settlement and thriving commercial economy; the latter is located in the coastal newly reclaimed area of Nam Dinh province, with agriculture-led

⁴ This study was conducted under the joint research program between the Institute of Sociology of the Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) and the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (IRSEA, CNRS), entitled "Social networks in north Viet Nam rural areas: Construction and strategies of using social networks in the context of contemporary socio-economic change" Project of the Prioritized Solidarity Fund "Support for research on the issues of economic and social transition of Viet Nam" funded by the Embassy of France in Viet Nam. The French and Vietnamese researchers have conducted fieldwork on personal research subjects. All data used in this dissertation, unless otherwise stated, were produced by myself.

economy. Alternative fieldworks were carried out in these two communes, allowing us to go back and forth to see how our research questions are answered in different social contexts. Each field trip usually lasted seven to ten days at each research site. During 32 months since 2007, I made 11 field trips in the two communes, not mentioning other short trips to do observations when voluntary associations organized their specific activities.

3.2. Data production and processing

3.2.1. In-depth interview

“The production of data based on the speech of natives is a central element of any field survey. First, it is because the participation observation does not allow access to different information needed for research. To do this, it is required that we get access to recourses of knowledge or memory of local actors. And then it is because the representations of local actors are an indispensable element to understand different aspects of the society. Interview remains a privileged instrument, often the most economical, to produce emic data giving access to indigenous, indigenous, local knowledge.” (De Sardan, 2003: 36).

In-depth interview is the main technique to gather information and produce most of the data used in this dissertation. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with the use of a guideline listing the main points to be discussed with the informants. The guideline was used in a flexible way during the interviews. The content and order of items to be addressed were customized to suit the informants. The interviews were conducted in the form of free conversations between the researcher and the informants (so the researcher had, to some extent, to answer questions raised by the informants). The interviews usually lasted for two hours and covered topics concerning voluntary associations in a rather general way to encourage the informants to share information. The informants were encouraged to tell the story of their life related to association

activities. During the conversations, interviewers also learnt and used dialects used by local people, creating an intimacy and mutual understanding between interviewers and the informants.

Assuming that specific social contexts influence the participation or not of individuals in association life, we focused on the life stories of the informants. The questions on association activities were prepared based on the information collected from the informants (occupation, education, social mobility, etc.). Questions about voluntary associations often come from the experiences of the interviewees as members of an association or associations. Sometimes, the informants (particularly representative of local authorities) were asked to provide their comments on association life in the community in general and voluntary associations which operate on the territory in particular. As for voluntary associations, several members with different statuses in the same association were interviewed in order for us to better understand the values and motivations of individuals when joining the association. Based on that, we hope to be able to offer a description of each form of voluntary associations under different perspectives of their members. A list of key informants was set up, with whom I conducted several interviews and with whom I came back and forth to check and consult further data. These interviews took place at different points of time and on the same subjects which were more in depth each time. This enabled us to verify the information provided by others on the associations to which they belong, or to set a new topic on association life. Social facts were thus constructed from the combination of information that is interconnected.

Our informants were selected among representatives and members of voluntary associations, representatives of local administration and representatives of mass organizations, and those who are not member of any association as well. During the selection of informants, we took into account their social and demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation, education, etc.). In 32 months, from 2007 to 2009, with 11 long-day field trips, we made in-depth

interviews with 103 informants. The number of interviews is even much more because key informants were often interviewed several times to find new information or confirm the information obtained from other sources. In details, we conducted interviews with 48 informants in Giao Tan commune and 65 informants in Dong Quang commune. Most of these interviews were recorded in accordance with the principle of verbal consent and anonymity. In a few cases, we did not have permission to use the tape recorder, not because of the sensitiveness of the topic, but because the recorder was too strange to some rural people.

3.2.2 Participant observation

Participant observation belongs to ethnographic methods, it is a technique about making sense of people's making sense of events and opportunities that confront them in everyday life (Herbert, 2000, quoted by Hannah, 2007). We practiced participant observation of voluntary associations at different occasions. This technique could help reveal the relationships of various events or people that the researcher had not noticed before. By observing the daily activities of actors, the researcher tries to understand the processes used and the implicit meaning of social life.

The observation was taken note in detail, together pictures and videos taken of the activities observed. I put myself in as much an objective position as possible, that is to say, temporarily forget my assumptions and hypotheses to observe and gather the facts. After each field trip, based on field notes, photos and videos, I made full descriptions of each observed activity of the voluntary associations. The information gathered was transcribed into written data during and after the observations. The descriptive or narrative passages are supplemented by the remarks and personal comments. In making the writing of the observed events, the researcher transforms "*a past event that normally exists only at the moment when it occurs into an interpretation that exists in written texts*" (Geertz, 1973: 15, cited in Hannah, 2007). However, the presence of an outsider who is, in many cases, the single woman in an all-male group (e.g.

Same-age association- *Hoi dong nien*) might have some influence on the collection of information during the observations. Indeed, being aware of being observed, the observed association(s) tended to make their activities more well-organized than usual.

3.2.3. *Process recension*

While conducting in-depth interviews, I also reviewed processes to produce quantitative data on voluntary associations in a consistent way. I was well aware it is not easy to study an object, which there is almost no formal basis to detect unless the individuals involving in it. The establishment of a list of voluntary associations about which I had to complete the information is a way to locate the objects and allows me to have a minimum overall and systematic knowledge on the objects. I systematically asked for the essential elements of an association such as its name, the year of foundation, leaders, the objectives and scope of operation, number of members, budget and operation. During interviews, I strived to collect information about other voluntary associations which the informants also join. The review of processes does not remove all inaccurate information because two members of an association can provide very different information. During our field trips in 2007, I, therefore, provisionally accepted these gaps to collect basic information on associations in the two communes.

The review of the processes brought interesting information, but it also had some influence on the course of the interview, especially when the interviewer wished to conduct the interview in a way as a free conversation. As a result, in 2008, I trained some local employees the review techniques so they could continue this work. I asked them to list all the associations that operate in the villages and communes. The results were then compiled to obtain the most comprehensive list of voluntary associations in both surveyed localities. The list gave us an overall view of active voluntary associations in the localities. It also helped us collect “*emic*” data in combination with the collection of “*etic*” data (De Sardan, 2003: 40).

3.2.4. Analysis of local written sources

During our fieldwork, I also collected local written sources. This work was carried out for three years, from 2007 to 2009. The information not only concern this period but also previous ones. The documents such as annual reports, administrative documents, statistics, maps, village conventions, village regulations and statutes, etc. provide immense sources of information. The information from these sources is often unique and is not likely to be collected by the global statistical tools because of their detailed and sometimes informal nature. The advantage is that they present information allowing researchers to have a deeper understanding of the surveyed localities. These sources of information provide me social facts and contribute to the explanation of these facts in the local context.

3.2.5. Data processing and analysis

Most of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed and arranged in folders. For those non-recorded interviews, I made resumes of what were taken notes during the interviews and put them in the respective transcript folders. Data include of interview transcripts, interview resumes, the descriptive notes taken during observations and interviewers' personal remarks on each object with respect to the information provided by others on the same subject.

All the textual data were entered and analyzed by NVivo software. I conducted preliminary coding according to the keywords of the entire corpus of data. Each interview minute was then reread carefully, marked and coded according to its contents. The list of coded keywords was supplemented with new keywords during data reading to avoid omission of important details and facts for the research subject. After all the data were coded, I classified the data either by keywords or interview cases. Reading and encoding data is a sensitive task, since the same content can be listed by two different keywords. All interviews were processed, but the information obtained in the last instance does not necessarily include all interviewed cases or

observation. Processing of the data helps me develop an overview of the topic, describe facts, discover local terms and concepts, and build relations among events. I could then draw conclusion on social events obtained from different perspectives, and study the social basis for the diversity of views of informants for the same social events. I then tried to include the data in this dissertation in the form of interpretation or quotation.

4. Research sites

Our assumption is that different socio-economic conditions can create different forms of social cohesion. Then we chose two communes of Bac Ninh and Nam Dinh provinces in the Red river delta to do our research. The commune of Dong Quang (since late 2009 has been divided into two urban wards of Dong Ky and Trang Ha) is located 25km far from Hanoi to the Northeast. Meanwhile, Giao Tan commune of Nam Dinh province is about 150km to the Southeast of Ha Noi (cf. map).

These two communes were selected for the following reason: Dong Quang commune is strongly oriented towards the craft industry with the emergence of commerce and trade. Giao Tan, in contrast, is a typical agricultural-led commune. The selection based on such dominant characteristics may not reflect the situation of an average village in the Red river delta (the model of "mixed" commune where the agricultural and non-agricultural co-exist may be more frequent) but it allows us to make necessary comparisons regarding the topic in two different contexts.

Figure 1: Map of Viet Nam with two research sites of Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes



The difference begins with the history of the settlement of the two communes. The existence of Dong Quang territory today dated back to the first century BC; it is located in a region considered the cradle of ancient Vietnamese civilization. At the time of my study, Dong Quang commune includes of three villages named Dong Ky, Trang Liet and Binh Ha. The commune of Giao Tan has a recent history and was created on land reclaimed from the sea in the clearing policy initiated by the Nguyen dynasty since 1828. In their history of about 200 years since their creation and during their development, Giao Tan includes of four villages with twelve hamlets that are numbered from 1 to 12.

In 2006, the area of Dong Quang land amounts to 555 hectares; while that of Giao Tan amounts to 505 ha. Giao Tan devotes 73% of its land to agricultural production, while in Dong Quang, about half of its area is reserved for this activity. The area of land for commercial and non-agricultural activities in Giao Tan is insignificant, only 0.34 ha. As of Dong Quang, it has to spend more than 155 ha for industrial activities. The difference in the use of land between the two communes is growing even more strongly in the following years, with a decrease in agricultural land in Dong Quang and an increase in land area reserved for agriculture in Giao Tan.

Giao Tan has an average population compared to a common rural commune in Viet Nam: In 2006, Giao Tan has 7,851 inhabitants living in 2,305 households. Meanwhile, the population of Dong Quang is 2.5 times larger: 18,423 inhabitants and 3,982 households. The size of an average household in Giao Tan is 3.4 members, while this figure rises to 4.6 in Dong Quang. Dong Quang commune also attracts seasonal migrant labour flows: this commune often welcomes approximately 5,000 workers a day from other neighbouring localities. Dong Quang commune no longer has the characteristics of an ordinary rural commune in the Red river delta but more likely an urban district. It is hard to find a house with tiled roofs, a brick tiled courtyard

and a jackfruit (which are the typical image in the Vietnamese house in the countryside) in Dong Quang while this image is still common in Giao Tan.

The percentage of agricultural households in Giao Tan is 83% of the total; 93.6% of the commune's active labour force work in agriculture. However, since agricultural work does not require full time working on the fields, much of the labour force rushes out to big cities for manual jobs and only come back home during the sowing and harvest seasons. Non-agricultural households consists of only 5%. Dong Quang commune whose natural conditions are more conducive to agricultural activity, agricultural production was not so high. In 2006, agriculture in both communes represents about 15.4 billion VND (equivalent to approximately 730,000 US dollars⁵). In 2006, the small industries and services amounts to 16.6 billion VND (about 790,000 US dollars). The value of small industries of Dong Quang (the production of wood furniture), not including commercial and service activities, counted for 195 billion VND (approx. 9.28 million US dollars). The development of non-agricultural activities (small industry, trade and services) enables this commune to have an important contribution to the state budget, unlike Giao Tan which must annually request the state subsidy to finance its operations.

5. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation, except introductory and conclusion parts, consists of five Chapters. The first Chapter named: Legal basis for the establishment and operation of associations in Viet Nam. In this chapter, I tried to make an overview of the policy and legal history on associations in Viet Nam. This brief introduction is even important given that the issue of legalizing associations is still a hot topic. This Chapter also mentions the development of associations in

⁵ According to the average exchange rate, 1 US dollar is equivalent to 21,000 VND.

Viet Nam according to official records to see the rapid growth of associations since Doi Moi-Renovation. Another effort is put into this Chapter in order to make a distinction of all types of social organizations in Viet Nam nowadays, whereas voluntary associations are part of the diversity.

Chapter Two paves the way to the main findings of the research, starting at identifying and classifying the voluntary associations in the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan. In this Chapter, I study characteristics of voluntary associations in these rural areas, examine various appellations of these associations in their reality. More importantly, this Chapter puts a bigger effort to classify the voluntary associations in the two communes based on their nature of operation. Examining their time of establishment, I find that the Doi Moi- Renovation has had a major impact on the establishment and restoration of voluntary associations in the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan. This period witnessed not only the birth of new associations but also the resurgence of collective activities that had been exercised long time ago.

Chapter Three tries to describe "associational life" through the activities of voluntary associations. Their organizational structure, scope of operation, and funding sources are examined to see how these associations organized themselves. The study of their activities gives us an vivid life of voluntary associations, where each activity, even feasting, has it own significant values. The portraits of members and non-members of those associations really requires us to read between the lines to see the real meaning of being membership in the context of the rural society in the Red river delta of Viet Nam.

Attaching the emergence and development of voluntary associations with the restoration of rural society since the Doi Moi-Renovation, I also try to map out the most significant traits in the formation of "social space" of these associations. This is presented in Chapter Four of the

dissertation. I try to find the causes that led Northern peasants to engage in local voluntary associations. Maintaining social order is one among the functions of the voluntary associations, in which, being “position removed” is a threat to the villagers. This also help to distinguish the villagers from the outsiders. Participating in lifecycle rituals of members and practising hobbies related activities are also the ways for rural residents to create their “social space” within the village.

The relationship between voluntary associations with the state under the perspectives of policy and reality is another highlight of the study that is discussed in the last chapter, Chapter Five. Through examining the reactions of local governments to the establishment of voluntary associations and the way they apply manifest or latent management to these associations, I try to point out that there is an interaction between the local state that continues to play the patron’s role to the people and a local society that is trying to assert its identity.

CHAPTER ONE: LEGAL BASIS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS IN VIET NAM

1. The Communist Party of Viet Nam's views toward associations

The success of the revolution in 1945 was contributed largely by the movement of the associations representing different walks of life (youth, women, farmers, etc.). It can be seen that right after the birth of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (now the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam), the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV) was interested in encouraging the establishment of new associations or helping newly established associations and celebrating the associations' founding anniversaries. The forerunner of the CPV today is also marked as the birth of an Association (Association of January 06, 1930¹). After having gained independence, the PCV greatly appreciated the support of the associations to the government of Viet Nam (National Assembly, 09/11/1946). In 1947, the Party Central Committee issued a directive requiring all levels of the Association to celebrate the establishment of 06/01/1930 Association and popularized its influence among the people (CPV, 1947).

During this period, since associations showed an important role in the operations of the revolutionary movements, the CPV (1948d) paid close attention to direct and manage the associations' activities, including the directives on communications among governing organizations and their subordinates (dated 08/10/1948), the relationship between the party and the associations' committee of gender mobilization (dated 28/09/1948) (CPV, 1948b), the Permanent Committee of the Party Central Committee's directive on contributing and supporting Viet Nam Culture Association, 1948a) etc. It can be seen that during this period the

¹ The first day of the Convention in 1930 to unify all communist organizations in Viet Nam into a single Communist party named Communist Party of Viet Nam chaired by Nguyen Ai Quoc- Ho Chi Minh in Kowloon, Hong Kong (Hong Kong, China).

main mission of the associations was to mobilize the masses to unanimously join the cause of national liberation. Therefore, the documents to manage the associations' activities at that time were mainly issued by the CPV.

In the first phase of seizing power, the CPV encouraged the participation of its members and mobilized the masses to join associations to popularize the public to take part in the national salvation. For example, in 1948 the Standing Committee of the Party Central Committee issued a directive to encourage participation and support for the newly established Viet Nam Culture Association (CPV, 1948a). The directive required the Party members working in the field of culture to join the culture associations in localities².

The Party considered the establishment of the associations under the jurisdiction of its management; therefore, many of its documents stated its viewpoint of encouraging (or discouraging) the foundation or expansion of associations. Besides, the Party also regulated the principles of each association's expenditure (CPV, 1948c); and directed the operations of the organizations in line with the political missions entrusted by the Party (including the works of mass mobilization and popularization of the Party and State guidelines and policies, etc.). *"The Party strives to persuade workers to actively participate in political activities and state affairs. Thanks to the participation into the associations' activities, the public will get acquainted with social affairs and handling of the common state duties, thereby acquiring management skills"* (CPV, 1983, pp. 78-79). The Central Party Committee's 4th meeting, tenure 5 (June/1983) stated: *"the critical role of the mass organizations should be acknowledged by law. We should coordinate and facilitate favorable conditions for the operations of Labour Confederation, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Women's Union and other mass organizations. They act as*

2 *"Once a culture association is founded in any localities, the comrades working in cultural field have to join it. We must have some comrades specialized in culture to be a member of the executive committee of such association. At the same time, it is necessary to lead a cultural movement among the public by forming study groups, reading groups, clubs, collective writing groups, etc."* (CPV, 1948a)

a school of socialism and communism for all social strata, as an invaluable collaborator of the State, and as the link connecting the Party with the masses". This fact has been recognized by Rigby (1991) when describing mono - organizational socialism in Viet Nam as follows: *"The Party controls and leads the formal organizations and associations. The Party sets the targets and approves the structure and leadership of these associations. In turn, these associations work closely in the framework of the Party's matrix organization"* (Rigby 1991: 111-112)

Since 1990, the Resolution 8B-NQ/HNTW on "renewing the mass works of the Party and strengthening the ties between the Party and the people" confirmed *"associations should be established in this new period to meet the legitimate needs of the people's profession and life in accordance with the state's benefits and mutual assistance. The associations of the masses are founded on the principles of voluntary, self-governing and self-financing in the framework of the law"* (the Party Central Committee, 27/03/1990). In its directives to realize the Resolution 8B, the Party noted on the need to provide information about the situation and entrust the mass organizations with missions, consulting the masses before making decisions related to the life of the masses, and mobilize the masses to discuss and participate in activities to concretize policies and laws of the Party and State in the localities.

On the other hand, the Secretariat also asked the Fatherland Front and other mass organizations to enhance the influence of the grassroots organizations' activities. The Party also encouraged public gathering activities by the requirements of profession and social life according to the needs of the masses (CPV, 25/06/1990). This is probably the basis for the establishment and restoration of many voluntary associations in both Giao Tan and Dong Quang (to be discussed more in Chapter 2- Identification of voluntary associations).

During the following years (National Assembly 7th, 8th, and 9th tenures), the Party continued to consider the development of associations as an important condition for the economic

development and international integration. The CPV stated that *"it is necessary to expand and diversify the forms of gathering people to participate in the mass organizations, social organizations, professional, cultural, friendship, charity, humanitarian associations... and to issue the Law on Associations soon"* (Resolution of the 9th Party Congress, 2001).

Along with encouraging the establishment of the social organization of the people, the Politburo also asked Party committees, governments and sectors at different levels to strengthen the leadership of the Party and the management of the State over the organization and operations of the associations. While waiting for the birth of a law on association establishment to replace the law 102/1957, the Politburo asked the Government to issue a decree regulating the organization, operation, and management of associations to serve as a basis for the management of associations. Decree 88/2003, and then the Decree 45/2010 was the response from the government upon the request of the Politburo.

Though the law on associations had not been issued through many Congresses, the issues on associations remain heated. The number of associations has increased each year with more diverse forms of structures and operations. These facts require the Party to continue innovating and enhancing the leadership of the party over associations. The Party's directive 17 - CT/ TW on continuing the renewal and strengthening of the Party's leadership over the mass organizations shows that the leadership and instructions of the Party's committees and organizations over the structures and activities of the mass associations is still limited. The Party acknowledges that the State management and its legal system on associations has not matched the development of mass associations (CPV, 28/08/2012).

The Party views that the mass mobilization is the responsibility of the whole political system which it is led by the Party, implemented by the State, and supported by the Fatherland Front and other political-social organizations. In recent years, the Fatherland Front and other political-social organizations are entrusted with supervising and criticizing role. Fatherland

Front and other political-social organizations are defined as advising and pivotal forces in understanding the public opinion. The Party and State create favorable conditions for the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and other political-social organizations to be more autonomous and active in their activities. Besides, the Party also sees the requirement of the development of mass organizations on the voluntary, self-governing, and self-funded principle, creating environment and conditions for people to promote their strength and creativity in order to meet their legitimate demands. To carry out mass mobilization works successfully, the Party requires a coordination mechanism between the Fatherland Front, the political- social organizations and mass associations (CPV, 03/6/2013). Regarding the innovating and perfecting of the political system from the central to grassroots, the Party views that the Fatherland Front's renewal of structures, contents, methods of operation, and mass mobilizing have not met the requirements (CPV, dated 05.28.2013).

In short, the Party redefines the primary role of the associations (both socio-political and mass organizations) as to carry out popularizing and mobilizing the masses to adhere to the Party and State's policies and guidelines. In recent years, socio-political organizations are divided into different groups basing on the nature of their activities. Accordingly, we have all kinds of organizations such as mass organizations (socio-political organizations), social – political organizations, socio- political - professional organizations, social – professional organizations, and social organizations. Basing on that, the State implements the general management of the associations. Those organizations associating with "political" are under the leadership of the Party. On that basis, the CPV assigns to groups of tasks corresponding to the importance of each organization.

Although the Party has advocated expanding the role and tasks of the associations in recent years, assigns them with specific and more practical tasks in the new period, the Party is consistent in controlling and managing closely the organization and activities of these

organizations. The Party sets out the political tasks for the organizations with the priority in mass mobilization works, including the popularization of the Party and State's policies and guidelines to the people. In clarifying the role of the socio-political organizations as a part of the political system, the Party considers these organizations as its extended arm in the implementation of the tasks entrusted by the Party and the tools involved in monitoring the administration and management of public administration. The associations not belonging to the Party's political system are also encouraged to admit Party members to their organization.

2. The process of legalizing the establishment of associations since 1945

The right of freedom to assembly [*quyen tu do hoi hop*] of citizens is ensured by the Constitution. The first Constitution after the establishment of an independent state (1946 Constitution, Article 10), the right to freedom of association and assembly has been recognized as one of the five basic rights of citizens (besides the freedom of speech, freedom of publication, freedom of religion and freedom of residence, travel within the country and abroad). This right continues to be affirmed in the 1959 Constitution (Article 25), the 1980 Constitution (Article 67) confirming that State shall ensure the practical conditions necessary for citizens to enjoy and use these rights. Since then, through revisions, supplements and re-compositions of the Constitution (1992, 2001, and 2013), the rights of assembly and association of citizens have been confirmed as basic rights of Vietnamese citizens. Article 25 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates *"Citizens have the right to freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and have the right of access to information, the right to assembly, the right to association, and the right to demonstrate. The exercise of those rights shall be prescribed by law"*. It can be seen that the right to freedom of association has been consistently recognized in the Constitution for nearly seventy years.

The right to freedom of assembly and association is established in the first constitution in 1946, and then concretized by two important decrees issued in 1957. It is the law on freedom of assembly (Government, 20/05/1957) and the Law on the right of association (Government, 05/20/1957). Both were signed to put into effect by President Ho Chi Minh. So far these two decrees are still in effect and are the highest legal basis (law) regulating associations operating in Viet Nam.

The State guarantees the right to freedom of assembly of the people by the law (Decree 101-SL/L003, dated 20/05/1957 stipulates the freedom of assembly, and Decree No.257-TTg dated 14/6/1957 gives the detailed regulations to implement the Act No. 101 - SL / L003 on the right to freedom of assembly). The right to freedom of assembly of people regulates two forms of assembly including the ones requiring prior permission and the ones without having to seek for permission. In particular, meetings among family members, relatives, friends; lawful assembly activities held within the headquarters of the association, the usual ceremonies of religious organizations in the worship places; and the meetings of the mass of the National United Front (now the Fatherland Front), and public meetings of these mass organizations do not have to obtain prior permission. As for the assembly of the organization, which is not in of the National United Front, having over 20 attendees must request permission from the local authorities. Today this law is still used by managing agencies (local government) to manage voluntary associations operating in the localities. This law article is also proposed in the current draft law on associations as fundamental legal basis for the management of social organizations having no legal status. In the cases of Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes, the local governments have applied this law to manage the unregistered voluntary associations in the communes.

Ordinance 102- SL/ L004 on the right of assembly still remains the highest legal text of its kind in Viet Nam. This law article shows the importance of social organizations and demonstrates the efforts of the central government to manage the establishment and operation of the

associations. This law holds that all citizens have the rights to form associations and the State respects and ensures that rights. Every individual who wants to form associations would have to ask for permission from the relevant authorities³ (Ministry of Home Affairs and provincial authority corresponding to the association's operational scale). This document also excludes economic organizations and mass organizations that have joined the National United Front during the war (the forerunner of the socio-political organizations today, including Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Farmers' Union, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and Labour Confederation).

The decree 258-TTg dated 14/06/1957 instructing the implementation of Law No.102-SL/L004 shall only apply to associations having the operations within an inter-zone, a zone, or a city/ province and beyond, without adjusting the voluntary associations which have long existed in the rural communities. The voluntary activities operating within the rural villages are not managed by the central government.

The first decade of the Doi Moi- Renovation process (1986) marked the birth of many legal documents of the Party and the State relating to the organization and management of associations in Viet Nam. The Instruction No. 01 of the President of the Council of Ministers (now Prime Minister), dated 05/01/1989, on the management of the organization and operation of public associations is a policy response when the State allows the establishment of over 100 public associations in the fields of science and technology, culture, art, health, social, sports ... (Council of Ministers, 01/05/1989). The birth of the associations in many fields proved that forming associations is a people's need. Moreover, throughout the history of gaining government with important contributions in mass mobilization of the public associations, the

³ The application for establishing association includes Name, goals and objectives, scope of activities, venue of the head office, location of branches (if applicable), Number of members, Origin of the assets, and Funding and program activities.

State finds that the associations might be an effective communication channel for the dissemination of the guidelines and policies of the Party and State.

Thus, the State, on one hand, requests the responsible agencies to create favorable conditions for Associations to grasp the State policies and laws and collaborate with the Associations to encourage their members to follow the State and Party's guidelines and policies. On the other hand, the government also wants to strengthen the management of the State over the organization and operation of associations by requiring strict management of the establishment of association at all levels.

Accordingly, the Directive states *"the associations operating nationwide must be licensed by the chairman of the Council of Ministers. For those operating within the centrally controlled provinces and cities, the President of the People's Committee shall provide license for operations before reporting to the Chairman of the State Council of Ministers. The associations operating to provide mutual assistance, social welfare in villages and hamlets such as the Association of Life Insurance, Association of School Support ... shall be licensed by the President of the local People's Committee before reporting to the Chairman of the district People's Committees"* (Council of Ministers, 05/01/1989). This might be the first time since 1945 the State of Viet Nam has a legal document manipulating organizations of mutual assistance and social welfare purposes in communes, villages, and hamlets.

The beginning of the 90s was marked by Decree 35 - HDBT/ 1992 on the activities of science and technology, which particularly allowed individuals to set up social associations. Subsequently, Circular 195/LB providing guidelines to register for the scientific and technological development organizations; or as the Decree of the Prime Minister specifying the activities of the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology, Art and Literature ... have paved the way for the establishment of private research institutions. The enactment of legislation in accordance with the requirements of the *Doi Moi*-Renovation period is really an

open direction for the groups, organizations, or individuals to have the opportunity to pursue their profession.

The Civil Code issued on 28/10/1995 was a legal response to the need to establish a legal entity in the early stage of Renovation period. Accordingly, an organization shall be recognized as a legal person entity when it meets all the following conditions: 1) established, permitted to be established, registered or recognized by a competent State authority; 2) has a well-organized structure; 3) possesses property independent from other individuals and/or organizations, and bears its own liability by such property; 4) independently enters into legal relationships under its own name (Article 94, Civil Code, 1995). A legal person entity may be established on the initiative of an individual economic organization, political organization, socio-political organization, social organization, socio-occupational organization, social fund, charitable fund, or in accordance with the competent State authority (Article 95, Civil Code, 1995). A social organization or socio-occupational organization which has been permitted to be established shall be legal persons when participating in civil relations (Article 114, Civil Code, 1995).

The advent of the Civil Code with the provisions allowing individuals to establish a legal entity is a big transition. Previously, association was mainly established in the framework of the State agency/ organization, and was funded as well as staffed to operate under the direction of the State agency/ organization. Since 1996, the law determined an individual has the right to form associations or join the association initiatives, thereby making association establishment a more civil activity rather than the extended managing arm of the State.

During this period, the early 1990s was marked by the launch of the National Assembly to build a law to replace the decree 102/1957 on associations. Resolution 18/ UVTV - QHK9 of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National Assembly assigned the Government's Committee of Organization and Personnel and the Viet Nam Fatherland Front to draft a law on associations. The Law Drafting Committee was formed begin composing the law shortly

thereafter. The law on associations was initiated since 1992. By early 1995, the Drafting Committee submitted the 5th draft law (The Committee of Organization and Personnel, 1995). Subsequently, the 9th, 10th, 11th drafted versions were reported to the National Assembly tenure XI (2006) for discussion and adoption. The 11th draft had included the issue of informal associations. Accordingly, the associations shall be determined as follows:

"Association is a voluntary institution whose members have the same needs and objectives with the purposes of non- profit and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of its members and the community; contributing to the country's development towards the goals of a strong, equal, democratic, and civilized country. Association includes those with legal person or without legal person status. Those having regular activities, being chartered or registered to operate in accordance with this Law and other provisions of the relevant legislation are the ones with legal person status. Those which do not hold legal person status are associations operating infrequently having no regulations, operating under the provisions of the Government."

There have been so far 13 draft laws on associations being prepared and revised, but the National Assembly has not passed the law on associations since no unanimous decision has been made. The issue of legal person of the latter is not mentioned in the Government's decree on the organization, operation and management of associations. Thus, voluntary associations by far, remain outside the scope of the legislation on associations.

To meet the management needs of the rapidly growing associations, the Government has directed the construction of the Decree on associations in 2002. The criteria set for the Decree on associations must both have simple establishment procedures and help strengthen the State management over associations. That Decree shall be applied to all associations holding legal status. The associations having no legal status operating irregularly under the form of meetings

shall be governed by the Law of Assembly 101/ SL - L003 dated 07.20.1957 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 28.11.2002).

By 2003, the Government issued Decree 88/2003 provides for the organization, operation and State management over associations. This Decree shall not apply to organizations such as the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Viet Nam Farmers' Association, Viet Nam Veterans Association, Viet Nam Women's Union, and religious congregations.

Decree 88/2003 defines that “1. Associations prescribed in this Decree are understood as voluntary organizations of citizens, organizations of Vietnamese of the same professions, the same hobbies, the same genders for the common purposes of gathering and uniting members, regular activities, non- self-seeking, aiming to protect members' legitimate rights and interests, to support one another for efficient activities, contribute to the country's socioeconomic development” (Article 2, Decree 88/2003). This decree also defines the scope of activities of the associations at four levels: central (or inter-provincial), provincial, district, and commune levels. The establishment of the association must be approved by the competent authorities. Association is organized and operates under the voluntary, self-governing, self – funding principle, and is regulated by the law. As for the association to be recognized as socio-political organizations, political – professional organizations, associations entrusted with State tasks will be funded by the State.

Shortly after the issuance, Decree 88 was criticized for the rigorous requirements of the establishment procedures as well as for strict rules about the number of members, the association regulations, etc. It did not meet the earlier criteria for a legal document regulating a simple establishment procedure. The Decree was based on the mechanism of requesting – permitting when requiring associations must ask for competent authority to set up associations (instead of just registering for establishment of associations), while the right to freedom of

association is a constitutional right. It also shows the strict management of the State when intervening too deeply in the activities of the association. In the context of the Law on Association not being passed by the National Assembly, the amendment and supplementation of Decree 88 is expected to continue in the coming years, with the active participation of associations – the main subjects regulated by law⁴.

In 2010, the Prime Minister issued Decree No. 45 (dated 21.04.2010) provides for the organization, operation, and management of associations. Two years later, in 2012, this Decree was further amended and supplemented (Decree 33/2012/ ND - CP). Decree 45/2010 (and amended Decree 33/2012) reserves the definition of association, the scope of application and the process of permitting - allowing establishment of associations like the Decree 88/2003. For associations operating at the commune level, local People's Council Committee is still responsible for licensing the establishment, but may authorize the district Committee to license the establishment of organizations operating within the commune. This is considered a less strict point than the Decree 88. In addition, Decree 45 on associations has tighter regulations on the organization, operation and State management over association. For example, associations operating at the commune level must have at least ten citizens, or social organizations which are eligible, voluntary to register, and submit application form for participation then they are eligible to establish associations.

By 7/2013, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a decision on the approval of plan to build a decree to replace Decrees No. 45/2010 and 33/2012. This aims to institutionalize policies and guidelines of strengthening the Party 's leadership in associations in the new context; and to complement and complete the provisions of the law on associations ensuring the right of association establishment of citizens pertaining to the Constitution, strengthening the

⁴ Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA) even submitted to the Government a draft decree to replace Decree 88/2003, which is viewed as controlling the associations too strictly.

management of the association's organization and operation, creating favorable conditions for associations to operate in the right direction and effectively (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2013). Along with continuing to amend the law on associations, the construction of a decree to supplement for Decrees 45/2010 and 33/2012 is also being conducted.

3. The development of associations since the Renovation

According to the Viet Nam Committee of Organization and Personnel's official statistics, by 1990, the Government has allowed the establishment of 124 mass associations- *Hoi quan chung* (including 41 Friendship Associations) operating nationwide and over 300 associations operating in the centrally controlled provinces and cities (Council of Ministers, 05/06/1990). The increase in the number of associations and the fact that many associations do not adhere closely to the law on associations and beyond the control of the State, Party and Government requires strict requirements for management of the newly established associations (Notification No. 194-T/TW, 28/05/1990; Directive 202/CT, 05/06/1990). The CPV and Government issued many documents to specify the roles, functions, tasks, organizational innovation, content and method of operation of the Fatherland Front, unions and civil social organizations to ensure political stability (Notification No. 194-TB/TW, 05/28/1990).

After five years, the number of associations and non-governmental organizations has increased dramatically. The Government's early 1995 statistics showed that there had been 30 more associations with national activities. In addition, as of early 1995, the country had 574 associations in 32 centrally controlled municipalities. Most associations established at this stage are professional associations, associations active in the field of science and technology, literature and art, sports, and friendship associations. Most of these associations are funded or

partially funded by the State⁵. Besides, many associations/ foundations with charitable and humanitarian purposes and non-governmental organizations are established to construct projects to seek for international fund or start to get involved in the field of service provision (Dang Thi Viet Phuong, 2004). During this time, there are also many non-governmental organizations being established at both central and local levels under the form of foundation, support center, charity, and humanitarian, etc. (unofficial statistics showed that more than 250 organizations of this kind are established) (Viet Nam Committee of Organization and Personnel, 04/03/1995).

The reason for the rapid growth in the number of associations and non-governmental organizations at this stage is to meet the needs of the practical situation. It should be noted that at that time Viet Nam had emerged as a bright spot in escaping poverty (1993, Viet Nam transformed itself from a lack of rice nation into a rice exporter). That success attracted the attention of international organizations. In this period, there were 200 foreign non-governmental organizations giving finance and development assistance for Viet Nam. In 1994 alone, Viet Nam received US \$50 million to support for the development in Viet Nam (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 04/03/1995). The establishment of associations and non-governmental organizations were meant to receive those grants and aids. Another reason is because there were many retired State officials during this period (around 20 years after the country unification), and they also tended to form associations to continue to operate in the areas where they had strengths and connections beforehand (Dang Thi Viet Phuong, 2004).

⁵ During this time, the State assigned staffing and provided funds regularly for 18 associations established before 1982 (excluding 6 mass socio-political organizations). In addition, 169 associations at centrally-controlled provinces and cities are also staffed and funded for their activities. The associations established in the mountainous provinces are also staffed and funded.

In the second half of the 1990s, the number of newly established association continued to increase. By 1999, the State had decided to establish 183 central associations. By that time, there were associations in all 61 municipals, making the total number of provincial associations operating throughout the country 1304. They mainly operated in major provinces and cities including Ho Chi Minh City (112 associations), Hanoi (76 associations), Can Tho (81 associations), etc. (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 01/03/2000). During this period a large number of associations were established in the provinces and cities; and those associations also set up a network of centers to facilitate their activities. These centers continued to establish clubs functioning like the associations themselves⁶. The associations did not only expand themselves by admitting more members, but they also extended their operating range (instead of operating within the province/ city, they went on to operate nationwide).

While the 1990s saw the establishment of friendship associations, literary and artistic associations, scientific and technical associations, and non-governmental organizations; the period from 2000 onward witnessed the needs for association establishment continued to increase, but mainly in the field of economy, science, and technology. This is due to the Government's support when its policy was to give priority for the establishment of economic – professional associations during this time (Report 11/ BC - BTCCBCP, 3/14/2001; Report 02/ BC - BTCCBCP, 04/02/2002). The associations' organizational models also varied including the associations, inter-associations, general associations, union, assemblies, clubs, centers, institutes, institutions of social protection, etc.

The association establishment movement continued to develop in the first half of the 2000s. There were 12 more central associations and 1465 more provincial associations being established in 2001. In 2002, the total number of central associations was 234 (Viet Nam

⁶ The State's official documents refer to "club" as internal activities of a group, organization which are unlike that of an association and do not hold legal person status.

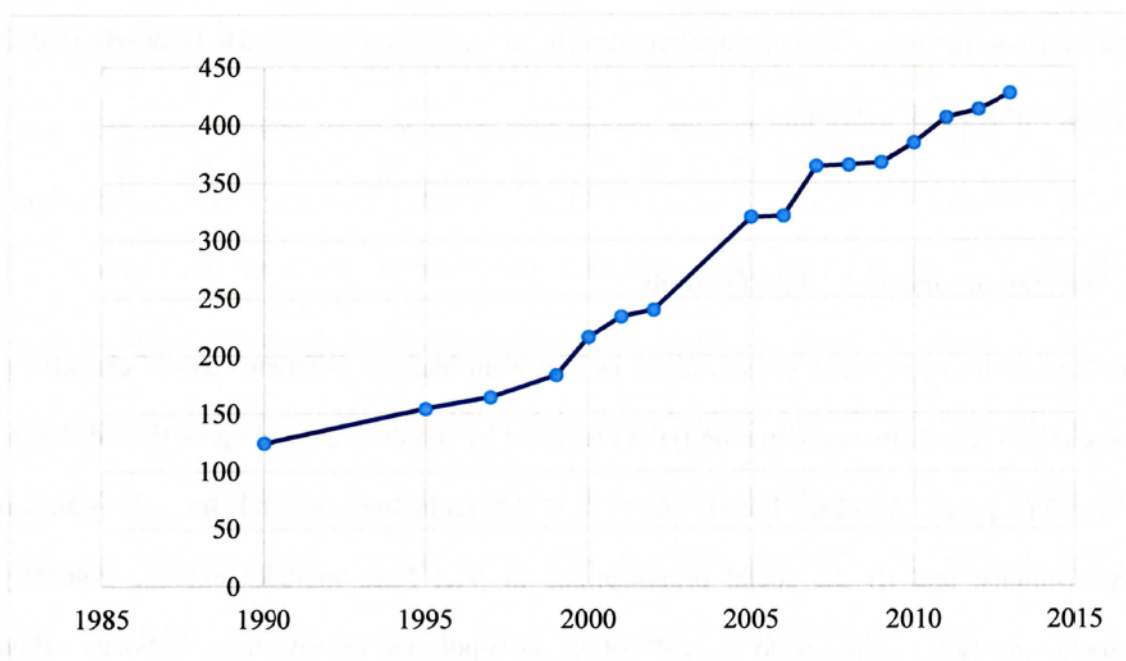
Committee of Organization and Personnel, 02/04/2002). By 2002, there were 240 central associations and 1500 provincial associations. In details, Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology has 99 members; Viet Nam Union of Friendship Organizations has 50 members; Viet Nam Association of Literature and Arts has 11 members. By that time, there have been also nearly 50 associations of economic organizations being established. The rest are independent associations operating in the field of social, charitable, and humanitarian areas. The centrally controlled provinces and cities have approved the establishment of 1500 associations operating at provincial level (Ministry of Home Affairs, 28/11/2002).

By the first half of 2005, there existed more than 320 associations with nationwide activities and 2150 associations operating in the centrally controlled provinces and cities. Associations were set up in all localities; there was high density of associations in the localities that enjoyed highly developed socio-economy (Ministry of Home Affairs, 17/04/2006). During this period, the associations were seen as participating more actively in handling social problems. The Party and State also allocated the civilian sectors to perform activities related to culture, health, education, sports, etc.; allocated public services to associations and non-governmental organizations. These movements had created favorable conditions for associations to participate in the programs of socio – economic development, consultation, social criticism and assessment (Ministry of Home Affairs, 03/4/2006).

Thus, within five years alone, from 2000 to 2005, the number of newly established and active associations nationwide had increased by 1.5 times compared to 1990. From 1990 to 1995, the number of associations operating nationwide increased to 30; that number from 1995 to 2000 was 41. Meanwhile, from 2000 to 2005, there were 125 newly established associations operating nationwide. The number of associations operating in the provinces, districts, and communes also tended to increase markedly. The official number of associations at provincial level was 300 in 1990, and it increased to 574 in 1995. From 1995 to 2000, the number had

risen by nearly 1.5 times. From 2000 to 2005, there were 700 more associations operating in all provinces/ cities across the nation.

Figure 2: The development of associations in Viet Nam from 1990 to present



(Source: Author compiled from the reports and statistics of the Ministry of Home Affairs, 1995-2014)

By 2007, there have been an increase of 111 associations to 364 nationwide; which means that there have been more than 30% of the associations being established from 1946 to present. The newly established associations are mainly those of profession, career, and economy. By 2007 there have been 23 national associations being staffed and funded by the State. Though total staff decreased, funding for these organizations increased depending on each project, program and activity associated with the tasks entrusted by the State. The associations actively participated in alleviating poverty, preventing and suppressing social vices, providing services,

applying new technologies in manufacturing, health care, etc. By 2007, there have been 6641 associations of which 2784 operating at communal level. The local associations founded from 2002 to 2007 were mainly associations with activities at district and commune levels (Ministry of Home Affairs, 17/12/2007). From 2008 until now, the number of newly established associations operating nationwide licensed by the Ministry of the Home Affairs alone is 63. The unofficial number of associations operating in all localities is estimated to be nearly 15,000 (Thang Van Phuc, 09/20/2010).

4. Associations and their classifications

The diverse forms of social organizations in Viet Nam leads to different ways of classifying associations. There are two common types classified by scholars, depending on their different research purposes, including: i) civil society in Viet Nam includes/ exclude the socio-political organizations; and ii) the social organizations in Viet Nam include/ exclude voluntary associations. Some scholars do not categorize socio-political organizations (scholars called them as mass organizations) into civil sector citing that these organizations are part of the political system which are led by the CPV, have personnel paid from the state budget, therefore, should not be classified as a civil sector (which is considered independent of the state) (Gray, 1999). However, most scholars are of the opinion that the Western concept of civil society (see civil society as independent organizations of the State) should not be rigidly applied into the case of Viet Nam (Wischermann, Nguyen Quang Vinh, 2003; Norlund, 2007).

Nguyen Khac Mai (1996) classified social organizations in Viet Nam into two basic types: i) the mass (socio-political) organizations- *To chuc chinh tri-xa hoi*; and ii) the mass associations- *Hoi quan chung*. The author goes on to divide further the mass associations into seven groups of associations: i) the scientific and technological associations; ii) the literary and artistic

associations; iii) the charitable associations; iv) sports associations; v) cultural and other professional association; vi) the peace and friendship associations; vii) religious associations. Although not being included in the classification of associations above, the author mentioned voluntary associations as a form of organizations in Viet Nam.

Le Bach Duong et al. (2002) divides the society in Viet Nam into five categories: i) the mass (socio-political) organizations; ii) professional associations; iii) community-based and service providing organizations (such as water user groups, savings and credit groups); iv) charities and support centers operating in the field of social protection; v) other organizations beyond the four categories mentioned above, mostly including informal, unregistered organizations (such as clubs, chess associations, parents associations, etc.).

Wischermann et al. (2003) classifies civic organizations into 4 groups: socio-political organizations, professional associations, issue-oriented organizations and entrepreneurs associations (Wischermann, 2003). Norlund proposes a broader approach to civil society in Viet Nam covering all types of organizations and organizational initiatives and activities at the community level, whether they are state- supported or not (Norlund, 2007; Nguyen Quy Nghi Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2011). Nguyen Duc Vinh (2013) uses a common name as social organization to classify organizations into three groups: i) socio-political organizations ; ii) professional associations comprise the member organizations of the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations, assistance funds, non-governmental organizations (NGOs); iii) community-based organizations including organizations, associations, groups ... which are often informal, established and operate on the basis of local communities (Nguyen Duc Vinh, 2013, p. 75).

This dissertation does not aim to determine the classification of civil society, but rather tries to go through different forms of social organizations in Viet Nam. Based on the classifications of scholars domestically and internationally, we divide the current social organizations in Viet

Nam into the following groups: i) socio-political organizations consisting of Fatherland Front, Labour Confederation, Youth Union, Women's Union, Veterans Association and Farmers' Union; ii) professional associations comprising the member organizations of the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations, assistance funds, non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Within this group, we can distinguish between a group of associations with specific characteristics and other professional associations; and iii) voluntary associations. This classification is based on the relationship of the associations with the State as well as the importance that the State assigns to the different types of associations. The relationship and the associations' importance are partly reflected in the policies and laws of the State and Party applied to the groups of social associations.

4.1. Mass organizations

Legal documents on the right to freedom of associations, including Decree 102/1957, do not regulate socio-political organizations (also known as mass organizations, including of Labour Confederation, Fatherland Front, Farmers' Union, Women's Union, Youth Union and Veterans Association). These associations were mostly established before 1945⁷, participating actively in the resistance movement under the leadership of the Party. These organizations are considered to be part of the political system, which are led by the Party. These kinds of organizations have not been regulated as separate articles since 1980 Constitution.

The Constitution 1980 defines: "Viet Nam Fatherland Front- including political parties, Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour, Farmers' Union, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, Viet Nam Union and other members of the Front – is the stable mainstay of the State. The Front upholds the tradition of national unity, strengthens political consensus and the spirit of the people, contributes to building and fortifying the people's government (Article 9). The

⁷ Except for Veterans Association that was established in mid 1990s.

role of these organizations has been constantly confirmed at the Congresses of the Party. Right after the renovation being determined, the Party recognized the need to "strengthen and promote the role of the Fatherland Front and mass organizations, especially the Confederation of Labour, Youth Union, Women's Union, Farmers' Union, etc." (CPV, 18/12/1986). The Constitutions of 1992 and 2013 continue to clarify the role of these socio-political organizations by stating that "the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and its member organizations are the political basis of the people's government" (Article 9). The Laws on the organization of People's Council and People's Committees at all levels (1983, 1994, 2003) identify the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, along with socio-political organizations, will work closely and is the mainstay for the People's Council and People's Committee in their activities (Law on the organization of People 's Council and People's Committee, dated 30/06/1983).

These organizations are structured having four levels from central to provincial, district, and ward/ commune. In all four levels, they are organized tightly and staffed, funded annually by the Government from the State budget. At the central level, these organizations are organized like a ministry. At the commune level, these organizations have their own offices as part of the local authority system. These organizations participate in the activities of the State administration at all levels, participate in the meetings, get involved in deciding important issues of the system of government at all levels. Some organizations have private laws/ ordinances, such as the Law on Confederation of Labour (1990), Fatherland Front Law (1999), and Veterans Ordinance (2005).

In 1993, the Ministry of Finance and the State Committee of Planning issued a Joint Circular guiding the management mechanism of the economic units of the Party and the political organizations (Ministry of Finance and State Committee of Planning, 22.03.1993), which defines that the heads of the political organizations at the central, provincial and central cities are entitled to request the establishment or re-establishment of enterprises. Personnel on the

payroll of the political organizations changing to work in enterprises of political organizations are considered to have continuous working time and entitled to receive all rights just like workers and employees of State enterprises (retirement, incapacity...). It means that the socio-political organizations have their own economic units and are regarded as state-owned enterprises. The investment budgets for this type of economic units are completely or partially from the state budget.

Thus, it can be seen that the socio-political organizations are a part of the political system, participating in state management, receiving salary and operating funds from the state budget, having private economic entities in the state-run sector. These organizations are directly led by the Party and cooperate with other state agencies to carry out routine tasks and the extraordinary political tasks assigned by the Party. The Party's Resolution 8B/ 1990 affirms that the socio-political organizations are under the leadership of the Party, and are the people's representatives to participate in the management of state and the core of the mass movement (CPV, 27.03.1990). Basically, the role of these organizations is to propagate and disseminate guidelines, policies, and laws of the Party and State.

In the current period, these organizations continue to promote the role as a bridge between the Party, State and people. Besides, in recent years, the mass organizations are recognized with the more important role in participating in state management. They are assigned to certain tasks on behalf of the state agencies, and acting as the role of a coordinator with different state agencies. Although the relationship between socio-political organizations and the state agencies is not a superior- inferior model, the former is funded by the later in order to carry out activities in coordination with state agencies. Due to the lack of self – funding, the organizations cannot stay out of the role assigned by the State as an agency of propaganda (in Wischermann's words (2010) as "transmission belts"), or at least from the perspective of the State.

From their own perspective, these socio-political organizations have developed beyond the framework of the organization and the role they are assigned. Since the 1990s, these organizations have grown in size in all four administrative levels, especially the expansion of activities at the grassroots level. During this period, Viet Nam received many international funds for social development, especially for poverty reduction programs. The poverty reduction becomes the focus of the activities of civil organizations in general and the socio-political in particular. These organizations (particularly the Women's Union, Youth Union, Farmers' Union, and Veterans' Union) play an important role in regulating the credit programs in the localities (Sakata, 2006). Despite the fact that a large percentage of members only register without involving any activities, it cannot be denied the extensive range of their influence when these organizations conduct synchronous activities from central to local levels.

Currently, the activities of these organizations are not limited in the scope of the tasks assigned by the Party and State. They also participate in providing social services and engage more in civic activities. These organizations have carried out thousands of projects and credit programs for the poor (funded by international and non – government organizations) (Norlund, 2007). Many representatives of the socio-political organizations say that their organizations have participated in areas such as social works, poverty reduction, strengthening the democracy at grassroots level, promoting economic development and fighting for gender equality (Wischermann, 2010). It is undeniable that the organizations' active and practical activities for the community have facilitated them to expand contacts with the grassroots level, thereby increasing the number of members, and help them more independent.

From the people's perspective and perhaps from the organizations' members themselves (actual or on paper), these organizations prove to play a positive role in the community. People appreciate these organizations for contributing to poverty reduction, enhancing the role of women, anti-corruption, anti-social vices, strengthening community solidarity, social equality,

improving cultural spirit, etc. However, the nowadays socio-political organizations still operate primarily on the basis of movement, instead of proactively participating to build community awareness and society (Nguyen Duc Vinh, 2013).

It looks like the dynamics, activeness, and development of the practical activities towards community of socio-political organizations have recently changed the views of the Party and State for this them. These organizations are now entrusted with the more important tasks of state management. The Party requires Viet Nam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, and the people to build regulations on supervision and social criticism for the Party's policymaking, guidelines, and policies, major issues (CPV, 2006). Politburo also asks National Assembly, government agencies at all levels to have a mechanism for the Viet Nam Women's Union to proactively participate in the process of building the legal documents, strategies, programs, national, ministerial, sector, and local development projects (Politburo, 27/4/2007). Politburo issues the regulations and supervisions of social criticism for the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and mass socio-political organizations (Politburo, 12.12.2013) and the provisions for the Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations and the people to participate in constructive suggestions for building the Party and Government (Politburo, 12/12/2013).

Accordingly, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations function as monitoring the implementation of the policies and lines of the Party, and the policies and laws of the State (except for the issues of state secrets) of State agencies, organizations, and individuals. Viet Nam Fatherland Front is the main responsible organization to oversee the implementation of the policies and lines of the Party, and the policies and laws of the State in accordance with its functions and duties. The socio-political organizations are the main responsible institutions to monitor the implementation of the policies and lines of the Party, and the policies and laws of the State related to the legitimate rights and interests of their members in accordance with their functions and duties; coordinate with the Viet Nam

Fatherland Front to perform supervisory duties for related issues (Article 5.6, Decision 217/2013). Although the scope of overseeing, and social criticism is limited and determined by the principle of "The Party leads, the Government manages, the People self – manage", this is still regarded as a major change in the relationship between the Party, State, and socio-political organizations in the current period.

4.2. Professional Associations

In addition to the socio-political organizations mentioned above, all the remaining social organizations are subject to the laws of associations. Decree 45/2010 referred to associations for those organizations that have different names: association, inter – union, general association, federations, confederations, and clubs. On the other hand, the Government and Party have a clear distinction for associations organized into groups with different priorities, particularly between “political” and social organizations. Accordingly, there are groups such as socio-political organizations, socio - political – professional organizations, and socio – professional associations, social organizations. Starting to appear from the early 1990s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can also be classified as social organizations, though they may belong to many different agencies and subject to other legal documents other than merely the laws on associations. Due to the distinctive features of the institutions associated with "political" (later referred to as the associations having specific characteristics), we will consider this group of associations separately from the remaining groups of social organizations.

4.2.1. Associations having specific characteristics

The organization bearing the name "political" means that it operates under the direction and orientation of the Party, and is assigned to perform certain tasks (mainly related to the tasks of disseminating information and mobilization, commonly referred to as "political task"). Along with the implementation of the tasks assigned by the Party and the State, these organizations

receive some funding support from the state budget. In 2000, the Government identified a list of 16 organizations recognized by the State and Party as socio-political organizations (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 01/03/2000) (see Appendix 1). These 19 socio-political organizations are also on the list of institutions staffed and funded by the State.

When the Decree on the organization, operation, and management of associations (Decree 88/2003) are in the process of being drafted, many organizations on this 19 - organization list do not want to be governed by decree on associations. They request the Party and State to recognize them as socio-political organizations like the six organizations mentioned above. The allocation of staffing and funding for these associations have made them, originally considered the civilian sector, become similar to the other administrative bodies, making them a part of the State administrative system. Some scholars classify these associations, along with other socio-political associations above into the "Pro-government" group" (Nguyen Quy Nghi, Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2011).

Although the 19 – association group's request to the Government was not approved, the Government was committed to continue to provide funding and maintain the set – up administrative system with the projection of changing from funding and staffing to support basing on certain tasks. The initial goal was to switch to the mechanism of supporting for activities, which are closely associated with State tasks, by 2005. But after that the Government continued to provide funding for the activities of these associations until 2010 (Government, 30/10/2006). The autonomy remains a problem for these associations.

The Government's Decree 45/2010, instead of switching to funding mechanisms for the 19 associations aforementioned, has a whole Chapter VI to provide to the rules for associations with specific characteristics (this is a new supplementing chapter compared to Decree 88/2003). This Decree does not list specific associations, but instead empowering the Prime Minister to be the one that determines which one is an association with specific characteristics.

This Decree specifies that the association with specific activities to be funded under the assigned payroll number; to be secured funding to carry out the tasks assigned by the State and supported with infrastructure and operational facilities; to be encouraged, created favorable conditions to participate in some activities of State management, public services; to be entitled to provide consultancy, social criticism and supervision; to be entrusted to carry out of programs, schemes, and projects assigned by the Government. Not long after that, the Prime Minister issued Decision 68/2010 identifying specific associations, together with a list of 28 associations that are entitled to this mechanism (Government, 01/11/2010) (Appendix 3).

Accordingly, specific associations are identified including groups of organizations as follows

- i) the socio-political organizations, socio-political – professional organizations which have been recognized, assigned staff, and supported financially, provided favorable conditions by the Party;
- ii) the social – professional organizations, economic organizations which have an important role in contributing to the development of economy, society of the country, but facing financial difficulties and being staffed, financially supported, given favorable conditions by the State beforehand;
- iii) social organizations working for social and humanitarian purposes; associations of the more difficult and disadvantaged subjects (Article 1).

State Budget Law shall ensure the balance of funding for socio-political organizations. The State budget spends recurrent expenditures supporting the activities of socio-political – professional organizations, social organizations, socio – professional organizations at central and local levels (including responsible for assigning part of personnel and providing funding for activities according to the assigned tasks). For example, the budget estimates of the Ministry of Finance in 2014 shows that the total state budget for the six socio-political organizations is 1,333,581 million (equivalent to approximately 49 million euros), and for specific associations

at the central level is close to 528,525 million (approximately 19.4 million euros), of which the majority of the budget is used to maintain the administrative system of the organizations⁸.

The budget for six socio-political organizations alone accounts for 71.6 % of the total spending for central mass and social organizations, the rest of 28.4 % is spent to support specific associations (according to Public State Budget Announcement of the Ministry of Finance). Total expenditure for the mass and social organizations at central level account for about 0.33 % of the total budget for the State departments and Central Government agencies. The distinctive name of the organizations associated with the political tasks along with the State support of personnel and finance have attracted many associations to bear the word “political” or become a specific association in order to enjoy the payroll and subsidies from the state budget.

The priority in the allocation of State funds for a number of socio-political organizations, socio-political – professional organizations, and social organizations from the central to the local level leads to the fact that many more associations try to become one of them in order to receive the state support (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 03/01/2000). Based on the conditions of the budget and the practical situation, the Chairman of the Provincial People’s Committee determines the list of specific associations in the locality. Thereby leading to a situation difficult to control from the central level when the localities are too flexible in approving a specific mechanism for the associations of the province. For example, in 1998, 427 out of the total 1242 associations operating in the province were funded and staffed by the provincial authority (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 03/14/2001). To avoid this situation, the Government Party Committee recently directs the study and construction of

⁸ It should be noted that the budget funded for specific associations is equal to that for a ministry or ministry – level agencies

criteria of socio-political associations, socio-political – professional associations, and specific association to submit to the Secretariat before the government issues (CPV, 28/08/2012).

It can be seen that the separation of the associations to become partners operating independently of the state is not easy and it does not seem to be desirable from both sides. The association wants to have special mechanisms to receive support from the State. The State itself also wants to strengthen the control over the associations to extend the scope of "politicizing" the associations and the State only provides fund for the tasks entrusted by it. Kervliet (2008) explains this trend by citing that corporatism ("a pattern of organizing interests and influences in the state which gives favored status to Certain interest groups") (Stromseth, 1998: 3; Jeong, 1997) - is a method that the government uses to organize the interests and influences affected by giving benefits to certain groups of preferential position). These groups of interest are closely associated with the State. Accordingly, under the direction of the state, the goal of socio-political associations as well as the specific associations changes from mobilizing and disseminating the State's guidelines and policies to becoming the facilitator of the concerns of the public and conveying these concerns into policy-making process (Stromset, 1998: 4, tutorial Kervliet, 2008).

4.2.2 Professional associations, social funds, social organizations, non-governmental organizations

This section discusses the associations holding legal person status under the regulating scope of Decree 45/2010 but not included in the list of associations with specific characteristics mentioned above. The names of these organizations are diverse, can be mass or mass associations (the Party distinguishes them from the above mass organizations which are the socio-political organizations), or social – professional organizations, social organizations, non-governmental organizations (under the classification of the official documents of the State), or the institutions of civil society, civil sector (coined by themselves and international scholars).

The Ministry of Home Affairs refers to them as: i) association, inter - associations, mass organizations; ii) foundations; iii) organizations of science and technology; iv) organizations of social protection; and v) non – governmental organizations providing legal consultation which are under the management of the Department of Non-governmental organizations. (Norlund, 2007)

It can be said that the development of professional associations, particularly non-governmental organizations is the most obvious illustration for social changes since *Doi Moi*- Renovation. The open reforms of Viet Nam during 1980s are considered successful not only on the changes in economic thoughts, but it is also open to more active participation of the civil sector in the field of social sector. The diversification of the society raises new social needs. The trend of forming associations and non-governmental organizations in the early 1990s was noted by Bui The Cuong (2003) as the collective effort to gather together to pursue common goals, and striving to form organizations as the main tool for the implementation of joint activities. Wischermann (2003) evaluates these organizations as the school of democracy for the people involved.

The association development takes a variety of forms, from non-governmental organizations, professional organizations, to community groups ... These organizations are distributed in almost all provinces in the country, operating from central to local level, participating in many different fields and attracting the participation of many walks of life (Norlund, 2007). The first phase of the 1990s saw the establishment of professional associations, associations in the field of science and technology, literature and art, sport, friendship associations. The next phase witnessed the birth of the associations/ charitable funds, humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, which were established to participate in the provision of social services (unofficial statistics shows that more than 250 of this type of organization are founded, the Committee of Organization and Personnel, 03/04/1995).

During the 2000s, the demand of forming new associations continues to increase, but in favor of the areas of economy, trade, science, engineering and technology. The statistics of a study in 2000 on social organizations in Viet Nam shows that there are over 700 officially registered social organizations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, of which the number of non-governmental organizations in the two cities is 322 (Wischermann, 2003). Less than ten years later, in 2008, there were nearly 1700 social organizations being registered officially in the two cities. The number of professional associations, social funds, and non – governmental organizations alone in the two cities is more than 1400. The number of non – governmental organizations alone increased nearly threefold (936 organizations) compared to the 2000 census⁹.

The strength of non-governmental organizations is that they are focused to meet the needs and fill the "gaps in the development process." They have no bureaucracy and their budget priorities are not imposed. They mainly focus on the grassroots level; working directly in the village, directly capture the needs of the people in the community (Andersen, 1993). The social organizations are often closer to the poor and often mobilize high participation of the people. These organizations also prove flexible, easy to adapt to change. They play an important role in promoting democracy (Laothamatas, 1997, cited from Bui The Cuong, 2005). The associations are highly appreciated by the State for their positive engagement in solving social problems. Therefore, the State began to entrust the civilian sector to perform cultural activities, health, education, sports, etc.; and provide public services. It has created conditions for the associations to participate in the development programs of socio – economy and counseling, criticism, and assessment of the society (Ministry of Home Affairs, 03/4/2006). These organizations have been actively cooperating with the government agencies in providing social

⁹ The author was the team leader in charge of the survey in Hanoi. The list of social organizations in the two cities were made based on the updated list of social organization founded in 2000 collected from the telephone addresses, internet and other sources. The list was then cross-checked by calling or sending people to the address to confirm the actual existence of the organization on the list. This list is divided into 4 groups: mass organizations, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, and business associations/ companies.

services for disadvantaged groups at the grassroots level, as well as representing and conveying the voice of the people (Nguyen Quy Nghi, Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2011).

The associations operate on the basis of self – funding and the State has no quota for staffing and operating funds for them. Most of the associations being approved to establish have financial autonomy. In addition to the revenue from the membership fees, the associations, especially non-governmental organizations, are active in setting up proposals to receive funding from international organizations. The associations also hold a number of services of their occupation or coordinate with other organizations to bid for some public services in order to have additional operating funds. Often, professional associations rarely receive direct funding from government agencies to implement activities, but they can become subcontractors of the associations having specific characteristics to perform the service contracts or participating in the State programs implemented by the associations having specific characteristics, especially the service contracts of science and technology. The contracts of this type are not limited to service contracts with government agencies at the central and local level, but also enterprises (Nguyen Quy Nghi, Nguyen Quy Thanh, 2011).

In recent years, the State agencies begin assigning associations to take on long – term public service contracts instead of seasonal ones like that in the past. However, not all associations find it easy to find the funds from outside. The too-hot development in the number of associations since *Doi Moi*- Renovation leads to the fact that many associations are established but do not have sufficient funds to maintain operations which results in infrequent or even no activities at all. Tight and unstable funding have hindered many associations from operating infrequently, forcing them to cut jobs and unable to set long – term goals for themselves. Many organizations previously depended on international funding sources to implement their tasks, now found it difficult in locating alternative sources while the development aid has shrunk or cut down (Taylor et al., 2012).

Social organizations involved in many different areas to promote social development. Many representatives of organizations (73.9 % in Hanoi and 72.9 % in Ho Chi Minh City) say that the most important reason why they found the organization is because they wanted to participate in solving the pressing social problems (Wischermann, 2003). Nguyen Khac Mai (1996) identifies four basic roles that professional associations, foundations, social and non-governmental organizations in Viet Nam to undertake: i) to participate in the social protection and development; ii) to take care of the interests of their members; iii) to educate their members and the target communities; and iv) to regulate the society (social assessment, counseling, and criticism).

More than a decade later, the role of associations is identified with the trend to expand to more targets for the development of society in general rather than to serve the needs of their members. Kerkvliet et al. (2008) suggests that the associations may participate under four forms: 1) the provision of services; 2) conveyance of the citizens' opinions to the State agencies; 3) supervision of the State agencies' activities; 4) participating in policy and legislation building. Many researchers agree with this statement and recognize the success of the associations in each role they undertake, especially the social associations' role in monitoring government and enterprises' projects (Nguyen Quy Thanh, Nguyen Quy Nghi, 2011). When assessing the activities of these organizations, Norlund (2007) find that these organizations mainly aim at poverty reduction, charity, humanitarian, self-management, career development, rather than legal issues.

Although there have been more openness in the assessment and recognition of the role of associations in the current period, but in general the procedures of association establishment compounded by the complicated administrative procedures remain an obstacle in the relationship between the Government and the associations. To establish an organization, the associations must go through a complex legal process procedures with at least six papers,

following three stages from filing, submitting papers, to waiting for the written approval from the authority. It takes a minimum of six months for an association to be set up. Besides, the strict rules on applications for establishment of associations such as regulations on the minimum number of members for each level of the association; or the newly established association must not have the same name and primary areas of activities with another association, which is legally established earlier in the same surrounding (Article 5, Chapter 2, Decree 45/2010).

Furthermore, there is an overlap in managing established associations when the Ministry of Home Affairs request other ministries, sectors, and branches whose duties correspond with that of the association to coordinate to manage the associations. There have been cases when local authority must ask for the opinion of the Ministry of Home Affairs of the association's applications because it does not know which sector to put that association¹⁰. The strict rules of procedures for establishing associations may be the reason why a large amount of voluntary associations operating within a small scale in the local community are unable to achieve the legal person status to be recognized as an association.

4.3. Voluntary Associations

Voluntary associations are called by different names in variously related studies. It may be called the informal associations (Nguyen Khac Mai, 1996), non-formal organizations (Bui The Cuong, 2003), voluntary organizations (Mai Van Hai, Ngo Thi Thanh Quy, 2011), community – based organizations (Norlund, 2007; Taylor et al. 2012; Nguyen Duc Vinh, 2013), etc. Though being called by different names, scholars share general criteria to identify these institutions. The criteria include i) formed on a voluntary basis by the members, ii) having no

¹⁰ For example, the Da Nang provincial Department of Home Affairs' Official dispatch 815/SNV-TCBC dated 10/5/2007 instructs the establishments of associations including Liason committee of enemy mobilization, Liason committee of clans... because these associations are not under the management of any department/sector.

legal person status, iii) having small scale of members, iv) operating primarily within a community, and v) having specific activities.

The Government's official report only takes into consideration the activities of the associations at central and provincial levels. Other inferior associations are mentioned summarily as "thousands of associations are operating in districts, towns, and provincial cities (generally referred as districts) and communes, wards, and towns (generally referred as communes), such as the association of parents, the association of fellow-countrymen, etc. " (Committee of Organization and Personnel, 3/4/1995, 07/6/1997; 13/ 10/1999; 03/01/2000; 14/03/2001; 02/04/2002). Kervliet et al. (2008) also notes a fact that there are tens of thousands of informal, non- registered associations, and, therefore, they are not officially recognized as operating in Viet Nam.

Many of the organizations in this group are classified as community – based organizations, of which many are recognized by the local authority. While doing research in a village in the Red River Delta, Quynh Nga (2008) also notes the variety of voluntary associations in rural areas. The author divides the organizations into groups such as religious associations (association of nuns, associations of temple, etc.); associations of mental support (same – age association, same – enlisted year association, etc.); economic – professional associations (livestock breeding associations, trade associations, etc.) (Quynh Nga, 2008). Another study conducted in a village in the province of Bac Ninh (Red River Delta) shows that there are 36 organizations being formed "based on willingness". Two – thirds of the respondents join the informal organizations in the village (Mai Van Hai, Ngo Thi Thanh Quy, 2011).

Asia Foundation's research team also notes a growing number of community – based organizations ranging from tontine associations, water – users groups to the charity clubs. Although these organizations are not registered, they are still considered as active members of civil society in Viet Nam (Taylor et al., 2012). An empirical study conducted with 1200 people

between the ages of 20-69 in Hanoi (Red River Delta), Dak Lak (Highland) and Can Tho (Mekong Delta) shows that up to 41% of respondents say they are currently members of the community – based organizations (compared to 59.7 % being the members of socio-political organizations, and 10.9 % being members of professional associations, assistance funds, NGOs. In particular, more than half of the respondents in Hanoi say that they are members of at least one community – based organization (Nguyen Duc Vinh, 2013).

A different form of voluntary associations in the local community is the association of Chinese – Vietnamese people, operating mainly in the fields of economics, society, life, culture, art, physical activities, sports, martial arts, and education promotion. Activities of these organizations are often conducted within the vicinity of the Chinese community in the localities. The majority of the Chinese – Vietnamese associations does not have legal person status or frequent activities, and primarily organizes some activities during traditional and customary events.

These organizations are seen to focus more on the livelihood of the people in the localities. They are established for purposes related to people's life including different groups such as water – users group, pig and cow – breeding group, youth group, mutual support group, education promotion group, elderly group, family group, and temple – festival caring group. There are neighbourhood group, cultural group, and recreational group, etc. in the cities (Norlund, 2007). The organizations also aim at holding humanitarian, charitable activities particularly in supporting vulnerable groups in the community (Kervliet, Ben; Nguyen Quang A, Bach Tan Sinh, 2008). In rural areas, voluntary associations are often recorded with the activities of mutual assistance in difficult time, and maintaining cordial relationship among members of the community (Quynh Nga, 2008).

In addition to creating mutual – understanding connections among community members, these organizations also hold activities of economic assistance, or support each other in their

professional activities (Mai Van Hai, Ngo Thi Thanh Quy, 2011). Organizing sports activities, culture, art is a way to win their status in the life of rural residents. Thanks to the associations' activities, their members can expand the social network and build social connections with each other in the community (Dang Thi Viet Phuong, Bui Quang Dung, 2011). These associations are also seen holding mediation activities, visits, mobilizing donations, fundraising, and support the disadvantaged (Nguyen Duc Vinh, 2013).

By far, the management over the associations still remains an open issue for the central government. As mentioned above, the fact that the central government provides an estimated number of "thousands of associations" operating in hamlets and communes shows that the management over the associations at grassroots level is not the concern of the central government. By law, the associations operating within the province (including districts and communes) must be approved for establishment by the President of the People's Committee. The fact that the provincial governments does not count or provide the number of associations operating within their provinces also shows a fracture of the management system for the associations at the grassroots level. It remains unknown that whether the associations at the grassroots level (districts and communes) have registered for legal person status or not, it is even more impossible to count the exact number of these kinds of associations and the voluntary associations holding no legal person status in the communes. Even the authority leaders of Giao Tan, Dong Quang¹¹ communes cannot know exactly the number of the associations in their areas.

The informality of voluntary associations makes them marginalized from the legal framework for the organization, operation, and management of associations. The government acknowledged that it was confused in managing the voluntary associations (Committee of

¹¹ The research sites of this study

Organization and Personnel, 04/02/2002). In the draft law on associations recently, the government begins to identify that the associations without legal person status as "the associations do not have frequent activities, regulations, operating under the provisions of the Government"¹². By far, the law on associations has not been enacted, and the government has not had any specific provisions for voluntary associations, leading to difficulties for the government itself when wanting to manage these associations.

In response to an official dispatch of Hai Phong Department of Home Affairs about a request to "allow its district/town People's Committee to establish associations having no legal person status operating in the locality", the Ministry of Home Affairs replies: "there is currently no law to manage the establishment of associations holding no legal person status, therefore, more regulations should be further studied in accordance with the practical development of society". Meanwhile, the Ministry of Home Affairs recommends the use of Ordinance 101 - SL/ L003 on the right to freedom of assembly in 1957 to manage the voluntary associations. Accordingly, the holding of meetings of these organizations must apply for and get permission from local authorities. At the same time, the Ministry of Home Affairs asks sectors/ branches to manage the no – legal person status associations basing on the expertise and profession expertise ("The clubs of basketball, badminton, table tennis, and teams of classical drama and operetta ... are under the management of the local managing agencies of culture, information, sports" (Ministry of Home Affairs, 19.10.2005)).

¹² The 11th Bill on Association, 2006

5. Sub-conclusion

This chapter makes a brief summary of the legal and practical basis of the establishment, operation, and management of social organizations including voluntary associations in Viet Nam. When considering the first legal texts since the birth of Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in 1945, it can be seen that the issue of association establishment and the right to freedom of assembly has been discussed from quite early in the first constitution and laws on freedom of association and the right to freedom of assembly (1957¹³). Since *Doi Moi*- Renovation (1986), various associations were set up as an essential requirement of the reform and open policies. The right to freedom of assembly became a need of the people. That fact requires new policies and laws to respond to the strong development of the associations during this period.

The two decades after Renovation have witnessed many important reforms in registrations and policies including the Council of Ministers' Instruction 01 (1989) on the management of the organization and operation of mass associations; the Council of Ministers' Decree No. 35 (1992) on the management of science and technology; Civil Code (1995) provides for the rights of individual to establish a legal entity; Fatherland Front Act (1999) determines the position and role of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front in Viet Nam's political system; Science and Technology Act (2000) provides for the establishment of institutions of research and development. Along with the above legal documents, the drafting of the laws on associations has been implemented since the first half of the 1990s. The Decree 88/2003 provides for the organization, operation, and management of the associations was issued in the context that the government was actively building laws on associations. Along with the discussions, amendments, and supplements to the legal documents of the organization, operation and management of associations, by 2012, Viet Nam was under the way of working on the amended

13 It should be noted that during this period Viet Nam had suffered from 9 – year long war from 1946 to 1954.

Decree 45/2010 and the 13th draft laws on associations (not known when to present to the National Assembly). So far, the decree 101 - SL/ L003 (1957) on freedom of assembly and Ordinance 102 - SL / L004 on the right to freedom of associations are still the highest effective legal documents on associations.

The *Doi Moi*- Renovation process (1986) marks a clear shift in the life of associations in Viet Nam. The social organizations were founded continuously both at the central, provincial, city, district, ward and at the community level. From over 100 associations counted since 1989, that number has increased to about 15,000 in 2010 in the provinces and cities throughout Viet Nam; not to mention the "thousands of associations" operating in the districts, communes, or in small communities without registering for legal person status, or without reporting to the central government. This causes the discontinuance in the management over the associations at the grassroots level. The central government does not know the number as well as the activities of the associations at grassroots level. Moreover, the local government does not care about the statistics on the number of associations active in the locality; therefore, a number of voluntary associations does not hold legal person status operating in the locality.

The provisions of the Decree on the organization, operation, and management of the associations set strict criteria for the association establishment, making voluntary associations, though wanting to register for establishment, difficult to meet the establishment criteria. However, the informality of these organizations does not hinder them much from conducting their activities. The voluntary associations are considered as paying more attention to the livelihood services at the local level. These organizations also aim at providing humanitarian and charity support towards disadvantaged groups. In rural areas, voluntary associations are often recorded with the activities of mutual assistance, mediation, advocacy, and maintaining village and neighbouring relationships, etc. These organizations also help members expand social networks and build social connections with members of the community.

Although the law on associations has not been issued, the legal corridor as well as the current political environment has allowed individuals and organizations to establish associations with relatively easily. In recent years, the government has a policy to expand the roles and duties of the associations by allocating them more specific and practical tasks and cooperating with the associations to carry out the public services. Also, besides socio-political organizations, the State also opens a wide spectrum of organizations associated with political role, considering them as the extended arm of the State, in order to propagate the Party's lines, guidelines, and policies and State laws to the people. These organizations, despite receiving funds from the State, strive to diversify funding sources through cooperation with other civil associations (Kervliet et al. 2008).

Another aspect of the situation is that, in many cases, there have many associations applying for the special mechanisms to become associations having specific characteristics in order to receive the priorities of the budget for the association's activities. The strengthening of state administration through increased cooperation between state and social associations in Viet Nam seems to stem from the same practices with other Asian countries, where "the Asian governments have mixed views toward the increasing role of NGOs in developing countries. (...) The government officials are not only worried about their power but also fear that any of their loosening can lead to the emergence of riotous forces in contemporary Asia. At the same time the decline in the financial resources of the government rules out the relying on the central government of the associations to implement and request for funding all development activities" (Korten, 1990, cited from (Van Thanh, 1993, p. 66)).

CHAPTER TWO:

IDENTIFICATION OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

1. Characteristics of voluntary associations

As discussed in the previous chapter, voluntary associations are defined as non-governmental organizations established on the basis of the voluntary participation of individuals who share commonalities such as profession, hobbies, and gender, etc. These organizations are completely self-funded, non-profit, and generally have no legal status (or partially legal status). They operate mainly in the vicinity of hamlets, communes, and villages, and do not have either hierarchical structure from the central to the local levels. Besides, they do not have any governing body.

The voluntary associations' non – governmental aspect is evident in the relationship with formal social organizations (which have legal status such as political-social organizations and other social ones¹). Being a member in political-social organizations in hamlets and communes is an ascribed status rather than achieved one. Being a citizen of a commune, a person may have been assigned by the local administrative bodies a position according to his/ her socio – demographic identification. For example, a female citizen would be almost automatically considered to hold a membership of the hamlet Women's Union and therefore a member of the same Union at commune level. It is noted that one of the functions of the political-social

¹ By principle, the political-social organizations and some specific associations such as the Red Cross, Learning Promotion Association, and Elderly Association are organized from the central to the commune level. However, in the two surveyed communes, these organizations hardly manifest their role in the life of the association operations and rural residents. Therefore, in this dissertation, when referring to the formal institutions (in relation to the non- official organizations such as voluntary organizations), we are mainly talking about the political – social organizations including: Fatherland Front, Unions of Women, Farmers, Veterans, and Youth (representing workers, therefore, Labour Confederation hardly play any role in the rural communes).

organizations is to rally masses to ensure that their mobilization and communication would reach all members for whom the organizations represent. Therefore, one mission of these is to expand their organization including increasing the number of its members. Since membership is decided mainly based on their socio-demographic characteristics, the local Women's Unions' membership often attract the majority of local women, almost 100%². Furthermore, expanding the membership network toward the development of the associations is one main task of local mass organizations assigned by upper level ones:

"Associations at commune level would have to follow assigned quotas of admitting more members by the district-level associations. This year, we have to recruit 50 members. The number of members is now 93% of agricultural households, equivalent to 2050 members. There are 2276 agricultural households throughout the commune. Each household often has one representative to join the association. Excluding those who died and are working far away from home, this rate would gradually go down because the association has already attracted most of the people. The number of households is counted because each household would normally have one person to be admitted to the association" (GT39, 2009).

The admission of members of political-social organizations is controlled by the annual quota set by superior ones. The pressure of expanding member network while there are fewer and fewer potential members has forced Giao Tan commune's Farmers' Union to loosen the criteria for membership. To get membership, one does not necessarily have to own any farm neither does farming. Even retired people or returning migrants would be admitted to the Farmers' Union if they desire to join³. The political-social organizations are defined as the representative

2 Admitting member based on gender makes mobilization and persuasion easier. One can easily refuse to become a member of the Farmers' Union saying that "Now I don't do fieldwork anymore", but could not cite the same reason to refuse to become a member of the Association for Women.

3 "Desire" in the past few years was mainly linked to the demand to receive preferential loans from banks through mortgage policy of the Farmers Association.

organization for different aspects (Women's Union represents all women, Farmers' Union for all farmers, Veterans for all veterans, and Youth for the entire youth aged from 15 to 35), so the associations' mobilizing the maximum number of their potentially eligible members is considered the political task. In fact, it makes the membership of political-social organizations like Farmers' Union or Women's Union a commonplace in rural areas.

"It would be no surprise for women to become a member of the Women's Union; Farmers also join Farmers' Union, etc. Thus, is there anyone left who does not belong to any association?" (DQ65, 2009)

For formal institutions in rural areas, their representatives mobilize and persuade people to join the associations. In many cases, people are enrolled in one institution and do not remember when and under what circumstances they have joined. Meanwhile, becoming a member in voluntary associations is mostly based on the voluntary basis. Although membership is not bound by the administrative procedures (such as an application forms, membership cards, etc.) as in formal organization, the characteristics set by the association are a required standard that not everyone can meet. The status of the members of these associations, therefore, is not ascribed at all.

"For example, if one is merely doing agricultural work and is not a soldier. She/he neither attended any school, nor is he/she member of any union. Then he/she cannot join any association⁴, because he/she does not have any connection. For example, Mr. A has never joined the army, so he could not be admitted to any army or veteran associations. Now he cannot join any associations at all" (GT25, 2008).

Voluntary associations are usually small, operating within the communes, hamlets, or even smaller hamlets. Those who join these associations often have to share certain common

⁴ In the case of Giao Tan commune, associations of same-age are not so popular (as in Dong Quang commune) that people think of as an association.

characteristics. The activities of the associations are also related to members' commonalities. Thus, if one wants to join a voluntary association, she/he needs to determine her/his common characteristics with other members of the organization.

"The other day, one person met me several times and insistently wanted to join the association. But she/he failed to meet the required standard of the association. For example, when members got together to recall what they all did in the past, she/he had nothing to share with the others. The association did not approve this case. [...] Associations are established when they have activities and missions. Consequently, one must get himself/herself involved in those activities and missions in order to join the associations" (GT21, 2008).

The voluntary associations' activities are often confined to small groups who share common characteristics, like a closed group. The activities are to meet the needs of its members rather than of outsiders. Perhaps the closed nature of these associations makes the questions like "Which social associations are you currently involved in?" at first put the interviewer and the interviewees to the quandary. Because when talking about voluntary associations, respondents often do not see them as real social organizations and they can hardly think of it when being asked about a social association. For them, participating in these associations is not the same as being a member of the formal organizations such as unions of farmers, women, and veterans, etc. During the interviews, it would be difficult for interviewer to obtain information about the voluntary associations' activities if posing direct questions like that. The interviewer must even be wary when using the word "participating" during the interviews. For many people, "participating in an organization" means "to hold a position in an organization." Therefore, sometimes the answer would be *"I am only in [the organization], but I do not participate in it"* (GT04, 2007); or *"not participating means I do not hold any position, nor go to meetings. Yet, I am still a member of the associations"* (GT12, 2007).

Voluntary associations are established by the willingness of its members to join the organization voluntarily. Moreover, they are also featured by, according to the informants, freedom and spontaneity. When comparing the participation into a voluntary association with that into a political-social organization, one member says:

“Participating in social institutions such as Unions of farmers or veterans, for instance, you would restrict yourself into the framework of the organization more or less. Being a member of these organizations, you must adhere to the Party and State policies. You must educate yourself, your family, and your wife and children. For instance, being a Veteran’s Union member, if your son, reaching the age for compulsory military service, hesitates to go to the medical examination preparing for the enlisting drive, people would pass bad rumor about you. For voluntary associations, this is not the case” (GT18, 2007).

Joining the voluntary associations means that people do not recognize the leadership of the government on the activities of the associations, and do not carry out the “political missions” entrusted by the Party and government. The government does not intervene in (but by no means does not control) the activities of the voluntary associations, allowing them to self – operate with each other, as long as they are adhering to the legal framework and local practical situations.

When comparing with other commune’s social institutions, voluntary associations’ members emphasize the advantages of being close, familiar, and attractive to the masses.

“To me, this is the closest association and it is very fun to associate with each other. Now I just need to sit together for fun and visit each other in the event of sickness. Please also pass my words to Mr. N. [Chairman of Fatherland Front] that having joined the organization for a dozen years, I still did not see anything that he organized; he never

shared any beer with us. Though when the [official] organizations hold meeting to review a period of time which is often accompanied with parties, but they do not invite everybody [who are not officials]. Only the executive committee of the organization along with the team leaders, secretary, and representatives are invited” (GT37, 2009).

On one hand, voluntary associations are established and operate independently of the local governments. On the other hand, thanks to the links among non – relative but sharing common characteristics people, the associations also go beyond the framework of the institutions to become family and relatives. Voluntary associations act as intermediaries between the primary group (family, relatives, etc.) with the secondary group (neighbours, friends, colleagues, etc.). They do not only help members feel familiar and intimate through participation in the life-cycle events (such as funerals, weddings, etc.) of the members; but they also help members familiarize and learn how to join the environment outside the family, and learn how to participate in society.

Voluntary associations’ members make a clear distinction between formal institutions and voluntary associations: *“The Farmers’ Union belongs to the commune. Yet, the [voluntary] associations are all spontaneous”* (GT25, 2008). It would be noted that spontaneity does not mean being unorganized, impromptu, not planned in advance. Spontaneity that members of the voluntary associations mentioned should be placed in the opposition to the leadership, direction and control of State on the local official organizations. Therefore, the spontaneity of the voluntary associations suggests a freedom of people to actively establish organizations for the benefits of their members rather than relying on the guidance, directions from the government. The clear distinction between “associations of the communes” and “our associations” offers the voluntary associations’ members a status other than enrolling in a political-social organization. This distinction also establishes the boundaries of the different social spaces, for

the voluntary associations, it would be the familiar and closed village space in opposition to that of the commune- an open social space (this issue is to be revisited in Chapter 4).

Thus, the identification of voluntary associations in rural areas in relation to the formal organization helps clarify the characteristics of these organizations. The highlights of these organizations are that they are founded on a voluntary basis by people with similar interests or sharing common characteristics. These organizations operate independently of the local governments, are non – profit, and functioning primarily to meet the needs of their members. Voluntary associations attract the participation of rural residents as they operate within the villages, communes with small – scale structures, and working simply and closely with people.

2. Appellations of voluntary associations

Due to the closeness to the people and the non – local nature, voluntary associations often do not have an accurate and consistent name that is commonly used by all members. As a result, voluntary associations are named carelessly. Even the representative of the association could not use the same name for the organization during the interview. Taking friendship associations as an example, one might call it by different names: association, friendship association, fellowship association, and guild, band, or friendship circles.

In terms of names, voluntary associations often appear under the names: party, association, guild, club, group, team, etc. It is difficult to know exactly the origin and time of the birth of each name associated with their activities, but the names of the organization in the current period also indicate the historical segmentation of the voluntary associations.

Party- Phe which is probably the oldest known name for voluntary associations in the village was identified by Gourou (1936) and Tran Tu (1984) as the term used before 1945, denoting an association of adult men in the village. In their ethnographic observation, these two authors

noted the existence of several *Parties* in the village. Among the *Parties*, Tran Tu (1984) found the emerging importance of civil mandarin Party which was an organization of educated people in the village. Specific conditions to participate into this Party was various from villages to villages and determined by each village's educated people. This party was usually entrusted to compose village orations to praise the virtues of the village's tutelary gods. In addition to Civil Mandarin Party [*Phe tu vãn*], Gourou also notes the existence of Military Mandarin Party [*Phe tu võ*]. Parties' activities are typically associated with the public life of the village rather than serving the interests of their members. In the survey of the revenues and expenditures of households, Le Huy Van also acknowledges the "Party expenditures" fees are part of an expense in the record book of each household (Le Huy Van, 1941, p. 16). Civil Mandarin Party is also known as the Civil Mandarin Committee or the Civil Mandarin Association.

In the case that Parties did not hold any position in the village community, they were even called the club, or private Parties. Although the name is a bit arbitrary and inconsistent, but according to Nguyen Tu Chi, every name has their own purposes, despite the fact that they might not always get the distinction of functions in association with their name. Parties are more or less associated with the organization, serving the village community. Meanwhile, associations are the organizations which are based on the willingness of participants (Tran Tu, 1984; Bui Quang Dung, 2007). Associations are founded based on the aspirations and interests of the participants; they can either participate or do not participate in the public's village community. But even if they have participated in the public activities of the village, then that decision must be based on the voluntary participation of the association, which is not subject to the corresponding control of the community or local government.

Association- Hội is the common name referring to the form of grouping based on the voluntary participation of the people to serve the purposes and benefits of its members. In our study, the *Association* is also the most common name used to denote the associations. When people do

not get the exact name of a voluntary association, "*Association*" then is used as a substitute for all other names. The name *Association* may also have the same historical period with *Party* or *Guild*. Studies on rural northern regions acknowledge that the name is common and regulates other different forms of groups under this name (Gourou, 1936; Nguyen Thanh Nha, 2013; Nguyen - Marshall, 2004; Nguyen Dong Chi, 1978b; Nguyen Tu Chi, 1980; Phan Ke Binh, 1990; Hy V. Luong, 2010). *Association* may refer to a group gathering together basing on the common interest (such as Cultural Association, Wrestling Association, etc.), or common beliefs (such as the Chur Bà Association, Male Association, etc.). *Association* is also used to name after the fraternal voluntary associations (Same-age Association, Same-enlisted year Association, etc.). *Association* refers to groups sharing the same profession or certain characteristics (such as the Agricultural Services Association, Plow Association, etc.). *Association* also is used to denote the voluntary associations functioning as aid and assistance, such as mutually assisted Associations (such as Supply Association, the Rituals Association, etc.). *Association*, in whatever form of activity, is to serve the operations as well as the interests of its members. Unlike *Party*, the *Association* hardly entrusts itself with the public task of the village.

The Association of Supply or Rotating Credit, for example, aims to launch mutual help among members within the organization. The help can be in the form of a rotating fund (also called eight groups) contributed by its members to help each other in times of difficulty for money. *Association* may have variant name as tontine. Various types of assistance are attached directly following the word "tontine". For example, to help each other money to hold major events in life, people erected Mourning Tontine (to organize the funeral), Wedding Tontine (to organize the wedding), or Tet (New lunar year celebration) Tontine (to celebrate Tet holiday). The smaller variant of Tontine can be pork tontine, when people pool some funds together and buy pigs for meat during Tet; or Banh Chung (Viet Nam's traditional cake) Tontine, i.e. purchasing raw materials to make Banh Chung (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1980, p. 91; Phan Ke Binh, 1990, p. 225;

Nguyen-Marshall, 2004, p. 280). The members of these associations often use the phrase “playing associations/tontines [*chơi hội/phường*]” meaning it as a fun game that does not aim for profit whatsoever.

Phan Ke Binh (1990) paid special attention to the existence of associations in the rural communes such as Association of Buddhism practitioners [*hội chư bà*], Supply, and Multi-occupations⁵. The Association of Multi-occupations is also the name that Nguyen Thanh Nha (2013) noted when studying non-farm activities in rural areas. The author found that the way these associations started up are more similarly to associations than real trade unions; they were formed from a familiar tendency towards collective life of the village and commune when people sharing the same profession join together. Agreeing with Nguyen Thanh Nha comments on the nature of this association, Nguyen Tu Chi has called the Association of Multi – occupations under another name, *Guild* [*phường*].

Guild [*Phuong*] is a form of professional associations having a long history, at least under Le Dynasty (XV - XVIII centuries) (Tran Tu, 1984; Nguyen Thanh Nha, 2013). In the past, due to the dominant number of farmers in rural communities, the other jobs became minor. As a result, people sharing the same occupation in the village gathered together. Accordingly, Tran Tu found *Fraternities* of painters, carpenters, embroiderers, etc. in the northern villages. The author also noted that in addition to occupational Fraternizes, the Traditional Popular Opera *Guild* existed in parallel with Traditional Operetta *Association*. Once again, the author made distinction between *Association* and *Guild*. In particular, Traditional Operetta *Guild* is merely professional or semi- professional, and often organizes operetta activities as a profession, not for entertainment. On the other hand, the Traditional Operetta *Association*, established basing

⁵ “Multi-occupations” means “a hundred occupations”, The Association of Multi-occupations refers to a collective group of occupations in rural areas.

on the voluntary participation of its members, is non-profit in which its members are free to join or withdraw from the organization (ibid, p. 95).

Nowadays, the name *Guild* has been broadened, it does not only refer to occupations (Market *Guild*, Trade *Guild*, etc.), different forms of assistance groups (Money *Guild*, Gold *Guild*, etc.), but also indicates groups of interests or traditional activities serving festivals (Buffalo *Guild*, Classical Drama *Guild*, Flag *Guild*, etc.). Or maybe they still retain the original name of the old *Guild*, but the nature of these activities is not the same. For example, Dong Ky Buffalo *Guild* were founded by buffalo traders. For farmers, Buffalo "was the most important to start up a career" and was a major asset of the household. Buffalo trading, therefore, was considered as an occupation only for wealthy, bold, and acute people who were also skilled at business. When the job has gone into oblivion, Buffalo *Guild* becomes the get-together platform for the former buffalo traders' descendants (who are also wealthy people). Until today, Buffalo *Guild* even admits those who love to eat buffalo meat!

While *Guild* is an ancient word that refers to the grouping relations bearing new meanings as mentioned above; *club* is a new word. The organizations corresponding to the two names also show marked differences in the time of establishment as well as the nature of their activities. *Guild* indicates that the organization has existed for a long time and will continue to be maintained or restored in the current period. Meanwhile, *club* is newly-founded organizations which primarily followed *Doi Moi* (1986), and mainly related to the activities of sports, culture, and entertainment (such as table tennis club, badminton club, art club, etc.). There are no clear – cut distinctions between the activities of the club whether to serve its members or the community. Initially, *club* also referred to a group having the same interests, mainly in cultural activities, arts, and sports. However, when the club activities have become more regular, their members want to communicate and associate with other clubs. Events such as festivals become a playground for the clubs to organize exchanges for their members to compete with each other.

These activities would boost the members' skills, and stir the festive morale, as well as expand the social network among groups in the village.

Although there is no clear distinction between *club* and the *association*, but in the administrative documents of the State agencies, *club* is considered as a form of internal organization of an institution, representing for a small group of members living within a limited space whose operations are not too complex. For example, the Directive 202/ CT, dated 05 June 1990 by the Council of Ministers Chairman (currently Government), for the observance of the provisions of the State regulations in establishing associations, stated that "some "Clubs" which in view of structure and activities were more like Association (rather than the form of an internal organ within an agency) which was founded without license".

In addition, researchers also saw different variations in the names of voluntary associations in some localities. For example, in a study of a rural commune in Thanh Hoa province in 1972, researcher Le Dinh Si found that people also used the word "village" [*làng*] to name their local associations. In this commune, members of the hamlets were closely associated with associations including the Male Village [*Làng trai*], the Authority Village [*Làng quan viên*], the Officials Village [*Làng chức sự*], the Literature Village [*Làng văn*], the Martial arts Village [*Làng võ*], the Safeguard Village [*Làng hộ*], etc. (Le Dinh Sy, 1977, p. 380). Such naming brings a feeling of closeness, familiarity to the participants making the associations sounded like a village and the village became a kind of association in return which helps create a bond among members of the village. More recently, Norlund (2007) noted that there appeared some groups which were established for the purposes of people's lives, including water usage Group, pig-cow breeding Group, temple-festival looking after Group, etc.

Upon reviewing the history of the voluntary association's names, it can be seen that although there are certain distinctions between the various names of organizations as well as variations of the name in each historical period; *association* undeniably remains the most popular and is

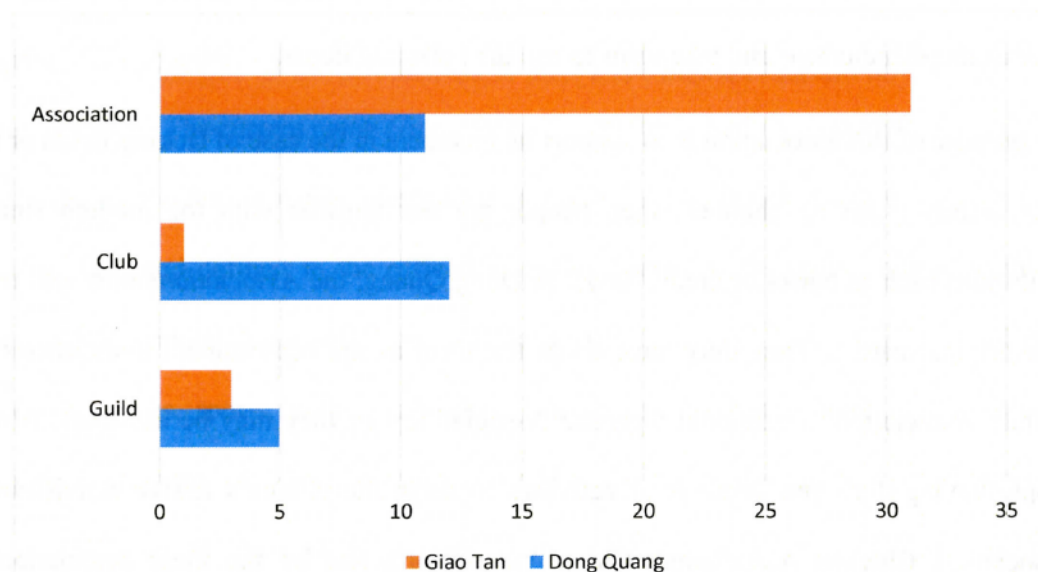
the longest used among the others. So far, the word is generally used to refer to social organizations in Viet Nam. This name, besides the fact that it continues to be used to refer to voluntary associations in rural communities, is also used in government and related legal documents⁶. Article 2 of Decree No.88 / 2003 / ND - CP by the Prime Minister, dated 30.07.2003 prescribed the association's structure, activities and management, accordingly, *Association* refers to "voluntary organizations of Vietnamese citizens and institutions who have the same professions, interests, and gender; share the same aim of gathering and uniting members, take part in activities regularly, operate without profit, and aim at protecting the rights and legitimate interests of the association members; support each other effectively, contributing to the socio-economic development of the country. *Association* bearing different names including Union Association, General Union, Union, Association, Clubs, etc. has legal status and other names in accordance with the law (hereinafter referred to as *Association*)" (Prime Minister, 2003).

After doing research in Giao Tan and Dong Quang communes and basing on the names of voluntary associations that we have collected when exchanging talks with their representatives, we have come up with a chart representing the distribution of the different names of voluntary associations as follows⁷:

⁶ Prior to 2000, the legal documents used the concept of "associations of masses". Starting from Decree 88/2003, "association" has been used.

⁷ The list of voluntary associations was drawn from the interviews we conducted with representatives or members of the voluntary associations. The number of voluntary associations in two communes Dong Quang and Giao Tan might be bigger in reality. But so far the two communes have not conducted a formal statistics should we be content with the list that we have synthesized during the research.

Figure 3: Distribution of voluntary associations' names in Giao Tan and Dong Quang



From the chart above, though those data are only a small sample representing the voluntary associations that we studied, it still reflects quite similar results that we have observed in reality. As can be seen, *Association* is the most commonly used, accounting for the majority of the organization name in the list that we have studied (the number of voluntary associations that are called *Association* is 31 in Giao Tan and 11 in Dong Quang). Most surveyed voluntary associations are characterized for fraternity, solidarity, therefore, their name, '*Association*' reflects appropriately with that in the history. *Club* only appears almost exclusively in Dong Quang (12 organizations bearing this name), and is associated with voluntary association in the field of physical activities, sports, culture, and art.

Club [Cau lac bo] is a new name and their activities are also associated with the gymnastics, sports, or modern cultural activities (such as Exercising Club, Balloon Volleyball Club, or Artistic Dance Clubs, Poetry Club, etc.). In both communes, the name *Guild* is still used, but indicating two different types of organizations, and is no longer associated with its original

meaning of occupation. In Giao Tan commune, the *Association* is to provide assistance in which members collectively contribute certain in – kind (cash/gold/grain depending on the name of the *Association*) and take turns to use the collected items.

The purpose of this association is to support its members in the case of lacking funds or food; or is merely a saving channel when people are not familiar with the modern financial institutions such as banks or credit funds. In Dong Quang, the *Associations* now still remain their original nature. They may have taken the form as the occupational associations (like Buffalo Association, Traditional Operetta Association); or they may be associations of the people having the same interests or activities to serve the village's festive activities (Bird Association, Chicken Association, Chess Association). But by far, these associations are mainly groups that share the same interests and serve the festive activities of the village.

Corresponding to each such organization, there are organizations with different specific names. In terms of location, the difference lies in the village names (such as Trang Liet village badminton club, Dong Ky village badminton Club), or the hamlet names (like Bong hamlet Friendship Association, and Bang hamlet Friendship Association), or even at neighbourhood level (such as Hamlet 2 Friendship Association, Hamlet 10 Friendship Association). Considering the characteristics of the members, the differences shown in the year of birth (such as Same-birth year 1983 Association, Same-birth year of Cat 1951 Association); in gender (such as Male Guild, Female Guild); in education (such as the Middle School Fellows, High School Fellows); having the same participating time in certain events (such as Same-enlisted Year 1982, Same-enlisted Year 1979), etc.

The name of the voluntary associations shows that they have inherited the tradition tending to reserve both the names and the nature of the organization. So far, *Association* is still the most popular, indicating organizations being established basing on the voluntary participation of its members, to meet the needs of the members rather than serving the communities. Besides, we

also see the connotative change of the name in comparison with the original one, i.e. *Association* is not merely characterized with occupations in which people having the same occupation get together to support each other in doing business or facilitating cooperation among members. The current name *Guild* now refers to the voluntary associations whose aims are to assist each other; or whose interests are the same. *Club*, which is a new term appearing after *Doi Moi*, and defined in the official state documents, is the name indicating internal organizations working for a small group of members. The *club* is mainly involved in the physical activities, sports, culture, and arts. Due to the informal nature of the voluntary associations, the name of the organization is used mostly inconsistently among members of the same organization. Or even when referring to one organization, a person may still use many different names. However, the organizations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang communes are now basically called *Association, Guild, and Clubs*.

3. Classification of Voluntary Associations

According to Baker (1999), there were many criteria to classify voluntary associations. Voluntary associations could be classified basing on their scales, their independence or dependence on external influence, their social functions, their territories or social features of their members. In terms of functions, there was a basic distinction between expressive groups (organized to promote specific interests of their members such as sports or entertainment groups) and instrumental groups (focusing on community activities in order to meet members' demand such as agricultural support cooperation group). However, this distinction did not exclude those that bear both characteristics (ibid, p. 49). In his research on 600 voluntary associations in Loir-et-Cher (France), he put them into 5 categories relying on their time of establishment, sphere of operation and significance. These include fire-fighting corps,

agricultural and livestock insurance societies, mutual assistance societies (sociétés de secours mutuels), anti-phylloxera syndicates and agricultural associations.

In his research on mutual assistance and joint liable associations in Viet Nam in 17th and 18th centuries, Nguyen Thanh Nha (2013) categorized them into 3 groups. Joining the first group were associations having a single consumption purpose such as pig raising associations, wedding association, or mourning association. The operating principle of these associations required members to contribute an agreed amount of money and take turns to use that money to buy pigs, to pay for the cost of weddings or funerals. The second group consisted of those that shared a specific purpose. This group was characterized by the close-knit association for common interests, shared circumstances, shared desire and hobbies etc. Joining this group were craft association, Confucian scholar association, schoolfellow association, veteran association, art lover association etc. The third group included those that offer credit for mutual benefits. These associations, operating on the basis of offering credit interest and consumption loans, still exist until today in the form of tontine (ibid, pp. 345-348)

Studying pre-revolution association in rural areas, Nguyen Dong Chi (1978b) categorized into 4 groups. First, craft associations were established to support members in doing business and promoting competitiveness. Second, mutual assistance associations attracted people of similar needs to support and assist members. Third, support associations (in which member support each other by cash or rice in the form of exchanges of equal value or of some interest but relatively small) included mourning association, wedding association, money association, rice association, tontine association etc. Forth, friendship associations are held within or outside a commune among people of the same school (schoolfellow association), fellow-countrymen association, same-age association etc. (ibid., p.225).

Nguyen Tu Chi (1980) based on how associations were called to classify them (This was relatively precise due to the existence of overlap in names). Accordingly, the first category

consisted of those called Group, in which men operated within a village to carry out shared community duties. Association was the name given to those established on the voluntary basis and operating for the needs and interests of members such as support associations (in which members contributed an amount of money and took turns to use it for any family purposes) and martial arts association, Cheo (a type of folk singing) association. Association was also used to call those operating for religious rationales such as associations for Buddhist nun, for Ladies etc. the third category was Craft Guild that referred to a group of craftsmen in a village such as carpentry guild, embroidery guild etc.

Phan Ke Binh (1990) divided voluntary associations into groups of craft, credit turnover and ritual. Craft associations, besides working sessions, often held collective feasts and celebrations. These events were added when the author mentioned the craft forefather offering rituals (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1980, p. 95; Bui Quang Dung, 2007, p. 123). Meanwhile, credit turnover or ritual associations were held among people within a residential area by their credit contribution. Members took turns to use the money to do business or to pay for important family events such as wedding or funeral (*ibid.*, p. 225)

Be Quynh Nga (2008) classified voluntary association in the Red River Delta into such categories as religious associations (Buddhist nun association); friendship associations (same-age association, servicemen association etc); craft association (husbandry and livestock association, trade association etc). A research by Asia Foundation also recognized support associations and charity clubs (Taylor et al., 2012).

Whatever the criteria are, all researchers agreed that the main purpose of associations in rural areas is to support and help members in their production and life. Their participation in voluntary associations may not help them considerably improve their economic status but protect them from risks and get them out of poverty (Nguyen-Marshall, 2004, p. 285). Nguyen Dong Chi, when explaining why associations, whichever forms they take, were to assist and

support members, affirmed that it was the manifestation of the commune remnants of an underdeveloped agricultural society, and the implementation of self-supply in rural areas in the past. Those forms of mutual assistance connected people and consolidated relations in village communities. At the same time, they also reflected an underdeveloped trading system and limited capital accumulation; thereby constraining social stratification (ibid., p 228).

A research on voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang also pointed out some other ways of classification. Basing on territory or sphere of operation, voluntary associations could be divided into those of the hamlet level (Village Friends' Association, Same-age Association etc.), the village level (Village same-age association, Village Elderly Association, Village Veteran Club, Village Badminton Club etc.), the commune level (High school Fellow Association, Commune Servicemen Association etc.) and the inter-commune, inter-district and inter-province level (Association for Veterans of the same battalion/division, Former Farm Cadre Association, Naval Officer Association etc.) In those above two communes, there were some that existed in one commune but not in the other. For example, in Dong Giao, same-age associations are popular, but rarely found or found in different names in Giao Tan. And craft associations are widespread in Giao Tan- a pure agricultural land, meanwhile they almost do not exist in Dong Quang, which is national wide famous for carpenter. This interesting difference is somehow related to the establishment as well as the characteristics of social structure of the two lands, which we will discuss in the following chapter.

It is based on the independence of dependence on the governmental control that voluntary associations are divided into two groups, one is established voluntarily by people and the other is set up via the encouragement of local authority. Spontaneous associations bear greater traditionalism since they were founded and existed long before the revolution. They are classical drama association, chess association, gold association or rice association etc. And these associations have long existed without any administrative link with local government.

"These associations are self-established without a leader. No one can make a decision on whether to admit a new member or not to the association. There is no written commitment so members can join or leave if they wish. For government-driven ones, one needs to have a decision from the authority to join." (DQ65, 2009)

Spontaneous associations operate without local government's direction on structure, personnel or activities. Therefore, they do not receive any financial support from the government to maintain their activities.⁸ However, there find a certain imitation of models that tend to be encouraged by the local government. Take the Chess association for example, members are mainly chess lovers. And it took the current chairperson only two years to be nominated by the previous one.⁹ The reason is simple, he is a Party member. Party membership is quite valuable to local people. And the appointment of a party member as the chairperson has shown signs that the association will operate in line with the guideline of the Party and State, which means a safe organization.

Clubs, another group of voluntary association in Dong Quang, are founded thanks to the local government's encouragement. These clubs have been recognized for over the past 10 years. Yet, it does not mean that the existence of clubs dated back only since its recognition. Baker (1999), when studying the development history of voluntary associations in France, found that the establishment of an association was not defined by the time it was recognized by the government (p. 150). And so was in Dong Quang.

Nowadays, with the encouragement and mobilization from the government and socio-political organizations, clubs are formed with an aim to popularize sports and arts activities. These clubs are encouraged to register their action program with the local authority but without any support

⁸ In some cases, to serve village activities, these associations are financially supported, enough to hold an activity assigned.

⁹ It should be noted that Chess Guild was born long ago. The head of the guild told that he joined the guild because his father once joined it. Half of the members of the guild are over 70 years old.

of workforce or finance from it. The difference in these clubs before and after recognition lies in the fact that their names are officially recorded as clubs such as Ping Pong Club, Badminton Club, Dance Club etc. Being officially recognized, these voluntary associations are put under a certain control of the local government¹⁰.

Box: Trang Liet Hamlet Ping Pong club

Trang Liet Hamlet, located right next to the University of Sports and Physical Training, is home to many students living in renting accommodations. Therefore, Sports and physical activities have long been popular in the hamlet. Besides other sports, there have been ping pong groups, who often gather in members' houses to play. In 2006, in order to strengthen the staff and innovate activities to fulfil the mission of economic, social and cultural construction and development at the locality (regulated by the Veteran Association's Decree 2005), Veteran Association Branch of Trang Liet Hamlet gathered all ping pong groups in the area to form a Ping Pong Club. These ping pong groups were chosen since among their players were members of the branch.

And in October 2006, the Ping Pong Club was officially established. Members who had been playing for long were now gathered to join the club. However, they were not familiar with administrative procedure with offices and leaders. Therefore, at its early days, the executive committee of Trang Liet Hamlet Veteran Association Branch acted as the management board of the club. Then, the congress was held and a new management board was selected, which marked the separation of the club from the Veteran Association Branch. The board works in a 2 year term and has to make preliminary and year-end summation every year. And after each term, the board is required to prepare a written report on its activities and outcomes to submit to the Commune People's Committee. However, since members are yet to get familiar to administration and paper works, sometimes local culture staff visits the club's management board to grasp its activities.

10 How local government manages voluntary association will be discussed in Chapter 5

Noticeably, activities of the club before and after its establishment are not much different from previously, excluding those meetings mentioned earlier. The club has 2 tables put on the second floor of the Hamlet Cultural House. These 2 tables are enough for only 10 people to play (meanwhile the club's number of players is 30), not to mention that members have to contribute 10.000d/month to run the club. Not being supported from the authority and not being able to play more regularly, many members left and got back to play ping pong at their houses like before.

Notes from interviews with representatives of the Ping Pong Club and the Veteran Association Branch in Trang Liet, Dong Quang (August/2008)

Basing on the nature of their activities, we can classify voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang into such categories as: Friendship Associations [*Hoi ai huu*]; Same-interest Associations [*Hoi cung so thich*] (of those who share the same hobby (sports, arts, singing etc.)); Occupational Association [*Hoi nghe nghiep*]; and Mutual help Association [*Hoi tu cap*]. According to the information provided by the informants, who are members of voluntary associations, I can list out 311 voluntary associations in the two localities. The following table lists the associations' names. In the list, we use one common name for identical associations. For example, we use same-age association for all such as 1967 same-age association, 1958 same-age association etc.

Table 1: Voluntary Associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang

Giao Tan Commune	Quang Commune
<i>Friendship Associations</i>	
Association(s) of School fellows	Association(s) of School fellows
Former Servicemen Club(s)	Veteran Club(s)
Servicemen Association(s)	Servicemen Association(s)
Association(s) for Veterans of the same battalion/regiment/division	Association(s) for Veterans of the same battalion/regiment/division
Association for Commando in the Southeast	Same-age Association(s)
Association for Cats (those born in 1951),	Friend Association(s)
Association for Mouses (those born in 1984)	Mourning Association/Life Insurance Association(s)
Buffalo Raising Association	Retirees' Association
Association for Party Member of 40-50 years of membership	Association of the Elderly
Neighbourhood association(s)	Neighbourhood group
Elderly's Association(s)	
Retiree's Association(s)	
Association for Health Official	
Association for Land Registry Official	
Association for Female Official	
Association for Commune's Key Official	
Association for Commune's Youth Official	
Association for Cooperative Official	
Association for Former Naval Officer	
Association for Former Military Medical Officer	
Association for Commune's Official	
Association for Secretary, Vice Secretary of Commune's Youth Union	
Association for Commune's Youth Union Official	
Association for Former Cooperative Official	

Giao Tan Commune	Quang Commune
Association for Youth Volunteers	
<i>Same-interest Associations</i>	
Ceremonial Association Association of Buddhism Female Practitioners Thanh Tam Dance Association Dance and Singing Association/Club Bonsai Association(s)	Buffalo Guild Fighting cock Guild(s) Chess Guild(s) Singing Bird Raising Guild(s) Cheo (Traditional Opera) Guild(s) Tuong (Classical Drama) Guild(s) Octet Guild(s) Wrestling Guild(s) Flute Guild Clarinet Guild Incense Offering Group Hamlet Bonsai Association(s) Antique Collectors' Association Bonsai Club Dance and Singing Club (Hamlet) Love Duet Club (Hamlet) Cycling Club Tai Chi Club (Hamlet) Walking Club (Hamlet) Ping Pong Club (Hamlet) Badminton Club (Hamlet) Poem Club (Hamlet) Dance Club (Hamlet) Volleyball Club (Hamlet) Football Club Literature Club
<i>Occupational Associations</i>	
Association for Dance and Singing Service Truck Drivers' Association Association for Husking Service	

Giao Tan Commune	Quang Commune
Vet Association Association of small traders	
<i>Mutual help associations</i>	
Rice Guild(s) Money Guild(s) Gold Guild(s)	Money Guild

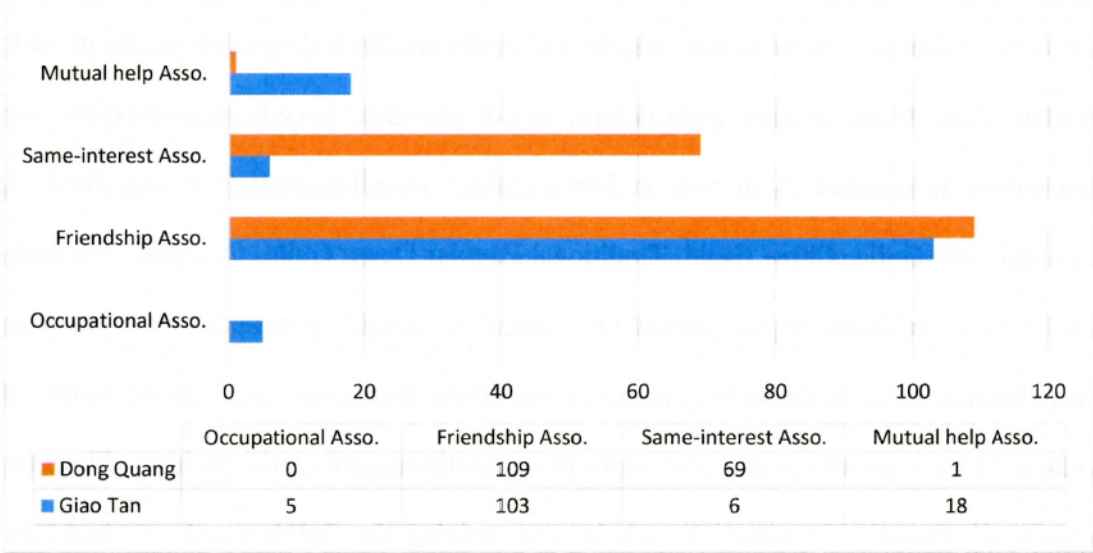
However, each of the informants (48 from Giao Tan and 65 from Dong Quang) joins 3 voluntary associations and 2 friendship associations on average (not to mention the membership of other social organizations). Friendship associations consist of those who are at the same age or of the same year of service, class, school, workplace or position. Among these friendship associations, same-age ones account for one fourth and are mainly found in Dong Quang¹¹. 51 out of 65 informants in Dong Quang are members of same-age associations. Hence, it can be said that joining same-age association is a popular phenomenon for informants in particular and local people in Dong Quang in general. Same-age associations, on principle, are only for men who are at working age. However, in Dong Quang, there are women joining same-age associations and retain their membership until the age of 70. These associations are not very common in Giao Tan, or even looked down on due to simple admission criteria (same year of birth)

In Dong Quang, voluntary friendship associations are more “traditional”, including schoolfellow association, same-age associations, former servicemen associations, etc. Friendship associations in Dong Quang admit members basing themselves on the relatively basic and universal characteristics, such as age, school grade, year of enlistment, etc. That

11 The popularity as well as special features of the Same-age association compared with other friendship associations and all other association that we found can be developed into a separate study. In this dissertation, we reserve some content (as in Chapter 4) to discuss these association because of their importance to the issue under consideration.

means that the criteria are simple enough to be able to meet the needs of almost all people. These associations also share common names. Therefore, we can only list a limited number of names. However, that does not mean that these associations are limited in number. From those described in the first part on the formulation of these associations, it can be seen that there are up to hundreds of fraternal associations in Dong Quang.

Figure 4: Voluntary associations by categories



In addition to associations like those in Dong Quang, there are also associations formed on the same occupations, such as the medical staff association, the land civil administration officer association, commune’s officials association, etc. These are not the trade associations in the sense that members support one another in business activities, but the associations of people who have and/or are doing the same job. They gather together, not for professional experience exchange, but for solidarity and mutual support when needed. For example, the association of secretaries and deputy secretaries of youth union is an organization for those who held and are currently holding the positions of youth union secretary and deputy secretary. The incumbent

youth union secretary and deputy secretaries also join this association, but they do not gather to share professional experience. From the names of the associations, it can be seen that only “officials”¹² in the state agencies join these associations, which suggests that “being officials” is a value for the people of Giao Tan. A number of different studies have shown that there is a common practice “being cadres” and “being farmers” are the two extremes of the occupational hierarchy (Nguyen Van Huyen, 1995; Do Thien Kinh, 2013).

While friendship associations are popular in both Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes, there are more associations of people with the same interest in entertainment, fitness, sports, culture, arts in Dong Quang commune than in Giao Tan commune (69 in Dong Quang compared to 06 in Giao Tan). Most of these associations, as we recorded, have been formed for several generations recognized by people in Dong Quang including Buffalo Guild, Bird Guild, Fighting-cock Guild, Chess Guild, Traditional Popular Opera Guild, Classical Drama Guild, etc. These associations are maintained or restored to meet the need for folk games of part of the population with the desire to preserve the traditions of ancestors as a cultural feature of the village. These associations also well serve people with interesting and exciting village festive activities¹³. People can spend the whole year training the fighting-cocks to just join the competitions in the festival of the village. The same thing applies to other guilds like chess guild, traditional popular opera guild, etc. New associations set up later such as bonsai club, pet club, culture and arts club, apart from meeting the need of entertainment of the members, also join the festive activities, see it as their responsibility when operating in the village. To perform in the village festival, the associations also hold other activities in order to maintain the link among members. Meanwhile, in the coastal commune of Giao Tan, due to the fact that

12 It should be noted that the word “official” refers to a person working in the state sector, regardless of whether the person holds a position or not.

13 Dong Ky village festival is also one of the interesting festivals attracting participants from not only Dong Ky village, but also from other localities, for it is a cultural festivity.

the commune was just formed for less than two centuries, the festive activities and the culture of the Red River Delta have probably not fully introduced to the area. However, even for non-traditional associations, only related to sports, culture and arts activities, Giao Tan commune is also “overwhelmed” by Dong Quang commune. The sport, culture, and arts clubs in Dong Quang commune, despite previous operation, have recently been encouraged to gather into associations recognized by the local government.

Occupational and aid/support associations are almost only found in Giao Tan commune. Occupational associations in Giao Tan consist of: 1. Culture and Arts Service association (gathering those renting out loudspeakers, amplifiers, backdrops, screens, performance clothing, etc. serving the cultural and art activities in the commune); 2. The Agricultural Transport vehicles/ truck association held by those who provide transport service in the commune (vehicles carrying rice, agricultural supplies and building materials or inter-provincial service trucks); 3. Milling association gathering people providing grain milling service in the locality; 4. The Veterinary Services gathering veterinarians of the commune; 5. Trader association consisting of traders working at markets of the commune.

Meanwhile, though Dong Quang commune is a famous carpentry commune with vibrant commercial activities, located near urban areas, there are almost no real friendship occupational associations. Instead, people here form businesses or cooperatives with legal status to conduct furniture production and sales. Dong Ky has become a furniture brand name famous nationwide, even though this is not the origin of the wood craft. More wood craft artisans come from the neighbouring village of Phu Khe other than in Dong Quang. Dong Quang people do not hesitate to admit that Phu Khe is the original village of carpentry. Dong Quang people have turned these craft village products into a valuable brand name via their business talent. This practice may explain the lack of occupational associations in Dong Quang.

In Giao Tan, we noticed the popularity of gold guild and money guild, a kind of aid/support or credit rotation association formed in Vietnamese villages before the August Revolution 1945 (Nguyen-Marshall, 2004; Nguyen Tu Chi, 1980; Hy V. Luong, 2010, etc.). Although our statistics show that there are only 18 associations (of which gold guilds account for the majority), from our observation, the popularity of this type of funding guild is comparable to that of same-age associations in Dong Quang. The reason why the respondents hesitated to reveal the number of the guilds they participate in is that this form of fund raising, from the modern credit viewpoint, is considered illegal. There are people, to have enough money to support two children studying at universities in the city, joining five gold and money guilds at the same time in the village. The concept of “*guild pay*” (paying gold or money to heads of guilds), “*guild receipt*” (receiving gold/money from members) have become so common in everyday life of Giao Tan people that people even use the words in other social activities.¹⁴

Thus, considering the nature of the voluntary associations’ operation, it can be seen that there are four groups of unique associations and there also exists the difference in the distribution of the associations between Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes. However, even though the associations are classified into groups depending on the nature of their activities, we believe that the basic function of the associations considered within this dissertation still bears the nature of fraternity and mutual support among members. If as prescribed by Baker (1999) and some other scholars, voluntary associations fall into two groups of sentimental and functional functions, then those in Giao Tan and Dong Quang are mainly sentimental.

¹⁴ To see how it is commonly used, please refer to Chapter 4.

4. Time of establishment

As most voluntary associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes do not register with local governments¹⁵, it is difficult to determine the timeline for the formation of these associations. Even when the associations have registered with the local governments, it does not mean that the associations were formed right at the time of the issuance of the decisions of recognition. It is normal for the associations to operate possibly months, or even years, before. Then, probably due to the need to formalize the organization of the members or due to the fact that the associations are mobilized to register to strengthen state management over these entities (as in the case of a number of voluntary associations in Dong Quang communes), the associations register with local governments. The same practice were also recorded by Baker (1999) in his study of the mutual support associations in France in the early twentieth century (p. 150).

In these cases, we roughly the associations into two groups to consider the time of establishment and the process to form an organization. The first group consists of those registered with the government and the second group included associations without registering with the government.

The registered group mainly includes associations gathering members of the same hobbies like sports, culture and entertainment activities (badminton club, poetry club, ornamental plant club, etc.) and some associations under the patronage of socio-political organizations (table-tennis club, cycling club, elderly health exercise club, etc.). These organizations were often formed after the *Doi moi (Renovation)*, largely in the early 2000, mainly in the form of clubs and concentrated in Dong Quang. Studying these organizations, we noticed a certain lag between

¹⁵ It should be noted that this practice is not unique in Dong Quang. In other rural areas, the same thing occurs for certain group associations.

the start of operation and the date of the official establishment¹⁶. These organizations often operated before the local governments mobilized them to register and there is almost no change in the operation of these organizations before and after the issuance of the decisions of recognition.

In fact, sports, culture and arts activities have always been held long before the emergence of these clubs. The ones to set up these clubs often have passion in these activities. Often, people gathered and divided themselves into groups to play the sports or hold activities before the establishment of associations. Dong Ky Quan Ho Folk Singing Club is an example. The club's chairman holds passion for traditional folk singing, especially Quan Ho folk songs. He also has many friends being popular folk artists. With passion for this art, he immediately set up the club when encouraged by the local government¹⁷, via the guidance of the commune cultural officer. *"So I implemented the establishment procedures for the club right away in August 2004. In 2005 we inaugurated the club,"* said the chairman (DQ41, 2008).

There are a number of associations placed under the auspices of a socio-political organization (Veterans Association, Women's Association, Vietnamese Elderly Association, etc.). The socio-political organizations themselves also need to renew their activities to successfully implement the assigned "political task"¹⁸ and create cohesion within the organizations. Therefore, a good number of organizations sponsor the establishment of affiliate organizations. As an example, Dong Ky Village Cycling Club was born in 2004 under the patronage of commune elderly association. Or in 2006, the Table Tennis Club of Trang Liet village was also

16 These organizations were established by the commune people's committee under Decision 1589/2003/ĐQ-UBTDTT dated September 19th 2003 on the organization and operation of the grassroots sport clubs. Accordingly, sports clubs are social organizations. However, if considered in terms of "association", according to Decree 88/2003 on the organization, operation and management of associations, the commune people's committee has no authority to issue decisions on the establishment of these organizations. This is a legal loophole which should be discussed in another time.

17 The way the local government mobilized groups to form Quan Ho folk singing club is presented in more details in Chapter 5.

18 As discussed in Chapter 1, the "political mission" assigned to the socio-political organizations is largely mass mobilization including the dissemination of guidelines of the party and state to the people.

formed from an initiative of the village veterans association. When newly established, the executive board of the village veterans association was also in charge of the table tennis club. After the table tennis club organized the congress and elected a new consecutive committee, the club was separated from the veterans association.

Among the socio-political organizations actively encouraging and supporting the establishment of voluntary associations, the most notably is the veterans association. As one of the six mass organizations, the Veterans association was established at the latest (1999) and its operation is codified in 2005. One of the contents of the Ordinance on Veterans 2005 (article 11, provision 3) prescribes the duties of the veterans association as *“gathering demobilized soldiers to continue to promote the tradition of “Uncle Ho’s soldiers,” joining clubs, organizing veterans’ liaison boards and revolutionary movements at the grassroots level.”* Thoroughly grasping the task, the veterans association in Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes have actively mobilized local veterans to form former servicemen clubs in villages. Notably, according to the circular guiding the mobilization and gathering of veterans to set up clubs, former servicemen clubs are only allowed to form at the grassroots level in villages, not organized hierarchically as the veterans association. This fact may help explain the simultaneous formation of former veteran clubs in villages of the 2 communes from 2006-2009. The former servicemen clubs¹⁹, of the villages in the two surveyed communes, despite the documents of recognition of local governments, do not enjoy a full legal entity.

To establish an association with legal entity, under Decree 88/2003, the association must meet the following requirements: 1) operational purposes in accordance with the law; having unique name and fields of activities, not overlapping with associations legally established earlier in the same locality; 2) having association regulations; 3) having headquarters; 4) having

¹⁹ A club, in administrative term, refers to the organization of internal activities of a group or organization unlike an association and without legal entity. For a club operating as an association with legal entity, people have to define it as the “club working like an association.”

sufficient number of members enrolled.²⁰ These requirements are considered to be too demanding when the freedom of association has been defined in the constitution. These requirements even become more troublesome when rural people are already unfamiliar with paperwork and administrative stuff (Bui Quang Dung, 2007, p. 28)²¹. Hence, it is unnecessary or unreasonable for the people to seek for the legal status for the voluntary associations that they have long participated in.

The unregistered group mainly consists of friendship, occupational associations, and mutual support associations in both communes, and even some traditional hobbies associations (fighting-cock guild, wrestling guild, etc.). Going without registering with the local government does not mean that these associations are not allowed to operate openly. On the contrary, many associations (same-age association for example), hold their activities more openly than the registered ones. Typical of this type of associations are same-age association, schoolfellow association, former servicemen association, chess club, fighting-cock guild, bird guild, buffalo guild, etc. These organizations were previously associated with the festive activities of the village. Many elderly informants in Dong Quang commune recognized that these guilds and clubs started operation before 1954. Guild and collective activities came to a halt or died down during the collectivization period and were restored since the advent of the *Doi Moi*. Even in Dong Ky, due to its large population, in the latter half of the 2010s, same-age associations were set up even in the neighbourhood rather than only at the village level like before.

20 According to Circular No. 01/2004/TT-BNV of the Ministry of Home Affairs dated 15/01/2004 guiding the implementation of some articles of Decree No. 88/2003/NĐ-CP of the Government issued on July 30th 2003 on the organization, operation and management of associations, to establish associations at the commune level, the founder has to form the board of campaign consisting of at least three members. An association operating withing the commune level must have at least 10 signatures (membership application forms) of competent citizens or organizations of the commune to voluntarily join the association. The decision of establishment of associations operating at the provincial level (including those operating within the commune level) must be signed by the Chairman of the Provincial People's Committee.

21 This was also mentioned in 1941 in a small survey on the expenditure log of a farming family. The author then found that "the peasants do not like closely keeping expenditure books" (Le Huy Van, 1941, p. 14).

Representatives of the “traditional” associations and the local authorities both believe that it is difficult to identify the specific points of times for the establishment of these organizations. More often people refer to the origin of these organizations as *“since the making of the village”* or *“since I was small.”* *“It has been there long ago, since the time of our ancestors. We are just following the traditions handed down from our forefather.”* (DQ36, 2008). It should be noted that Dong Quang commune was formed in Kinh Bac area with the long history of culture. The traditional associations in villages (buffalo guild, wrestling guild, chess club, etc.) were formed in the ancient time and the people here continue to follow to today.

Unlike Dong Quang, Giao Tan is a new land, so even religious and festive voluntary associations have also just formed recently. And it is easier to denote the time of the establishment of these organizations. Associations of the same interest were formed only from 2000 to present. And the oldest associations in the locality are mutual support associations such as the rice guild, gold guild, and money guild. All of the three associations share the same feature of “credit” rotation. The informants cannot identify the birth of these guilds. They only know that the guilds exist in the commune and guilds have been formed sequentially without any specific points of time. One guild is built then closed after the rotation of the “credit” is completed for all members of the guild. Then, another guild will be erected. The guild may be set up by some backbones, relatively stable, but the members may change in each rotation. There are people staying with the guild and there are also those leaving the guild, so more people needed to be added²². In the past 10 years, there have been more gold guilds in Giao Tan. The reason is that the gold price stays stable, less slippage in prices than money or rice. Therefore, the capital contributed in gold is less risky. While money guilds are often set up by pensioners, gold ones are the realm of those who work away from home or have relatives

22 A guild often has 10 to 20 members.

working away from home. They set up gold guilds as a way of saving for business or major household consumption.

The informants in both Dong Quang and Giao Tan agreed that the majority of voluntary associations came into being since the advent of *Doi Moi*. Policies related to the establishment of associations include Resolution 8B-NQ/HNTW on the “*renewal of the mass mobilization of the Party and strengthening the Party-people relations*,” which reads “*There should be associations established to meet the legitimate needs in terms of career and life of the people, operating on the basis of national interests, household benefits, and mutual support. These associations should be founded on the voluntary, self-governing and self-financing principles in the framework of laws*” (Central Party Committee, March 27th 1990). The first half of the 1990s was marked as the boom of social organizations across the country (Wischermann and Nguyen Quang Vinh, 2003; Dang Thi Viet Phuong, 2004), in both urban and rural areas.

In the subsidy period, there were few organizations except for party organizations. The concept Fatherland Front was still blurred at that time. I only know for sure that there two associations at that time. They are the Women's Union and the Elderly Association, but the two associations were only formal in structure. The number of members was still limited. Association activities have been observed for hundreds of years now, but they have just truly rapidly developed since the last 20 years of Doi Moi. (DQ65, 2009).

The reform and open policies at that time not only brought changes to the economy, but also lead to profound changes in the society. Luong Van Hy (1994) suggests that there is there exists the relationship between economic development and the strengthening of village rituals. Kervliet (1995) also sees the restoration of the household economy has revived the patriarchy which is the basis of the family and other institutions in Vietnamese society. In our study, the informants also confirmed the impact of economic conditions to the transformation of social relations, especially to the emergence of voluntary associations:

Schoolfellow association has been developing mainly since 1995. Economic development leads to the birth of associations like this. Previously, people were poor and had not time to visit one another. As the economy develops, schoolfellows meet annually on a certain date; then it is spontaneously developed into the schoolfellow association (DQ51, 2008).

The mid-1990s marked a “movement” in the establishment of voluntary association in Giao Tan commune. Most of the informants in Giao Tan referred to the years between 1993 and 1996 as the peak for the establishment of associations in which they are members. They believed that this movement came to the commune from other localities. Many associations established at this time are mainly because of the influence of this movement, for example the schoolfellow association, the former servicemen *club*, and even same-age association, which had never existed before in the commune. The movement even led to the introduction of some voluntary associations which are in the view of some villager “very funny.”

"There are a lot of funny things. Same-age, schoolfellow, and fellow country-men associations, etc., so many things. Fellow country-men association is for those coming from the same locality living away from hometown. Then, people from other places getting married in the same place also establish their associations, named Association of wives getting married outside their native places!" (GT34, 2009).

Just as the groups above, the dates marking the establishment of the voluntary associations like this are mainly symbolic. In fact, people gathered into groups and held “activities” together long before the dates. When the groups’ activities become more frequent and people want to regularly organize activities, then they discuss the establishment of the associations.

There are associations marking its formation by the date of the announcement of the association. For example, the same-age association in Dong Quang was formed on the day an active member, after getting the list of all the people of the same age, called for the people in

the list to throw the first party together. The formation of the same-age association was also witnessed by *the most respectable elderly* in the village.

In some cases, following “the hidden green light” of the local government, people united those who already had common activities before to form an associations. For example, the establishment of the traditional association for secretaries and deputy secretaries of the youth union in different periods of time. The forerunner of the association is the association for former youth union cadres formed in 1986. At that time the association held many exciting activities. In addition to the tasks assigned, they also worked to raise fund for the extracurricular activities of the association, bringing nice memories for one another. In 2004, on the occasion of Youth Union founding day (March 26th), the commune government held a meeting inviting all secretaries in all periods to review the historical traditions of the union²³. After the meeting, the majority of the participants wished to establish an association to regularly meet. In 2005, the commune government saw that the association was about to operate and invited former youth union secretaries to a meeting. Then 5 to 7 meetings were held and the association was born under the name of the traditional association of youth union secretaries and deputy secretaries (instead of the Executive Committee of the commune youth union as before because there would be too many people if all members of the executive committee were included). The date of establishment is August 12th 2005 and March 26th was chosen to be the day for members to gather for celebration. Members of the association stays unchanged exception for the admission of a few more people, including the incumbent secretary and deputy secretary. Representative of the association verbally reported to the leaders of commune people’s committee of its establishment. The authorities considered the association as a voluntary

23 It is common for the commune people’s committee to hold meeting on the founding anniversary of the mass organizations. However, it is special to invite all the secretaries in all the periods of time to join a meeting. It should be noted that in 2004, the new leaders of Giao Tan commune including the commune people’s committee chairman, vice chairman, the president of the commune’s Viet Nam Fatherland Front, Chief Office of the commune people’s committee, all used to be the secretaries or deputy secretaries of the Youth Union and joined the operation of the commune Youth Union Executive Committee before.

association; therefore, they did not issued any documents recognizing the establishment of the association.

There are associations whose establishment was recognized by the admission of more members to one existing group without a mark for the date of establishment, for example, the association of close friends in the neighbourhood. Initially, the association consisted of some close neighbours often visiting and helping one another when needed. Then, after some time, those friend wanted to expand the group and admit more members to operate more regularly, supporting members when in need. They wanted to find a name for the group, just in order not to be confused with other groups, while showing their “identity.” That is how an association was born from an insider's perspective, without any announcement. For these types of associations, members can only remember the year, not any specific date as a benchmark for the establishment of the association. For most of the friendship associations (former servicemen association, schoolfellow association, culture and arts association, etc.) and occupational associations (association of agricultural vehicles/trucks, milling association, etc.), the establishment point of time can be determined in this way.

Studying voluntary associations in France, Baker (1999) found that “*while traditional communities get weaker, voluntary associations emerge. Voluntary associations play an important role in shaping the flow of new ideology and ways of life and it is importance in shaping social relations*” (p. 313). Considering the time of the establishment of voluntary associations in two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan, we have found the impacts of socio-economic change on the establishment and restoration of voluntary associations since the advent of *Doi moi* (Renovation). Luong Van Hy also sees the relationship between economic growth in Viet Nam and the restore of the rituals and traditional festive activities. In the case of the two communes studied, we believe that the formation of voluntary associations (under the perspective of time of establishment) did not reflect the contrast between tradition and

modernity as in Baker's observation. It should be considered characteristics of the current socio-economic structure.

5. Sub-conclusion

The identification of voluntary association helps to paint a portrait of community life of rural villagers in Northern Vietnam. The salient features of these association are that they, though are mostly invisible in the eyes of outsiders (due to their non-official nature), expose the social activities of rural communities in the most vivid and lively way. Voluntary associations are formed on a voluntary basis of rural villagers who have the same concerns and share common characteristics. In relation to official social associations, we can see that the membership of these associations is linked to the achieved position (while in official ones, the membership is often imputed). These associations operate independently from local authorities, without a governing body and primarily serve the needs of members and their families. Voluntary associations receive the attention of rural residents because they are neat, simple, familiar and close to the majority.

In the history of their existence, voluntary associations were known under many different names. Despite small differences in names, even in the past and at the present, Associations, Guilds and Clubs are still three most common names for voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang. Names of such voluntary associations are descriptive for their activities or objects of their service, thus, to some extent, the name of an association is a brief introduction of its activities or targeted objects. Names of voluntary associations are often hereditary from traditional ones, but sometimes a change is made to suit the new situation. Due to the non-official characteristic, names of voluntary associations are not necessarily consistent between members of the same association. Even when talking about the same association, a person may

refer to it by many different names. Nonetheless, “association” is still the most common name to refer to official social associations and voluntary associations.

Some scholars of voluntary associations are trying to classify them into different groups. From the research findings of voluntary associations in two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan, we are also trying to sort out these associations according to different criteria. Based on the location or scope of operation, we may have associations constrained by the government, also we may classify them by administrative levels such as hamlet, commune or higher. Voluntary associations can also be classified based on their independence from the control of local governments. Based on their nature of operation, we may classify voluntary associations in Giao Tan and Dong Quang into: i) Friendship; ii) Hobby-based; iii) Profession; and iv) Funding. Our study also noted the differences in the distribution of associations in Dong Quang and Giao Tan. However, even when categorized into different groups, the basic functions of voluntary associations are mostly to provide affection, mutual help and reciprocity among members.

Socio-economic change brought by the *Doi Moi*- Renovation has had a major impact on the establishment and restoration of voluntary associations in the two communes of Dong Quang and Giao Tan. This period witnessed not only the birth of new clubs for the needs of rural residents in the current period, but also the resurgence of collective activities that had been exercised long time ago. This event should be regarded as an important feature of the socio-economic structure of Vietnam in the current transitional period. The naming, description and search for the origins of community activities of rural population are now becoming increasingly significant in the context that not many studies have focused on these associations in Vietnamese rural areas.