

ABSTRACT

SOCIOLOGICAL MONOGRAPH ON VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS IN NORTH VIETNAMESE RURAL AREAS

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Socio-economic changes in Viet Nam since the Doi Moi- Renovation (1986) mark a substantial change in the associational life in Viet Nam. Social organizations have been consecutively established at national, provincial, district, commune and even grass-root levels. There was no exception for rise of voluntary association, non-governmental, non-for-profit organizations in the rural areas of Northern Vietnam, that are created on the basis of voluntary participation of individuals who share common characteristics in the rural areas. The 1990s in Dong Quang and Giao Tan communes witnessed the coming into life of not only clubs operating for need of rural residents, but also the revival of associational practices that have been formed since the old days.

This study seeks to answer the following specific 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? To answer these questions, the study is conducted with two aims: identification and explanation. Within five chapters (not including the introductory and conclusion parts), 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 (Chapter One). 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 at the moment. This Chapter also mentions the development of associations in Viet Nam according to official records to see the rapid growth of associations since Doi Moi- Renovation. Another effort is 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, and try to find the causes that led Northern peasants to engage in local 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. 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 to a social and functional one. This movement helps distinguish a voluntary association from a primary group such as family or kinship.

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 thread to the villagers. This also help to distinguish the villagers from the outsiders. Participating in lifecycle rituals of members and practicing 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.

In examining voluntary associations, we can see that the construction of social network of an individual implies a certain dependence in the village and concerning traditional institutions, when,

in many cases, members of voluntary associations are those who could not seek for a better life outside the village. Therefore they made efforts to extend their own social relations in the locality. In another dimension, the efforts for organizing an associational life beyond the boundary of a village (often found in the group of same-interest associations) also show up a local society who is trying to assert its identity. In the present social context, it is still quite early to assess the prospects of the voluntary associations in shaping up civil space of rural residents.