Work without name: changing patterns of children's work in a Northern Vietnamese village
Van Chinh, Nguyen

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WORK WITHOUT NAME
Changing patterns of children's work
in a Northern Vietnamese village

Nguyen Van Chinh
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ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT
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ABBREVIATIONS

Ban CTNT: *Ban Cong Tac Nong Thon* (Committee for Rural Affairs (of the Communist Party of Vietnam).

Ban NNTU: *Ban Nong Nghiep Trung Uong* (Central Committee for Agriculture (of the Communist Party of Vietnam).

Ban QLHTXNN: *Ban Quan Ly Hop Tac Xa Nong Nghiep* (Committee for Management of Agricultural Co-operative).

CASA: Centre for Asian Studies Amsterdam.

CCC: Central Committee for Census.

CPCC: Committee for Protection and Care of Children.

CPV: Communist Party of Vietnam.

DBLD: *Dang Bo Luong Dien* (the Communist Party of Vietnam, Luong Dien Chapter).

EFEO: *Ecole Francaise d' Extreme Orient*

GSO: General Statistical Office.

HCM City: Ho Chi Minh City.

HDBT: *Hoi Dong Bo Truong* (Council of Ministers).

ILO: International Labour Organisation.

IMR: Infant Mortality Rate.

IPEC: International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour.

ISS: Institute of Social Studies.

IUD: The Intrauterine Device.


KHXH: *Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi* (Social Sciences).

MAFI: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries.

MOLISA: Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

MMR: Maternal Morality Rate.

MOET: Ministry of Education and Training.

PNVN: Phu Nu Viet Nam (Vietnam Woman).

SPC&GSO: State Planning Committee & General Statistical Office.


TCTK: *Tong Cuc Thong Ke* (General Statistical Office).

UBNDS&KHHGD: *Uy Ban Dan So Va Ke Hoach Hoa Gia Dinh* (Committee for Population and Family Planning).

UBND: *Uy Ban Nhan Dan* (People’s Committee).

UNDP: United Nations Development Program.


USD: United States Dollar (currency).

Vie vn KSNDTC: *Vien Kiem Sat Nhan Dan Toi Cao* (The Supreme People's Court of Investigation.

Vie nn TTKHXH: *Vien Thong Tin Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi* (Institute of Social Sciences Information.

VLSS: Vietnam Living Standards Survey.

VND: Vietnam dong (currency).

VOC: Value of Children.

WHO: World Health Organisation.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: INSIDE STORIES OF RURAL CHILDREN’S WORK

Between the country life, personal experience and academic interests

“I wish I were a boy”

Among the children working in the wood workshop owned by the son of my host, there was a girl who lived in the neighbourhood. I shall call her Tuyet. Tuyet was 14 years old, daughter of a 54 year-old veteran. Tuyet’s mother was a humble peasant who had never traveled farther than 20 km from her village. Tuyet left the school 3 years ago and had been working as a trainee for more than one year now. Tuyet’s brothers also worked as wood carvers in Ho Chi Minh City.

I met Tuyet regularly in the workshop. Unlike other trainees, Tuyet often came to the workshop later and left earlier. She explained to me that her parents did not want her to work in the wood craft. Her father often said to her: "You're just a girl. You'll get married in a few years' time and then you'll work for your parents in-law on their farm. It's a waste of time for you to learn wood craft". But Tuyet did not think so. "I wish I were a boy," she said. A girl's life, in her opinion, is full of obligations and constraints, in contrast with a boy's life. Her parents let her go to the wood workshop only when the house chores had been done. And Tuyet was often asked to drop her woodcraft to assist her mother on the farm. In our conversations, Tuyet said she dreamed of becoming a seamstress, which is quite suitable for girls, or having whatever jobs in the non-farm sector. But since she had no money to learn such trades, she had to follow the woodcraft. Tuyet complained that she was no longer treated kindly by her parents. Instead, they often scolded her if she neglected her house chores. As a 'good girl' in the village, she did not want to bother her parents for money to cover such things like clothes, shoes and so on, and she began to earn her own money. More than once, she attempted to raise livestock from her own "capital", but her parents didn't let her keep any profits from these undertakings. And they didn't want Tuyet to spend time to earn her own money...

One early morning, while taking pictures of some wood workers waiting for the bus bound for Ho Chi Minh city for work, I saw Tuyet among them. She stood behind the advertisement board, together with two other girls. The bus station was set up recently to serve the increasing number of wood workers leaving the village to search for work in the

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1 Names of the persons used in this book are disguised.
But Tuyet could not get on the bus. Having found out that Tuyet was not going to the workshop, her mother became suspicious and immediately came to the bus station. There she found Tuyet trying to get on the southbound bus. She took her home, scolding and beating her. After that Tuyet was not allowed to work away from home.

For about two weeks after the incident, I did not see Tuyet again. Then one day Tuyet's mother came to see me and told me in tears: "My little girl has left home for ten days now. We don't know where she went. We don't think she could go far because she had no money. My husband guessed that she might have gone to the wood workshops in Hanoi or Dong Ky to search for work there, together with her fellow villagers. If you go back to Hanoi, please find out whether she works there?"

Afterwards I did make inquiries among several wood workshops in Hanoi run by natives of Giao village, but I was unable to locate Tuyet. Back in the village, I advised Tuyet's parents to ask Hanoi Television for help with its 'Missing Persons' program, but they refused to do so, fearing this would bring Tuyet's and the family's name in disrepute. They still believed that Tuyet had found work somewhere in Hanoi. By the time I left for Amsterdam (February 1996), Tuyet had not returned home. Rumours had it that she had been tricked by criminals who smuggled her across the border into China.

"Don't cry if I die"

9.30 a.m. I was talking with my host about the situation of the children in the village, when we suddenly heard terrific noises coming from the neighbourhood. Moments later, my host's grand-daughter rushed in and told me excitedly: "Thanh from the An family has wounded himself in the belly. Why don't you go and have a look?" I didn't feel like going, but curiosity took over and I went outside the gate to see what happened. Children and adults were milling about in the yard. Someone shouted for a Honda. After a while, they brought out a stretcher and two bicycles which served as a sort of ambulance that was to take Thanh to the hospital. I saw the blood-stained bandage wrapping around Thanh's belly. But he still retained consciousness.

Back in the house I asked the children what had happened. They told me that this morning, after a brief period at work, Thanh began to complain about being tired. He then left work without permission, and climbed up the guava tree to pick fresh fruits. His elder brother told him to get down and go back to work. Thanh refused to do so, saying that his back was aching and he needed some rest. Their mother joined in the quarrel, taking the side of Thanh's brother, shouting out loud that Thanh was a lazy boy who was always tired before doing any real work. She forced him back to work and left for shopping. When she got home and saw Thanh back on the tree, she became very angry and lashed out at him.
He climbed down from the tree and went back to the work place. But his mother went on abusing him. Thanh suddenly shouted: "Mother, you want me alive or dead?" Still angry at him she said: "I don't care if you just drop dead." Without a word, he took a chisel and stabbed himself deep in the belly. Blood started to flow from the open wound. The mother in panic shouted for help. Neighbours came running to the house. While his wound was being dressed, Thanh took it calmly and said: "Mother, I am just a bad son, so don't cry if I die."

A few months later, I met Thanh again. He looked healthy. It was a very hot day, and he did not wear any shirt, so I could see the scar on his belly. Noticing that I was staring at his scar, Thanh's face turned red. He asked me if I knew something about electricity. "Something went wrong with my paddy sorting machine," he said. "My dad saw smoke coming from the plastic covering the engine, he bent down to blow out the smoke. Unfortunately, he got an electric shock and collapsed on the ground. He's so scared now that he won't touch the machine. If no one can repair it, I have to sort paddy by hand and it would waste a lot of time."

I said he should look for a professional electrician, but he just shrugged: "That won't happen until Tet", which means that there was no professional electrician in this village. Then he turned to me: "We're going to gamble for a bit of fun, would you like to join us?" I asked: "Aren't you afraid of your mother?" He said: "No one dares to touch me from now on."

Thanh was 15 years old. He left school at the age of 9 and had been working as a wood carver for 6 years.

"Undutiful children"

Giao villagers do not mention the name of the dead since this is considered taboo. They believe that if one does so, the soul of the dead would not rest peacefully. In accordance with this practice, the person involved in this story will remain anonymous.

He was a father of three sons. The eldest son was 20 years of age and the youngest was just 13. None of them finished primary education. They all worked as wood workers away from home and only returned for visits a few times each year.

When he was still alive, he often quoted the old Chinese saying: "Tam nam bat phu, tu nu bat ban", (Three sons do not make you rich, four daughters do not make you poor), in referring to his current circumstances. He often complained about his sons. In his opinion, they earned a lot of money but they did not give him any. They lacked filial piety, he told me. They always said 'no' when he asked them for money. When he had to buy
liquor for himself, he had to sell paddy for cash. He believed that his children spent all their money on gambling while they told me they would not give their father any money because he would gamble it away.

He told me that he often reminded his sons of their obligations towards their parents. He wished they would follow the example of their village workmates and send money home regularly. Surely he would know how to use their money for the right purposes. But none of them heeded his appeals.

One day before the Tet festivities, like most wood workers of Giao village, the three sons returned home for the holidays. He expected them to bring him money as the other young wood workers in the village would for their parents, but his sons came home empty handed. He decided to use a little blackmail, threatening that if they did not listen to him, he would leave home or even die. No one took him seriously. They even made a joke calling him, "ong gia kho-ta-bit" (a slang phrase, referring to an old and conservative man). That night, after taking a bath, he sharpened a knife and brought it with him to bed. He cut his own throat and died.

These stories among many others concerning children's life and work were collected during the year I spent in Giao village. In recounting them I do not wish to add sensationalism to a situation that was already fraught with vagaries and surprises. The stories, though specific to Giao village as they might be, to a great extent reflect the ongoing conflicts between parents and children--the generation gap further exacerbated by the fast changes of rural Vietnam.

From the very beginning of my field research, I regularly noticed the deep concerns of many parents as regards their children's life style, their work and education, which they considered to be greatly different from their own experiences at similar age.

My host was a 76 year old man who had once earned his living as a skilled wood worker. Having lived through French colonial times, Japanese occupation and American war, he had also witnessed the upheavals that took place in his village during the first land reform (1956) followed by the collectivization period (1958-1981) and recently the economic reforms (1981-1995). During my stay in his house, despite our difference in age, I somehow became his confidant with whom he often shared his thoughts on his family and on what was going on in the village. He was well respected by fellow villagers for his honesty and rich past. Naturally, the subject of children and the young generation of the village came up in our conversations, particularly about his own grand-children.

One day, he brought out a large scroll, put it on the table and dusted it with a great care. He told me this was a poem in classical Chinese he had written many years ago and
which he used to hang on the wall to teach his grand-children how to live in a correct way. He read it aloud, explaining to me its finer points. He gazed at it for a moment, then, to my surprise, took it to the yard and burned it. Let us listen to his story:

I am respected by the villagers because all my life, I’ve tried my best to lead an honest and exemplary life. I wished my grandchildren would follow my example but now I’ve given up all hopes. In the villagers’ eyes, my third grandson is a bad, bad boy. He left school early and went to work. Now he spends his wages on drinking and gambling, and often gets involved in fights with other children. It’s a great shame for us. I spend sleepless nights worrying about his future. Nowadays the kids just don’t give a damn about the moral values I try to teach them. They even makes jokes about my poem. That’s why I burned it.

He was sad because children these days are so different from his own childhood. He mused:

“In my time it was a natural thing for a boy of 16 to wade naked into a pond to catch crabs and shellfish, without a thought of making money. Nowadays, children of 12 or 13 already know how to make money. If they don’t get along with their parents, they just leave home. I’ve spent all my life in this village and never saw such things until now”.

In my conversations with other villagers, it was quite obvious to me that their children’s welfare was the major concern of most parents in Giao village. The general complaint was that children were becoming more and more selfish; and their main interest was to earn money for themselves. A number of parents worried about their future, about their old age when they would be neglected by their children whom they tried their best to bring up in a proper way.

Generally speaking, parents often passed judgments on their children based on their past experiences. Through their life stories, I was able to understand to some extent the changes and conflicts, perceptions and attitudes, thoughts and actions in the daily interactions between them and their children. While young adults and middle aged people tended to appreciate the ability of children to earn money at an early age, older people often worried about the erosion of moral standards and the low education level of their children as a result of their leaving school prematurely. From these stories, I could discern the great changes that were taking place in the life of children in a rural setting which had a direct bearing on their education and employment. In fact the subject of children was the foremost concern of every household in the village.

Naturally while examining children’s life of Giao village and talking to their parents, I often thought of my own childhood. My school-age was spent in the countryside, in the midst of agricultural collectivization and the destructive war by the Americans. I left my home village to study at the University of Hanoi when I was 18. During the years I spent with my family in my village, we children often went hungry because of food shortage. Being the eldest son of a family with 6 brothers and sisters, I was taught to do some house-chores at an early age. Such work as collecting fire-wood, fetching water, cooking, feeding pigs and livestock and taking care of my young siblings were part of my daily activities from the time I was about 9 or 10. What I mostly liked to do was the
cooking. Because rice was a scarce staple in those years, we only had one rice meal daily.

Children were often allowed to eat rice while adults had to contend with potatoes, cassava or maize with very little rice at meal times. I used to volunteer for cooking because I could help myself to a little extra beyond the regular meagre portion of rice, particularly during the periods between harvests. Apart from the house chores, I spent half a day at school. I always found plenty of free time to play with other kids in the village. At the age of 16, I was asked to work on the farm to help my parents, and still found time to attend school half a day.

My own childhood and family background are more or less related to my work today. The person who made the greatest impact on my future career was perhaps my grandfather. He formerly worked as a village teacher of classical Chinese under the colonial regime. After the revolutionists had come to establish themselves in the village and classical Chinese studies had become redundant, he moved to work as a carpenter and wood carver. Living in hard conditions, he did not stop studying his Confucian books, most of which were classic poetry, ancient Chinese philosophy, ethics and historical texts. Whenever he found something interesting from these texts, he would ask me to come up and explained them to me. Although I did not understand almost everything he said, I became his 'beloved pupil' if only for my patience in listening to him. I was often asked to serve tea to his numerous guests who came and talked to him about everyday matters, particularly about the fate of their sons who were serving the army during the war. Later, when I grew up and studied at the faculty of history at the University of Hanoi, I understood how important my grandfather had been to me during those formative years.

Comparing my childhood with that of rural children today, I think the generation I grew up with during the early period of agricultural collectivization was lucky because we had access to a free education at all levels. This explains how a poor rural boy like me was able to follow through to the university level.

Like the peasants of Giao village, I realize that many changes have taken place in the countryside particularly in the economic field since de-collectivization. Children today generally no longer suffer from hunger and from lack of clothing as we did. They however are more interested in earning quick money than in having an adequate education.

My youth spent in the countryside and the present-day concerns of the peasants regarding their children lay the basis for the study I am pursuing: The economic roles of children in a transition economy in our society.

Among many scholarly writings on child labour that have been accumulated recently, the economic roles of children are often tackled in terms of poverty, demand for labour in peasant households or as a result of the seniority system, as if the economic importance of children in peasant societies was immutable. There have been very few
studies that focus on the dynamic roles and patterns of children's activities in a fast changing socio-economic system. This is understandable because most of the child labour studies tend to dwell on underdeveloped societies where the subsistence agriculture still exists on a large scale and changes at a slow pace. Moreover, these studies tend to approach child labour basically at the micro level. While this approach enables the researcher to measure in detail economic activities of children and their contribution to the household economy, it often leaves out the socio-economic and cultural environment in which children's work occurs.

This situation may be worth reconsidering if one takes into account the tremendous changes in the so-called "underdeveloped societies", particularly in Asia. The thrust behind these changes is the introduction into traditional agriculture of strong market forces, bringing with them new production processes, which in turn create an increasing demand for child labour outside the agricultural sector. In the Vietnamese context, these changes lead to the fast expansion of a non-farm sector in the rural areas, which was previously confirmed within the household context and usually carried out between the two harvests. The growing practice of subcontracting in this new production system, the competition of manufacturers and informalisations of labour have rendered child labour more attractive and more accessible for employers. Urbanization at a fast pace increases demand for man power and serves as a magnet in luring male labourers from rural areas to the cities, mainly on the seasonal basis, leaving the farm and rural non-farm work for women and children to shoulder.

Beside these changes in the rural production system, which is geared toward diversification, social stratification has become more apparent, not only in material terms but also with regard to access to education. The high drop-out rate from school during the years of economic reforms in Vietnam is another indicator of children's intensive involvement in work. The marginalisation of a sizable number of the rural population puts extra pressure on parents in passing the earning burden on to their children.

Based on these hypothetical processes, the fundamental question that has been raised for this research is whether the transition to a more diverse economy in Vietnam has any impact, and if so to what extent, on the nature and patterns of children's economic activities in response to these new conditions? What are the agents involved in this process? To prepare for an empirical answer to these questions, a theoretical framework of analysis will be required (chapter 2).

As an insider observing his own society at first hand, I have both the advantages and disadvantages in carrying out a study of children's work. The personal experiences of my childhood spent in a village of the northern delta are no doubt helpful to my study, but they should be regarded at best as recollections rather than scientific sources to evaluate
the changes in children's economic activities. However, these experiences had brought me in intimate contact with the world of rural children, which still stays with me up to this day. This is perhaps why I have chosen a rural setting for my field research.

The field work

Selection of research setting

The choice of the rural Red River Delta for field research is not based alone on personal familiarity. There are several reasons for such a choice.

Firstly, the Red River Delta has a long history of wet rice cultivation. It is the most densely populated area of Vietnam, which is among the highest densely populated areas of Asia, next to the delta of southern China, the Indonesian island of Java and Bangladesh. In the colonial period, the density of the Red River Delta was 430 persons/km² (Gourou, 1936:197). The 1989 Census showed a density of 932 persons/km² and a recent survey indicated a density of 1,104 persons/km² (Nguyen The Hue, 1995:109). In spite of a long agricultural development, 83% of the population of the Red River Delta (or 13.6 million people, according to the 1989 Census) were still living in the rural area, their main source of livelihood being rice cultivation. With high population growth, rice land per capita has decreased considerably, from 1200 m² per capita during the 1956 land reform down to 540 m² per capita in 1993, the year of redistribution of land to peasant households (TCTK, 1995). Demographic pressure on economic activities of peasant households with little access to arable land may offer an interesting opportunity to understand children's work in the peasant society. In fact this question has been raised since the 1970s, where one often links the economic roles of children to high fertility rates (Mamdani 1972; Nag 1972; White 1975; Hull 1975; Mueller 1976).

Secondly, the Red River Delta has long been involved in a long process of socio-economic transformation. The land reform (1954-56) and subsequent agricultural collectivization (1958 onwards) were first launched in this area. And more than anywhere in northern Vietnam, the collective economy under co-operative management was vigorously carried out in the Red River Delta. This no doubt had a direct bearing on the life of every peasant in this area for over 20 years (1958-81). Because of this, the shift from the collective and centrally-planned economy to an economy based on individual peasant household has become a significant factor in the rural society of the Red River Delta. Because of the change in the production system, one may assume that the economic

\[2\] The population density of the Pearl River Delta in southern China is 638 persons/km² in 1986; Java and Madura in Indonesia: 755 persons/km² in 1985; Bangladesh: 726 persons/km² in 1988, (see: Le, T.C & T. Rambo (eds.), 1993: ix).
roles of children would change accordingly. However, this question cannot be cleared up by a large scale survey. The difficulty lies not only in the methods employed in such a survey and the evaluation thereof, but it is also a very time consuming process. Moreover, the qualitative aspects inherent in this process of change are likely to be overlooked by surveying techniques.

This is the main reason why the research project will concentrate on just one village, aiming at gaining substantial empirical data on the impacts of economic reforms on children's work. Because it is mainly a case study, in some instances the characteristics of the village under the study will stand out. But it is not an isolated unit. From an socio-economic standpoint, the inhabitants of the village have lived in a similar environment and shared comparable experiences under different systems, past and present, with the bulk of the rural population of the Red River delta. Hence the findings collected from the research carried out in this particular village would give a fair description of the larger geographical area.

From the empirical viewpoint of anthropology, finding an ordinary village with favourable conditions for field work is highly desirable. For that reason, I spent considerable time visiting a number of villages located in three different provinces of the delta with a view to getting a general picture of rural children's economic activities, before deciding on the selection of just one village. A close examination of these villages brought forth some important starting points. While these villages tend to diversify their economy after the introduction of reforms, they do not necessarily follow the same path. Those villages previously well-known for their traditional crafts have now restored their old trades with some new forms of production organization, ranging from single households and inter-households to co-operatives. The villages of Da Hoi (Ha Bac) and Van Chang (Nam Ha) for example, were previously well known for their metal crafts (forging and casting). Over 20 years of agriculturalisation had turned artisans of these villages into farmers while the development of these crafts was seriously curtailed. Economic reforms provided a new opportunity for these villages to raise again their non-farm economy. Between 1986 and 1994, 19 per cent of households (212/1070 households) of Da Hoi had established workshops for processing metal wastes and producing construction materials on a small scale, each employing more than 5 wage workers, (reported by UBND xa Chau Khe). In Van Chang village (Nam Ha), 80 per cent of households (504/625 households) owned their small smitheries, most of these were self-employed, but some hired extra hands. These smitheries produced home utensils and machine tools targeted at the rural

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3 For a further reference on the process of economic diversification taking place in traditional craft villages since economic reforms in the Red River delta, see, for example, reports by Central Committee for Agriculture of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), Kinh Te Xa Hoi Nong Thon Viet Nam Ngay Nay (Socio-Economic Situation of Rural Vietnam Today), Hanoi, 1991, 2 vols.
markets of Laos, Cambodia and mountainous areas of Vietnam. While rice cultivation was still practiced in these two villages, the non-farm sector played a dominant role in the village's economy, fast becoming the major source of income for most families.

In both villages, I found a kind of informal "labour market" where labourers (males, females and children) from the surrounding villages came and waited for being hired to work in various types of farming, non-farm and house-chores. I also found that in these two villages, a considerable number of children were working in processing raw metal materials and forging. I was told that a number of these children were hired on a daily basis from the fore-mentioned "labour market". Their wages were about one third of those of adult workers. Employers said they used child workers mainly as assistants in unskilled types of work, which was cheaper than hiring adults. In Van Chang village, child workers were used as assistants and apprentices and generally their work was unpaid.

In the villages where the non-farm sector was not well developed and rice cultivation still dominated, a large number of male labourers went out in search of work in urban areas. As a consequence, children were involved much more in agricultural activities, particularly girls, while a number of young boys were sent to vocational training elsewhere.

Initial examinations of economic activities of a number of villages in the northern delta led to the assumption that a dominant feature of economic diversification in rural areas after "renovation" (doi moi) was the expansion of non-farm activities, which involved an increasing number of farming labourers in these sectors. There were also indications that there had been an increase in children's paid employment in rural non-farm sectors. This phenomenon of children entering the labour market was a recent development and it would seem to be an interesting theme for a research project on child labour during the transition period from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy in rural Vietnam. For that reason, I preferred to choose a village for an in-depth study where a mix between farm and non-farm activities existed. Most villages I had visited were interesting enough for such a research, but their sizes were usually too large, ranging from 625 to 1075 households per village, which is difficult to cover for an empirical study. While I was looking for a smaller village, one of my ethnology students invited me to visit his home village, located in the heart of the Red River Delta (Hai Hung province). This is a middle sized village with 459 households, where wood carving has become an important economic activity besides farming since economic renovation. I eventually chose this village because it is an ordinary village sharing similar socioeconomic conditions with many others in the area. Besides its size, my personal acquaintance with a number of villagers should prove to be a great asset in conducting field work.
Data collection

A former student who later became my assistant provided valuable help at the initial stage of field research. From the very beginning, I was aware that the theme I was pursuing — the impact of market-oriented economy on rural children's work — would require an understanding at the macro level (changes of socio-economic system) as well as at the micro level (economic activities of children in households), both viewed from a historical perspective (before and after economic reforms). This was no easy task. In practice, a range of methods were applied for data collection.

Household survey

Like many other villages in Vietnam, statistics and other written sources on Giao village were hard to obtain. To gain a comprehensive view on economic activities, education and life styles of its inhabitants, I began with a household survey. I had planned to survey about one fourth of households (100/459 households) but at the end, the survey was extended to 376 households, thanks to the collaboration of the village headman and his assistants. The survey was designed to collect detailed information on the composition of households within the village, their productive resources (land, tools, capital, drafts, etc.), the number of household members engaged in the production process, and other sources of household income. Furthermore data were collected on life styles (housing and comforts), education level and the involvement of children in work. (The survey results will be analyzed in chapter 3).

Counting the labour

Data obtained from the survey of 80 per cent of households within the village was very useful. It served as a basis from which I was able to select the right target group for further study while making sure that specific groups of households would not be excluded from observation.

During the field research, although my observations and interviews involved many respondents, including males and females of different ages and backgrounds in a large number of households, in-depth observations and interviews were principally concentrated on a sample of 49 households with 117 children between 6 and 15 years of age. Among these, a group of 11 households owned rather well-established wood workshops which employed 82 child workers (paid and unpaid) were particularly interested. Additionally, 116 pupils aged between 11 and 16 attending primary and low secondary schools in the commune were asked to write briefly about their lives, work, attitudes and wishes.

An important aspect in this study of child labour is to assess the extent of children's involvement in various types of economic activities. Two students helped me to
do this, as we call it, "counting the labour", which follows the principles of instant records and 24 hour recall, developed by Reynolds (1991).\footnote{According to Reynolds (1991), the technique of '24 hour recall' is applied to collect data on child labor in which all activities done by the interviewees over the 24 hours leading up to the moment of the interview were strictly recorded.}

This enumeration of labour were carried out in two periods in accordance with the agricultural cycles. The first round was conducted in May and June of 1995 when demand for farming work reached its peak, and the second round was in August and September of the same year, when agricultural activities were at the lowest level.

However, counting the labour is not the ultimate aim of this study. It is only a measure to gain a quantitative view of the extent of children's economic activities. To shed more light on the nature of children's work which undergoes rapid changes in recent years, it is necessary to utilize data from interviews and other observations.

*Interviews, a child-focused approach*

While interviewing the heads of households, it became apparent that the male heads did not know exactly about activities of their children, particularly about work on the farm. The reason was that most male adults were no longer regularly involved in farming. For that reason, 24 hour recall and interviews were conducted on individual situations in one-to-one encounters. Conversations with children were often interrupted by adults, who tended to answer on their behalf. Moreover, children's shyness to talk in the presence of their parents was another drawback. A number of conversations between me and my children respondents therefore took place at their workplaces away from their homes, in groups of several children at a time. I found that such informal interviews were very useful. I also relied on key informants for obtaining sensitive information and making cross-checks.

*Life histories*

As an "insider" more or less familiar with village life, I was able to gather useful information from the villagers through their life stories rather than formal interviews. Adults liked to talk about their own youth and compared it with their children today. Data on the children's work under the co-operative system (before economic renovation) were mainly obtained from this source. And in keeping with the perspective of socio-economic changes, respondents from 49 households were separated into 3 groups:

1) Those who were born between years of 1969-1979 and therefore spent their childhood during the days of early economic reforms.
2) Those who were born between 1954 and 1968 and had experience with the collective economy of the co-operative as a child.

3) Those who were born before 1954 and lived through the periods of changes from colonial times to the present.

Respondents were picked from these 49 households. Specific topic-interviews were arranged to acquire such information as at what age a respondent performed a specific type of work, with whom and for what purposes, as well as his/her family's socio-economic background at that time.

Life stories were mainly collected at the later stages of the field research. The respondents were encouraged to talk about their own childhood: life, work, education, etc., in connection with a particular period of the village history. These stories are very useful to understand not only the work itself, but also attitudes, thoughts of the children and the environment in which they lived. Although this wealth of information would better serve the case-studies approach rather than quantitative analysis, it does help this researcher to obtain valuable insights into the impact of socio-economic changes on children's life and work.

Observation

While studying child labour in an African village, P. Reynolds used observation as a single technique to supplement other techniques in which "observation of two-hour spell of activity, during which time behaviour of and relationship between those present were recorded minute by minute", (Reynolds 1991:46). Such a method requires great patience and is time-consuming. Moreover, it is almost impossible to cover all types of children's activities.

For me, observation is a continuous process of participating in the daily life of the villagers, sharing their activities, observing their joys and sorrows, following their customs. The information gathered will be screened so that they remain relevant within the socio-economic context of the study underway. For such purposes, I spent one year with a family in Giao village as a paying guest. I shared their food, talked about the interests of the children and shared the vagaries of their family life.

As it turned out, my host had several grandchildren. His only son owned a small wood workshop which employed a few children as apprentices with whom I became quite close. The information I got from them were not through interviews but rather by way of informal, confidential chats. Having regarded me as a "member of the family", and as someone who 'knew' everything that was going on in the village (a teacher from Hanoi, imagine that!) they did not bother to tell me until near the end of my stay in the village, about their habit of going to the pagoda and the communal house to worship the Lord.
Buddha and the village's tutelage god -- a practice quite common among adults. One evening, my host's children invited me to go with them to the Pagoda. There I was surprised to see children from other families as well. Unlike adults who went to the Pagoda in day-time, children often went there in the evening on the first and the fifteenth day of the month of the Lunar Calendar. With burning joss-sticks they prayed the Buddha to bless them with a good life. And children before leaving home for jobs away from the village or after their return often came to the pagoda to pray for their protection. This is just an example of having the advantage of being an 'insider' whose eyes and ears are constantly alert for that extra information. If I had not been in this privileged position, I would have missed this interesting episode and maybe many others.

*Child, work and classification of work*

*The child*

A definition of "what is a child?" does not seem to be immutable but changes with the passage of time and varies from culture to culture. In 20th century Western societies, a child is defined as someone who has needs (Woodhead 1990:60). The term 'needs' implies the distinctive status accorded to young humanity and which gives priority to protecting and promoting their psychological welfare. This is in contrast with former times and at variance with other societies where adult priorities have centred more on children's economic utility, their duties and obligations rather than their needs. From this perspective, a child is considered dependent on adults. This notion that overlooks the socio-economic values of children is understandable because in modern Western societies, one relies heavily on chronological age to define a child. However, from an anthropological viewpoint, the system of classification based on age is variable according to specific cultures. Schildkrout, for example, argues that a girl of 10 or 12 years of age in Hausa culture is normally considered suitable for marriage. And one she gets married, she is classified as a woman, and in this case, work performed by her would not be described as child work (Schildkrout 1981:96).

The child-adult relationship is an important element while considering the "child" concept. A number of studies on low-income countries show that children make a considerable contribution to the economic survival of the family and that they support their parents in old age. Apart from economic considerations, children are generally regarded as having a symbolic value and playing a central role in their family and society. In many cultures, children not only make adults into parents but also confirm their respectable roles among the adult world-- a position which someone without children cannot possess. However, in this interdependence, adults universally have some power and authority over their children, which are determined by the kinship system, gender
hierarchy and social-political system in a particular society. Authority over children is manifested by children's respect and obligations towards adults, while adults often exercise their power over children regarding work.

It is obvious that criteria involved in the definition of a child such as biological (puberty), legal (labour law), and customs (status), etc., have limitations because their basis is mainly chronological. This suggests that it is not easy to reach an universal definition. At this stage I think that an analysis of the "child concept" in the Vietnamese cultural context, in both traditional and modern senses, would be useful before tackling the problem of children's work.

Traditionally, Vietnamese determine the "maturation" of young people according to age and sex, by a simple definition: "gai thap tam, nam thap luc" (a girl is mature at 13 and a boy, at 16). This definition implies the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence, readiness for marriage. However, it should be noted that in Vietnamese culture, age is usually determined according to the lunar calendar. This system of age is called "tinh tuoi mu", which means that a baby is believed to have been formed by the 'goddess' before actual birth, and as such, a new born baby is considered to be one year old. This is something completely alien to western chronology (tuoi tay) based on the solar calendar. The "tuoi mu" system in counting age is still popular in rural areas while the official census applies western chronology standard for determining age. Because of this, Vietnamese adults are often confused when they talk about their children's age and the researcher may not always get the exact chronological age from his respondents. Moreover, the tradition of showing reverence to the elderly encourages people to mention their "tuoi mu" rather than "tuoi tay".

The "goddess age" system and traditional attitudes towards the maturity of young people are among the reasons behind a practice called "tao hon" (premature marriage). Though considered to be illegal, this practice still exists and has become more frequent recently (Do Thinh, 1994:36-37). It is apparent that the traditional definition of the maturity is not always in line with legal regulations and therefore, should be taken into account while considering the concept of the child in the cultural context of Vietnamese society.

Another aspect which influences the position of the children, their rights and obligations within the family is the kinship structure. My observations indicate that there are at least 3 factors involved. Firstly, the difference between the first-born and the last-born child in which the last-born child is customarily given more indulgence by parents. Secondly, the difference between children borne by the legitimate wife and by concubines. Although polygamy has been officially abrogated by law in Vietnam, men who have more than one wife are tolerated by local customs. Children borne by the first wife have
precedence over those borne by other wives regardless their age. Moreover in the system of extended family the relationships among individuals of the same lineage are based on a certain order of precedence. In this system, children of the same chronological age may belong to different generations and therefore have different obligations and authority. These factors will be taken into account in understanding the work performed by children in Vietnamese society (detailed analysis will be given in chapter 7; for more reference, see also Luong Van Hy, 1989).

While the traditional concept of the child is flexible, to put it mildly, the child concept as applied by official laws is fraught with ambiguities as well. The 1992 Constitution, by stipulating the right to vote for all citizens aged 18 and older (article 54), recognizes that those under 18 are not adults. Following this line, various laws and regulations (The Law on Marriage and Family, The Law on Military Service, The Law on Nationality, etc.), all recognize that people under 18 are socially not adults. Similarly, the Labour Code defines "an under-age worker is someone who is younger than 18 (article 119, SRV: 1994:97). However, it is worth noting that while chronological age is used as a bench-mark, all these laws do not give a clear cut definition on a boundary age of a child. There are legalistic ambiguities in determining the age of "the child". The 1994 Penal Code stipulates that people aged between 14 and under 16 years have to bear penal responsibility for serious, intentional offenses and those aged 16 and older shall bear full penal responsibility for any offense they commit (article 58, SRV 1994: 145). The 1993 Law on Education is determined to universalize the primary education for the people between 6 and 14 (article 1) while the Labour Code "prohibits the recruitment of workers who are less than 15 years old (article 120). Interestingly, while all existing laws do not recognize people under 18 years of age legally as adults, they do not consider people aged between 15 and 18 as “children”. The Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children includes only those under 16 (article 1; Vu Phap Luat, 1994). As it is explained by the law-makers:

People under 14 years of age are deemed unable to fully perceive and control their actions while people between 14 and 16 should be able to perceive what is good, what is bad. (Quoc Viet, 1993:141-142).

As pointed out previously, while it is difficult to delineate a clear-cut boundary age of a child, traditional practices and existing laws provide an interesting point of departure for approaching *the child* in the Vietnamese context: Those over 16 years old are no

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5 However, marriage ages for men and women are different. The Law on Marriage and the Family stipulates the minimum marriageable age for men is 20. For women, this is 18. (Vu Ngoc Binh (ed.), 1993).

6 The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* defines a child as some one who is under 18 years old.
longer considered "children". However, as suggested by Nieuwenhuys (1994), if we group those aged between 16 and 18 into "adult" category, we would wrongly suggest that they are socially adults. 7

In terms of age, the difficulty in determining the child concept reflects clearly that childhood is a long process of acculturation and socialization. One cannot one day wake up and become an adult. Therefore, a clear-cut boundary between the child and the adult should be regarded as a representative parameter for the research purpose.

Because of this, "children", as referred to in my study, are people under 16 years of age, and the focus will be on the age group between 6 and 15. This age group is also the target of various child labour studies (White 1976; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Reynolds 1991), which may facilitate comparative researches on child labour in the developing world. Moreover, the age of 15 is determined as the basic minimum age for employment by the International Labour Standard (ILO:1986). Nevertheless, to avoid arbitrary measures in the data collection process, observations were also extended to the age group of 16-18 and in some cases, data on labour of this age group are used for comparison.

Child work

The criteria applied to the concept relating to children's work vary widely, and the lack of such a conceptualization has been the main cause for the gap of information on the economic roles of children.

In general, current approaches to work performed by children are dominated by economic considerations. These approaches differentiate children's work as economic and non-economic, productive and non-productive, or sometimes use wages (paid and unpaid) as criteria of definition. Ahmad, for example, defines child labour as

"activities by children below the age of 14 years for remuneration, undertaken in institutional settings for third parties on regular basis with the underlying idea of earning a livelihood for themselves or their families" (Ahmad 1990:9).

This approach leaves some gaps yet to be covered if a more thorough analysis of child work is to be achieved. Because it deals only with the participation of children in the wage labour force, it neglects most children's work that occurs outside this sector. Additionally, empirical observations on the daily activities of children indicate that it is

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7 The exclusion of this age group from "children" is, in some instances, problematic because in most cultures people between 16 and 18 are not recognized as adults but as a loose grouping in-between, often referred to as adolescents. However, the concept of adolescent is very flexible. This situation also reflects that the transformation from a 'child' to an 'adult' is a process of gradual socialization. To my knowledge, this age group has been largely overlooked in academic literature.
very difficult to say what is economic and what is not, because in many instances children's contribution is indirect, and very often their labour is not paid.

In reality, the concept of children's work is quite a controversial subject. Its perceptions vary widely, depending on what cultural background and economic circumstances in which child labour takes place. Some work done by children is considered to be service rather than work itself, such as running errands for their parents or taking care of young siblings. Most parents do not consider such chores as work 'per se', or as the children in Giao village called it, "work without name". However, these activities can be construed as work, because if children do not perform these tasks, they would be done by others whose work may be paid in kind or cash. This situation requires that in order to understand children's work, we need to clarify the concept: what kind of children's activities should be considered as "work".

According to Morice, attempts at defining work at the most general level as a simple exertion of physical or intellectual energy is a somewhat unclear and undiscriminating concept. Morice proposes that a definition of work should be related not only to the activity itself but also to its economic and social contexts. He further advocates studying the question of work on the basis of whether or not it constitutes exploitation (Morice 1981:135-36), which often takes place outside the family framework.

Another attempt was made by Maria de la Luz Silva who defines work "as gainful activity for the production of goods or services" (Silva 1981:166). This is an interesting definition with which an approach to children's work can be made. Even though it does not emphasize too much the monetary aspects, it is still rather abstract. The complexity of child work needs more elaboration in a comprehensive definition, as argued by Schildkrout: "Work can only be defined in relation to the age and sex of the person performing a particular tasks and in the context of the cultural expectations appropriate to this person's status (Schildkrout 1981:94). On this basis, he proposes a definition of children's work as

"any activity done by children which either contributes to production, gives adults free time, facilitates the work of others, or substitutes for the employment of others" (1981:95).

This definition opens up various channels to analyze children's work in different situations and economic-cultural contexts. It allows researchers to approach child work from a broader perspective, which helps to understand the dialectical relation between work done by children and appreciation by society toward their work. For this reason, Schildkrout's concept of child work will be adopted as a guideline for data collection and analysis of children's work in this study.
By taking a wider framework for analyzing children's economic activities, I do not make a distinction between "child work" as something "acceptable" and "child labour" "unacceptable", which tend to be common in some recent literature on this subject (ILO 1993; George 1990). George, for instance, distinguishes child labour as "the employment of children and the extraction of their productivity for the economic gain of another, with debilitating ramifications on the psychological and physical development of the child", which is different from child work where the child is supposed to actively participate in the decision making and the appropriation of resources, and "the whole work process is a learning experience, entered into willingly." (George 1990:22-23). The differentiation of children's work into acceptable and unacceptable is, as criticized by White, "resulting from the awkward combination of protectionist approaches with the old 'abolitionist' legacy (White 1994: 47). Such an attitude towards children's work is, in fact, an adults' view which neglects the voices of working children, many of whom I talked with in the course of this study, just as White points out:

It is impossible to draw a clear and unambiguous line between 'child work' (the more acceptable forms of children's work, which are relatively harmless and in cases may even be beneficial) and 'child labour', unacceptable, exploitative and harmful forms of children's work, a 'social evil' (White 1996:10).

Moreover, the exploitation of working children cannot be easily be determined by "the extraction of their productivity for economic gain of another", as a measure used for adult work (Nardinelli 1990; Nieuwenhuys 1995).

Personally I prefer to use the term "children's work" rather than "child labour" in my writing, because it not only refers to work as an economic activity but also covers its social significance in a wider context.

Classification of children's work

There are considerable differences in the existing literature on the criteria for classifying children's work. This situation, on the one hand, reflects that "the desirable typology depends on the analytical focus of the research" (Rodgers and Standing 1981:1). On the other hand, it reveals that a uncritical application of the classification of children's work into different environments and situations may drive the process of data collection and analysis into irrelevancy or inadequacy.

In an elaborate paper designed for child employment studies, Rodgers and Standing distinguish nine most important categories of child activity, including: 1) Domestic work; 2) Non-domestic, non-monetary work; 3) Tied or bonded labour; 4) Wage labour; 5) Marginal economic activities; 6) Schooling; 7) Idleness and unemployment; 8) Recreation and leisure; 9) Reproductive (1981:1-11).
This typology of child activities is fraught with problems. It covers all types of activities, including sleeping and eating, idleness and leisure, etc., which can hardly be considered as work. Moreover, the criteria for classifying are not clear-cut and tend to overlap, which make the task of data collection difficult.

In general, most classifications of children's work, for instance, Morice (1981:136), Dube 1981:201-203, White 1994:46, Sabattini 1996:168), are based on several criteria in which both sectors of work and their nature are combined. These criteria can be generalized into 6 main characters:

1. The sectors in which work takes place (agriculture, industry, service, or urban and rural)
2. The fields of activities (productive and non productive or reproductive/domestic).
3. Remuneration (paid and unpaid)
4. Time (full-time, part-time, seasonal)
5. The nature of work (tied, bonded, employee, self-employed)
6. Work site (at home and outside, indoors and outdoors)

While these criteria are useful for studying children's work in different environments, they still leave some vagueness. Dube's classification for example, separates 3 groups of children's work: 1) Domestics; 2) Productive; and 3) Income-earning activities (1981:201-204). As indicated by empirical observations, it is difficult to draw a dividing line between productive and income-earning activities because productive activities are, in many instances, aimed at earning incomes. Similarly, domestic work is understood as activities taking place in the home, and without pay. This is one of the most common activities of Third World children. In reality, many children are hired to perform this work for wages. And in this case, labour is performed as domestic work but labour relations are not the same.

This suggests that while approaching children's work, it is necessary to indicate the sectors in which work takes place and the social relations of such activities. My own experience with children's work in rural Vietnam reveals that their economic activities are quite diverse, full of complexity and mobility. While agricultural production is still the dominant activity of most peasant households, there are various economic activities in non-farm sectors in which children are engaged in large numbers.

As pointed out earlier, my research is to investigate the patterns of children's work in an economy in transition. In such conditions, one may suppose some types of work have
changed while others have developed recently. For data collection and eventual analysis, I categorize rural children's work into three major sectors in which work takes place: 1) domestic work, 2) farm work, and 3) non-farm work.

However one must assume that children's work has changed not only in types but also in nature. An important aspect in the study on children's work is the social relations connected with their labour. Economic activities take place in an intricate set of relationships, among them social relations among people, (Marx 1980:740). These relations are bound to change under different socio-economic conditions. It is therefore necessary to consider the social aspects of children's work in a proper socio-economic context if the nature and significance of their work are to be understood. This can be observed and analyzed through the way children work and how results of their work are controlled and how their labour is used and appreciated.

By taking the village as an unit of analysis and putting children's work in the context of a transition economy, I will take into account all types of children's work and analyze their work in relation to concrete socio-economic circumstances of two periods before and after economic reforms.

Doing fieldwork in one's own culture

The concept of field work is deeply rooted in the tradition of the Western ethnography. Generally, when anthropologists conduct their studies in an alien and exotic society, they often begin by establishing good relations with the indigenous inhabitants and observing their culture. During colonial times, following this fashion, French scholars conducted a number of researches on cultures of the local population in Vietnam, including the ethnic minorities (Kleinen, 1997). However, since the political change in 1954 up to the present day, there have been very few foreign researchers allowed to conduct field work for a lengthy period of time in this country. Meanwhile until very recently, serious field work has been neglected by native scholars.

Unlike most western anthropologists conducting their researches in alien societies, I have carried out a long term field work in my own society. There have been discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of anthropologists who do their field work in familiar settings (Razavi 1992:152-163). Personally, during a year doing field research on child work in a Vietnamese village, I have encountered some interesting experiences which may serve as possible topics for further discussions. Among these are the sensitivity of the subject of child labour and the relationships between the researcher and his respondents at both institutional and household levels.
**Political factor**

While preparing a research proposal on child labour in Vietnam, very soon I received various reactions from my colleagues and professors at the University of Hanoi and the Social Research Institute. Some confidential advice came up to me, to the effect that this particular subject is not serious enough from an academic viewpoint, and it does not augur well for my future and so on. While some seriously questioned about the scientific significance of the topic of child labour, others considered it an outright political issue rather than an academic one. Despite the fact that child labour has long been a social and economic issue, for many local researchers and policy makers, this is a totally new subject. And those social scientists who might be fully aware of the problem, preferred to avoid this sensitive area, fearing it may cause them undue trouble.

Those policy makers and government officials with whom I had interviews, tended to regard child labour as a political issue, somehow connected with sensitive matters such as human rights and children's rights, which are hot topics in the international arena at the moment. They insisted that the government has done and will do everything possible to promote the well-being of children, pointing out that adequate laws and regulations have been promulgated for the protection of children, and Vietnam was among the first to have ratified the United Nations Conventions on the Right of the Child (1989). It seems for them such a legal system is good enough to protect working children from abuses and exploitation.

I should add that while my research project on child labour was not received with enthusiasm, fortunately there was no interference. This was partly explained by the fact that I am an "insider", considered to be more trustworthy than an "outsider".

**Researcher-respondents relationship**

One of the most essential conditions for social anthropologists to carry out their field research successfully is the relationship between the researcher and their respondents. This will have a great effect on the reliability of qualitative data (Devereux & Hoddinot 1992; Streefkerk 1993). My own experience indicates that even though the researcher is an "insider" who does field work in his own society, speaks the same language as his respondents and has good knowledge of the local customs, he may still face difficulties if there is no confidence between the researcher and respondents.

As a matter of procedures, I started my field research by an official introduction from the local authority to the villagers. The head of Giao village took me to visit some families in his village. He proudly introduced me as a "central cadre" (can bo trung uong) who would come and stay in the village for a year to do a research on children's work and education. I was a bit surprised at being called a "central cadre", since I had told him I was a teacher at the University of Hanoi. The head of village later explained to me that there was no big difference between a teacher and a cadre, but a "cadre" is no doubt more
impressive than "teacher" in the eyes of the villagers, and this in the end would facilitate my field work.

The first week in the village passed smoothly while I spent time examining local reports and statistics kept at the commune's office. However, when I attempted to get to know the local people, I soon encountered a rather cold reception. While they did not refuse to see me, our conversations tended to be very formal. My requests to talk to the children were often turned down politely by their parents with such excuses as: "They are just children", and "they are too young and naive to talk any sense". Faced with such negative reactions, I began to think that my role as a researcher seemed to have aroused suspicion among the villagers. Eventually I found out that just before I arrived, there had been a robbery attempt in the village and the robbers were caught and killed by the local villagers. Later I found out that the villagers had taken me for a policeman who was sent to investigate the robbery.

My promotion to "central cadre" by the village head did little in facilitating my research at the earlier stages. A particular event made my presence more than suspect in the eyes of the villagers. When a band of gamblers was caught red-handed in a high stakes game, I was considered to be a police informer. About the same time an inspector from the district came down to assess the taxes to be collected from the local wood carving industry. Again my presence in the village was suspected to have something to do with tax collection.

But somehow I managed to clear up this misunderstanding with the villagers at an early stage. And once trust was established I was able to carry out my work without any further hindrance. The lesson from this experience is that the indigenous researcher often takes for granted his relatively good access to local population and therefore might neglect to cultivate good relationship with respondents.

Great care in the way how children should be approached has also been learnt. The Vietnamese have a saying "ra duong hoi nguoi gia, ve nha hoi tre nho", which means that "if you want to know your way around, ask the elderly; if you want to know what really goes on in the home, ask the children". This saying reveals a behavioural pattern in the daily routine of the Vietnamese. It implies that one should not ask the children about "kitchen stories" in the absence of adult members of their families when you are still considered a stranger in their eyes. And the researcher should only try to interview children after a good rapport has been established between him and the head of the child's family. This principle is relevant particularly in rural Vietnam, where "children affairs" are

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* The term commune (xa) as referred to in this study denotes an administrative unit under the district level. In Vietnam, a commune may include several villages or a single village, depends on the size of village. In my case study, Giao village is a dependent unit managed by the commune.
very sensitive and the patriarchal culture and the power of male heads of family are still very much alive.

Hull particularly draws attention of the researcher working on child labour to some obtrusiveness inherent in the process of participant observation which may change the children's work patterns in response to a researcher's presence (Hull 1981: 55). This is quite significant if the period of field research is limited. My own experience shows that one needs time and patience to gain the children's trust before they would talk to you. Moreover, the gap of age, gender and social position between the researcher and his child respondents, particularly girls, could be a handicap. In a society dominated by men, girls' opinions are usually overlooked. During my fieldwork in Giao village, I found that it occurred very often that a male head of household interfered in our talks by saying that his daughter (or wife) was "ignorant", making them more shy. But this bias subsided gradually when I was no longer considered an outsider in their eyes. I noticed that sometimes the participation of male heads in our conversations turned out to become an interesting discussion among the interviewer, parents and their children. But to do this, one certainly needs not only patience but also enough time in the field.

The book: focus, justification and presentation

This research is a description of children's work in the context of an economy in transition in rural Vietnam. The emphasis of the study is placed on qualitative aspects to investigate the economic roles of children in a changing society. Based on the analysis of changes of rural socio-economic life as a consequence of recent economic reforms, the study attempts to access their impact upon the patterns of children's economic activities in a village located in the Red River delta of northern Vietnam.

The problem of child labour is multi-dimensional and ought to be considered at several levels. First we shall examine changes of children's involvement in work under the collective system and their participation in labour process after the introduction of the economic reforms which recognized the individual peasant household as a production unit. In order to get insight into the patterns of children's economic activities, data will be collected and analyzed according to types/sectors of work, then classified under domestic, farm and non-farm activities.

At a higher dimension, the data of child labour collected from the case study of the village will be studied in the framework of structural changes of production, especially in the distribution of land and the development of small scale industries. The data will also be examined in the light of social-cultural constraints, intra-family relationships, kinship and social network.
Furthermore, we shall scrutinize the changes in the relationship between education and child labour, as indicated by the increase of the drop-out rate since economic reforms. While this may reflect the intensive involvement of children in the labour force, it also poses a dilemma to the authorities in the field of public education during the transitional period.

It is unavoidable that questions may arise concerning data collection, whether the quantitative data support arguments and to what extent the qualitative data are reliable.

Naturally, solid data on children's participation in the work process have to be a prerequisite if one is to examine the changes of their economic activities from a historical perspective. In reality, such an approach is not that simple. Firstly, children's participation in labour force has not always been covered by official statistics. The periodic census only focused on large scale industries and services in state-run sectors while most work done by children occurs at the household level and in the informal economic sectors. Secondly, the criteria for collecting data on working children are not always uniformly applied in statistics—such notions as age groups, work and labour, etc. For this, even when the statistical data on child labour is available, the comparison is often a difficult task. Thirdly, the quantitative data obtained from the field work of my current study, based on techniques of counting labour and time-location budget, may be incompatible with labour data of an earlier (pre-economic reforms) period collected on the basis of recall methods.

For all these reasons, the emphasis of this study is placed on qualitative analysis rather than quantitative. Meanwhile, the available statistics on child labour and education will be used as much as possible to support the qualitative data.

Another aspect is the subjectivity of qualitative information. This problem has actually been raised since the 1960s among social anthropologists who conducted their field work by participant observation. While the aims of social scientific studies are to reach the objective explanation, the subjectivity of the researcher still remains as an undeniable factor during the process of collecting and analyzing the data (Breman 1985; Nieuwenhuys 1994). On the other hand, respondents are liable to be subjective on the particular subject, which may lead them to idealize or to deny their past experiences. Fully aware of these biases during my field work, I have cross checked these data by interviewing different people at various times and confronting them with available written sources. Moreover, the dialectical approach to anthropological knowledge, as pointed out by Kloos (1988:288), is an interaction between the socio-cultural backgrounds of field workers and the people they study. It is fair to say that "the ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial-committed and incomplete", (Clifford 1986:7).

Focusing on the impact of economic reforms upon the children's work, this study is not designed to find a solution to the child labour issue. However, by pointing out the
changing process of children's economic activities, and analyzing the problem of children's entry into the labour market in a fast changing socio-economic environment, it is my wish to make a contribution to the on-going debate on this very topical issue.

The available literature, though still scarce at present, points to a similar trend in the increase of child labour and the decline of school attendance in other economies in transition, for example the case of China (Fyfe 1985; Croll 1995; see also: Carnoy & J. Samoff (eds.), 1990; Cornia & Sipos (eds.), 1991). These findings suggest the desirability for further comparative studies on child labour in transitional economies.

The research results are presented in nine chapters. Chapter 1 introduces principles and experiences while doing fieldwork on child labour. It particularly suggests a way to look at the rural children's economic activities by classifying their work into three major domains (domestic, farm and non-farm work) from which the social relations of children's work can be examined. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical framework for analyzing children's work in the context of social change. Adopting an approach to child labour as a social construction, the chapter analyses the structural changes of the socio-economic system and their possible effects on children. Chapter 3 expounds in details the process of rural transformation taking place in Giao village.

The second part examines changes in children's economic activities in Giao village before and after economic reforms in the 1980s, on the fields of domestic work (chapter 4), farm work (chapter 5) and non-farm work (chapter 6). The findings indicate that while gender and age are still the essential factors of children's work, their involvement in work tends to become more intensive and the nature of their work also change accordingly, particularly in the market employment sector.

The third part considers how the cultural constraints, social institutions and formal education impact on the process of childhood, socialization and work. Chapter 7 analyses the constraints of the family, patrilineage, traditional ethics in relation to the child and child work. It further points out that social value of children is often the deep cause of high fertility in rural Vietnam while the family morality (Dao Hieu, filial duty) imposed by Confucian ethics still prevailing in the society puts more obligations rather than rights on the children. Chapter 8 examines the linkage between children's work and education. High drop-out rate and the depressing state in schooling support the assumption of intensive involvement of children in market employment since economic reforms.

Finally, the conclusion will summarize the major analyses presented in the thesis. The implication is that it is worth considering the issues of child labour in the light of production system, socio-cultural constraints and public education, and that child labour studies which neglect the larger context of society might not yield valuable insights for practical actions.
Map 1. Vietnam and Hai Duong province
Chapter 2

CHILDREN’S WORK IN A TRANSITIONAL ECONOMY:
A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

...Viec nha, hoi tre nho
To know what really goes on in the home, ask the children
(Local saying)

Research background

This study examines changing patterns of children's work in response to the shifting from a centrally-planned economy to a market-oriented one in northern rural Vietnam. These responses suggest changes in types, extent and nature of children's economic activities. From a perspective of socio-economic changes, this study shall raise the following issues: 1. Types and nature of children's economic activities; 2. Socio-cultural constraints of children's work; 3. Relationships between children's work and education.

The study will also deal with questions beyond the household parameters such as distribution of productive resources, relations of production, cultural constraints and social institutions and their changes, which are bound to have effects on children's work. From this broader perspective of change, the research then looks into the household unit, examining intra-household relations, family organization, hierarchies of age and sex, perceptions of norms and values concerning the economic activities of children, the child and childhood, conflict between work and education facing children and their parents in response to new circumstances.

Although I cannot deal at length with all these issues, in this dissertation, I would suggest that the shifting from collective economy to individual household production in rural northern Vietnam has had strong impacts upon the patterns and nature of children's economic activities. I suppose that such economic reforms liberated individuals from formal constraints of the collective regime and opened alternative options for people's life strategy. The increasing entry of children into market employment in recent years, which appear as individual acts, should not be looked at separately from the social environment at large. Therefore, this study will examine children's work in close relation with structural factors, namely the economic system, socio-cultural constraints and public education.

The dissertation's theoretical orientation has been developed on the basis of the limitations of child labour studies so far which often focus on an exclusively economic interpretation, regarding children merely as an economic asset of their parents while
neglecting the socio-economic context within which children's work occurs. In
overcoming these shortcomings, I shall try to move beyond a narrative account of the
household level and look at children's work from a broader perspective of social
transformation in order to understand how changes on a macro level impact on the nature
of their work.

Theoretical perspectives

Scientific concerns with and discussions of child labour erupted in the early
decades of this century when economists and demographers started to mention the "popu-
lation explosion" in the Third World and raised questions such as why peasant societies
have such a high fertility. With a view to offering practical intervention, many
demographic studies have formulated the problems and issues in a functionalist and
determinist way. Their underlying assumption is that children are economically valuable to
their parents, and the value of children could be accurately measured in terms of "costs and
benefits". The value-of-children (VOC) approach which links high fertility with child
labour was strongly influenced by a fascinating study launched by M. Mamdani, "Myth of
Population Control" (1972). Mamdani studied children's economic roles in a village of
India and came to suggest that a variety of waged and non-waged tasks performed by
children were complementary to those of adults and were necessary for the reproduction
of peasant families. According to Mamdani, in the agricultural societies, labour is the most
important factor. A large family is an asset and a good strategy for household wealth
accumulation. The conclusion from Mamdani's work is that "those who had few resources
responded to adversity not by decreasing their number, but by increasing them" (Mamdani

This research trend that links high fertility to child work in the peasant societies
has been followed by a number of researchers, among them Hull (1975), Mueller (1976),

White (1975) attempted to measure the economic value of children empirically. He
used the method of collecting time allocation budgets to study the relationship between
production and reproduction in a Javanese village. His work indicated that by the age of
eight, the economic contribution of children to the sustenance of the household was often
equal to that of adults (1975:135).

Nag and Kak revisited an Indian village and found that the value of children is at
least manifested in three dimensions: 1) a source of labour; 2) a source of old age security;
and 3) a source of risk insurance (Nag & Kak 1984).
In terms of VOC analysis, works conducted by Bulatao (1975) and Hull (1977) also provide a similar assumption that children make a substantial contribution to the well-being of the peasant family. These studies however emphasize that having more children is the outcome of a specific interplay of economic, social, cultural and psychological values.

The demographic approach to children's work has caused a fascinating debate on the causal relation between high fertility and the utility of children for the peasant household. Repetto (1978) while commenting on the work by Nag and White, put forth an opposite view, pointing out that economic welfare of the household does not appear to be positively related to the children's labour contribution. Empirical studies conducted in various villages of India, for instance, by Dasgupta (1977) and Vlassoff (1979), who, like White, used the method of making quantitative assessments of children's and adults' work inputs, led to the conclusion that "the common view of young children as "poor man's capital" is not accurate (Vlassoff 1979:428). This finding forced the demographic researchers to rethink their "costs-benefits analysis". White later on re-examined five case studies on children's work in Asian developing countries based on a similar approach, and came to the conclusion that "the associations between fertility, lower labour income and high inputs of child labour, prove only that there is something interesting to explain, and many empirical studies of 'economic value of children' have not progressed much further; discussion tends to centre on the appropriate definition, measurement and valuation of 'costs' and 'benefits' and in the end produces little more than the conclusion that reproductive behaviour reflects these rather obvious realities" (White 1982:605).

The ensuing debate on the determinants of high fertility in peasant societies reveals several weaknesses. First, the cost-benefit analysis of children for the rural poor overlooks the historical, social and cultural roles of children in society (Caldwell 1976, 1982). It fails to consider the symbolic meaning and centrality of children-- the social values that might underpin economic behaviour (Rogers & Standing 1981, Goddard & White 1982). Also the use of the concept of the household as an unproblematic unity, has generally led to the negation of internal contradictions within the family, notably male versus female, seniors versus juniors, etc. On the other hand, focusing quite exclusively on the micro-setting of the peasant household would fail to provide an overall analysis of the wider socio-political parameters in which the actions of its members are embedded (Nieuwenhuyys 1990:5; 1996:241). The mode of explanation of economic utility of children as labour force and insurance has been criticized as an extremely rational and post hoc functionalist. Moreover, by rationalizing the decisions of having or not having more children and the expectations of the parents, "Mamdani, Nag and Kak problemize the relationship between what people think will happen and what actually will happen" because at the time of
making decisions, one did not know how the future would be, unlike the researchers now looking back (Saaval 1997:192).

In developing the VOC approach, Caldwell (1982) suggested a theory of inter-generational wealth flows to analyze the parents-children relationships. He proposed that wealth flows are an aggregate of work, money, expenses, gifts, services and securities. The shifting from an economy based on familial relations to a society where mass education and waged labour are essential has changed the direction of wealth flows in the families. In earlier times, wealth would flow from children to parents. When the society changes, children no longer work for their parents but rather, they derive wealth from their parents for the costs of schooling and upbringing. Consequently, this would lead to a rational choice of having low fertility. This theoretical concept of wealth flows was, however, not tested empirically to measure the wealth flows between generations and did not specify by which mechanism this choice is translated into fertility behaviour.

While the demographic approach concentrates on the linkages between the fertility practice and value of children, the economic theories seek to uncover the routine of children's entry into the labour market and to explain why children do work. Child labour in the course of industrialization of 19th century Europe was a major concern of Marxist economics. Marx refers to child labour very often in his influential book "Capital", particularly in chapters 8 and 13 of volume 1 (Marx 1976). From Marx's labour theory of value, two major points concerning child labour are drawn, referring to: a/reproduction of labour power and the position of children's labour in the capitalist labour market and b/ exploitation of child labour.

According to Marx, the reproduction of labour power is normally organized through households consisting of husbands, wives and children, in which the husband is responsible for earning money and the wife for domestic labour. The male adult's wage is assumed to normally constitute a 'family wage' necessary for the subsistence of the whole household. The development of capitalism with modern machinery put all the family members, regardless of age or gender, under the direct rule of the capitalists. Marx went further by pointing out that when women and children enter the labour market, they would lower the male wages and therefore increase the level of exploitation by capitalists. In Marx's point of view, "it was not however the misuse of parental power that created the direct or indirect exploitation of immature labour power by capital, but rather the opposite, i.e. the capitalist mode of exploitation, by sweeping away the economic foundation which corresponded to parental power, made use of parental power into its misuse" (Marx 1976:620).

Apparently, Marx regards the cause of the entry of children into the labour market not as autonomous or as a result of the decision of individual enterprises but rather, as
shaped by the development of the economic system as a whole. In other words, children are pushed into work by the development of the capitalist system.\(^9\)

As far as exploitation of child labour is concerned, Marx suggests that the employment of children is one way in which the capitalists can increase their exploitation, as he puts it: “machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms the principle object of capital's exploiting power, at the same time raises the degree of exploitation” (Marx 1976:495).

The Marxist economic approach to child labour is useful while considering the entry of children into market employment and the exploitation of child labour. It is particularly helpful to look at child labour phenomenon in terms of historical evolution of the production system. By pointing out the relationship between capitalist accumulation and child labour exploitation, it advocates openly a political struggle to change the economic realities of workers' lives. However, this approach leaves some gaps that need to be considered. First, by focusing on the economic system as a whole, it neglects the intra-household relationships by considering the parental power as unproblematic. It regards the economic system a real actor putting children to work rather than individuals. This often causes difficulties while considering the peasant economies because it ignores the role of households in labour organization and production. Secondly, as pointed out by Elson (1982), "the Marxist concepts confuse economic dependence with social dependence" and therefore characterize children as 'supplementary' labour power while empirical studies indicate that children might be de facto 'breadwinners', supporting other members of their family, especially in the absence of a male 'household head'. Thirdly, Marxist economic approach does not take into account the cultural constraints of children's work, which are based on hierarchies of kinship, age, gender and ideology. As I will point out later in this study, cultural constraints play a vital component shaping children's work. For instance, in those societies influenced by Confucianism, filial duty is often a motive encouraging children to earn money to help their parents.

Unlike Marxist economic theory which treats the child labour phenomenon as a consequence of the pressure exerted by capitalist accumulation, the neo-classical economic theory examines issues of child labour in the framework of households. The neo-classical approach is "concerned with the household as an optimizing, rational decision-making unit, in which children are depicted as both consumption and investment 'good' (Rodgers & Standing 1981:26). Using the key concept of 'demand' (capitalist firms' side) and 'supply' (households' side), this approach suggests that the differentiation of children's labour is not imposed by capitalist enterprises but is, on the contrary, the results

\(^9\) Criticism on theoretical frameworks of Marxist economics, neo-classical economics and feminist economics regarding child labor is largely derived from Elson (1982).
of a difference in the labour endowments of children and adults (Elson 1982; Rosenzweig 1981). The neoclassical proponents believe that child labour is essentially a problem of household economics (Nieuwenhuys 1996:24) and therefore "as family incomes rose, child labour declined" (Nardinelli 1990:102). Looking at child labour in terms of household economy has been espoused by a number of studies published under the auspices of national and international agencies such as UNICEF, WHO and ILO (Nieuwenhuys 1996:241).

The neo-classical approach leaves also some questions that remain to be answered. First, the key concept is the exchange between the labour market and the households in which preferences of all household members are taken into account. This is problematic because, as Elson argues, it fails to explain the cases where household members are able to freely enter the labour market and leave the household, assuming that household functions as a firm itself. And in such a case, the neo-classical framework does not provide adequate instruments to analyze the internal relations within the household (Elson 1982:482-3). The second dilemma facing the theory of 'household preference' is that by stressing on household economic behaviour, it obscures the socio-economic system which might have been socially predominant as opposed to the household individual motivations. Another problem is how to use the concept of 'marginal productivity of labour' to analyze the exploitation of child labour. "According to the neoclassical definition, economic exploitation exists when the value of the worker's marginal product (that is, what the worker adds to the revenues of the firm) exceeds the wage rate" (Nardinelli 1990:67-68).

While one may agree this is the case of apprentices or trainees (Elson 1982:483), the problem still remains is that "there is no physical measure of the marginal productivity of child labour" and therefore "the question of exploitation of children cannot be resolved through the direct measurement of neoclassical exploitation" (Nardinelli 1990:70-71).

In the search for a comprehensive approach to child labour, some social researchers have found in feminism a new channel to conceptualize children's work (Schildkrot 1980, Elson 1982, De Tray 1983, Wyer 1986, Dube 1988, Reynolds 1991, Nieuwenhuys 1990). Actually, feminist economics does not pay direct attention to child labour in particular. As Elson points out, feminist economics is "an approach which rethinks economic categories themselves, in the light of feminism" (Elson 1982:488). Feminist researchers have argued that economic phenomena, such as skill classifications and wage levels, are not determined by purely economic factors. They are neither 'object' in the sense of deriving simply from the material requirements of the process of production of goods and services, and reproduction of labour power, nor are they the result of purely personal preferences about type of work and hours of leisure. On the contrary, they are structured systematically by the hierarchy of gender-- a hierarchy in which women as a gender are subordinate to men. The feminist economic approach emphasizes that the
forms of authority exercised over women workers in the capitalist labour process are not simply personifications of the power of the capital, they are also personifications of the power of the men. The feminists therefore view the differentiation of women in the capitalist labour market, not simply derived from capitalist enterprises. It is to be understood in terms of the permeation of production by the hierarchy of gender (Elson 1982).

The feminist economic theory has been applied to the field of child labour. Feminist researchers see an analogy between the position of children and that of women. Elson (1982) argues that the differentiation of children's labour in the capitalist labour market cannot be derived from the process of capital accumulation alone. The kind of exploitation to which children are vulnerable cannot be understood only in terms of concepts such as the appropriation of surplus. Based on this starting point, she expounded a new approach to child labour, defined as the seniority system:

Instead of the concept of subordination through parental authority, we might use a concept of the social construction of an age hierarchy, of a system of seniority in which those in junior position are unable to achieve full social status in their own right (Elson 1982:491).

The seniority approach contends that the position of children in the capitalist labour market can be interpreted in terms of the way in which economic relations, though in themselves not ascriptive of seniority, are bearers of seniority, as Elson puts it:

It is not the case that the logic of capital accumulation first defines jobs and wage rates for those jobs, and then employers find that children are most suited for some of these jobs. Jobs are designed with the seniority system in mind; wage systems are designed with the seniority system in mind. The seniority system obviously encompasses a range of gradations, not simply the division between children and adults, but children are at the bottom of it (Elson 1982:492-3).

In brief, according to Elson, the seniority is a hierarchical system in which those in junior positions are unable to achieve fully their own right. It is not the nature of what children do that is inferior. Children's work is valued as inferior because it is performed by children.

The different theories mentioned above lay further the basis for efforts to rethink the problems and to search for a comprehensive approach to children's work.

While realizing the limitations of the demographic approach, one cannot completely ignore the relation between low labour-income and child labour in the peasant societies. However, White found that most studies based on cost-benefit analysis are analyses of 'symptoms' rather than 'causes'. This led him to reconsider what needs examining is not a rather trivial question like "when children work, are they valuable" but rather "what are the conditions giving rise to the interrelated phenomena of low labour income and child labour", which is aimed at broadening the analytical framework of the
conditions and relations within which work takes place and is rewarded (White 1982:605-6).

In seeking a new approach to child work, Nieuwenhuys employed the ethnographic approach that the work undertaken by children acquires its meaning from the contextual situation in which it is embedded:

...the work undertaken by these children, however, is shaped in response to economic process, in which children are, with the households to which they belong, but small wheels. The standards by which children's work is valued and, more generally, the way they are subordinated to seniors, reflect patterns of socialization and more in general, attitudes with respect to children's role in society (Nieuwenhuys 1990:267).

The implication from Nieuwenhuys's study is that it may be essential to distinguish between the economic valuation of children's work and its meaning for the continuity of social system. Therefore all kinds of activities undertaken by children, which directly or indirectly contribute to income generation should be taken into consideration. Apart from offering new theoretical perspectives, her work can also be seen as a pioneer study in the field, which moves beyond the “conventional socialization” approach to children's work and focuses on children's voices and life worlds.

Recent efforts apparently do not tackle the problem of child labour in terms of pressure of the capitalist economic system alone, nor do they concentrate separately on purely economic reasons and rational weight of the individual peasant households. They rather look instead at the phenomenon in the structural framework of the integrated socio-economic system and cultural environment. The failure of the educational system is also regarded as a crucial factor influencing the entry of children into the labour market at an early age.

Adopting a new approach to children's work, researchers recently tend to view children as active social beings instead of passive recipients. This trend puts emphasis on children's life-worlds, their own social network, understandings, preferences and life styles (Boyden, Ling and Myers 1998; Woodhead 1999). Such a notion of children’s work stems from the “new anthropology of childhood” which came to the fore front during the 1990s (Jame and Prout 1990; Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995, Stephens 1995; Corsaro 1997, Jenks 1996; Jenks, Prout and James (1998). While this new perspective carries important implications for practical actions in combating child labour in terms of the “empowerment from below” (White 1994), it leaves out some aspects that require critical examinations.

By emphasizing children as active social beings capable of creating and negotiating their own social worlds, relying more on peers rather than on adults in the formation of their understandings, preferences and life styles, one tends to blur out the concept of the child vis-à-vis adults. Traditionally, the child is considered as “young
humanity” who is entitled to protection and should be given reasonable chances for future development (Woodhead 1990:60). Accordingly, childhood is regarded as the realm of innocence and during the process of childhood, the child’s education is of primary concern. In this sense, the new perspective of childhood seems to have moved from one extreme to another.

While approaching children’s work as a research subject and listening to children’s voices, one should bear in mind that work is, in its nature, a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It does not occur in a vacuum but involves an intricate web of inter-relations between employers and employees, parents and children; between labourers and productive resources, capital and social institutions. By focusing only on children, the researcher may overlook the parts played by other actors, no less vital, who are intimately involved in the work process. Additionally, my own experience with working children shows that they generally strive to maximize their earnings but at such a young age, they may not be well aware of physical dangers and health hazards inherent in the nature of their work. Furthermore, as one may have noticed, most of children’s work takes place in the informal sectors where the primary concern of employers is profit making. For these reasons, information collected from children alone may not reflect the whole picture.

In brief, children’s work, as a social reality rather than an abstract economic entity, has been studied from different angles. In the anthropological perspective, it often invokes a requirement of the conceptualization of children’s work, its social-cultural meanings and relation between children’s work and the socialization process (Reynolds 1991). The different approaches and the criticism outlined here do not constitute an attempt to refute them but merely suggest that the formulation of a universal and all-encompassing theory of child work is very difficult. This difficulty can be explained in two aspects: 1) The phenomenon of working children exists as a social reality but social researchers tend to analyze it through their subjective views, particularly since the problem of child labour is easily influenced by personal emotion of the individual researcher. 2) Child labour has existed through the ages although the historical process differs in time and space. Apart from the rising process of globalization, different societies have their own economic-cultural characteristics as well as their own perception of children’s roles in society. These two aspects (subjective views and different social contexts) usually create heated debates among scholars on 'determinants' of children's work.

Perceptions drawn from different theories previously referred to induce this researcher to assume that children's work is to be approached and analyzed in both its economic roles and socio-cultural meanings. It is important that analysis be focused on a particular society and from this, various models of explanation and implications may ensue. This means that the above mentioned theories, in one sense or another, can be used as tools for understanding the problem of child labour and that they should not necessarily exclude one another. For instance, the suggestion derived from Marxist economic theory is significant for this study to look at the child labour issues in the context of the transition
from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented model which is underway in Vietnam.

From such a broad perception, I shall adopt for this study the theoretical suggestion regarding children’s work as a social construction raised by Rodgers and Standing. Their comprehensive conceptual framework is proposed as follows:

Among the structural influences on the extent and nature of the economic roles of children in low-income countries, two sets of factors can be identified: first, the mode of production; and second, the associated structure of the labour market (Rodgers & Standing 1981:13).

In addition to structural socio-economic factors, at least two sets of determinants of child work should be considered: (1) the social and cultural framework—attitudes to children and their roles, cultural constraints, and social institutions which govern the process of acculturation and socialization; and (2) the nature of decision-making at the household or other micro unit level, and the employment of children as an outcome of the trade-offs between alternatives in economic behaviour (Rodgers & Standing 1981:23).

This theoretical suggestion allows the researcher to observe directly how changes of the socio-economic system during the transition in Vietnam impact upon children's work. It also opens up some lines to apply for analyzing the intra-societal variation, including comparisons of families, social groups and other economically distinct sectors, particularly the nature of the work done or the setting in which it occurs and the social organization of work. In order to develop this theoretical framework, the following sections will be devoted to analyses of the socio-economic context of transition taking place in Vietnam after economic reforms. By emphasizing the related developments of the mode of production and social issues, I shall indicate how the economic roles of children will vary according to the transition to a market-oriented economy.

The economic context of transition and children’s work

As proposed earlier, this research will look at the issues of child labour as a component of the socio-economic structure. This derives from the assumption that there is a coherent set of conditions relating to the external environment of household economy such as resource distribution, technology, production relations, surplus extraction, employment opportunity, etc. to its internal organization such as structure of the family, rigid and hierarchical authority patterns and control of children's work and product (Rodgers &

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10 The term of 'transition' (qua do) is often used by Vietnamese Marxist theoreticians to refer to a social transformation from a mode of production to another, for instance, a transition from capitalism to socialism. It is however difficult to judge whether the current transition in Vietnam is oriented to the so-called socialism. To avoid a possible misunderstanding of using such terms with all their inherent political implications, I will use hereafter the term 'social transformation' and 'transition' strictly to describe the process of transformation of the economic system from the collective production into production based on individual households.
Standing 1981). From this assumption, it could be expected that the patterns and nature of economic activities of children will change during the transition of the economic system. In arguing that children's work and children's welfare are heavily influenced by a host of structural factors, it is therefore essential to analyze the theoretically assumed consequences of the socio-economic transition and its potential impacts on the economic role of children in Vietnam. In order to provide some ideas on the changes of the production system, let me first summarize the significant features of these changes by highlighting some sets of contrasts of the two economic models--the model of collective economy previously existing and the model of individual household production currently prevailing in rural northern Vietnam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The model of collective economy</strong></th>
<th><strong>The model of individual household economy</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(before economic reforms)</td>
<td>(after economic reforms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Production activities were organized by co-operatives and work teams.</td>
<td>1. Production activities are organized by individual peasant households.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Productive resources (land, draft animals, tools, etc.) were collectivized. Private production (particularly of-farm) was discouraged.</td>
<td>2. Productive resources, particularly rice land, are redistributed to peasant households. Private production (farm and off-farm) is highly promoted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The labour market was controlled by the state in two major sectors: state-run and co-operative. Job diversity was strictly limited and education was of crucial importance for rural youngsters to improve their conditions.</td>
<td>3. A free labour market has emerged, made up of multiple economic sectors. More options and job opportunities have opened up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The division of labour, economic strategies and incomes were pre-determined by co-operatives. The state, with its socialist-oriented ideology and legal system, was against social inequality. The gaps between the rich and poor were minimized.</td>
<td>4. Labour division, economic strategies and incomes are determined by individual households. Social stratification is acceptable and private wealth accumulation is secured by the legal system. The gap between the rich and poor is widening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Costs for health services, education, social securities and welfare were wholly or partly subsidized by the collectively-shared system and the state.</td>
<td>5. Costs for health services, education, social securities and welfare are wholly or partly borne by individual households.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The structural change of production systems from collective to individual household economy as presented above has some implications. It suggests a set of interrelated phenomena following the shifting of economic system: 1) Reversal of social relations of production; 2) Increase of privatization and entrepreneurship in small-scale enterprises and household production; 3) Emergence of a free labour market in which
labour becomes a commodity; 4) Increase in social stratification and polarization; and 5) Increased burden on the individual household budget as social services deteriorate.

Since we assume that the process of transformation leads to changes in the economic role of children, it would be essential to examine the question how such changes affect children’s lives.

**Impacts of horizontal mobility: diversification in economic activities**

Shortly after the land reform which abolished the landlord and rich peasant classes, collectivism in agricultural production was established in rural northern Vietnam. Under the administration of co-operatives, almost all material sources of production were exclusively controlled and managed by the collective system. Family handicrafts and small trading, which had been a part of peasant economy, became targets of being "remoulded" by strict regulations and control because they were regarded as potential seeds of capitalist development (Vien KSNDTC 1965).

In reality, agriculturalization of economic activities with an emphasis on rice monoculture was the overriding feature in rural development during the period of the cooperative regime. Observations of the process of economic transition to the market orientation in the last decade in rural Vietnam on the other hand, indicate a rising diversification and commercialization of production in which non-farm activities have become an important form of work. At the national level, statistics indicate a considerable decrease in industrial employment in the state sector during the 1980s and 1990s and a dramatic increase in industrial employment by the private sector. For instance, in 1984, the annual percentage rate of growth of employment in state-run industries was still 5.9 percent. This rate began to decrease in 1986 at 0.0 per cent and fell to (-)7.1 percent in 1989 due to the retrenchment of a large number of workers and civil servants. Conversely, the annual growth of industrial employment in the private sector increased from 0.7 per cent in 1986 to 27 per cent in 1990 (ILO 1993, table 5).

In sheer numbers, the private sector has shown a dramatic increase in employment, from 3.7 million employees in 1988 to 9.7 million in 1991, a 162 percent addition in only three years (ILO 1993:2). This increase can be attributed to a fast expansion of small scale industries and household enterprises, particularly in the rural areas. For instance, ILO statistics (1993) point out that in 1990, more than 330,000 household and individual enterprises were operating, accounting for 84 percent of employment in private industry.12

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11 In the centrally planned economy, labour was theoretically not regarded a commodity.

12 An other source provided by the UNDP (1994:3) gives a figure of 1,6 million households involved in
The increase of private and household production has led to changes in the composition of the industrial workforce. In 1990, the state and collective enterprises still accounted for 61.3 percent. This rate decreased to 43.9 percent in 1992 while the private and household enterprises increased correspondingly.

Consequently, the composition of industrial output value also changed. During the period between 1990 and 1993, the increase in industrial output value of the state-run and collective sectors was only 3.6 percent while the rate of private and household sector was 32.7 percent (UNDP 1994). The increase of rural small industries and private enterprises briefly presented here has some theoretical implications regarding children's work.

First, the opportunities to work for wages for rural dwellers have increased. The nature of rural enterprises and cottage industries worldwide is taking advantage of all household labour force, including children. Particularly, since the returns to labour in rice production are extremely low, and not a source of cash incomes, wage work in small industries is most welcomed by all peasant households.

Secondly, the decline of the state-run and collective enterprises and the increase of private sector and household production imply a loosening in the implementation of labour laws, in terms of recruitment, level of wages, working hours, working age and so on, and inspection would hardly occur. This is quite significant when one looks at the increase in recruitment of child workers. Worldwide experience has shown that most working children are not found in large firms but rather in small manufacturing enterprises (Fyfe 1988:4-5; Burra 1995).

Thirdly, the growth of private enterprises and wage labour are more or less associated with capitalist relations of production. In the period of collective system, children mainly worked at home, doing domestic chores and on the farm for their parents. They had little opportunity to take part in market employment. The fast expansion of small industries has created not only more opportunities for wage work but also constitutes an additional form of capital accumulation. From this perspective, child workers are a potential source of labour for their cheap wages and availability, which entails an intensification of child labour exploitation. The history of industrialization of the 19th century Europe has shown that in the long run, the industrial revolution has brought about to a decline in child employment (Nardinelli 1990:102) but in the early stage of capitalist accumulation, extensive employment and exploitation of children were obviously widespread, to the extent that the "employers commonly hired whole families for a "family wage" (Rodgers and Standing 1981:16).

private manufacturing, of which 550,000 engaged in small scale industries and crafts, 950,000 in trade and services and 140,000 in transport.
By referring to this, it is not my purpose to make a systematic comparison of the present situation of Vietnam to the past of industrialized countries. The nature and scope of children's market employment might be different. This is, however, a good example to show how a social transformation can affect the economic roles of children. Available statistics at national level seem to indicate a rapid increase in number of children at work since the "market oriented economy" was put into effect.

The 1989 census indicates that more than 30 per cent of children aged between 13 and 15 in the country were employed, 91 per cent of which engaged in agriculture (CCC 1991:282-84). In 1992-93, the Living Standards Survey reveals that 56.58 per cent of children at the age group 13-14 were involved in economic activities (SPC & GSO 1994:123). In 1993-94, a survey carried out by the Ministry of Labour (MOLISA) reports a rate of 73.4 per cent of children aged between 13 and 15 taking part in the labour force (MOLISA 1994:123).

It should be noted that these statistics did not regard housework as economic activities and therefore excluded it from tabulation. Although these various sources of statistics may be difficult to compare, they show a consistent trend of working children increasing. But the nature of their work is worth being examined more closely.

**Impacts of vertical mobility: widening of economic gaps**

Most researchers in Vietnam acknowledge that for about one decade now, there has been a process of social stratification in rural areas where the economic gap between rich and poor peasant households is becoming more and more pronounced. However, these researchers offer different views as regards the nature and possible consequence of this process. Some insist that the differentiation between the rich and poor does not signal the emergence of new classes but should be viewed as a redistribution of different occupational groups among the peasants (Hoang Chi Bao 1992). Others suggest that social stratification taking place in rural Vietnam is in fact a transitional phenomenon that will eventually provide the peasantry a closer solidarity (i.e. no social stratification at all!), (Dang Canh Khanh 1991:319-20).

Such interpretations are heavily influenced by ideological considerations, according to which there are no antagonistic classes under socialist regimes, and current developments should be considered of a temporary nature. At this stage, based on

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13 Another data given by *Detailed Analysis of Sample Results* processed from the same source of the 1989 census report the employment rate of children aged 13 and 14 is 33.9 per cent and employment rate of youths aged 15-19 is 70.6 (GSO 1991:143).

14 Details are presented in the annex at the end of this chapter.
available statistics, I shall argue that the social differentiation has been on the rise for several years now, and that this process should be examined in terms of "market adaptability" of different peasant households, taking into account factors such as access to land, income and education. Chances are that the upheavals brought about by the market-oriented economy will cause further social polarization in which a substantial number of the rural population may find it hard to find their way in a vastly fragmented labour market and consequently, economic burden of sustaining families would partly fall on their children.

Actually, the contention that there is no a significant social stratification in the rural areas is based on the fact that The Law on Land (1993) does not allow peasants to use more than 5 hectares per household, with the assurance that every family will have equal access to land. However, official statistics reveal that peasant households with higher income often have access to larger area of land, ranging from 2 to 5 times bigger than the average (MAFI 1993:19). One reason for the poor peasant households to have less land is that they cannot afford to pay tax in time and that therefore a part of their land is taken back by local authorities; most of this land is redistributed to the richer farmers. The proportion of land taken back in this fashion accounts already for 36.5 percent of the total of distributed land. Apart from this, rich peasant households are often given priority to rent public land earlier managed by state organs and military units (MAFI 1993:326). Another important fact is that most of rich peasants gain their wealth from non-farm activities rather than from farming (MAFI 1993).

In terms of household incomes, statistics also indicate an increasing gap between the rich and poor.\textsuperscript{15} A report made by the Agricultural Commission of the CPV said that during the period of 1965-1975, there was not much discrepancy in incomes and living standards among peasants in the North Vietnam, the difference was only from 1.5 to 2 times. This differentiation has sharply increased since 1981, to between 6 and 8 times (Ban NNTU 1991, vol.1:43). In the rice growing provinces of the northern delta, the gap between the rich and poor seems to have widened further during the last few years, varying from 11 to 18 times. The survey conducted by the MOLISA in 1993 estimated that there are about 22.14 per cent of peasant households in the whole country that have fallen into the poverty line (MOLISA 1994::98) with an average monthly income per capita of 27 thousand VN dong (an equivalent to 2.5 US$). Living standards of peasant households according to this report were divided into 5 categories, namely rich, upper middle, middle, lower middle and poor households. If one also takes into account the 23.21 per cent of

\textsuperscript{15} Data from the Vietnam Living Standards Survey generally indicate that the reported household incomes are lower than the reported expenditures and are therefore difficult to assess. This source of statistics is however important as it is the only one that allows us to look at distribution and composition of income sources at a national scale (SPC&GSO 1994:21).
lower middle peasant households as reported by this survey, the group of poor peasant households should be 45.35 per cent. The *Vietnam Living Standards Survey 1992-93* on the other hand indicates that some 90 per cent of the poor live in rural areas with their main source of incomes from agriculture while the largest source of household incomes of well-to-do farmers comes from non farm self-employment (SPC&GSO 1994:218).

Poverty could also be seen from the aspect of access to education. A sample survey by MAFI on 1522 households in 27 rural communes over the country shows that the rate of adult illiteracy among the poor peasant households was 24.3 per cent, with only 1.8 per cent of them having reached the upper secondary level. These rates among the rich peasant households were zero and 26 per cent respectively (MAFI 1993). Furthermore, high school dropout was found mostly among children of the poor. The school enrollment rate by income quintile indicates that at the age group 15-17, only 2.2 per cent of the poor children were attending school while in the age group of 18-24, none attended regular school or vocational education any more (SPC&GSO 1994:18).

Another aspect that should not be overlooked is that the nature of rural poverty nowadays has changed. Under the collective system, almost every peasant household had a similar living standard, all being poor. Today while a considerable number of households no longer live in poverty, others have become actually worse off because their access to land, education, capital, credits and other social services has been curtailed due to the high costs of these services and rising privatization.

The question now arising is: what is the relation between the social stratification and children's economic activities? As I shall suggest and further analyze in the following chapters, with the changes of social structure, children of the poor are under increasing pressure to engage in earning activities to alleviate their family’s financial burden. Results of various field studies in northern Vietnam tend to support this assumption. First, in terms of nutrition, a sample survey among poor peasant households reveals that 50 per cent of children from these households only had fruits once a month, 63 per cent of them said they had eggs once a month and 40 per cent said they had meat only on special days such as festivities and anniversaries during the year (Ton Thien Chieu 1993:44-52). This investigation apparently suggests severe malnutrition among the poor children. A survey in 1993 by the MAFI found that among the rural poor households, 47.1 per cent were usually short of food for three months a year while over 30 per cent lacked food during 5 months or more. In coping with poverty, these households often take to borrowing (food and cash) as the first remedy to survive.\(^{16}\) The report reveals that 56 per cent of them were

\(^{16}\) While carrying out the study on the poor in various rural areas of northern Vietnam, Ton Thien Chieu found that among several solutions often used in coping with food shortage, the first priority for the poor was borrowing (46.5% of respondents), followed by a combination of borrowing and working as hired labor (15.9%); only 9.1% of respondents said they hired out their labor for wage while 5.7% cut down their daily
unable to pay back their debts. Because of this, 8.3 per cent of poor households had to send their children to work as servants as a form of debt payment while five per cent had to give away their children to others for adoption because of their being unable to feed them. About 46 per cent of poor parents cut short their children's education because they could not afford school fees (MAFI 1993:334). Three quarters of the poor households could not wait for their paddy until the harvest was due but had to sell the crop while it was still standing to get food for survival. Particularly, 32.4 per cent of poor peasant households often committed themselves to get credits in advance and pay back later by their cheap labour. This survey looked further into Thanh Hoa province especially and found that the situation of poor households there was more desperate: 17.1 per cent of the peasant households had to send their children to work as servants for others as a return of debts and 9.5 per cent of parent had to give away their children for adoption (MAFI 1993). Young children were often taken away by their mothers to the urban setting to work as beggars instead of schooling (Le Canh Nhac 1994:1&4).

The Living Standards Survey mentioned earlier found a similar relationship between poverty households and the economic role of their children. This survey indicates that in the expenditure quintile I (poor), 73.46 per cent of children aged 13 and 14 and 90.66 per cent of youths aged between 15 and 19 were engaged in economic activities while in the quintile V (rich), these rates were only 37.02 and 64.98 per cent respectively (SPC & GSO 1994:123)

It is obvious that the rising social stratification has serious implications as regards the changing economic role of children: 1. Low household income and unemployment of adults give poor parents no choice but sending their children to work to supplement family incomes; 2. Unequitable access to children's education often forces the parents to choose between investment in schooling for their children or send them to work. More often than not, parents will opt for a "piece-meal" solution rather than a long-term but risky investment in children's education.

Impacts of the labour market structure: stratification of market employment

As I shall suggest in this study, the growth of small rural industries and non-farm activities in the private sector and household production since the agricultural co-operatives were abandoned have changed the structure of labour demand and labour utilization. On the one hand, we can see that a part of household labour force previously working on the farm has now moved to non-farm work for wages which consequently shifts farming tasks on the rest of the household members.

ration (Ton Thien Chieu 1993:48). This perhaps suggests that wage work is difficult to find.
On the other hand, the relations of production in non-farm and small industries have also changed. These relations are now governed by the market forces, i.e. capitalist competition and accumulation. The market employment is becoming more segmented. Highly educated people and skilled labourers have better chance to earn a good income while less skilled labourers become more vulnerable in a competitive labour market, bound for low paying jobs or unemployment. In the case of Vietnam where changes are taking place so fast, the 'shock syndrome' would cause more negative responses.

In such a socio-economic environment, children can be affected in various ways. First, with the withdrawal of a part of household labour from farming, usually male adults and heads of households, to wage labour elsewhere, children are likely to be sent to work on the farm to substitute for these absent adults. Secondly, private small enterprises mushrooming in rural areas now find in children a ready source of labour which might allow them to raise more profits by using this cheap and 'sweated' labour. Children's employment in this sector can be found in various forms such as subcontract via the putting-out system, where they work alongside other family members and the payment often goes directly to adults, or in various types of apprenticeships and training in which children’s work is not paid or underpaid.

These assumptions need more empirical data which this study will attempt to present. But let me first document briefly some significant features of the changing structure of the labour market in Vietnam to lay out the background of the theoretical orientation.

Vietnam's economic renovation entails vast changes in the structure of employment and incomes. At the first glance, various sources of data suggest an increase of adult unemployment and a drop of real wages over the last decade. These are actually related to both external and internal factors facing the country. The breakdown of former socialist countries in the Eastern Europe has led to more than 100 thousand Vietnamese workers being sent home during 1990-1992. At the same period, the armed forces had demobilized a large number of service personnel while the state-owned enterprises dismissed 25 per cent of workers and 20 per cent of civil servants, which were regarded a surplus to requirements. According to the ILO, the total of employees retrenched from the state-run sectors was more than two million during the period 1989-1992 (ILO 1994:18). For sure, these numbers only put extra pressure on the structural unemployment in the economic system of Vietnam. The MOLISA statistics give an estimate of 7.49 per cent of the labour force unemployed in 1993 (MOLISA 1994:126), an equivalent of 2.5 million

17 Together with the redundancy of a large number of workers formerly employed in state-owned sectors, the abandonment of the subsidy system in which, housing, health care and social security are no longer secured by the state, caused the real incomes of workers to drop dramatically.
persons. But these statistics do not seem to reflect the real unemployment in rural areas. The lack of reliable data make the assessment of rural unemployment extremely difficult. The ILO estimated underemployment in agriculture at about 27 per cent of the agricultural labour force, or the equivalent of 6.5 million persons in 1992 (ILO 1993) while another source estimates the number of unemployed persons in rural areas to be about 30 percent of the rural labour force (Pforde 1993:54).18

Rural unemployment under the collective agriculture had been disguised by the work-sharing system. Decollectivisation and redistribution of small pieces of rice land to individual households lay bare this fact: almost half of the household labour force now cannot find enough work on the farm. A consequence of this development is the intensification of seasonal migration from rural to urban areas in search of work. My own observations indicate that in large cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, the visible 'labour markets' where peasants hang around looking for jobs have rapidly increased over the last few years. These seasonal workers often make up about 3 per cent of the total city population (Nguyen Van Chinh 1997). In Hanoi, the bulk of rural seasonal workers are males who search for heavy tasks in construction and transportation. Because labour demand is lower than supply for simple work, seasonal workers in the city are rather vulnerable in terms of work bargaining. Female seasonal workers in the city are estimated at about 19 per cent of the total of rural migrants. Most of them aged between 15 and 30, and mainly work in the service sectors, street vending and garbage picking.

Not only adults but a large number of rural children have also found their way into urban areas to earn their living. A government report estimates that one-third of the people with no fixed residence in Hanoi are children under 16 years old (Su That 1992:54). These children are engaged in a variety of jobs: selling newspapers, cleaning cars and motorbikes, picking garbage, running odd jobs for restaurants and various domestic services. Some survive as beggars, thieves and prostitutes. The number of street children has risen steadily, creating a social malaise in the eyes of city authorities. Quite often these children are picked up and sent back to their villages but this measure soon turns out to be ineffective (Vi Tre Tho 1993:3). Children earn money not only for themselves but they also send remittances home to support their parents. Some entrepreneurial persons in the city organize them into 'work teams' peddling newspapers, cards, maps and souvenirs to rising numbers of tourists and take a share of the profits of their sales (Binh Trang Nguyen 1993:4-5).

18 The term 'rural unemployment' used in different studies is relatively flexible. It should be taken into account the fact that in rural areas, there is not total unemployment but rather underemployment because of the existence of a large source of secondary economy with low productivity or low returns.
"Labour markets" can also be observed in many villages where small industries and manufacturing enterprises are operating. Job seekers waiting to be hired in these rural labour markets are expected to do all kinds of work, ranging from farming, gardening, house chores to simple tasks in family workshops.

Wages in these types of work are extremely low, varying from about 10 $US to 20 US$ per month, depending on workers' skill and ability. However, jobs are not always available. A report by MOLISA estimates that 15 per cent of job seekers in "labour markets" cannot find work on a given day (Hoang Huu Tien 1992).

The low incomes in rural areas and high costs of education make it difficult for poor children to continue with their schooling. Educational statistics indicate that the average school drop-out rate of children aged 10-14 in rural areas is 17 per cent compared to 10 per cent in urban areas. More particularly, this source of statistics also points out that one-fifth of the rural girls aged 10-14 already dropped out of school and in the age group of 15-19, only one-sixth were still going to school (GSO 1991:60). Indeed, drop-out at an early age to get low jobs is the popular trend in rural areas where family-based workshops use child workers for a part or the entire length of the production process. The MOLISA survey reports that children under 16 years of age take up about 15 per cent of the workforce at family workshops in Ha Tay province (Huu Duc 1992:7) while my own survey in a village of Hai Hung indicates that some 40 per cent of the workforce in the wood sector are children under 16 (Nguyen Van Chinh 1997:19). Some child workers attend school half a day and spend the rest of the day at work while a number of them are already full-time workers. They work 10 hours daily, sometimes well into the evening at extremely low wages, about 2,500 dong to 6,000 dong on daily basis (about 0.25 to 0.6 $US). In these family enterprises, the MOLISA's investigation reports that there are no regulations with regard to minimum wages, working hours, age limits, health risk and insurance. Children who take part in work as apprentices often express their willingness to work since they do not have to pay training fees as required by formal education. Moreover, they are promised waged work after two or three years of learning. From a different perspective, the researchers report that local authorities appreciate the social aspects of this development which helps to create jobs for children while enhancing political security and social order (Huu Duc 1992:7-8). Child work in this type is viewed as a positive development rather than a negative illness.

In brief, the observations obtained from a macro perspective tend to suggest an association between the structure of labour market-- rising unemployment in agriculture, labour absorption in rural small industries, increasing seasonal migration and low wages and the intensive employment of rural children. This suggestion will be taken into account while considering the economic activities of children at the village level.
The social context of transition and children's work

Adopting the analytical framework of child work as a social construction, this study proposes that children's work is not only a reflection of the economic process but also reveals a set of socio-cultural determinants, among them the normative attitudes towards children, the values by which their activities are judged and the nature of socialization processes. It is thus important to examine the process of social change in Vietnam and how this change influences children's work. In this respect, three major aspects will be examined: 1) The reverse development of social values connected with the economic transition; 2) The decline of children's social welfare during the transition; 3) The dilemma of the socialist state in enforcing legislation on children's issues.

By emphasizing the process of social transformation and the contradictions facing society today, I would submit that these changes affect the economic behaviour at the household level that shapes children's work.

Revival of traditional social values

Kerkvliet has analyzed the dilemma of socialist development in Vietnam during the mid 1990s following the economic reforms. This fascinating study points out that while economic liberalization has achieved high growth which in turn improves general living standards, this success has put pressure on political system that the regime's leaders are struggling to cope with (Kerkvliet 1994:5). This remark is helpful when one looks at the process of social transformation in Vietnam.

Regarding the educational system in Vietnam, Marxism-Leninism has been used exclusively as a spiritual force behind the educational development in this country for several decades. This doctrine helps educators to explain the complex phenomena of the natural and social worlds. It has been taught not only as a science of politics but an all-purpose subject that appears in all school text-books. But the official Party's line in textbooks and in teaching practices faces a dilemma in the light of the recent collapse of world communism. The fall of the central economy based on Marxist-Leninist theory has created a crisis of confidence in the system of social values among people who had been taught that the centrally-planned economy is the key to achieve prosperity. While this model of economy has disappeared and the ideology of socialist society has collapsed, an educational system that is still based on social values dating from the collective phase of development makes little sense. The educational policy under the centrally-planned economy tended to emphasize quantity and diplomas rather than quality of knowledge. The widespread corruption under the current education system contributes to the erosion
of the position of formal education in society. Education as the safeguard of social values has begun to lose its credibility in the eyes of many.

As I shall further analyze children's education in chapter 8, the crisis of formal education in Vietnam during the transition period 1980-1995 could be traced back to the role of the state and politics. Before the economic reforms, the state sought to collectivize all sources of production through public rather than private ownership in an effort to change society into a non-exploitative, highly productive and eventually classless, one. The state assumed a central role in determining the direction of social transformation in which education was regarded as a crucial vehicle to achieve this goal. Marxist-Leninist education was indeed seen as a force to change history. The entire population was mobilized to achieve universal literacy as children were put into the school system. The state rather than the family took full responsibility in children's education with a belief that the next generation would be prepared to carry out the revolution that society expects of them. The reverse development of the economic system after reforms negates these ideals. In other words, the economy is no longer the material ground of social ideology as before. While at school, educators are still teaching children in the old fashion, the state no longer bears the brunt of the costs for children's education, which now becomes more and more a matter for individual households to handle.

This development has created a new socio-economic environment which constantly affects the thinking of the common people. The decline of belief in socialist ideology, skepticism in the so-called "market socialism" and the crisis of formal education give rise to an the intensive revival of traditional social values and practices in rituals, life cycle ceremonies and Confucian ethics, which were previously condemned by the socialist state as social evils. One may also observe that only after a short time since the economic reforms, more and more temples, pagodas, churches and other places of worship have been restored and opened again. Traditional folk festivals and processions are held and historical and mythical figures are openly worshipped. In the realm of relationships, visits to relatives and friends as well as taking part in banquets, festivities, weddings, funerals are common place. Ancestor worship and patrilineal consolidation are strengthened with ceremonies such as commemorations of death anniversaries of ancestors, reconstruction of ancestral halls and regular visits to ancestors' tombs. The strong revival of the traditional social values, as pointed out by various studies (Luong Van Hy 1993; Kleinen 1999) reflects the flexibility of ideological control of the state but also shows the resilience of age-old traditions. As the state loosens its grip on educational and cultural activities, the revived traditional values will play an increasingly important role in shaping children's life. The Confucian ethics that "prefers" boys to girls---- that demands filial obedience, that emphasizes family, lineal and other ties, all these will have some impact on children's thinking and actions. The consolidation of family relations and old traditions may lead to a
reassertion of parental authority over children and an unequal treatment of women and girls in daily practice.

Decline of children's welfare

It is undeniable that the economic reforms in Vietnam have opened up new opportunities for development. In part, this can be seen through the way people evaluate their lives since 1990. The 1993 survey by MOLISA reports that 51.7 per cent of respondents said they felt better than before, 17.5 per cent said their lives were worse while 30.7 per cent said they did not see any change (MOLISA 1994:97). However, together with the success of economic reforms, more problems facing the country have also emerged, among them the decline of social security and children's welfare. In the long run, stable economic growth may well foster the people's welfare but at present, the transition has had a negative impact on the well-being of children and at least half of the population are living near or below the poverty line. I will take into account several factors of change in household income and savings, social benefits and state's expenditure on health, education and child care to explain this.

Despite the recent economic growth, Vietnam remains one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. However, the poverty level varies considerably from region to region. North Central, Northern Mountainous Areas and Central High-Lands are among the poorest where the poverty rate ranges from 50 per cent to 71 per cent (SPC&GSO 1994). In the regions where the poverty rate is relatively low, statistics tend to show high discrepancies of income as reflected in the Gini-coefficients (Dao The Tuan 1993:16; World Bank 1995). Thus an increase in income gaps occurs not only from region to region but also among the peasant households of the same region. These discrepancies are likely to intensify if we look at the access to social services available to rural people.

In terms of household incomes, statistics indicate a slow increase between the two periods before and after economic reforms. In the period 1976-80, average income per capita was 17,600 VND. This income increased to 19,596 VND over the period 1981-87 and 21,428 VND in 1989 (at constant 1989 prices; Ban NNTU 1991:208). While the income per capita increases slowly, growth fluctuating between one and two per cent annually, household expenditures have become bigger since the subsidy system, and particularly since the social services previously provided by the state have suddenly disappeared. The fact is that real household income has dropped while many people have has no savings at all. According to the VLSS 1992-93, more than 50 per cent of households have no savings, except the high income groups (SPC&GSO 1994:233).
In terms of social security, under the centrally-planned economy, families in
difficulty could receive benefits transferred to them through the social policy system
which balanced household incomes between advantaged and disadvantaged families. The
economic reforms which abandoned this 'harmonizing policy' are in fact cutting off a
source of security for the poor. The distribution of the state budget on social security at
present mainly benefits civil servants, pensioners and war invalids-- the majority of them
from the high income groups (World Bank 1995:107). The erosion of social transfers has
accentuated the decline of household income as well.

In the domain of education, state budget for this sector has declined sharply since
the reforms. The central government now covers only one-fourth of educational
expenditures while the bulk is passed down to local levels. In actual fact, the state could
pay only 51 per cent of its own budget expenditures (World Bank 1995:82). These
statistics not only point out a serious decline of state budget for public education, they also
imply that poor children now have less access to formal education than before since they
can not afford the rising costs even when they attend public schools. Moreover, various
sources indicate that the enrollment rate increases together by quintile of income level
where children from higher income groups have better chance to benefit from public
expenditures for their education. This means that the financial support for education from
public sources benefits mainly the rich children.

A similar situation also occurs in public health services. An overriding feature of
health care during the transition is the drastic decline of public services and the rapid
growth of private health centers. This decline of public health services suggests rising
costs for health care for the people. In reality, the state now covers only 16 per cent of total
of expenditures for health services (World Bank 1995:94). The report by the World Bank
also found that most poor people often use private health centers with low quality. In rural
areas, poor peasants come to the commune clinic or private health practitioners while the
rich prefer go directly to the big provincial hospitals. Since the abandonment of the
subsidy system, local clinics are provided with little financial support while most
government money goes to the big hospitals. So the rich people who often use the big
hospitals have better access to public health services than the poor.

The reforms no doubt have brought prosperity to large segments of the population.
But for those who could not make it, their position has worsened in particular because they
had little or no access to the most basic social services. The economic reforms bring to the
fore an apparent contradiction: economic growth on the one hand and intensification of
poverty and inequality on the other.
The child and the state

It would be inadequate to approach the changing roles of children in a transitional economy without considering the relationships between the child and the state. This section will offer a brief overview on the child-state relationships in the context of social change in Vietnam, where the state foundation and the socialization of children are closely related. The socialist state, which is based on a centrally-planned economy, strives at creating new generations for the socialist society and therefore takes full responsibility in taking care of and educating children. The problem arises when the economic system the economic system has shifted into the market-oriented model, the state's social policy regarding children remains practically unchanged.

Indeed, through out its history, the state and its social ideological foundation played a significant role in shaping normative attitudes towards the process of child socialization. From the 15th century until early 20th century, during which Confucianism firmly established itself as the corner-stone of the cultural and educational life of the feudal state, the legal system was geared towards Confucian ideals in which the principle 'nam ton nu ty" (veneration for men and disregard for women) was followed. All feudal laws, from the Le dynasty under Le Thanh Tong in the 15th century to Gia Long and Minh Mang under the Nguyen dynasty in the 19th century, upheld the absolute authority of the father over his children and affirmed children's dependence on the parental power. These laws empowered parents with full right to punish their children and legally force them to work (Dao Duy Anh 1938; Phan Dai Doan 1992).

Perhaps for the first time in history of Vietnam, a labour code was passed by the colonial regime in December 1936 forbidding the employment of children under 13 years old and women in harmful work (Article 62, Lao Dong 1946:4). However, this regulation was only applied in the industrial and service sectors. In rural areas, old customs still allowed parents to hire out their children's labour, regardless of age, sex and nature of work.

The Revolution of August 1945 led to a new Labour Law approved in March 1946 by the new regime. That this law prohibited apprenticeship to children under 12 years of age suggests that exploitation of young trainees was widespread in this period. The 1946 Labour Law raised the age of employment in harmful jobs to 15 instead of 13 as regulated by the 1936 Law (articles 130-131:40). In reality, this labour law was only used as a political tool to fight against capitalist/colonialist employers and attack attitudes abusing child labour. It was hardly referred to during the period of socialist transformation until the official 1994 Labour Code was approved.

Even during a period lasting 40 years without written labour laws, the socialist state of Vietnam tried hard to change social attitudes towards the roles of children. Based
on socialist ideology, the state banned the old feudal laws which allowed parents to hire out their children’s labour. It fought for the abolition of discrimination against women and facilitated the access to formal education for children regardless of gender. The cause of ‘cultivating the people’ aimed at creating new generations to serve socialism was of primary importance for the revolutionary state. The state and the Party, not the family, regarded education of children as their natural task to which great commitment was made (Pham Van Dong 1995:2).

As early as 1945, the country leadership called for the liberation of children from “feudalist constraints”. In May 1961 a state committee for children and youth was established the main tasks of which were to propagate the movement of caring for and educating of children. Ho Chi Minh, the father of the revolutionary regime, particularly emphasized the work of ‘cultivating the people’ (su nghiep trong nguoi), as he put it: "For the benefit of ten years, we should plant trees; for the benefit of a hundred years, we should bring up our children". However, while political discourse was talking loudly about the enhancement of the children's roles in society, there were no official laws or legal regulations to ensure this ‘commitment’. Only in 1979, on the occasion of International Year of the Child, the socialist state of Vietnam for the first time approved the “Ordinance on the Protection, Care and Education of Children”, setting the stage for promulgating various laws on children’s rights a decade later.

It is no coincidence that a series of laws, ordinances, regulations and directives concerning the issues of the child came into effect only after the economic reforms, when the state felt itself vulnerable in controlling non-state economic sectors, which have been expanding very fast. In 1990, Vietnam signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ratified it without reservations. In 1991, the Law on Universalization of Primary Education and the Law on the Protection, Care and Education of Children were passed on the same day (12.8.1991) by the National Assembly. In 1994, the Labour Law with specific provisions regarding child labour was approved. A year later, MOLISA issued a list of jobs where children’s employment was prohibited. In addition, numerous government directives and regulations regarding child issues were issued in a short period from 1986 to 1994 (SRV 1994). There is a recognition of the need to protect children under the conditions of a market-oriented economy. However, in reality there exists a wide gap between rhetoric, political ideology and actual facts. In the centrally-planned economy, the state in carrying out its social policy, tends to weaken the role of the family in child socialization and education. When the economic system shifts to market orientation, the state’s role becomes weaker in its attempts to impose its ideology on the people.
Discussion and conclusion

I have attempted to analyze the structural changes of socio-economic system in Vietnam in order to arrive at an integrated explanation to changing patterns of children’s work since the Doi Moi policy (renovation) was implemented in the mid 1980s. The analysis is based on the assumption that the economic system and the social and cultural framework are among essential factors for examining the extent and nature of children’s work in the transitional economy taking place in Vietnam.

As far as theoretical orientation is concerned, a good deal of previous child labour studies, instead of looking at children as agents of change, often focused on external factors such as capitalist exploitation, adults’ authority, parental abuses, the neglect of state protection, inadequate legal system, and so on. Anthropological approaches today tend to look at the question at the grass-roots level, focusing on the children themselves, their voices and attitudes, the significance and meaning of their work. In a sense, the different theoretical perspectives reviewed in this chapter, together with their strengths and weaknesses, play an important role from which a relevant approach is formulated. Adopting the suggestions by Rodgers and Standing (1981), my study examines children’s work at two levels: the broader context of society and the individual determinants. As I see it, children’s work is but a component of social construction. Any study that looks at child work as separate from the cultural-social environment and economic system within which the child is born and brought up would be of little relevance. This means that children’s work should not be understood in terms of economic values only. Further emphasis is also to be placed on the local perception of the child, of childhood and child education. During the past decades most attention has been given to the children’s place in the school, not at the workplace, and childhood is generally viewed as a realm of innocence while child work is looked upon as a social evil to be eliminated. A number of researchers in the field recently suggest a rethinking of the concept of childhood, which should encompass both work and school in children’s lives, and some even advocate that children’s rights are to be heard. The fundamental question has been raised with regard to children’s education at a turning point: working or schooling? This poses indeed a formidable challenge to our current understanding of the issues of child labour. However, empirical studies dealing with these problem at the grass-roots level remain rather meagre and rarely move into the centre of the debate.

As previously pointed out, this study does not intend to dwell on the type of work conventionally labeled as “child labour” nor does it seek to present practical solutions to the problem it entails. Rather my work attempts to analyze the patterns of children’s work in relation to the social-economic changes based on empirical observations. And in doing so, my approach tends to regard children’s work as a complex phenomenon, taking into account the broader context of children’s life and viewing childhood as a social construction. In this regard, I wish to shed some new light on the on-going debate on the work performed by children, particularly in the Vietnamese context against the backdrop of social, cultural and economic changes.
Annex to chapter two

I am aware that the statistics presented below may not cover adequately and accurately all forms of child labour in Vietnam, for instance, domestic work and particularly, work in the “informal sectors”. Most Vietnamese sources of statistics do not take into account the work of children below the age of 13. Different sources of statistics sometimes contradict one another, suggesting that the criteria applied for investigation may vary. Moreover, the terms of reference also differ: Some say “employment”, others refer to “economic activities”. These statistics are, however, useful to form a rough impression about the development trend of child labour in Vietnam over the last decade. For such reasons, I present here some statistical data which enable the readers to have an overview of the situation of children and their work before going into more details on the nature of children’s work in the village under this study.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1985</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMR</td>
<td>IMR per 1,000 live births</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under 5 MR per 1,000 live births</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMR</td>
<td>MMR per 100,000 births</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malnutrition</td>
<td>Moderate (in percentage)</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very severe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean water</td>
<td>Percentage of population access to clean water:</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early childhood education</td>
<td>Percentage of children attending</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- creche</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- kindergarten</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis education</td>
<td>Net primary enrollment</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary school drop-out rate</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary school repeat rate</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy</td>
<td>Adult aged 15 or more literacy rate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Committee for Protection and Care of Children, Hanoi 1992:8
Note: IMR: Infant mortality rate
       MMR: Maternal mortality rate
Table 2.2. Children’s employment by age group 13-15 and work sector, Vietnam 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work sector</th>
<th>Number (person)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1 227 011</td>
<td>91.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>22 365</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>12 991</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction &amp; manufacturing</td>
<td>13 788</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>4 121</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>68 776</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children employed</strong></td>
<td><strong>1 349 052</strong></td>
<td><strong>30.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children aged 13-15</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 382 570</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Central Committee for Census 1991, Table 5.2:282-4.*

Table 2.3. Percentage of children at work by age, sex and areas in Vietnam 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Whole country:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Rural areas:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>78.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Urban areas:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-14</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: General Statistical Office 1991; Table 7.1:143.*

Table 2.4. Percentage of children at work by age group and expenditure quintile in Vietnam 1992/93

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>1 (poorest)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (richest)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 - 14</td>
<td>73.46</td>
<td>62.93</td>
<td>54.16</td>
<td>46.39</td>
<td>37.02</td>
<td>56.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>90.66</td>
<td>83.19</td>
<td>82.95</td>
<td>76.04</td>
<td>64.98</td>
<td>78.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5. Percentage of children in the age group 6-15 that are economically active in Vietnam, 1993-94

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>7.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.65</td>
<td>16.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.93</td>
<td>16.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>32.72</td>
<td>35.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.68</td>
<td>42.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>49.77</td>
<td>50.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>63.44</td>
<td>60.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>68.83</td>
<td>78.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>83.18</td>
<td>86.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | 36.47 | 38.47 |

Source: MOLISA 1994:123
Chapter 3

RESEARCH SETTING: A RURAL COMMUNITY IN THE RED RIVER DELTA

Phep vua thua le lang
The King's law surrenders to the village custom
(Local saying)

Introduction

Like many villages in the region, Giao is an ordinary rural community of the Red River delta where villagers earn their living by rice cultivation. It is impossible to claim this is a typical example of a northern Vietnamese village. However, since the renovation policy was applied in the early 1980s, the Red River delta has proved to be one of the most economically mobile areas of the country. The shift from a collective system to individual household production has led to fast economic growth while non-farm activities have become one of substantial sources of peasant household incomes. Indeed, Giao village was chosen for this field research because it represents the popular trend of economic diversification geared towards non-farm activities in the region since the reforms.

This chapter deals with the most common characteristics of Giao village in transition. Data of pre-collectivization of Giao village are used to give a comparative understanding of its developments in a historical perspective. Furthermore, the case of Giao village is placed in the context of the Red River delta, which may provide a broader view on the rural transformation in northern Vietnam. By revealing the transition processes of Giao village, the chapter may help to understand the context of socio-economic changes of the village under study and what impacts these may have on the patterns of children's work.

The village: a brief profile

Village Location

Lying half-way on national road No.5 linking the capital city of Hanoi with the port of Hai Phong, Giao village is located at the heart of the Red River delta, about 50 kilometers East of Hanoi. The inter-provincial road No.20 crosses Giao village, connecting the Cam Giang railway station on highway No.5B with the old town of Sat. The road No.20 is significant for Giao village because it links the village with the central town of Cam Giang district in the North and Sat-- the central township of former Binh Giang district to the South, just 5 kilometers from Giao village. The towns of Sat and Cam
Giang were famous during the colonial period as the central markets from which agricultural products, silk and pottery were circulated to the entire delta via the interlacing network of railway, roads and the Sat and Cam Giang rivers. During the period of collectivization, these towns lost their importance as central markets. Recently, administrative restructuration and economic activities have restored them to their former position as centers of trading and small scale industries.

Village History

Giao village has a long and rich history. Although we do not have historical records indicating when Giao village was established exactly, there is evidence to believe that before the 17th century, Giao was already a prosperous village. Several family records (Gia pha) found in Giao village mentioned a peasant revolt against the Le-Trinh court taking place in the region in the late 17th century, which resulted in a number of villages, including Giao, leveled to the ground. Their inhabitants had to flee for their lives. The Gia Pha of the Vu Xuan Family recorded how their village was restored. In the early 18th century, a wood carver named Vu Xuan Ngon was recruited to participate in building the Royal Palaces in the capital of Thang Long, now Hanoi. For his contribution, the King Le Du Tong (1705-1719) awarded him a farm in his native village, now called Giao. The Vu Xuan family returned to their home village and named it Chinh Tan, meaning loyalty to the King. As time passed, more families returned and re-settled in the village.

The loyalty of the Vu Xuan family to the Le dynasty was marked by a historical event. Vu Xuan Ngon's grandson—Vu Xuan Toan, head of royal palace guard, supported King Le Chieu Thong in fighting against Tay Son's revolt in the 18th century. When the Le court was defeated, Vu Xuan Toan assisted the King to escape to China. The Tay Son took revenge on the Vu Xuan family. Vu Xuan Toan's father was sentenced to exile for life while the family's estates were confiscated and their ancestors' tombs and ancestral hall were destroyed (The Vu Xuan Family Record).

Under the colonial regime, Giao was part of Mao Dien canton, Cam Giang district. In the early 20th century, several villagers led by Vu Xuan Duong, took part in the anti-French Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Tonkin Free School) movement, urging the youth to learn the national script [chu quoc ngu], (DBLD 1993:12). During the period 1940-1954, Giao village was a regional hub of political activities of both communists (Viet Minh) and nationalists (Quoc Dan Dang).

After the August 1945 Revolution, Giao village and eight other small villages and hamlets of the former Mao Dien canton were merged into one commune, called Luong
Die (1946). At present, Gia is an administrative unit under the commune of Luong Dien, Cam Binh district, Hai Hung province.¹⁹

Gia villagers have experienced for generations many upheavals. Many elderly individuals have lived through French colonial regime, Japanese occupation and socialist programs such as the 1956 land reform, intensive collectivization (1958-80) and most recently, economic renovation. No doubt, for its rich history, Gia village bears a great complexity in its patterns of cultural practices and social organization, which are worth looking at while considering the contemporary issues of the village life.

**Village Population**

Available data on village population indicate a fast growth during the past decades. About 60 years ago, the total population of this village was only 575 inhabitants, among them 168 were male adults aged between 18 and 55 who were obliged to regularly pay poll-tax (Ngo Vi Lien 1931:80).²⁰

In 1946, the first year under the revolutionary regime, the commune's records indicate a total population of 812 persons (UBND xa Luong Dien). Five decades later, the population has increased almost three folds as many. The 1994 village census shows a total population of 2,194 persons, including 1,038 males and 1,156 females. 33% of village population were younger than 15 years.

The population registration of Luong Dien commune shows that in 1993, Gia village had 396 households. However, the 1994 tax registration book of Gia village indicate a total of 459 households. The increased number of households was attributed to the impact of land re-distribution in 1993 when the commune administration decided to allow couples with two or three daughters-in-law living in the same residential unit to apply for new household land, which consequently led to an increase in the number of households in the village. At the time of my research, the average size of these households was 4.8 persons in Gia village compared to an average of 4.1 persons for the Red River delta (TCTK 1995:151).²¹ My own household survey in 1994 indicated that 69.2% of village households were nuclear families with two generations, including parents and

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¹⁹ Recently, after my field research was carried out, Cam Binh district was re-divided into two districts under the administration of Hai Duong province, as they were in the colonial period. Their former names Cam Giang and Binh Giang are now restored. Gia village belongs to Cam Giang district.

²⁰ Prior till 1954, censuses in Vietnam mainly counted male adults aged between 18 and 55 for imposing taxes, distributing community land and public services.

²¹ Household, as referred to in this study, includes members living under the same roof, sharing common production resources and yields.
children. 29% of households contained three or more generations while only 1.8% were single-person households. Additionally, 16.2% of households were female-headed.

Looking at the patterns of in and out-movements during the past few decades, we did not find great population mobility among Giao villagers. There seems to have been a net out-movement in the 1960s and 1970s when 17 households and 63 persons went to the New Economic Zones and a number of young men joined the army. However, the net in-movement increased during the 1980s and 1990s with 123 persons returning to the village from public services.

Annual population growth in Giao village shows a rather high rate of 3.5% in the 1960s and 1970s. This has declined during the 1980s and 1990s, fluctuating between 2.4% and 1.8% (DBLD 1993).

A detailed listing of persons by sex and year of birth indicates a distinct shortage of males aged 25 - 29 and a higher ratio of females over males in the age group 20 - 44. This perhaps reflects the pattern of out-movement during war-time. The village records indicate that 115 men and 3 women served in the armed forces from 3 years up to 23 years during the two wars. During the American war, 38 men and two women from this village were killed and 16 were wounded.

Village Social Organisation

Under the colonial regime, Giao was an administrative village [xa], under the direct management of Mao Dien canton [tong], (Ngo Vi Lien 1931). In 1946, a new administrative system was established. Giao became a dependent village under the control of Luong Dien commune. Canton as an administrative unit was abolished by the revolutionary regime.

In 1958, under the collectivization movement launched by the CPV, a new agricultural co-operative was set up, based on the old village structure with four production teams, made up from four former hamlets of Giao village.

In 1973, in line with the large-scale production policy in agriculture, the village-based cooperative was merged into a larger co-operative together with eight other villages, known as Luong Dien co-operative.

In the early 1980s, after the large scale co-operative system went out of control, the contract system in agricultural production was introduced in the Red River delta. The co-operative was gradually losing its function in production management. At present (1995), the co-operative system is limited to a few functions such as supplying water, taking care of irrigation system, security and collecting agricultural taxes.
During the last four decades, changes in administrative structure did not blur out village boundaries in both physical and mental sense. In 1990, for the first time since 1958, the administrative apparatus of Giao village was set up again, including one head of village (*truong thon*, called *ly truong* (the village head under the colonial regime), two deputy heads of village (*pho thon*) and a village security team of 8 members under the authority of village leadership. The village administration, in principle, is controlled by the *chi bo dang* (the CPV's village cell). Village cadres were paid crop-share wages, ranging from 80 to 250 kilograms of paddy per harvest. Their payments came from the villagers' contributions.

There was a strong tendency among villagers to demand more autonomy for the village. In their opinion, economic independence would limit bureaucracy and prevent corruption by commune cadres who were not natives to the village.

The persistence of the village corporation seems to have resulted from long traditions and specific development of the village. The dense concentration of residential houses within the village territory creates close relationships and inter-dependence among the villagers. The existence of sub-communities (religions, blood organizations and neighbourhood) under the control of a common village convention (*huong uoc*) consolidates these relationships. This feature is the theme of a fascinating debate on the autonomy and corporation of Asian villages (Breman 1988, 1997, Kemp 1988). The available data from Giao village tend to indicate a common trend of corporation in terms of village territory, community cult and village customs although villagers still retain broad relationships with outside.

Traditionally, Giao village was divided into 4 small hamlets (*xom*), named respectively Nhoi, Gach, Giua and Ben. In the past, each *xom* had its own territory, paths and temples. Xom also had its own guarding team (*doi truong tuan*). The development and expansion of residential areas during the past decades made the territorial division of the hamlets rather ambiguous.

Village inhabitants come from 10 different major patrilineages (*dong ho*). Among these, the Vu Xuan and Vu Van lineage are considered to be the descendants of the village founders while the lineage of Vu Huu and Hoang, who came and settled in this village since the 19th century, are still regarded as 'adopted residents' (*dan ngu cu*). At present, those men who are not village natives but have married with local women and settled in the village are also referred to as 'strangers' (*nguoi thien ha*) although their status is no longer discriminated against as in the past.

Kin relationships have intensified recently, playing the role of social network. Some major patrilineages even use their domination to put pressure on village politics by nominating their own candidates for village leadership.
Besides the village's sub-organizations such as neighbourhood (xom, hamlets) and blood organizations (dong ho, patrilineages), the voluntary mass-organizations also play an influential role in village life. Among these are Hoi Bao Tho (Association for Protection of Elderly People), Hoi Cac Gia (Buddhist Association of Elderly Women) and Ban Bao Ve Di Tich Lich Su, Van hoa (Committee for Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments). The establishment of these organizations are aimed at promoting mutual assistance and forging religious-cultural activities locally.

While the voluntary mass-organizations have begun to assume more importance, political mass-organizations, which are under the umbrella of the local CPV, such as the Communist Youth League, Pioneer Association and Women Association seem now to have lost influence. The village youngsters today pay more attention to economic activities rather than politics. Nowadays, the local CPV leadership is dominated by the emerging village elites. Young people are more concerned with making a living since the abolition of the planned economy and education is no longer the only way to climb up the social ladder.

Village taxation system

While the village government has more tasks to perform, its major duty is to collect agricultural taxes and various contributions imposed on villagers. Taxes on rice land are the primary source of revenues for the village government. Other financial contributions such as charges due for irrigation, electricity, water supply, crop security, public constructions and a number of public funds are also collected by the village government.

Land is taxed at different rates, depending on presumed productive capacity and its assignment to different management categories or funds. Rice land is divided into 3 categories and two funds. Land category I (most fertile soil) is taxed at 19.8 kilograms of paddy per sao (360 m2)/crop while taxes for land category II (fair soil) is 16.5 kilograms and 13.3 kilograms for land category III (poor soil). These rates apply only to the first land fund (quy dat I), which is distributed equitably to every individual. A small proportion of rice land (10 per cent) is reserved for other purposes (housing and public constructions). This is called the second land fund. This kind of land is not allowed for long-term uses. Those villagers who have means (money, labour force) can buy the right to use this land for a duration of three or five years. Taxes on this land are higher and these extra-taxes are used for public welfare.

Regularly farmers have to pay tax at full rates regardless of whether they produce good yield or not. In the years when crop fails due to natural disasters, the Tax Department
at the district level will decide on tax rates reductions after official assessment has been made. Individual crop-failures do not count. For this reason, during 1994-1995, 139 households of Giao village were unable to pay taxes and they still owe the land taxes on two crops.

In addition to taxes on land, various kinds of contributions and charges mentioned previously are levied on individual households as well. For example, in 1995, farmers had to pay 45 kilograms of paddy per saol/crop of which taxes on land took up only 35% of all payments.

Taxes are also levied on livestock slaughtered for commercial purposes, whereas animals killed for ceremonial purposes are not taxed.

Since the 1990s, taxes have also been targeted on businesses and shops, particularly on wood manufacturing. These are collected by the district tax department. The tax rates are based on the quantity of products sold. However, in reality, taxes on wood production are not easy to collect. Villagers often regard the wood trade as additional jobs supplementing their meagre incomes from agriculture. In 1995 when I was staying in the village, tax collectors of the district came and established a tax office. They received a cold response from the villagers. Some of them were attacked at night. Many wood workers moved out of the village to work elsewhere. Some villagers said they would not pay tax on the wood trade because they did not know if their taxes would be used for the right purposes. To a high ranking government official who visited Giao village in 1995, an elderly man said openly:

We villagers work very hard for many years in our skilled profession but we are not earning enough money for our daily expenses. A poor man with bare hands, returned home from the army and became chairman of the People’s Committee for a couple of years. He then built a new house, purchased a good tractor and an expensive Honda. He has no skills and doesn’t do any extra jobs at all. Where did he get all that money if not from our taxes? If the wood workers have to pay tax, how about the chairman?

Land and land use

Land Reform in the village (1956)

Apart from a small proportion of rice land owned collectively by organizations such as the communal house (ruong dinh), Buddhist Pagodas (ruong chua), patrilineages (ruong ho), a regime of communal land (ruong cong lang xa) did not exist in Giao village as it did in many villages in northern Vietnam before 1945. The available data indicate that before the 1956 Land Reform, 60 per cent of Giao village households had very little or no rice land at all. About 26 per cent of households owned from five sao to one mau (0.18 to 0.36 hectare) and 14 per cent owned more than one mau.
Table 3.1. The composition of social classes in Luong Dien commune in 1956

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Persons</th>
<th>Percentage of households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>1,110</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>1,524</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm hand</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>829</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,446</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dang Bo Luong Dien 1993:74.

Notes: No available data on the total area of rice land occupied by landlords. According to Dang Bo Luong Dien (1993), the criteria to be applied for determination of social classes by the land reform brigade in Luong Dien were:

1. Landlords: those who owned more than 1.8 hectare of rice land and exploited the hired labour.
2. Rich peasants: those who owned more than 1.8 hectare but used their own labour only.
3. Middle peasants: owned less than 1.8 hectare.
4. Poor peasants: owned very little land or landless.
5. Farm hand: landless.

Land reform, which was started in Giao village on the 12th January 1956 and finished on the 15th June 1956, created a great change in land ownership. According to a report by the Land Reform Brigade, 4.1 per cent of village households were classified landlords (*dia chu*). 4.6 per cent of households were regarded as *phu nong* (rich peasants). Landlords' estates (productive materials, houses, gardens) were confiscated for redistribution to poor peasants. The record on Luong Dien commune presented in table 1 gives a more detailed picture of land ownership up to 1956.

Among the larger landowners of Luong Dien commune, there was only one landlord holding 40 *mau* of rice land (14.4 hectare). Rice land confiscated from landlords and rich households was then re-distributed to peasants. In Giao village, the average allotted land per head was 5.8 *sao* (1,980 m2). Access to land was not equitably arranged for all individuals but was based on family background. Land allotment was made as follows:

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22 Available literature on the Land Reform of 1956 in Hai Duong tend to indicate an equal distribution of land to every individual regardless of their former background. Data collected from Giao village, as shown above, are different.
- Former landlord families: 3.7 sao (1,332 m2) per head
- Rich peasant families: 7.9 sao (2,844 m2) per head
- Middle peasant families: 6.2 sao (2,232 m2) per head
- Poor and landless families: 5.1 sao (1,836 m2) per head

The Land Reform Brigade also distributed brick houses, draft animals and cooking utensils to poor peasants, which were confiscated from landlords and 'tyrant' (cuong hao) families.

The individual household-based production brought about by the 1956 land reform did not last long in Giao village. In September 1958, the mobilization for collective production was officially launched. One year later, 61 per cent of households participated already in the agricultural co-operative. By extensive propaganda campaigns and coercive measures, in the late 1960s, 99 per cent of households were in the co-operative, only about one per cent of farming households insisted on staying out of the co-operative despite all kinds of troubles they suffered (DBLD 1993).

De-collectivization

Collective production under co-operative management dominated Giao village for more than two decades. During that period, most economic activities were managed by the production brigades. In the earlier years of the collectivization movement (1960-1965), when the co-operative was still small, living conditions of peasants were more or less improved. Since the co-operative became larger in terms of households encompassing more villages, numerous problems cropped up. As their living and working conditions worsened, the co-op members became dissatisfied. The mechanism of collective production increasingly proved not to function well. Peasants did not feel deeply attached to their co-operative. Villagers said that many people had turned away from collective work to do extra-jobs, while others concentrated their labour on small pieces of household land-- known as five per cent land. In the whole of Northern Vietnam, the same situation was observed (Kerkvliet 1995, Fforde 1989). The central government finally came to the conclusion that family-based production rather than collective farming was a better way to achieve higher production and improve living conditions. In the early 1980s, the contract system, known as khoan san pham (output contract) or khoan 100 (contract 100), was introduced to agricultural production.

23. This term comes from the fact that the directive authorizing it was number 100.
Under this contract system, farming households were allowed to do the major processes of farming while the co-operative still controlled part of the work. In exchange, the households had to produce a specified amount for the co-operative. After paying the contract quotas, they were allowed to keep the surplus for themselves. Although contract 100 did give impetus to productivity, it did not fully liberate farmers from the co-operative constraints. Farmers realized that co-operative cadres who did not do productive work had higher incomes, while they produced more but had less left for themselves. Villagers told me that sometimes they even did not want to harvest although rice was ripening in the fields because the contracted quotas they were supposed to meet were set too high.

By the mid 1980s, the “output contract” was replaced by “household contract” (khoan ho) which was sanctioned by the CPV’s Resolution No.10 (thus known as Contract 10). This policy opens the door for farming families to produce as much as they can on the allotted land for which they are obliged to pay taxes and fees for water supply, security and administration.

Economic reforms went further when the Law on Land was officially promulgated by the National Assembly in 1992. In 1993, Giao village carried out the distribution of rice land to farming families for a long-term use. The revised land law (1996) even allows the peasants to transfer their use right over rice land.

Land use

According to 1994 cadastral register provided by Luong Dien People’s Committee, the natural area of Giao village is 1,454,715 m2, among which:

- residential land: 116,081 m2
- rice land: 1,162,794 m2
- marches, cemetery, canals: 139,610 m2
- the rest areas are lakes, ponds and roads.

24 During the period of collective economy, there was a popular saying in the village about this abuse: Thang gu lung lam cho thang ngay lung an (hard workers do more but in the end, lazy-bones [meaning co-op’s cadres] eat).
A striking feature of residential practice in Gia village is that most households are concentrated in a narrow area. The residential land is rather small, an average of 252 m² per household, as compared to 331 m² for the whole commune. This means that home gardens, often adjacent to houses, are not highly developed in Gia village. The farmers rely for their incomes mostly on rice cultivation rather than on gardening.

Actually, residential land of Giao village has expanded to a surface area three times larger than that of 1960. During the period between 1975 and 1990, about 90 thousand m² of rice land were converted to housing. Recently, the narrow banks along the canals and Road No.20 were also distributed for villagers to build houses. Not only residential land has become scarce, rice land per capita of Giao village also shows a steep decline during the last 60 years.

Table 3.2. Rice land per capita in Giao village between 1931 and 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total area of rice land (in sq.m.)</th>
<th>Population (person)</th>
<th>Av. Rice land per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>1,875,600</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>3,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1,983,600</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>1,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,162,794</td>
<td>2,194</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1931 data are from Ngo Vi Lien, 1931:80; 1956 data are from DBLD, 1993:75; 1995 data are from village records.

In 1993, rice land distributed to individuals was 480 m² per head in the First Land Fund (quy dat I) and 50 m² in the Second Land Fund (quy dat II). Although access to land was based on equality, some households did not take any land from the Second Land Fund because of its higher tax rates.

The average rice land per capita of Giao village is rather low compared to the average of 572 m² per capita for Hai Hung province and 556 m² for the Red River delta (TCTK 1995:80).

Rice cultivation techniques have undergone great changes during the past decades in Giao village. During the colonial period, in more than 88 per cent of paddy fields only one crop was grown each year, *vu mua*, which was transplanted in late June to August and harvested in late October - November. The improvement of the irrigation system and water supply since the early 1960s have changed the crop structure. At present, two rice crops are grown on 97 per cent of the total rice land of the village, compared to only 10 per cent before the 1956 land reform. This is certainly an impressive achievement.

With changes in the number of rice crops, productivity has also increased considerably. In 1955, the average rice yield was estimated at 1,600 kilograms per
hectare/year (DBLD 1993). Forty years later, each hectare could produce an average of 7,000 kilograms paddy annually, a four-fold increase.

Table 3.3. Changes in crops and paddy yield in Giao village (1955-1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total area (ha)</th>
<th>Rice land (ha)</th>
<th>Vegetable land (ha)</th>
<th>Paddy yield (kg/ha/yr)</th>
<th>Av. paddy yield per capita (kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>189.7</td>
<td>168.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>163.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>159.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>116.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>113.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The archives of Luong Dien co-operative.

Without a doubt, improved farming techniques, irrigation, seeds, fertilizer and particularly, intensive investment of farmers have contributed to this achievement. However, population growth is putting a strong pressure on food production. Available data show that in 1955, the average paddy yield per capita was 327 kilograms. In 1995, paddy yield per capita was raised to 370 kilograms, an increase of just 43 kilograms. This gives rise to a skeptical view on the potential food production in the Red River delta in general. Indeed, sixty years ago, Gourou already predicted that with an annual population growth of 1.0 to 1.3 per cent, it would be impossible for the Red River delta to feed a population twice as large by the end of this century (1936:197). As far as the fertility of soil is concerned, rice land in the Red River delta has become exhausted by short crop-cycles with two to three crops per year while labour utilization has to be maximized to raise productivity. In view of the scarcity of land, farmers have to turn to non-farm activities, which consequently leads to a more diversified economy in the region.

Economic responses to de-collectivization

Towards a more diversified economy

The most significant characteristic of the agricultural economy in the Red River delta is a combination of rice cultivation, family handicrafts and petty trading (Nguyen Van Chinh 1989). This feature is perhaps regulated by the nature of rice cultivation in northern Vietnam. Before rice fields had access to irrigation, the farmers of Giao village

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25 A survey conducted in 1935 by the French scholar Gourou indicated that the Red River delta was the area where family handicrafts were highly developed with 108 different trades. (Gourou 1965).
could grow only one rice crop per year. This means that the non-farming period would last for about six months, during which farmers could take up various non-farm activities. A majority of male labourers took up wood work far away from home.

Under co-operative management, the period between the two harvests was mainly devoted to such tasks as upgrading the irrigation system, repairing communal paths, roads and other public works. Peasants were not allowed to engage in earning activities in family handicrafts or petty trading. Some types of non-farm tasks were done by specialized teams managed by the co-operative.

De-collectivization and household-based production have given farmers an opportunity to participate actively in non-farm work. Another factor is that the scarcity of rice land per labourer results in a surplus of agricultural labour force. My survey conducted among 376 households in Giao village in 1994 indicates an increasing trend in non-farm activities. Villagers' earnings have become more diverse. Most households are involved in various economic activities.

Table 3.4. Composition of household economic activities in Giao village (1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic activities</th>
<th>Households Engaged</th>
<th>Ratio (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>99.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising livestock</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood work</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty trading</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home gardening</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-paid work</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usury</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonally hired work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Household survey conducted in Giao village 1994, based on a sample of 376 households.
While a majority of households are still engaged in farming, wood work has also become an important activity of villagers with 90 per cent of household involved in it. Vegetable growing is not highly developed in Giao village, perhaps because most labour force is concentrated on wood work. A little land is indeed used for growing maize, potato, tomato, beans, etc. but these are mainly for domestic consumption and household livestock.

Although raising livestock is a standard component of rice cultivation in the Red River delta, a detailed list of animals kept by households reveals that up to now, livestock husbandry has never been a significant source of household incomes. Farmers raise buffalo and cattle primarily as draft animals to plow paddy fields rather than for meat consumption, even half of the paddy fields are now prepared by tractors. While pigs are the dominant livestock in terms of number, for the majority of peasant households, pig raising is basically to produce manure for their rice fields. Villagers keep one or several pigs to produce organic fertilizer. But for many families, pigs are also a source of saving for the family budget. Only about three per cent of interviewed heads of households said they could produce two or three tons of pigs a year commercial purpose.

Chickens are also raised by most families although the numbers per household is rather limited. Some households raise ducks, predominantly for eggs. Other types of animal like dogs, geese, quail, rabbits and pigeon are also observed in family yards.

Fish farming was almost neglected in Giao village. This was partly because the ponds were used mainly as a source of water for washing, bathing and also for cultivation of aquatic weeds for pig feeding. Recently, the village government decided to rent out some community lakes, ponds and canals for fish farming where large areas were shared by a number of households, each paid a tax of 15 kilograms of paddy or its cash equivalent per 360 square metres and per fish harvest crop. The average fish yield in 1994-1995 was not so high, about 1.2 ton/hectare/year. Farmers explained this was partly due to the theft problem while other villagers complained that fish raising polluted their sources of clean water.

The life stories often referred to catching shellfish, fish, crabs, snails, frogs as an important source supplementing villagers’ daily diet in the past. These practices have become rare nowadays, perhaps because of the effects of pesticide used in the rice fields.

In the broader economy of Luong Dien commune, a report based on an annual survey made by the district statistical office in 1995 indicated that 55 per cent of households within this commune were involved in small businesses, shops and services. In this sense, Giao villagers as a part of the commune seem to have gone further in non-
farm activities with a large majority of households involved in the wood trade and other businesses.

As pointed out earlier, the wood trade has a long history in Giao village, dating back to several centuries. Wood carvers of Giao village had participated in building the royal palaces in the capital of Thang Long (now Hanoi) in the 18th century. In the 19th century, a group of wood carvers from this village were engaged in building the royal palaces in Hue under the Nguyen dynasty. Most of them then settled down in Hue and built a new village named Dong Tien, [meaning "moving to the east"], (Tang Ba Hoanh, 1984). During the colonial period, wood carvers from Giao village still earned their living far away from home. Life histories revealed that wood workers normally returned home for harvesting but more often than not, while rice was ripening in the fields, they were still a long way home.

Since the collective economy was established in Giao village in the early 1960s, the wood trade was severely curtailed. Wood workers were not allowed to earn their living out of co-op's control (Ban CTNT 1962; Vien KSNDTC, 1965). Some wood workers were assigned to work in the construction team while others were turned into farmers even though they did not know the farming work that well.

In the early 1980s, the economic renovation policy brought a fresh impetus to the local wood trade. The market of wood products had been opened up to Asian countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan where Giao wood carvers found new customers. Wood carving has been booming in the village ever since. This trade absorbs almost all households' labour force, including children and elderly people at various phases of production. Although the future of wood work is not guaranteed because of the scarcity of hardwood and the uncertain policies of the government, it does in fact change the face of the village economy.

**Intensification of seasonal migration**

The liberation of labour force from collective constraints seems to have affected the whole society and even goes beyond the economic reformers' wishes. Many male labourers, who used to toil on the coop's rice fields for many years, now leave the small pieces of allotted land to their wives and children and look for non-farm work. Available data indicate that the migrants from rural areas to urban settings in search of jobs have become widespread recently. In Hanoi, the numerous seasonal workers who came to find work made up 2.5 per cent of the city population (An Ninh Thu Do, 6. 1996) while in Ho Chi Minh city, seasonal workers hanging about in the city to look for jobs took up about 3 percent of the city population (Nguoi Lao Dong, 17.1.1997). In
deed, migration has been a significant characteristic of the Vietnamese in their long history (Dang Thu 1993; Li Tana 1996) but circular and seasonal migration in search of work are perhaps more widespread today.

Seasonal migration to earn a living and return home on harvest days was a distinctive feature of Giao wood workers during the colonial period (Ngo Vi Lien 1931; Gourou 1936; Tang Ba Hoanh 1984). This practice was suppressed under the co-operative regime but came back strongly with "Doi Moi". Among 376 households under the 1994 survey, 218 households had one or more members who migrated seasonally. A detailed profile of seasonal migrants is shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5. Seasonal migration of Giao villagers in 1994.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indications</th>
<th>Net number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total seasonal migrants reported</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- females</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- males</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>87.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- under 16 years old</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24.0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- between 17 and 39 years old</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>67.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- over 40 years old</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destinations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- HCM city and southern provinces</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>71.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Hanoi and northern provinces</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>28.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs expected:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- wood work</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>83.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- others</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>16.3 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Quantitative data indicate that the majority of seasonal migrants were males, 63.4 per cent were between 17 and 39 years of age. While most migrants were expected to find jobs as wood workers, female migrants were primarily expected to work in the service sector.

In 1995 and early in 1997, I visited several work-sites in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city where Giao villagers were working as wood workers. They were recruited through foremen/entrepreneurs who were village natives. Work-sites were primarily temporary sheds or shops rented by entrepreneurs/foremen. Wood workers usually slept at work-sites free of charge. In some places, women were hired to cook for them but most often, the entrepreneurs' wives did the shopping and cooking. While working conditions were hard, wages were relatively high compared to similar jobs in their home village. For example, average wages a wood carver earned in HCM city ranged from
650 thousand to one million VND per month compared to about 350 thousand VND in Giao village. More than half of the wages had to be spent on daily expenses and only one third could be saved to be sent home. Many young wood workers said they could save nothing because of many attractions in the city.

The intensification of male labourers' seasonal migration in the wood trade has an impact on labour division within peasant households. Virtually all women are expected to work on the household farm, in petty trading, services and food processing. The employment patterns in Giao village has changed to the extent that men are more involved in waged work and women are moving to domestic, non-wage and low-income work.

Interviews with village male youths revealed that most of them were unfamiliar with farm tasks, such as ploughing, planting, weeding, watering and fertilizing. Some of them were even proud that they did not have to do any farming. While this may reflect the lack of agricultural employment, it is an indication that waged-work is more highly valued.

Under the co-operative system, available data indicate a nearly equal participation of men and women in farm work. After land has been redistributed to individual household, the main agricultural burden now seems to fall on women. In the past, ploughing was mainly done by men. Now, many women and girls have to take on this task because male labourers are hard to find.

The burden of farm work on women in household-based production also has another implication: the withdrawal of women from public activities. During the co-operative period, women in Giao village assumed many political and community functions. This could be seen as a consequence of the absence of men who had to serve in the army during war time. At present (1995), there were no women serving in high positions locally. Among 27 party members of Giao village's chapter, only one was a woman. Women while considering themselves as their families' breadwinners, show little interest in politics. Young girls are expected to leave school early and join their mothers in domestic and farm work, leaving their foot-loose man folk to look for greener pastures elsewhere.26

Emerging of a free labour market

Following the economic reforms of the late 1980s, the Seventh Congress of the CPV adopted a policy of employment generation as an important factor for the socio-economic development of Vietnam (CPV 1991). At the national level, there is the

26 Chapter 8 will further analyze the state of village children's school drop-out.
serious problem of weak absorption of farming activities and a high rate of rural unemployment, while the state is likely unable to provide farmers with the capital to raise non-farm business. Under these circumstances, the case of Giao village in particular and, to a greater extent, the district of Cam Binh, seem to offer an interesting case to examine impacts of economic reforms on the local labour market.

Starting with the district of Cam Binh, de-collectivization of agriculture has brought about not only dramatic changes in agricultural production but also in the employment situation. Unemployment has become a serious problem. Actually, unemployment had already existed before but it was disguised by the work-sharing system of the co-operative. When rice land was redistributed to peasant households, rural unemployment became more apparent because these lands were not sufficient for the surplus of labour force. My calculation based on the correlation between required farming labour and allotted household land indicates that work is just enough for only half of the household labour force (Nguyen Van Chinh 1997:58). Furthermore, the nature of rural unemployment has undergone fundamental changes. Unemployment today has been passed on to individual households and is no longer a matter of concern for the co-operative.

In Cam Binh district, unemployment was estimated at 24.3 per cent of the total labour force. There has been an increasing trend of income diversification in non-farm activities and seasonal migration. Statistics provided by Cam Binh district indicate a rise in participation of farmers in small scale industries. In the 1980s, only about 5 per cent of the district labour force were employed in small industries. This non-farm employment took up about 15 per cent in the early 1990s (Phong Cong Nghiep Cam Binh 1995) and increased to 38 per cent in 1995.

Table 3.6. Employment structure of Cam Binh district in 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment sectors</th>
<th>Labour engaged</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total labour force</td>
<td>89,853</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Agriculture</td>
<td>71,365</td>
<td>79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Small scale industries</td>
<td>13,320</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Services</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Construction</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Transportation</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Others</td>
<td>2,921</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data provided by the archive of the People Committee of Cam Binh district.

A report by the Planning Office (Phong Ke Hoach) in 1995 indicated an increasing participation of farmers in non-farm activities involving more than 35,000
labourers (i.e. about 38 per cent of total labour force). They were employed as full-time or part-time workers in various small scale industries. Although the report did not provide a break-down of sectors, it pointed out that total output value in industry for the district had remarkably increased from 17.9 per cent of total gross product in 1993 to 25 per cent in 1995. Small scale industries expanded to 34 out of the total 37 communes in the district. The major production branches were food processing, engineering, pottery making, carpet weaving and wooden furniture manufacturing. Rice husking was developing very fast with more than 800 husking machines. Wooden furniture manufacturing was regarded as one of the most developed industries in the region. An important feature of off-farm activities in Cam Binh district was the family shops and enterprises. In 1995, 8,619 households (18 per cent of total households) conducted small businesses in which 70 per cent of the labour force were family members.

The development of small scale industries gave rise to several changes in the labour market. In several villages of Cam Binh where non-farm activities were well developed, households which were intensively involved in non-farm work often hired seasonal workers from within or outside of the village to do farm work. In the village of Hung Thinh for instance, I found that many of them had formerly worked in the state-run brick factory located in the area. They usually expected to be hired for farm work, particularly at peak seasons. In the village of Vac, where comb making had become a substantial source of income with 12 million combs annually produced, many farmers from neighbouring villages came in search of agricultural work. They usually hung out along the road leading to the center of the village from early morning till late afternoon. The place where labourers gather for hire is called cho nguai (people market). Villagers said this market emerged recently after comb making became an important industry of the village.

Wages in agricultural work were relatively low. An average daily wage ranged from 10 to 15 thousand dong. Those who got one or two meals a day from their employers received 10 thousand dong or lower. Despite these low wages, jobs were not always available. Talks to these labourers revealed that because there was not much work to do at home, they just came here to try their luck.

Low wages in farming are not only an indication of labour surplus but also of the state of low commercialization in agriculture where farmers rely heavily on rice production for their own consumption. While small scale industries are regarded as a source of hope for job creation in the struggle against rural poverty, the phenomenon that a huge number of children are involved in this sector seems to work against this expectation.
Widening economic gaps

"Without the wood trade, our lives would be much more difficult". Villagers often stress the importance of small industry in such a way. No doubt, the wood work has provided a good source of income to improve the living conditions of many farmers. However, studies conducted elsewhere in Asia suggest that "diversification in economic activities would in turn breed social differentiation" (Muijzenberg 1991: 314). Although it is still too early to talk about the emergence of a new class within Giao village, it is obvious that the economic gaps among the income groups appear to become wider since the abandonment of collectivism. I will try to show this with the help of data on housing and home appliances.

My own household survey conducted in the village in 1994 found that 86 per cent of 376 households lived in their own houses while 14 per cent still shared the same roof with others. Data on types of dwelling indicate some differences in living conditions. According to Vietnamese standards, rural houses are classified into three groups of building materials. Based on these criteria, 135 households living in 134 permanent houses (36%), 172 households living in 164 semi-permanent houses (45%) and 71 households living in 64 temporary houses (19%). Noticeably, 76 per cent of the 134 permanent houses were built after 1986.

While for many the first priority is food, some villagers began to "urbanize" their life style. For them, urban-styled furniture is a manifestation of prosperity. Within the village, several hair studios and make up shops have been set up to meet new demands. Western-style dress is the dream of many young couples. The purchase of expensive appliances has increased among villagers. As the survey in 1994 indicates, 172 households had radio/cassette players, 125 households had television sets and 85 households had motorbikes. Especially, nine households had telephones at home, primarily used for family business but also for rent. Four households owned cars and two households owned trucks. These cars and trucks were mainly used in the cities where their owners were doing business.

Among the valuable means of production, nine households owned husking machines, six households had small multi-functional tractors (local brand called Bong Sen) for transporting, preparing rice fields and water pumping.

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27 Types of dwelling are classified into three groups:
1. Permanent: Brick, storey/multi-storied houses with good materials.
3. Temporary: Various types of dwelling (houses, shacks, sheds...) made up with thatch roof, earth walls and other simple materials.
Table 3.7. Types of dwelling and home appliances of Giao village compared to areas elsewhere (as % of total households)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Types of dwelling</th>
<th>Home appliances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red River delta</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>56.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hai Hung province</td>
<td>32.37</td>
<td>47.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giao village</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>45.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: - Data from Red River delta and Hai Hung province are from TCTK 1995:18 & 93; - Data from Giao village are based on my own survey in 1994.

Talking about the living conditions of villagers today, an elderly man with a 'landlord' background told me:

"Today, even poor families in my village have meat to eat, at least several times each month. Their daily meals are better than ours in the old days when we were regarded as wealthy. I remember when I was a boy, we normally had only soya sauce and salted egg-plants every day. Meat was only served on ceremonial occasions."

Except for the visible display of possessions mentioned above, it is difficult to judge the real wealth of rich families. We can however say that most of their wealth came from the wood trade. The head of village estimated that the six or seven richest families had wood workshops with capitals ranging from 200 million to one billion VND and their annual incomes ranged between 20 and 100 million VND.

Comparing living conditions in rural Philippines and Vietnam, Kerkvliet (1997:26) suggests that the land regime is not the only factor accounting for rural poverty. My empirical observation in Giao village supports this argument. Previously, I have indicated a rather equitable access to rice land by all individuals within the village. Although rice productivity by individual households might differ, rice cultivation was obviously not an important source of profit making. Many farmers of Giao village kept rice land mainly to take advantage of available household labour force, while for some families, having land on hand was just like having an insurance policy in case their non-farm business failed. The village tax collector estimated that taxes on land and other charges such as irrigation, security and various kinds of contribution often accounted for 35 per cent of total incomes from the allotted land. Apart from paying taxes, farmers had to cover other expenses, such as fertilizer, seeds, pesticides and labour. In case of crop failure, they would therefore suffer heavy losses.
Although working on rice fields is not favoured by many villagers, farming still remains one of the major sources of household income. Nonetheless, possibilities for improving living conditions are mostly expected from off-farm work. This stresses the importance of a diversified economy in rural areas where non-farm activities provide a hope for farmers who are tilling their small pieces of rice land.

De-collectivization and social welfare

Studies on economic reforms in rural Vietnam often concentrate on changes of institutions, land regime, social inequality and so on. Few studies have closely examined the impact of these reforms on the welfare system in rural areas. A survey of these issues in Giao village may provide useful insights into the process of rural transformation under economic reforms. Three major aspects of social services will be examined, including health care, child care and welfare of elderly and disabled people.

Health care

Northern Vietnam was once regarded as an area where public health services had achieved relatively high standards as compared with other developing countries (World Bank, 1995). However, the health sector had suffered and seems to have deteriorated gradually since the economic crisis in the early 1980s, followed by the abandonment of the collective system some years later. The case of Luong Dien commune will show how the change of economic system affects public health services.

The commune clinic station (tram xa) of Luong Dien was set up in 1962. This clinic station was responsible for providing health services to the people of nine villages within the commune. Its tasks were to carry out activities such as primary care, vaccination, prophylaxis, medical consultation, family planning and midwifery. These activities were funded by the government, which took care of medical instruments, medicines and the payment of the staff's salary. At one time, this clinic had a good professional team of 12 workers including a medical doctor, nurses, technicians, midwives, traditional herbalist and other assistants. Besides this public funding, the agricultural co-operative provided additional resources to maintain the activities of the clinic station. It also provided land for growing traditional medicinal herb and paid crop-shared wages for the herbalist. All health services provided by the commune's clinic station were free of charge.

Since the subsidized system was abandoned, staff members of the clinic station dropped from 12 to 3. As a result, the clinic station has severely curtailed its functions,
providing only family planning services, vaccination and midwifery. Medical equipment and medicines were not freely supplied while the clinic buildings were no longer in the care of the co-operative. The commune clinic station as a centre of public health services has lost its status as a community health center. "As quiet as a pagoda" (vang nhu o chua) is an usual phrase by which the local people often referred to their clinic station today. Why did the people not want to go to the commune clinic station any more? Three reasons were often given:

1. There are private health services within the village.

2. Diagnosis and treatment by native practitioners are seen as more reliable.

3. Private health services are convenient and payments on credit are acceptable.

Obviously, health care system tend to move from public to private centers, which are mushrooming in the rural areas.

In 1995 there were 6 private health practitioners operating within Giao village. They provided primary care and sold medicines. Among them, only one was formally trained at the medical school and held a nurse certificate, while the others previously worked as assistants at various medical stations and had no medical certificates. Together with these practitioners, there were also some vendors who came to the village to sell medicines and give treatments.

The most striking feature of health care practices in Giao village was the casual attitudes adopted by both providers and receivers. Most of villagers preferred to buy medicines and treat themselves. They went for consultations only in case of serious illness. Interviews with the village health practitioners revealed that their patients often asked for the medicines they themselves wanted, regardless of professional advice. Also very often the patients themselves cut short the treatment when they felt better even though the illness was not completely cured.

Health care has also become expensive. Recently, a medical insurance system was introduced to the villagers but it was not a success. In the villagers' opinions, medical insurance only offered cheap medicines. If the patients want good medicines, they should pay extra. Moreover, the rampant corruption in the various branches of health care was among the reasons why people no longer trusted the public health services let alone the insurance system.
**Child care**

Child care was high on the priorities list of the co-operative regime. This was politically regarded as the social idealization of the collective welfare system that epitomizes the socialist state.

In Hai Hung province, all crèches and nursery schools were placed under the management of co-operatives during the 1960s and 70s. The co-operative was responsible for providing the kindergartens with a basic support to maintain their activities. Teachers were appointed and paid by the co-operative with crop-share wages. The co-op paid the costs for short-term training conducted yearly at the provincial level. Under the regulations laid down by the Provincial People's Committee of Hai Hung, the co-operative reserved a specific budget for its creche and nursery school. Besides, the co-op was obliged to provide at least 50 per cent of the food requirement and fuel supply free of charge to its kindergartens. In addition to these, parents were to carry a part of the costs, partly in cash and an amount of five kilograms of rice per child each month (Ban QLHTXNN Hai Hung, 1986).

There is no detailed information on the children's attendance in creche and nursery school of Giao village in the old days. The former chairman of Giao co-operative told me the pre-school system of the village had four classrooms, two classrooms for children from one to three years olds (*nha tre*, crèche) and two other for children from four to five years of age (*lop mau giao*, kindergarten/nursery school). He estimated that about 70 per cent of village children were sent to these classes. The attendance rate was high because parents had to work to contribute regulated work-points to the coop. This rate dropped gradually in the late 1970s and the pre-school system of Giao village no longer existed in the early 1980s. The collapse of the pre-school system was attributed to the failure of the co-operative, the primary force behind it. However, villagers contended that the teachers' professional quality was also low. They were not adequately trained and had little experience in taking care of young children. Low hygienic conditions were among the reasons making parents reluctant to send their children to the village creche.

The disappearance of village kindergartens posed some problems for children to enter primary school. As a consequence, a high school drop-out of primary pupils at the first and second cycles during the early 1990s was partly attributed to the failure of the pre-school system. The curriculum designed for the first cycle of primary school was in fact a continuation of pre-school programs. So, those who did not attend kindergartens had difficulties to follow programs of the first grade at primary school. In recognizing this, in 1994 a class for children aged between four and five was restored in Giao villa-
ge, for which a monthly tuition fee of 10 kilograms of rice or its cash equivalent was required. The co-operative was no longer able to bear any costs for such an education.

Discussion on the creche and nursery system under the co-operative period and its collapse arouses much controversy (see, for instance, Forbes, et al. 1991). No doubt, economic difficulty was a major problem facing the pre-school system with the disappearance of the system of collective care to children. The abandonment of the agricultural co-op has passed the early childhood education on to individual families. However, by doing so, one may take away the services that might provide rural children, particularly poor children, with a regular physical and psychomotoric development that they need at their critical age, while burdening their families with more child care where more often than not, an older child is expected to take care of younger siblings.

Special social groups

Those who are disabled, war-invalids, orphans and elderly people will be referred to as special social groups. Under the co-operative system, this group was protected by a kind of social security. During its existence, the co-op of Giao village regularly spent a food budget for 'doi tuong chinh sach' (subjects covered by a social policy). Under this policy, disabled and elderly people were provided with a certain amount of paddy equivalent to the average income of labourers in the cooperative, regardless of good or bad harvests. This budget was called 'thoc can doi' (balanced paddy) or 'luong thuc dieu hoa' (harmonizing food). For elderly people and those who could not work on the farm but were able to contribute to the co-op's economy to earn their living, specialized teams were set up, such as doi trong cay (tree planting team), doi thu cong (handicraft team) or doi cac cu (elderly people team). Such collective schemes were dropped since the abandonment of agricultural co-op, which caused this group some difficulties to make their living.

According to village records, 2.6 per cent of village population are disabled and 6.2 per cent are 60 years or older. Instead of the social welfare policy provided by the co-op in the past, these people are allotted the same area of rice land as the rest of villagers. It is true that they do enjoy extra privileges such as access to better land and reduced tax rates, but the problem remains whether they are able to work on the land and whether the paddy yield produced could secure their living? My interviews with elderly people reveal a serious dilemma. On the one hand, most of elderly people want to be economically independent, but on the other hand, they are closely tied to their children because they cannot work on their own land. More than 80 per cent of elderly people in Giao village are living with one of their children. They often perform in such domestic work as taking care of grandchildren, raising livestock, keeping house and
gardening. Many elderly people however complained they had no pensions like other government workers despite the fact that they had worked for decades for the coop. For the disabled and the elderly, the costs for health care, which were previously provided free of charge, are their main worries. The decline of public health system has put more pressures on this group of people and the poor. The change of economic system also implies that social security, which was collectively shared by the coop has passed on to individual households. In coping with the changing system, the elderly people set up the Association for Protection of Elderly People (Hoi Bao Tho). Members are obligated to pay monthly fees, which will be spent on visiting sick members and covering a part of funeral costs in case of death. But such a mutual support has more a symbolic meaning rather than material assistance.

Some observations on rural social services in transition are worth mentioning. In their struggle to gain a better life, the Vietnamese peasants have significantly influenced agrarian policy which led to de-collectivization (Kerkvliet 1995; 1997). However, the impact of de-collectivization upon social welfare appears to be controversial. Do Hyun Han (1997) argues that the welfare system under the co-operative regime in rural Vietnam did not properly function in the past and the shift from the collective to individual household production would bring better welfare for farmers. This may well be the case for long-term development but in the immediate, it should be seen in a different light. Do's study neglected the welfare provided by the co-operative for special groups. By pointing out the dramatic changes of welfare system during the economic transition of Giao village, it is not my purpose to 'idealize' the past. The point is that shifting from a collective to individual household-based production has passed down various burdens on the individual households, including costs for social security. Consequently, the people who lose out are, certainly, not the well-off but the poor and physically weak. The intensification of kin relationships and mutual support networks among the villagers are, in my opinion, a more or less natural response of the peasants to these challenges of change.

**Change and continuity of traditional social values**

Studies based on solid field-work have indicated the intensification of rituals (Hy Van Luong 1993) and the re-appearance of ceremonial life (Kleinen 1999) in northern Vietnamese villages in the wake of economic reforms. The following short de-

28 The report by World Bank (January 1995:94) pointed out that the state budget paid only 16 per cent of total health expenditures in 1993. The economic reforms have turned health services from public concerns into a huge private market. This implies that the vulnerable groups, particularly the poor, are subjected to low quality services at higher costs.
scription will bring forth some aspects of spiritual life in Giao village. It strengthens the view that religion and rituals are integral parts of village life and that their recent revival reflects a continuity of the traditional village values, which have been created and developed during a long history and became more apparent after the socialist ideology has lost its credibility.

**Village Buddhism**

This common saying, *dat vua chua lang*, (the land belongs to the King, the pagodas belong to the village) reflects the importance of Buddhism in Vietnamese villages in the past. For a small village like Giao, once there were five pagodas. Most of them were built in the previous centuries. Unfortunately, during the movement of socialist collectivization in the 1960s, they were destroyed or used for other purposes.

*Meo pagoda* (also known as *chua Ca*) was the largest in the village. This was once considered to be one of the biggest and most famous pagodas in the region. In 1965 the co-operative decided to tear it down and use its wood for building storage-houses. However, the pagoda's mausoleums with the graves of the residing monks still remain untouched to this day.

*Chua Chay* was the second largest and oldest pagoda in the village. The history of Chay pagoda is connected with the history of the village itself. It is said that Chay pagoda was built many centuries ago and its name Chay was also the former name of Giao village. In the mid 17th century, when local peasants revolted against the Le dynasty and failed, Giao village was destroyed and the villagers had to flee. Giao village was later re-established at a new location next to its old grounds and an other larger pagoda was built in the heart of the new village, called *chua Ca* as mentioned above. Chay pagoda was also pulled down by the co-operative in 1963.

Three smaller pagodas, *chua So, chua Hoi* and *chua Am* were constructed later. *So* pagoda was destroyed in 1948 by the French and restored in 1954. But all of these pagodas were ruined later by the co-operative in the mid 1960s. From then until the early 1990s, Giao village had no pagodas. Villagers, mostly women, had to go to neighbouring villages for their praying.

Following the economic changes which brought a degree of prosperity to the village, in 1990, villagers decided to build a Buddhist temple to meet their religious needs. To circumvent state regulations prohibiting construction of new religious sites such as pagodas, churches and temples, the village Elderly Association therefore requested the permission to build a Cultural House (*Nha Van Hoa*). When the construction was completed in 1992, Buddha statues were moved in and the Cultural House began to
look like a Pagoda. It was named New Pagoda (Chua Moi) and a solemn ceremony was held with a Buddhist procession. The village pagoda has been continuously expanded with financial contributions from villagers. In 1995, two large worship halls were added. A young nun (su nu), herself a former university student, was invited to reside at the pagoda. The village Buddhist Association of Elderly Women sent volunteers to help the nun to manage various activities. The number of membership of the Buddhist Association has increased to 180, taking up 87 per cent of women aged 45 or older. Before the 1956 land reform, all pagodas in the village had their own plots of rice land to sustain their activities. The New Pagoda was not officially granted land but the village leadership temporarily offered the pagoda some land around the communal house. But the major financial source of Buddhist activities still comes from the villagers' contributions.

The Pagoda pantheon is in fact a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism and Goddess worship. In the main hall of the pagoda, there are various Buddha statues but statues of other deities such as Duc Ong (Guardian Deity) and Thanh Mau (Mother-Goddess) are displayed in other parts. For the villagers, the pagoda plays an important role in their spiritual life. Every month on the first and fifteenth day of lunar calendar, elderly women and children come to pray at the pagoda. One often heard a saying "a village without a pagoda is not a real village".

Village deities and community cult

The community cult was one of the most important ritual practices of Giao village before the imposition of the atheist ideology by the communist regime in the early 1960s. Although economic reforms in the 1980s did not entail cultural reforms, village worship was strongly revitalized since then. According to popular beliefs, the village is under the protection of Thanh Thanh Hoang (Village Tutelary Deities). Giao village worship two tutelary deities. The first tutelary deity is Phu ma Nam de, a mythical character known as the King Ly Nam De's son-in-law who lived in the 7th century. The second tutelary deity is Trinh thi De nhat Thai quan, a historical figure (Ngo Vi Lien 1936:80). The founder of village wood craft is also worshipped behind the village deities in the communal house.

Worshipping the deities is a collective obligation. The village's prosperity, in the villagers' thinking, depends on the homage they pay to the deities. In the past, the Giap (an organisation of village male members aged from 18 and over) took turns in carrying out the annual rituals while a custodian (thu tu) elected by the village Committee for Rituals (Ban Khanh Tiet) took care of the monthly duties. Worshipping the village deities was done in village temples (den) and in the communal house (dinh). The main
financial source for the annual rituals came from the communal land, which was in turn cultivated by the Giap organizations. Fruits from the gardens of the communal house and temples were used for daily rites.

Village tutelary worshipping was suppressed in the early 1960s although no one attempted to destroy the village temples and the communal house as they did to the village pagodas. The communal house was then used for the primary school while two temples were left empty without care. In 1990, a village committee for rituals under the new name 'Committee for Historical and Cultural Monument Protection' (Ban bao ve dich lich su va van hoa) consisting of seven members was set up by the Elderly Association of the village. This committee took care of collecting contributions to repair temples and lobbied to win the communal house back to villagers. Since 1993, communal ritual practices have been revived. It is interesting to note that when the dinh was restored, the village leadership moved in and used a part of the dinh as the village office, which re-establishes the dinh's functions as a centre of religious and social activities of the village as it was before 1945. In 1995, the village committee for rituals appointed a war-veteran as custodian of the communal house. His duty is to take care of daily rituals at the dinh. At present (1995), the Committee for Historical and Cultural Monument Protection is responsible for community rituals.

Ancestor worship

Observations of the kinship relations in Giao village point to an intensification of numerous rites of passage and solidarity among the patrilineal members in recent years.

During the collective regime, worshipping activities were generally prohibited. There were several reasons for this. First, the communists regarded ancestor worship as a feudal vestige and a religious activity. Secondly, the shortage of food during the co-operative period did not allow patrilineages to organize meetings attended by many people. Thirdly, the consolidation of kin relationship might influence communal affairs and create partial attitudes within the public apparatus. For these reasons, activities of patrilineages during the co-operative period took place on ancestors death anniversaries and were attended by only a few elderly men.

29 The former chairman of Giao co-operative told me that he had held a number of meetings concerning the matter of removing the village temples. The Communist Youth League of the village was ordered to destroy village temples but the leader of campaign--Secretary of the Youth League, suddenly fell ill. The co-operative leadership finally came to the conclusion that it was not necessary to remove such small temples after all.
This situation has changed. Most of the major patrilineages of Giao village have now restored their ancestral halls. Ancestral tombs were also rebuilt and are protected with great care. The head of lineage become more important in arranging activities concerning ancestors' worship and maintaining relationships among its members. In the past (before 1954), patrilineages had their own land, called ruong huong hoa (ancestral cult portion land) to cover all cult expenses. Since the lineage land is no longer available, contributions are now required of male members. For instance, in 1995, the Vu Xuan partilineage required each member to contribute 100 thousand dong to repair the ancestral hall and restore ancestral tombs. Annually, the contributions to the gatherings on the occasion of the lineage founder's death anniversary were about three kilograms of rice or its cash equivalent (between 6 and 10 thousand dong) per participant.

Recognition of the patrilineage membership has become more popular. During the "socialist movement", many individuals and households were ordered to move to new economic zones or to work elsewhere. For many years, their patrilineage relationships were interrupted. Now they return to their home village with their children to visit relatives and pay homage to their ancestors. Several lineages started to compile family records in Vietnamese instead of classical Chinese, with new branches of lineage. On the occasion of the annual grave-visiting festival (tiet thanh minh), senior male members are expected to take their children to visit and take care of ancestral tombs.

In individual homes, the ancestor altar is always placed at a central position of the house. Children are now taught to venerate and honour their ancestors, which is often neglected in public education. Those who devote themselves to ancestral worship are regarded as "dutiful children" and highly respected by the villagers.

Several remarks may be made on the intensification of kin relationships after de-collectivization. First, for all Vietnamese, veneration of ancestors is not only a form of moral obligation but also bears religious significance. This ethics stemming from Confucian ideology, has dominated politics and education in the Vietnamese society for many centuries. The socialist ideology imposed on this society for just a few decades seems to have had little influence on the folk culture. Moreover, economic reforms made the state more concerned with economic development rather than with cultural transformation (Luong Van Hy 1993:259). Secondly, the collapse of the collective regime had a strong impact on the rural society. Practically, agricultural production activities need more co-operation among peasant households. Together with the collapse of the co-operative, the disappearance of the collective welfare system put more economic

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30 The proverb "giu cua nhu giu ma to" (keeping the valuables as carefully as keeping the ancestral tombs) reflects how important the ancestral tombs are to the patrilineal members.
pressures on individual families. In such a situation, the peasants have to find other sources of support. Kinship therefore appears as an ideal social network where people can find not only a moral strength but also a material assistance.

_Life cycle ceremonies_

Marriage and wedding practices in Giao village have been undergoing great changes. These changes can be observed from different perspectives.

First, village endogamy, which was traditionally encouraged by villagers seems to be in decline. My own survey found that among married couples aged 35 or older, 81 per cent got married with natives of the village while among married couples aged between 20 and 34, the village endogamy rate was 54.7 per cent. Most youngsters expressed a liberal attitude forwards love and marriage while elderly people prefer to stick to "village traditions". The increasing trend of "marriage with outsiders", on the one hand, reflects the more open relationships between villagers and the larger society since out-migration increases. On the other hand, it implies that the old custom of marriage arrangement by parents is no longer as prevalent as before.

Secondly, although no statistical information on marriage age is given, direct observations suggest a changing trend as well. Boys who work away from home tend to get married late, at about 24 or 25 while village girls express their wish to get married earlier, at 17 or 18 years of age. At the age of 22, rural young women often worry about the difficulty to find a husband and regard themselves as "being on the shelf".

Thirdly, wedding ceremonies tend to be expensive. Under the co-operative regime, these were simplified. The old usage of a dowry was banned and wedding feasts was limited to serving tea, cigarettes and sweat cakes. Banquets of ten or more trays (for about 40 guests) were not allowed by local authority because it was regarded as wasting food, money, time and a manifestation of 'feudalism'. Such attitudes are no longer a problem in Giao village today. In 1995, a normal wedding was estimated to cost about one hundred kilograms of meat, several hundreds kilograms of rice and two million _dong_ in cash and attended by several hundred guests.

The increase in wedding expenditures is perhaps linked to the elaborate network of gift exchange (Luong Van Hy 1993:227). As a custom, the groom and his family often receive more gifts than the bride's side. Gifts offered to the groom and bride normally in cash or in kind, are worth between 20 to 50 thousand _dong_ each, depending on the relationships between the givers and the receivers. Most gifts were, however, given to the parents while young friends offered gifts directly to the groom or bride. Some villagers estimated that gifts may help to cover from one half to two-thirds of total
wedding expenditures. Dowry does not seem to be a crucial feature but depends on the personal circumstance of the bride's parents.

The extent of wedding feast is often a topic for gossips among villagers because it reflects the social relationships of the groom/bride's families with the community in general. A small number of guests at a wedding feast might be regarded as a sign of a poor social relations.

While wedding feasts tend to be grander and the old customs of wedding ceremony are revived, funeral rituals have also become more elaborate. Traditionally, funerals were organized in a simple manner in Giao village. Only well-off families could afford elaborate funeral rites as regulated by *Tho Mai Gia Le*, a Confucian book of family rites. Nowadays, funeral rituals have gained more popularity. However, Organisation of a funeral seems to reflect a community share of loss rather than individual grief. In Giao village, the Elderly Association and village authority take charge of preparing the grave and sharing a part of the funeral costs, usually equivalent to the cost of a wooden coffin. For a natural death occasion, music is played from the death announcement until the burial ceremony. The rituals of burial ceremony and other practices (ceremonies of the third day, the 49th day, the 100th day and the second burial (1000 days) are carefully observed by the bereaved family. The deceased body is often dressed in the traditional tunic. Their death ceremonies are held at the village pagoda with the presence of the monk and Buddhist Association members.

In summary, religion, rituals and ceremonies are an important part of life in Giao village. Together with economic transformation, observations in the social domain show a great change during the last decade since the collective regime was abandoned. Many of these activities had once been condemned by the socialist state as "feudalist" and "reactionary". Their revival and intensification indicate the fast transformation of rural society in response to the new circumstances, at a time when the "revolution of culture and thought" launched by the party some decades ago has become something obsolete. They also reflect a popular demand for a rich spiritual life, a distinctive trait of Vietnamese village culture.

**Conclusion**

It has been more than a decade now since the economic reforms were officially sanctioned by the government. The last decade has shown dramatic socio-economic changes in Giao village. The economic reforms that abolished the collective economy and helped promote individual household-based production have gone beyond the reformers' expectations. In a historical perspective, the *Doi Moi* process in rural
Vietnam has brought about drastic changes in the production system accompanied by great social upheavals.

First of all, the production system under co-operative management and production brigades no longer exist. The former co-operative itself becomes a state enterprise for supplying water, controlling the irrigation system, providing security and collecting agricultural taxes. The individual peasant household has been restored in its function as a production unit with small rice-land holding. This crucial change has opened up more economic mobility.

The economic changes in Giao village are most visible in the shift of a part of household labour force into non-farm activities, mainly small scale industries, and in the intensification of seasonal migration of male labourers. Consequently, the division of labour within the household has changed. Women and girls are intensively involved in agricultural activities and non-wage work while men and boys are more and more engaged in non-farm and waged work.

While the majority of households still cultivate small pieces of land, the commercialization of wood trade in Giao village has changed the socio-economic landscape locally. Some households have rapidly established family businesses and become entrepreneurs while a number of wood carvers work as wage laborers. The economic gaps among the peasant households are likely to widen. Better incomes in the wood trade attract a large part of family labour force and often induce parents to allow their boys to leave school early for wood work while girls are expected to leave school at a young age as well to assist their mothers in farming and domestic work.

Economic changes also have a strong impact on social life in the village as manifested in the intensification of religious and ritual activities. The collective welfare system in education, health care and social security previously provided by the co-operative has been passed on to the individual households. Peasants nowadays are burdened with extra charges which in many cases, result in shortening their children's education for a place in the labour market.

Giao village has become a more diversified rural community as a result of far-reaching socio-economic changes during the last decade. It is, however, not an easy task to predict the extent of these transformations in the years to come.
Chapter 4

BEYOND PATRONAGE:
CHILD WORK IN THE DOMESTIC CONTEXT

Thuong con cho roi cho vot
Spare the rod and spoil the child
(Local saying)

Introduction

Recent studies on child labour generally agree that children's participation in various house tasks is rather substantial and this type of work also contributes to the household economy, in the sense that "it often frees adults to undertake directly productive tasks" (Hull 1981:66; see also Dube 1981, Cagle & Tasker 1982, Blair 1992, Nieuwenhuys 1994). However, scientific interpretations on work of this type vary considerably. There seems to be a popular trend to regard children's housework as somewhat light, unharful and thus, acceptable (Shah 1996:5; ILO 1993:6; George 1990:2-23; Myers 1989:5). Such an attitude tends to treat adolescent domestic work as a kind of service, non-productive, which helps develop the children's skills and self-confidence. In this case, helping the parents is in effect part of the process of socialization, constituting an apprenticeship in life (Luz Silva 1981:173).

In contrast to this point of view, White (1994; 1996) strongly argues that it is hard to make a distinction between "acceptable" and "unacceptable" forms of children's work. His own observation points out that children themselves generally do not welcome unpaid labour, including housework and family farm work, but rather wish to escape from it. As he puts it: "For many children however, working in a factory or other large-scale enterprise comes high on the list of preferred kinds of work, while working at home occupies a very low place" (White 1996:5-6).

Recently, a new trend of childhood studies that regards the child as an agent of change is posing a challenge to our current knowledge of children's work. To some extent, the debate has brought about important implications for a further understanding of the position and meaning of work in children's lives. For several past decades, studies of children's work have been dominated by the idealization of childhood as a realm of innocence, considering the children's place is at school, not at work. Today, a number of researchers have begun to embark on a rethinking of childhood, calling for the recognition of the value of work performed by children as well as their right to be heard. While such an argument needs more critical examination, it opens up a new framework to study children's housework in which children's voices are at the heart of the matter.

Taking this controversial issue into consideration while examining children's house tasks in Giao village, my research adopts a child-focused approach based on the analysis of children's voices, their attitudes and perception of work. This chapter examines tasks performed by children in various aspects, based on the following assumptions: 1) House tasks performed by children represent a process of socialization or apprenticeship in which age and gender are the essential factors; 2) Their work is induced by parents to make a contribution to the maintenance of household; 3) Demand
for girl domestic workers has been increasing in recent years and the nature of their labour in this type of work is often beyond the scope of patronage relationship.

For data collecting purposes, I divide the children's domestic activities into two major categories: 1) Indoor housework, including tasks such as shopping, food processing, cooking, sweeping and tidying, washing, sewing, housekeeping, taking care of young siblings; 2) Outdoor housework such as collecting "free" goods like wild fruits, vegetables, fish, crabs and shellfish for household consumption, helping to raise livestock for domestic use, carrying water, and gardening.31

My field work examined the work performed by children from 38 households in Giao village. While focusing on children's voices, parents and adult members of the same families were also interviewed for two reasons. The first is to compare their own childhood and work habits with those of their children to underline the changes that have occurred. The second is to cross-check the children's responses with those of their parents. I also paid attention to village children who offered their labour elsewhere as household servants, those who are widely considered by the villagers as the Oshins of Vietnam.32

Children's house-task performance

While the definition of children's work is admittedly fraught with controversies, approaching their housework performance is an extremely difficult and complicated task. Generally speaking, housework goes on the whole year long and takes considerable time as compared to other activities. However, as usual, one tends to underestimate this type of work or often ignores it. The fact remains that is not easy to take into account of the wide variety of children's tasks in different settings, for instance, when they are doing what, and how to measure their task performance. Reynolds (1991) used an integrated method combining instant records, 24-hour recall and direct observation while Gill (1998) used a questionnaire structured around 144 tasks related to several major household chores to access the family division of labour and children's participation. As mentioned previously, my research puts more emphasis on qualitative aspects of children's housework. As I will elaborate further, children of Giao village usually mentioned their house tasks as "viec khong ten" (work without name), implicating that their labour is not fully recognized by adults. Given the choice, they would prefer to do heavy jobs "with name" (means "incomes") rather than staying home for such "odds".

31The gardens of households in Giao village are narrow and some households do not even have gardens. For most households, income from this source is insignificant and work of this kind is not considered as farming.

32The name Oshins is taken after the name of the main character in a Japanese TV serial. This Japanese girl migrated to the city to work as a house servant and experienced many hardships during her childhood. The serial was shown on the Vietnam Television in the early 1990s and was received warmly by local audience.
Patterns from the past

Let me first present some data on housework performed by children before economic reforms in order to give a comparative view while looking at the current practice of children's housework. To understand children's housework during the period of collective economy, I asked the adult members of 38 randomly selected households: at what age they had been first told to do housework, what types of work, for how long, and what they thought about it. Responses to these questions reveal that domestic work took the most time, particularly among girls, in the pre-reform, agricultural co-operative period. About 45 per cent of respondents said they carried out tasks described in group one (cited above) when they were just six or seven years old. While most female respondents reported that they did housework at this early age, 12 per cent of the males said they did not do most of the house tasks until they were 14 or 15. But it soon turned out that these boys were the only sons of their families and their parents exempted them from work. The average age was 10 for the task of tending buffaloes and other outdoor chores such as collecting "free goods". These adults recalled that domestic work took them almost half a day after school. They mentioned the serious food shortage during the collective economy period, which compelled them to supplement their daily meals by collecting wild vegetables and catching fish and crabs. According to them, this type of children's activity has decreased recently because children were more engaged in other "gainful work". Because of close control of adult labour by production brigades at the time, adults often passed housework on to their children, as Mrs. Lam recalls:

"... I shall never forget the day when we went to the cooperative's field to steal some sweet potato leaves to make soup for lunch. We were found by the guard. My friends ran away but I was caught because I had to carry my sibling on my back. The guard kept me in the watch-tower until my dad came and took me home in the afternoon. He was so angry and my mother scolded me because lunch was not cooked and my parents had missed their afternoon work. That evening I was not allowed to eat as a punishment. Now remembering those days, I still wonder why we children had to suffer so much. After half a day at school, when I came home, there were tasks I had to do. Apart from taking care of my brother, it took me two to three hours each day to prepare vegetables, potatoes, cassava or maize and then mixed them with rice for the evening meal, which was precious little. The food was so bad, fit only for dogs, and if you didn't know how to make it a little palatable, then a whipping would follow.

Life stories reveal the difference in boys' and girls' house work. The women talked much about their past misery. As girls, they had to shoulder the bulk of housework such as cooking, washing, taking care of siblings, sweeping, and carrying water. Boys were responsible for outdoor tasks such as tending buffaloes, geese and ducks, and catching crabs and shellfish, some of which were sold to buy extra rice. Such activities continued until they reached the age of 16 when they could be accepted to work as laborers for the co-operatives, on the farm or in irrigation teams. The women however added that from generation to generation, housework is regarded as a karma which they have to bear from childhood until death.

Most life stories recalled by those people who grew up during the collective period bring back memories of starvation and pains rather than the heavy burden of work. Hardship and work were almost on the same par. Apart from this, there was no reliable data to quantify house tasks performed by children during this period. However,
one may see at least two factors influencing children's housework that often emerge from these life stories: 1) Low income from cooperative production and weak development of family economy were common causes inducing children to take part in collecting "free goods" such as wild vegetables, fish, crabs, etc. to improve their daily meals, which increased the time spent for house tasks. 2) The withdrawal of male labourers from farming to serve the armed forces and the "feminization" of agriculture caused children to be regularly involved to a large extent in housework.

A profound achievement of the collective system in the wake of the "socialist revolution" was the abolishment of the practice of hiring poor children to work as household servants. Some villagers recalled that before the land reform 1956, they worked as bonded child labourers (o do), houseboys (thang hau) and maid-servants (con sen, dua o) in landlord and well-to-do households in the village and elsewhere. When the land reform came to the village, employers immediately sent them back to their parents and relatives for fear of being accused of "feudal exploitation". Life stories reveal that most of the village's poor children growing up during the colonial regime worked as dua o for somebody else. Villagers categorized the status of "dua o" in the previous period into several forms, based on the period contracted between their parents/sponsors and employers, including o mua/o vu (seasonal servant), o nam (servant based on annual basis) and o doi (servant for life). While serving their employers, these children were normally not paid, except getting daily meals and one or two sets of clothes a year. Needless to say these children had to work hard. During the period between the establishment of the collective system in 1958 and the implementation of the economic reforms in the mid-1980s, using children as house-servants was condemned as cruelty to children and was certainly forbidden. When the planned-economy built on socialist ideology collapsed and the gap between the rich and poor widened recently, the demand for child servants was revitalized. In the following section of this chapter, case studies from Giao village will provide more insights into this theme.

**Boys, girls and their housework**

White and Brinkerhoff (1981) report that children were encouraged to participate in household chores from an early age, as young as two years old, and their task performance made a significant contribution to the household. This observation is also supported by Cogle and Tasker (1982), Peters and Haldemen (1987), Blair (1992). Indeed, rural children are often induced to do house chores at a very early age. However, at that age, their activities should be understood as an exercise that make them gradually integrated into future working life, and they are not expected to make any concrete contribution. Generally speaking, children start to take part more regularly in housework at the age of six or seven. As found elsewhere, girls usually start to do house chores at an earlier age as compared to boys. My own observations indicate that at the age of eight, most children are already assigned to perform all tasks mentioned in "indoor housework" (group one) and part of the tasks in "outdoor housework" (group two). Such activities as taking care of young siblings, keeping and tidying the house, washing dishes and running chores are performed at an earlier age as compared to "outdoors" chores such as collecting "free goods", carrying water, cooking, washing clothes, prepa-
ring food for livestock, which often come later, between the ages of eight and ten. Even children from well-to-do families perform these tasks, usually at ten or older.

A survey conducted among a sample of 73 children under the age of 16 in 38 households indicate that from the ages between 9 and 13, girls contributed an average of 2.7 hours per day in various house tasks, which was almost equal to the contribution of female adults. Girls of age group 14 to 16 contributed a daily average of 2.4 hours to housework. Boys of age group 9 to 13 worked an average of 1.5 hours per day on housework while boys between 14 and 16 contributed only 0.4 hours.

To test survey results, a long-term observation was focused on a smaller group of 8 households to find out who were doing what in the bulk of household activities. The findings (see Table 4.1) show that the time proportion spent for domestic tasks of girls at the age group between 8 and 15 was almost equal to the proportion of adult women’s time devoted to these tasks while boys and male adults spent much lesser time for this type of work.

Table 4.1. Time spent on domestic tasks by girls and boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/Age</th>
<th>Time spent for house-tasks</th>
<th>Time spent for other activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Own survey in Giao village 1995*

While most of the house tasks are not income-generating activities, certain domestic work contributes directly to raising incomes, such as husking and pounding rice, raising livestock, and collecting "free goods". Catching wild crabs, fish, shellfish, shrimp and tiny shrimp is a typical job of poor children to improve their family daily diet but as I found out, most of the village children enjoy this activity. Products from this work are mainly used for domestic use but part of them is also for sale. Some children are in favour of this task because if the catch is good, they can sell the surplus and are allowed to keep the cash for their own use. This type of work tends to be more extensive in the period between the two harvests. Women and children take advantage of this period to catch extra crabs, fish and shrimp to prepare sauce and dried fish/shrimp for later consumption.

Husking and pounding rice for daily meals take a considerable time of children and of women too. Particularly, children from families working as rice millers (*hang xao*) are deeply involved in this task. *Hang xao* has its long history among the activities of peasants in the Red River delta (Gourou 1936, Kleinen 1999). Typically, this activity can be regarded as a kind of domestic work. Peasants buy paddy, turn it into rice and then sell the processed rice on the market. The left-overs from milling rice such as broken rice (*tam*) and bran (*cam*) to feed pigs are the main gains from this activity. Other left-overs such as rice husk (*trau*) is to be used as cooking fuel or serves as a kind
of fertilizer for rice land. Recently, rice-mill machines have been introduced into the village but hand-processed rice is still favoured by consumers.

Almost all village households raise pigs but the number of pigs kept may vary. Families doing *hang xao* or having more children usually raise more pigs. Pig raising is mainly aimed at producing the manure for rice land. Finding vegetables and cooking *cam* (the mixture of vegetables and bran) for pigs are often the house tasks for children to do.

It should be noticed that while most children work in one way or another, the extent of their participation in housework may differ depending on various factors such as age, gender, household composition, parents' educational background as well as agricultural cycle.

A popular feature of the Vietnamese family is that old parents prefer to reside with one of their sons, often the eldest or youngest. My own observation reveals that children living with their grandparents spend less time on domestic tasks as compared to children without grandparents. In fact, grandparents prefer to cover most of the domestic tasks instead of their grandchildren or at least, share part of these tasks. Families without elderly people usually pass on house tasks to their children, particularly first-born daughters. As I often heard during my stay in the village, people like to compare the girl's housework responsibility with "a good buffalo", which means that she can work as hard as a main household labourer. As I made my inquiry on boys' housework, they often explained that because there were no girls in the family, they had to do domestic chores, which in their view, is the tasks reserved for girls. Those parents who were interviewed on their preference for the gender of expected children often said if they can have a choice, they want both sons and daughters. It is interesting that the reason why they prefer daughters was because daughters are often more *tinh cam* (having more sentiments) and more *dam dang viec nha* (responsible for house-tasks) than sons. Household size is another factor affecting children's participation in housework. My findings indicate that children from big-size households do more housework than those of smaller households. These children are usually assigned tasks such as collecting "free goods", raising livestock, tending cattle, and processing food. Family adult members often expressed the view that children should do some useful tasks. Otherwise, idleness might involve them in social evils. Parents told me they often have no time to keep an eye on their children, so housework would keep them from trouble.

In a sense, household living standards and parents' education background also affect the extent and types of children's housework. Children of well-to-do households usually start to do housework at a later stage, often after the age of 10, and they are rarely assigned to do such things as hanging around the farm or along canals to catch wild crabs and fish. Daughters of these families perform house chores such as cooking, washing, and needle work while their sons are exempted from house chores to focus on schooling or vocational training. Parents with higher education (teachers, civil servants and local administration staff) tend to emphasize the "socialization" aspects of

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33 The often quoted saying is "mot me gia bang ba con o", which means an elder mother can work as hard as three house servants.

34 As a local saying goes: "Ruong sau trau nai, khong bang con gai dau long" (A first-born daughter is worth more than a piece of fertile rice land or a good buffalo).
Previously I have discussed the differentiation in house tasks between girls and boys, in terms of time allocation and type of tasks. A close observation reveals that the position of a particular child in the family has an important influence on their house task performance. Boys who are the only sons of their parents or male heirs are usually exempted from house tasks until they become 12 or older. Similarly, boys who were commended to deities' protection are also rarely assigned to do "heavy" tasks such as carrying water, washing clothes and collecting vegetables for pigs. From a religious point of view, parents believe that these boys belong to the gods, and are protected by the world of spirits, therefore any abuses to them may have an adverse effect on human affairs. These boys are not only exempted from most house tasks but also rarely scolded or punished by their parents.

Finally, the agricultural cycle also has impacts on children's housework. At the peak demand of farming period for such tasks as watering, preparing soil, planting and harvesting, etc., most children are expected to do more house tasks, freeing the adult members for productive work. During the period between the two harvests, children have more idle time because their house tasks are shared by family female adults.

While regarding children's domestic tasks as part of household labour division, it is important to take into account influential factors such as age, gender, position as well as family background and features of the production system, which are essential to analyze housework performance. Some studies on childwork tend to look at this type of work as a kind of "odds" through which children while helping their parents also serve to strengthen family bonds. Such instances are true where, for example, the mother while cooking needs her child to clean rice, vegetables or look after the young sibling. However, most of children's house tasks should not be judged as help only. They need to be examined in the entire household strategy in which parents and adult members work in productive/earning tasks leaving their children to take charge of non-production activities labeled as housework. Most of the parents I interviewed shared similar attitudes, regarding their children's house tasks as a "natural process" of household labour division. According to them, children have an obligation to fulfill these tasks.

In the following section, I will further highlight the contradictions between work and socialization with regard to children's house tasks. I will show that children are compelled to do house chores rather than doing them of their own accord.

**Housework and children's socialization**

"Chi, it's already full daylight, why are you still in bed?" her mother yelled. "Get up, quick! What a lazy piece of skirt! Then no dog would want to marry you. Hurry up! Bring food for the pigs, then come back here, then we'll go to the farm together."

But it was no need for Chi to hurry. She rubbed her eyes, got out of bed, then went down to the kitchen and squatted next to her mother who was mixing up vegetables and bran for the pigs. It was just 5 o'clock in the morning. Chi's brothers and father were still sleeping soundly. Her mother's shouting caused little surprise to her because every morning she was woken up in the same way. She even joked at her mother's shouting, calling it "singing a song". In her view, she was worthy of being a good daughter and her mother's "singing" was just a way of showing her affection to her, as people in this village call it, mang yeu (reprimanding affectionately).

This story from Giao village illustrates vividly the problem of housework and
children's socialization. The question here is why the mother wakes her little daughter in early morning to do house chores while her brothers were allowed to sleep on. Closer examination of the daily activities of the local people suggests that it is the cultural roots that shape the process of children's socialization and that, through children's housework, one can observe a female-male dichotomy in this process.

Before presenting empirical data to test this hypothesis, let me first review some controversial discussions at a societal level regarding work and socialization of children in Vietnamese society. In the mid-1980s, the well-known weekly newspaper Phu Nu Viet Nam (Vietnam Women) raised a public debate on the specific topic For the Girls of The Future. This newspaper published various opinions from all over the country, focusing on how best to educate daughters (PNVN, 11.8.1987:4). Most opinions agreed that family education of daughters should not be the same as applied to sons. The debate was dominated by the emphasis of the mother's role in the education of daughters, and by the general consent that such virtues as perseverance, household responsibility and gentleness are essential to girls. The opposition however questioned why so much is required of the girls and so little is demanded from the boys (Nguyen Mai Ha, PNVN 19.5.1987:4). Some complained that such an attitude would only increase the burden of domestic tasks on girls, which was already heavy enough (Thu Dung, PNVN 27.6.1994:8). According to them, it is necessary to get children to do housework from an early age, at 3 or 4 because this would help create a good sense of household responsibility to prepare them for their future life. But an equal education regarding housework responsibility should be compulsory for both girls and boys. Hoai Huong, for instance, suggests that boys' sloth in housework is induced by parents, not themselves (Hoai Huong, PNVN 26.12.1995:6). Similarly, Ngo Cong Hoan argued that housework plays an important role in the process of children's socialization and during this process, children partly learn by themselves but it is important for parents to guide them in a correct manner (Ngo Cong Hoan 1995:5-7).

So far the debate has brought to the fore the central concern of society: should boys need to show their good behaviour by doing domestic tasks or is such a thing only required of girls? How do the housework and children's socialization actually occur at the grass-root level? The case of Giao village will help bring to light this matter.

For the villagers, housework has a special meaning to the child. By doing house tasks, children show their obedience, good morality and fulfill filial obligations towards their parents. However boys are not expected to participate in house tasks in the same way as required of girls. Observations elsewhere also share this view (Wolf 1972; La Fontaine 1978; Schildrou 1978; Rydstrom 1998). Embedded deeply in the cultural psyche of the Vietnamese society, obedience (vang loi) and good behaviour (ngoan) are considered among the most highly valued characters of children, particularly with respect to girls. Girls are only commended as "ngoan" when they show their obedience to parents by fulfilling house chores. Otherwise, if the socially established norms applied to the girls are not followed, they would be criticized as "hu" and "mat net" (undisciplined and naughty). Parents do not seem to care much about their sons' obedience as required of daughters. Most boys at the age between 6 and 10 are not so strictly bound by discipline although parents often complain about their boys being disobedient, naughty, irresponsible, but I rarely encountered cases where punishments are meted out for bad behaviour.

The following is an example taken from my case studies of Giao village to
explain the differentiation between boys and girls in performing house tasks.

Dan is a girl of 13 and the first-born daughter of a family with 3 children. Her two younger brothers are Hat, 8 years old and Cu, just 3. Their father works away from home as a woodworker, and only visits them during the Tet holidays. Their mother works on the farm and takes care of household affairs. Every morning, she assigns tasks to Dan and Hat before going out to work. Dan goes to school in the morning, so she would do the tasks of taking care of young brother Cu in the afternoon, cooking lunch and dinner and tidying up the house and the yard. In the morning Hat takes care of young brother Cu while keeping an eye on the house. Hat's mother says he is a "mischievous" boy. She wants to send him to a wood workshop for vocational training and learn how to behave in a disciplinary way but since there's nobody to take care of little Cu in the morning while she and her daughter Dan are out of the house, Hat has to do the task.

But Hat rarely stays at home to "keep an eye on the house" as he's been told. He carried his younger brother on his back to a neighbour's house, lets him join his peers while he wanders off somewhere. Very often, he plays games with other kids or climbs up the trees to pick fruits. As soon as his mother gets home from work, he immediately runs off again. His sister Dan complains to me: "My mother never scolds him. He hardly does any house chores but often runs off looking for fun. Once while looking after Cu, he left the little child alone on the ground and ran after other kids. Mother didn't reprove him for his neglect but instead scolded me, blaming me for everything that goes wrong. Mother always says to me: "You are the oldest sister, you have to show your self-denial (nhuong nhin) while dealing with your younger brothers".

A girl's involvement in household tasks is not simply a duty. It is through these tasks that she learns the skills of performing typical "female" house chores and requires good behaviour expected of her gender. I observed many instances of girls working in wood workshops who were often called back home to do chores or to work on the farm, whereas boys were not bothered at all. I also noticed that after their assigned tasks of farming or woodwork, girls went on cooking, sweeping and washing while boys were free after finishing regular work in wood carving or farming. Girls were told that housework was their natural duty, and if they envied (ghen ty) their brothers' free time while they had to do house chores, they might be reminded by parents that envy is a bad character for girls.

Self-denial is regarded a top virtue a girl needs to learn during her childhood. The mothers teach their daughters to be self-denying through practicing daily house chores and interaction among the family members, between brother and sister. Daughters are always reminded that if they do not know how to run house chores and behave correctly, they may never find a husband. Even if they get married, they may be punished by their husband. Such an attitude is locally explained in terms of "nong" and "lanh" (hot and cool) something of a dichotomy of ying and yang that are embedded in the male and female make-up. The hot element is typically attributed to the male character while cool is characteristic of the female and therefore, male anger is acceptable but it is awkward for females to lose their cool. This local concept of "hot" and "cool" dichotomy is analyzed in details by Rydstrom based on her long term research in a village of the Red River delta (1998:157):

...since "hot" and "cool" are understood as bodily poles that need one another in order to maintain "harmony" within a household. The "hot"-"cool" dichotomy, furthermore, designates morally appropriate ways of enacting what is defined as one's congenital female or male body.

While parents regard obedience, self-denial, responsibility and hard work as
desirable traits a daughter should possess, such characteristics do not seem to be required of a son of the same family. In the eyes of parents, boys should be strong, independent, ambitious, worldly and dutiful. Having a son is regarded as a source of security for parents in old age. Sons are expected to carry on the family's name by having heirs, to carry out the worship of ancestors and to bring repute to the family. In this sense, the boy's body is believed to contain in itself a certain esteem (Campbell 1964:268), the biological continuity of lineage that should not be "demeaned" by deeply involving in household chores. Such an attitude is in fact rooted in the long tradition of oriental philosophy concerning male and female energy. According to this theory, the females are in their nature considered to belong to the world of yin, which correlates with the moon, water and cool and therefore, harmony and negativeness. The males on the contrary belong to the world of yang, which is in principle associated with the sun, fire and heat and therefore, strength and positiveness. Such a symbolic perception of male and female body apparently influences the process of socialization of boys and girls as well as the house tasks they perform (Rydstrom, 1998).

Researchers such as Khuat Thu Hong (1991), Le Thi (1992), Ngo Cong Hoan (1993) and Rydstrom (1998) believe that it is self-denial and "the swallowing of resentment" of Vietnamese women that help keep their family atmosphere in harmony and peace. This is why a number of mothers in Giao village, when preaching obedience to their daughters, usually threaten them by saying "if you (the daughter) don't know how to handle the family affairs, no dogs will give you a shit", or "if you don't know how to show self-denial in dealing with your husband when you get married, he'd beat you to death!". These preachings have much to do with two highly regarded virtues in a woman: 1) to behave in an exemplary manner and 2) to manage well household affairs.

This observation coincides with the fact that the rate of girls' school attendance is often lower than that of boys, particularly in higher secondary level. Mothers in Giao village emphasized, more so than the fathers, that their daughters need no higher education but should work on the farm and learn how to handle family affairs. Meanwhile, young men generally value the ability of their prospective spouses to manage housework more highly than their ability to earn money. In addition to this, girls show their respect towards their parents in the way they fulfill domestic duties while at home. Once they get married, these duties are transferred to their husbands or their families. The practice for a wife to live in her husband’s family house after marriage induces a number of parents to cut short their daughter’s education to help their mothers in housework while they still live at home. A mother explained to me her reason for withdrawing her daughter from school as follows:

Look, if you consider all the pains in giving birth to my little girl and raising her, you'll know what I mean. When she gets older, say at 17 or 18, she'll get married. She then works for her husband's family. What do I get in the end? All for nothing! If she leaves school a couple of years earlier, then she may help us a bit before leaving us for good to work for her in-laws.

I noticed that while she was saying these words to me, her husband objected mildly, but I believed she expressed frankly her main concern.

Without a doubt, "housework was a medium through which parents, especially fathers, could exercise their authority and redefine behaviour expectations for their children" (Gill, 1998:305). In a sense, the differentiation in house tasks performed by girls and boys is in fact a process of children's socialization in which the gender-specific roles
are shaped for the children's future lives. Such a pattern of socialization is greatly regulated by the male-orientated structure of the family and the patriarchal order, consolidated further by Confucian ethics. Even today, public opinion as represented by the newspaper Phu Nu Vietnam (Vietnam Women) still emphasizes the four women's virtues (Tu Duc) as a guideline for a girl's education, while the school system prominently exhorts the Confucian motto "learn the rites first".\footnote{The further analysis will follow in chapter 7.} It is apparent that several decades under the revolutionary regime, the communist ideology was unable to remove the traditional cultural tenets deeply rooted in Vietnamese society for many centuries.

**Housework: important but boring**

As I entered my hostess' house on a hot midday, I found her chatting with a number of middle-aged women while her daughter named Tang was cooking in the kitchen, drenched in sweat. "Look! Mrs. Dung (the hostess), you must be very happy!" I exclaimed. "You're just enjoying yourself chatting away waiting to be served by your daughter.".

"How can you call it a service?" Mrs Dung immediately countered. "Who serves whom? Everyone has his/her own tasks. Other children at her age (12 years) already earn money for their parents. Not me, but she's happy. Imagine if you already work for many hours on the farm, and when you're home, you still have to cook and run house chores, how can you continue the heavy work the next day? Children are to do house work!"

A woman next to Dung added: "Being a girl, she (referring to Tang) should learn to do more house tasks. If not, she'll be put on the shelf (e chong) in a few years' time."

Previously, I have analyzed children's housework as a process of socialization. I will now consider their contribution in maintaining the household stability and the relationship between parents and children through housework. Based on the "voices" expressed by both children and their parents on housework, I will point out that housework performed by children is on the one hand "indispensable" for their household but on the other hand, undesirable tasks from the children's point of view.

Economic researchers while analyzing children's domestic work, attempt to draw a line between economic and non-economic activities (Hull 1981:86). As a matter of fact, such a distinction is extremely difficult to make. Even the use of a time-allocation study to measure children's contribution to household tasks has also to cope with definition problems. A suggestion made by Dube (1981:179-214) is useful to look at the issue. According to this author, "it would be necessary to weigh children's work in terms of its indispensability for the household "(1981:202).

Indeed, while adults usually argue that teaching children to master their housework skills is part of upbringing, they at the same time recognize that children's help in housework provides parents with more advantages and make their lives easier. Let us listen to the way parents appreciate their children's housework:

It doesn't matter if one stops working on the farm for a couple of days and does it later. But it is impossible to neglect house tasks for only one day. Meals must be cooked, clothes have to be washed, house should be cleaned up and livestock is waiting to be fed everyday. Without children, no way I can run the whole mess. (Quoted from an interview with a mother of three
In a previous section, I have indicated that the time spent by girls at the age between 10 and 14 for housework is almost equal to that of a woman. I also found that although boys regarded housework as a feminine duty, in case of absence of girls, they had to do house chores as well. It can be said that parents expect their children to take part in most house tasks, which helps relieve their total work load. In families where the mothers spend most of their time on farming, it becomes obvious that the load of house tasks usually fall on their daughters. Gill analyzes the strategies of parents to involve children in housework as follows:

A majority of the tasks that added extra burden centred around children themselves, therefore, strategic training to involve them in housework served two purposes. Firstly, they became self-sufficient individuals and helped themselves with basic necessities and secondly, their abilities and skills became useful and an asset to their overburdened parents (Gill 1998:311).

Adults consider tasks such as taking care of younger siblings, fetching food for pigs, tending and cutting grass for buffaloes, washing clothes etc., as somewhat "natural". In many instances, I found that if children did not do properly their assigned tasks, they would be punished by parents (or in some instances, by their elder brothers and sisters). I have pointed out elsewhere that punishment can be understood as a measure whereby adults exercise their authority over children. It occurs when adults want to force children to carry out certain tasks or impose discipline on them (well-behaved manner). To collect data for this, I recorded the cases where children were punished (by whom, nature, frequency, severity and the reasons thereof). Surprisingly, I found out that punishment was mostly related to domestic work. Particularly, punishment was often applied when children left the house to play without permission, neglected the care of young siblings, forgot to cook meals in time and did not do other house chores. Measures of punishment varied from mental abuses (scolding) to physical abuses (beating). Mothers often scolded children for their misbehaviour and neglect of house chores while fathers took stronger methods such as beating, whipping and leaving them alone for definite periods without food.

A boy named Lam (12) recalled:

I used to be beaten by my parents when I made mistakes but some times I did not understand why I was punished. I remember that not long ago, my mother asked me to go to the field for collecting the left-overs after sweet potatoes were harvested. For the whole morning, I could gather only a few small sweet potatoes which were not enough for feeding our two pigs. When I came home, my mother suspected that I had spent the time fooling around, so I was cooped up indoors for a long time without food. Only in late afternoon when my aunt came to visit us was I allowed to go free again.

And this is a story told by Thiet, a boy of 13 years old:

Once I carried my younger brother on my back to visit a neighbour. There seeing other kids eating sweets, my little brother also wanted some. But there were no sweets left. He started to cry. To force him to stop crying, I slapped him on the face. He screamed now. I dropped him to the ground. He staggered and fell, his face was covered with mucus. The neighbour saw this, went to my house and told my mother. My mother immediately came, scolded me and took us home. In the afternoon, my mother told my father the story when he just came home from work. He was so angry that he told me to lie down on the floor and whipped me many times with a bamboo stick.
Generally speaking, most adults I have interviewed agree that punishment of children for their misbehaviour is a necessary measure to impose discipline on them. Actually, various types of "empty" threat are often used by adults when they want to discipline a child, most popular among these are the threats of inflicting bodily harm. My own experience in Giao village supports the observation made by Rystrom that "a senior female or male kin may threaten a child with "cutting of hands or feet", "to be beaten to death" or "to be killed". Rydstrom rightly observed that for young children, "threats of punishment occur much more often than actual punishment". (Rydstrom, 1998:147).

At an older age, when children are assigned full responsibility for certain house tasks, some types of threat are still used while punishments (physical or mental) are presumed to be taken if children show disobedience. In this sense, one can no longer see housework as a kind of socialization but rather a division of labour in which children are expected to make their full contribution to the maintenance of household activities.

In the past, state laws allowed the father to mortgage his children or force them to work for household earnings. In case children failed to fulfill their obligations to parents, the father was allowed by law to punish them physically (Dao Duy Anh, 1938:116). Villagers today still favour a local saying "gia don non rhe", which means that "to enforce discipline (on children), let's use a big stick". Local opinion does not value highly those parents who let their children neglect household obligations. It frowns on parents who spoil their children with too much indulgence. Children's laziness is often attributed to their mothers and grandmothers who do not impose enough discipline on them. 36 At the village level, social opinion plays an important role in shaping the behaviour of particular individuals and families. In the context of child work, parents of those children who work hard and behave well, are highly commended and respected. 37

The point raised from this observation is that threats and punishments meted out to children for their neglect of housework and misbehaviour are not likely the preferred measures of a particular family or parents. It could be inferred that the daily interaction between parents and children through housework has deep roots in the cultural structure and family background in which established practices and ethics are embedded. Nevertheless, the borderline between "disciplining the child" and "abusing the child" in this sense is truly thin and hard to be delineated.

Recently, the public media has launched a big campaign against violent fathers who try to educate their children by whipping and beating. An investigation by lawyer Xuan Yen indicates that 70 per cent of cases where children were seriously hurt or beaten to death were caused by their parents (Xuan Yen, PNVN 25.2.1991). Educationalists believe that such methods of teaching children as scolding and beating do not provide desirable results but on the contrary, create a cool distance in parents-children relationships and have negative effects on the development of children in a

36 This is expressed by a popular saying "con hu tai me, chau hu tai ba", meaning that the indulgence by mothers and grandmothers make their children lazy and misbehave.

37 Another local saying goes similarly: "con dai cai mang" (parents are responsible for the foolishness of their child).
long-run (Vo Nhu, PNVN 6.12.1989). The conservative attitude which emphasizes "spare the rod and spoil the child" can be seen as one of causes of physical abuse of which children are victims.

I have noticed that threats and punishments are strong measures taken by parents to discipline children and involve them in housework. To a certain extent, my observations also reveal that parents also used encouragement as a strategy to mobilize their children to do housework. Dan's mother (whom I mentioned earlier) for instance, usually left the house with a promise of reward to her: "Keep staying in the house and take good care of your brother, when I am back there will be gifts for you". What she mentioned as gifts could be a cake or sweets, simple toys, sometimes a little pocket money or some new clothes. Children from well-to-do households, particularly boys, due to their lack of motivation and interest in the house chores, often demanded rewards for doing house chores, which sometimes led to punishment. My host in Giao village once confided to me:

It's not my intention to force my son doing housework through the hard way but my wife indulges him too much. Whenever he does something, he asks for pocket-money. It's no good because she may spoil the kid. I hate to beat children but it's a necessity if they go too far. At their age, they still don't understand that housework is their responsibility.

While boys usually ask for pocket-money, girls sometimes negotiate with parents for some favours, for example to allow them to raise a few chickens or ducks together with the family livestock to make their own money. Such a scheme seems to be easily acceptable but sometimes can lead to conflict. Que, a girl of 14 years, said:

Last years, my brother gave me some money on the occasion of Tet. I invested all this money in raising chickens. The mother said I can keep the money from selling these chickens. But then, she asked me to lend her this money with the promise she would return it to me when I needed it. This was not to be the case. I know I'll never see it again. So this year I won't raise any chickens on my own. I'm so fed up.

Que's mother explained:
I agreed that she could raise chickens for earning some pocket money, but she just spent all her time taking care of her own chickens and neglected other house tasks.

While most people would regard house tasks performed by children as an important contribution to the household economy, children themselves generally do not seem to welcome this type of work. Sociological studies on domestic work generally point out that household tasks are boring, repetitious and monotonous (Oakley, 1974). In the context of child work, there is an obvious contradiction between adults and children on their perception of house tasks.

As I have pointed out, parents attempt to involve their children in house tasks so that they themselves could concentrate on earning and productive activities. In their views, housework is light, simple and suitable for young persons. Moreover, some adults see rational considerations in asking children to run house chores. They worried that leaving children loiter about without adult's control would make them the lazy when growing up. A repeated quotation I heard very often is "nhan cu vi bat thien" (idleness is the root of all evils).

However, most children I interviewed did not share the same ideas. Girls were told that housework was their natural duty but they often expressed their reluctance to do housework, seeing themselves as disadvantaged, performing tasks which were not defined as "work" compared to those doing well-defined, wage-earning work, such as
farming, trading, and particularly work in non-farm sectors. Apart from this desire to work for wages, another reason depressing them in doing housework is that their labour is not fully appreciated by their parents.

My case study of Dan, the girl of 12 mentioned earlier, brings to light the fact that she always compared her disadvantageous situation with other classmates who did paid work and got pocket money on their own. Dan said her friends with a little pocket-money often came to school with their supercilious faces. To show their "wealth", as she put it, they bought snacks for others and threw litters all over the classroom. She dreamed that one day her mother would allow her to stop doing housework, then she would take on "whatever tasks" with pay so that she could earn some money on her own.

Motivation of earning money with paid jobs is particularly strong among children aged between 12 and 15. In a sense, their wish to earn money is one way to show their working ability, through which their labour value can be recognized, and to gain self respect and independence. Most working children in the wood trade of Giao village under my study were not "bread winners" of their families. It is the boring nature of housework that often caused children to opt for paid tasks outside the home. A number of girls who were deeply involved in house tasks expressed the view that their "hanging around the house" would prevent them from making contact with the outside world, giving them no chances for future self-development.

One of the factors influencing the way rural children think negatively of their housework is the public media. As I often heard during my stay at Giao village, rural children felt themselves at a disadvantage in comparison with their peers in the cities who, in their eyes, often appeared on the TV screen with an aura of freedom, worldliness and glamour.

I wish to conclude my observations on children's housework with the following remarks. Beyond the debate on children's housework as something light, unharmedful and acceptable and opposing views, my study further highlights the contradictions inherent in the relationships between parents and children as regards this type of work. Without a doubt, children's housework plays an important role in children's lives and it makes a considerable contribution to the maintenance of the family. However, while parents tend to rationalize children's housework, regarding it as a process of socialization and a "natural division of labour", children want to get away from it. In their view, housework is not recognized as "well-defined tasks", and it is also boring. This view does not alter the fact that most children still do house tasks. As I indicated previously, housework carries with it a number of functions and meaning. By performing house tasks, children show their dutifulness, obedience and obligations towards their parents. And in that sense, one can see one aspect of children's housework as "work for love" (Nieuwenhuys 1994).

**Between patronage and exploitation: stories of girl domestic workers**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, it was commonplace in the past that a poor family had to hire out their children as servants or mortgage them as bonded labourers. This sad situation disappeared in northern Vietnam after the land reform of 1956. Recently, the media has increasingly talked about the revitalization and expansion of the demand for child domestic workers. Worse yet, the exploitation and physical abuses of
working children were also brought to public attention. The *Phu Nu Vietnam* (Vietnam Women) Newspaper for instance reported the case of a little girl named Nguyen Kim Huong who came from Lang Son province and worked as a house servant in Hanoi. She was severely tortured by her employer for being suspected of stealing. She was then expelled from the house without pay (PNVN 26.7.1989:1). Further investigations by the reporter Nguyen Dinh Chuc (PNVN 8.1.1993 & 26.9.1994) reveal that 90 per cent of the house servants working in Hanoi were females who came from rural areas. The majority of them were at the ages between 12-17 and 45-60. Nguyen surveyed 170 cases of working children who migrated from rural areas and worked in Hanoi. His analysis shows that 89 per cent of child house servants were from poor peasant families among which 21 per cent were in special situations (broken families, orphans, abandoned and children of widows, etc.). According to Nguyen, there existed a hidden network operating as broker between child workers from the countryside and employers in urban areas. His confidential sources of information reveal that such abuses as mental and physical punishments (scolding, beating) and exploitation (unpaid, underpaid) are an "everyday occurrence", (Nguyen D.C 1993:3).

Another investigation made by the reporter Giang Ha Vi on the *Ha Noi Moi* Newspaper (4 June 1995) gives a figure of 18,000 children making their living in Hanoi with various occupations including that of house servants. Giang reported that in the central district of Hoan Kiem alone where his survey was concentrated, he found more than 3,000 children who had to hire out their labour for a living. Other reports by Mai Thu (NTNN 17.10.1995), Uyen Chau (PNVN 12.9.1994), Duong Kieu Linh (PNVN 15.8.1994), Tho Cao (TTT 30.10.1995), Minh Thuy (GD&TD) 11.12.1995), etc., confirm the fact that a substantial number of rural children were hired to work as house servants in urban areas. According to these investigations, a great majority of house servants were girls, and the number of girls looking for domestic work has increased substantially in recent years since the economic reforms were implemented in the mid 1980s. The reports also painted an alarming picture of children who were hired to work at various subsistence levels, a number of them have become homeless, beggars, thieves and prostitutes.

Because of the limitations of field research, this study does not cover children working as domestic servants in urban areas. However, during my study in Giao village, I had some opportunities to interview several girl domestic workers. In this section I will present three case studies, or rather the stories of three girls, which may help shed some light on this new development of children's work, followed by some personal remarks.

**Case 1: "I'd rather be a waged worker than an adopted child"**

Trang was a girl of 11. Before being adopted, she attended the third grade at the village school. She was the third-born child in a family with 5 children. Her elder brothers, Vung (15) and Chai (13) were no longer at school and currently worked as woodworkers in the village woodshop. Her younger siblings were 8 and 4 respectively. Trang's father was an invalid veteran who died some time ago from lung cancer. Trang's mother tilled the 7 sao plot of rice land, which was the main source of the family income. Apart from farming, she also raised several pigs and ducks and had a fish pond. Monthly average income per head was about 67,000 VND (about 6.1 USD in 1995), somewhat lower than the village average.
After Trang's father passed away, she was sent to her aunt (bac: father's older sister) as an adopted child. Mrs. Lam (her aunt), 45 years of age, was married to a man who lived in the town of Sat, a district town 5 kilometers away from Giao village. Mrs. Lam gave birth four times but only two sons survived, now aged 16 and 13. Both of them were studying in the lower secondary school in town. Her husband was formerly a state-owned enterprise worker. He lost his job in 1987 after the government launched a retrenchment campaign. Mrs. Lam ran a small shop selling sundries in the town market, called cho Sat. At the moment, Sat was the commercial center of the Cam Binh district. Her family was considered as rather well-off, with a storeyed house filled with modern furniture, TV set. They owned a Honda motorbike.

Mrs. Lam said she was not that wealthy but her life was easier as compared to others. Everyday she worked from 10 to 12 hours in the market. She often complained that the two sons had no time to help her in the shop. According to Mrs. Lam, she adopted Trang since she wanted to share the burden with Trang's mother in bringing up her children. Moreover, since she did not have a daughter, so Trang could do some house chores at home.

Trang's mother told me in tears that she did not really want to send Trang away. But Mrs. Lam was a close relative who could be fully trusted. Living with her, Trang would have a chance to go to school and might have brighter prospects.

I was told that Trang often skipped school and returned to stay with her mother home until her aunt came and took her back. I quote below part of our conversation when we met in the village.

- Chinh: What did you do at Mrs. Lam family?
- Trang: I helped her to prepare goods for the market, tidying the house, feeding two pigs. Then I went to school. After lunch, I went to the market and helped her selling goods.
- Chinh: Then?
- Trang: Then I came back home with my aunt in the evening. She always cooked and washed clothes in the evening and I washed dishes and cleaned up the mess.
- Chinh: What did your two cousins do? If they helped you?
- Trang: Nothing at all. They studied, watched TV, listened to music and played games with friends.
- Chinh: Do you like staying in your aunt's house?
- Trang: She is kind, but I don't want to be her adopted child.
- Chinh: Tell me why?
- Trang: As an adopted child, I have only daily meals and clothes, that's all. My friend Luyen works for a family in this town, she gets paid 120,000 dong per month and gets clothes as well.
- Chinh: But she didn't go to school, did she?
- Trang: I'm not sure, but I'd rather be a house servant like her than being an adopted child. I want money to help my mother.

**Case 2: "Nowhere to go"

The girl whom Trang mentioned in her story was employed as a domestic servant for a family in the same town. In the eyes of neighbours, this was a wealthy family. The husband worked as a tax inspector and his wife was a teacher. They had two children, a son of nine and a daughter of four.

Luyen, the name of the little maid, came from Giao village. According to her employers, a relative introduced Luyen to them some months ago. I was told that Luyen was hired out of compassion and the employers regarded her as their own child. Luyen had a younger brother who was 9. Their father died young and their mother remarried,
so they lived with a poor uncle who had to take care of five children of his own.

The hostess, Luyen's employer, said she wanted to have a trustworthy servant to help her with some house chores since her husband often worked away from home while teaching took most of her day time. The main task Luyen was expected to do was to look after a girl of four. Besides, she also helped clean the house and run some chores. Her monthly salary was 120,000 dong, but it went directly to her uncle who took charge of her younger brother in the village. Luyen was allowed to eat and sleep in her employers' house. According to the verbal contract with Luyen's uncle, she received two sets of clothes per year.

When I visited the house, Luyen was asked to boil water and prepare tea for me. She then went out to the yard to "play" with the little daughter. I expressed my wish to talk with Luyen, but her employer ignored it, saying that Luyen was just an innocent girl.

Back in the village, I met Luyen's uncle. He looked thin and his eyes with dark circles under them told me that he was having a hard time. He and his wife had to feed five children plus Luyen's younger brother. All lived in a house with a thatched roof, a rarity in the village today. Luyen's uncle currently worked as a wood worker and his wife tilled a plot of five sao (1,800 sq.m2) of rice land. All sources of incomes provided them an average amount of 54,000 dong per head monthly (equivalent to 5 USD). This meant that Luyen's earning of 120,000 dong per month made a considerable contribution to the household budget.

Luyen's uncle told me that when Luyen's mother decided to remarry with a man from Hai Phong, she sent her children to him, saying that she could not bring them with her. The man said:

"We are all poor. But the children are blood-related to me. I cannot leave them to their own devices. We all love them very much. We were reluctant to send Luyen away to work as a house servant, but what else could we do? Thank God, she's much sagacious than her age, so she can help a bit. If she stays with us, our situation may be even worse".

**Case 3: "She is not your daughter but a waged servant"**

Van, 14 years of age, recalled that two years ago, she was told by her father to leave school and follow a neighbour to the district of Kim Mon. As previously arranged by her father, Van was hired to work as a house servant for a fellow villager who was running a shop selling draft beer (bia hoi) and food. This shop was located next to the cement plant of Hoang Thach, about 40 kilometers away from Giao village. At the beginning, Van was assigned to look after the owner's boy and run house chores. A few months later, she was sent to serve in the shop. Her day started at 4.30 a.m., and ended at midnight. Her main task was to wash dishes but she sometimes doubled as a waitress.

Van told me that once she fell down and broke a pile of plates and bowls. Her employer smacked her, swearing loudly, calling her a parasite. Van repeated the employer's words: "I want to help you and your father, let you live in clover but what you do in return? Just go home if you want!". The husband asked his wife to stop scolding, but she even became angrier: " She's not your daughter, she's just a servant working for wage!". Her husband came up with an advice: "Just don't pay her wage for this month. That'll settle it. All right?"
According to Van, scolding and beating occurred any time she made a mistake. Once she dared to talk back to her employer, and she was immediately sent home, being called "ill-bred". Van's father beat her, called her a "lazy-bones" and sent Van's younger sister to work in her stead. I asked Van if she managed to save some money from her wages, she shook her head, meaning: Not at all. Her salary (150,000 dong per month, equivalent to about 13 USD at that time) was sent directly to her father in the village.

When I met Van's father, I asked why he let her daughter stop going to school, his answer was straight: "What for? It's no need for a girl to get a higher education. To be able to read and write is enough. In a few more years, she'll be someone's wife. That's it".

Since she returned home, Van took a job polishing wooden-carved objects for a workshop in the village. Van's father was in his fifties, lived with two wives, and had seven children. Van was the daughter of his first wife. He had a primary education and earned his living as a farmer.

The cases briefly presented above raise some concerns as one examines the changes taking place in children's work in the domestic context. During the colonial period, a number of children in Giao village, both boys and girls, had to work as house servants. Villagers' life stories told us that in the past, the use of domestic help in the homes of better-off families was very common. The socialist regime had changed the fate of many poor children. The employment of maids and house boys was condemned as hideous vestiges of colonial-feudalist exploitation and therefore had to be eradicated. Some of my informants recalled that when the Land Reform Team came to their village in 1956, employers hurriedly sent off their domestic servants for fear of being denounced as exploiters of children. During the collective period, child houseservants were thought to be something of a distant past. Since the economic reforms in the mid 1980s, the revitalization of demand for child domestic workers no doubt reflects the dramatic changes in labour relations. Not only the mode of children's employment has changed but the public perception of the nature of children's work and their roles in society has undergone drastic transformations. No one raises an eyebrow when the media approach this once-sensitive subject with something like this: "the fact that some children work as domestic workers is only an objective process of the natural division of labour" (Nguyen Dinh Chuc 1993:3).

Available information reveals that demand for child domestic workers has increased recently and child domestic help is now becoming more commercialized. The case studies presented above indicate that child domestic workers are mainly from very poor families. Their earnings are fraught with uncertainties and as usual, go directly to parents or sponsors. Differing from those making a living off the streets, who are thought to be "run away" kids, jobs offered to child domestic workers are always arranged by adults regardless of the child's interests. Historically, the wealthy families who hired house servants often looked down at them as destitute. The information gathered from my case studies shows whether children work as waged house servant or disguised under the form of an adopted child, the work performed by them bears the same feature: it does not suit their interests but contributes to the well-being of others,
and their labour is the outcome of a financial transaction, a traded commodity (Black
1997). Parents who send their children to work for others as house servants are
ambiguously hopeful that they might get lucky and have a better life. But the reality so
far as indicated by some of my findings presents a sombre picture which deserves
further empirical investigation.

Conclusion

Previous studies have indicated the important contribution of children in
housework, which helps sustain the productive activities of adult members of the house-
hold. My observations of the situation in the Giao village also support this. These
studies enable me to look further into children's housework in the context of cultural
constraints and socio-economic transformations. In the Vietnamese realities, housework
is seen as a process of socialization through which parents bring discipline to the child.
During childhood, obedience is emphasized as a vital preparation for the child's future
adulthood, marriage and parental life. Through this process, parents induce their
children to perform various house chores and expect them to make a contribution to the
maintenance of the household.

There is a little doubt about the importance of children in doing housework.
However, there are discrepancies between parents and their children in the way they
regard housework. Most children consider house tasks as monotonous and boring duties.
In their view, their labour in this type of work is not fully recognized by adults, a kind
of "work without name". Most village children often express the wish to take on work
"with name", i.e. well-defined tasks providing direct earnings.

An interesting development recently is the increase in demand for child domestic
help, which is becoming more commercialized. While children may perform the same
tasks they do at home, the nature of their work in the others' households is totally
different. This has nothing to do with socialization and "upbringing" but their labour is a
mere financial transaction negotiated and strictly controlled by the adults whose primary
concern is their household's well-being.

Like many other authors, I find that age and gender are the essential factors
affecting children's house tasks performance, bearing in mind that girls are expected to
do more house chores than boys. Their labour in this area reflects not only an economic
function but also the "symbolic function and the function of dressage, or discipline"
(Foucault 1980:161), which are aggregated in children's daily activities. The changes in
productive mechanism brought about by economic reforms do not seem to reduce girls' 
housework but rather intensifies it. Associating housework with females is considered
an enduring trait of rural society; this lies at the root of domestication of girls who do
more house chores than boys. This pattern suggests, as Reynolds (1991:187) puts it, that
if the position of women need to be altered, a place to begin is with children.
Chapter 5

COOPERATIVE, HOUSEHOLD AND CHILD WORK ON THE FARM

Ruong sau trau nai khong bang con gai dau long

A first-born daughter is worth more
than a piece of fertile rice land or a good buffalo
(Local saying)

Introduction

This chapter examines children’s work in the agricultural sector. It attempts to analyze the changing patterns of children’s farm work since the collective economy was abandoned and rice land was redistributed to individual peasant households.

Traditionally in Vietnam, children’s work in agriculture is regarded as a fact of life that “has existed from time immemorial in one form or another”, it is an integral part of family life that children should work alongside other household members, often under the direct supervision of their parents. This often “helps keeping them safe from more extreme forms of exploitation to which children may be subjected when working on their own or for third parties” (Vu Ngoc Binh 1994:47). Such a view presumes that children’s work occurs only within the family context and therefore should pose no problems at all. Furthermore, it suggests that children’s work on the farm is, by its nature, unchangeable, as if children’s involvement in agricultural work is immune to changes regardless of social circumstances. Such ingrained assumption is, to say the least, oversimplified and should be reconsidered.

Based on empirical observations on children’s economic activities in Giao village, this study assumes that decollectivization and the advent of the household economy have brought about significant changes with regard to children’s work in rural Vietnam. Such changes can be observed in terms of work organization, gender division of tasks, the way in which agricultural work is perceived and valued in comparison to other economic activities, and the social relations involved in work.

Child labor studies in agrarian societies generally agree that children are regarded as a source of labor, to be put to work at an early age (Fyfe 1989; Sahoo 1995), and that children’s agricultural work is basically an apprenticeship and vital to women (Reynolds 1991:XXVII), which has often been clouded “unduly by moral considerations” (Nieuwenhuys 1995). The evidence collected from my own field research in rural northern Vietnam shows an increasing trend of children’s involvement in work since the economic system changed in the 1980s. The question can be raised as
to why child labor is much more extensive under the individual household economy than under the previous co-operative system and why peasant households make their children work. Empirical observations on the role of children in relation to the production system will be provided to understand this change.

**Agricultural cooperative and child worker**

"My childhood was bitter and monotonous. Just barely 12 years old, the plough-beam was already put on my thin shoulders, and when I went to work, I felt as if the sharp edges of the plough were poking at my legs. I used to get up early in the morning and went to work on the farm when the grass was still soaked with the night dew. My bare feet were frozen and the cold rushed to my brain. I used to get home when darkness already fell on the rice-fields and flocks of bat were flying out to search for food.

I did all kinds of heavy tasks, which were normally performed by male adults, such as plowing, harrowing, and carrying stuffs even though I was still a little boy. I also did other jobs, which were often assigned to females, such as weeding and fertilizing. I still remember that because I was so small, when I bent down to weed, I almost disappeared into the patch of rice plants while my face and neck were torn by sharp rice-leaves. What annoyed me most at the time was to hear all kinds of naughty stories told by middle-aged matrons whom I had to work with. Some women even pulled down their trousers and peed noisily right into the field despite my presence. I just stood there, next to them, deep in the mud, blushing with shame. It seemed that for them, I did not exist as a boy but something like a rock. I tried to ignore them and went on working in silence. But next day, next month and next year, I had to go on working with these village women. These were unpleasant experiences I endured during my childhood, but strangely enough when I grew up and left the village behind to fight on the southern front, these became sweet memory which followed me everywhere until the end of the war. (Quoted from life stories told by Nguyen, a village and veteran aged 45 years).

The story told by Tan who spent his childhood in Giao village during the 'American' war tends to support the view that agricultural collectivization provided the men for military mobilization, leaving women and children to handle agricultural production on their own. This was described by some as the wartime "feminization of agriculture" (Werner & Luu 1993). There is no doubt that the women did play a large role in "running the coops and brought in the crops" during the years of war but it does not, however, imply that when women played the main role in agricultural production, child labor would be intensified accordingly. My study on the utility of child labor during these years indicates that it was the organization of work and structure of employment under the co-operative system that put limits on children's involvement in farming tasks. In order to gain insights into the nature and extent of children's involvement in work within the co-operative framework, I traced back the types of work organized by production brigades and households, and ascertained how children were assigned to do these. Such an approach soon proved to be effective. Most villagers recalled their childhood during the wartime as a period of sorrow, poverty, deprivation and starvation, while little was said about the burden of work. I came to realize that the experience recalled by Ngoc Tan
above turned out to be one of the rare cases when children were burdened with work at a young age. My interviews with villagers confirm that it was the collective mechanism and socialist ideals that kept children from intensive involvement in farming tasks. To shed more light on children's work on the farm in the previous period, an attempt will be made to reconstruct the structure of the co-operative's employment in which the position of child labor will be analyzed.

_Relationship between collective and family economy in the co-operative of Giao_

- **Lam**: At the age of eleven and twelve I spent the whole day on the farm.
- **Chinh**: To work?
- **Lam**: No!
- **Chinh**: What did you do there for the whole day?
- **Lam**: Catching craps, fishing and tending the buffalo
- **Chinh**: Why didn't you do farm work?
- **Lam**: Even if I wanted it, I was not allowed to do.
- **Chinh**: How come?
- **Lam**: The Doi (production brigade) would not assign tasks for children under the working age. My family was short of main laborers, so the _doi_ assigned me to tend a buffalo for work-points.
- **Chinh**: I heard some children also did farm work as adults.
- **Lam**: Are you kidding? Only children from households without a main laborer were assigned to do farm work. Children tending buffaloes were no longer assigned farming tasks. Those who told you they worked on the farm, they perhaps referred to some pieces of work their parents had contracted with the _doi_ and they worked as retainers for their parents, not for the coop!

A central feature of agricultural production under the co-operative system was that labor was organized and controlled by _doi san xuat_ (production brigades). Between 1960-1976, Giao was a village-based cooperative with four production brigades. Since 1976, when the co-operative system was developed into the so-called "high level" agricultural co-operative (_hop tac xa nong nghiep bac cao_), Giao became a part of it while the production units (_doi_) remained as before. Like many agricultural co-operatives in northern Vietnam, the main task of the co-operative of Giao (after 1976, called Luong Dien) was the production of foodstuff, mostly rice. The agricultural activities of the co-operative were geared towards specialization. While the production of rice was considered as the major activity in implementing the state plan, animal husbandry such as pig-raising was also promoted, aimed at providing manure for rice cultivation and at the same time, ensuring the obligatory annual deliveries of meat to the state in accordance with the quotas fixed in the plan.

Besides these, other production activities which were defined as supplementary (_nganh phu_) involving occupations such as brick-making, manufacturing and repairing

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38 Writings on the organization of work in the cooperative of Giao are largely based on the _Lich su Dang bo xa Luong Dien_, (A history of the Communist Party, Luong Dien chapter, 1930-1990), a book prepared by local cadres who were formerly in charge of the co-operative. Giao village is a part of Luong Dien commune.
work tools and transport vehicles, processing food products, making cattle fodder, etc. These were also organized to meet the internal needs of the co-operative and its members.

By emphasizing the production of foodstuffs, Gia o co-operative included both rice and subsidiary crops. As a rule, rice cultivation was predominant while sub-crops (sweet potato, maize, potato, soybean and vegetables) were to support mainly animal husbandry. The truth is that these secondary crops sometimes turned out to be vital for co-op members in struggling against starvation, especially in the periods between the two rice crops.

It was said that the co-operative was the best way to improve work conditions and increase production but after two decades of collective work, the material and technical foundation of the agricultural co-operative of Gia o remained weak, apart from improvements of the irrigation system and the mechanization of a few tasks by the use of small machines. Manual power was intensively used in farming. Most of the tasks such as watering, plowing, harrowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting were still done by traditional methods.

The cycle of food crops in the co-operative of Gia o was based on two rice crops and one sub-crop. These are *vu thang Nam* (5th-lunar-month rice), transplanted in January/February and harvested in June, and *vu thang Muoi* (10th-lunar-month rice), transplanted in July/August and harvested in November. Subsidiary crop or *vu dong* (winter crop) started between October and February was for potatoes, maize, and various kinds of beans and vegetables. Although sub-crops were promoted, they did not figure among the targets of the obligatory items in the state plan but rather it was a way to diversify agricultural production and partly to help improving the co-op members’ incomes.

During the co-operative period, nearly all the means of production of village households were collectivized and managed by the co-operative. The labor force came under collective management and was used for collective production. However, as many villagers could recall, the collectivized economy could meet only a part of their needs although they spent most of their time working for the co-op. To improve the household incomes, they had to rely on the so-called “5% land”. Five percent land was defined as “the patch of land reserved for each household member (after collectivization of land) which is not greater than five per cent of the cultivable area per inhabitant of the commune. It is allotted for the purpose of growing food crops, vegetables, fruit trees and raising family husbandry” (Nguyen Xuan Lai (ed.), 1975).

Despite claims from the agricultural co-operative leaders that the collectivized economy played a leading role in the local economy while the family production was negligible, peasants reported that this small piece of land (5%) was an important source of
their household incomes, from which they could get extra food, animal fodder, and cash to pay for clothes, medicine, education costs and house furniture.

The five-per-cent land was regarded as the center-piece of the individual family economy under the co-operative regime. This land was usually very small, its size depending on the area of land they cultivated for the co-operative and number of household members. In Giao village, the range varied between 150 and 500 square meters per household. It was here that the family labor was utilized for recycling crops and enhancing productivity. There was ample evidence to believe that labor was intensively utilized in family plots rather than on collectivized land. The productivity from collectivized rice fields was usually between 60 and 70 kilograms of paddy per sao (360 sq.m) while family plots were producing 120-130 kilograms/sao per harvest. Villagers said most families put more labor, care and fertilizer into their own plots than they did on collective rice lands. Most respondents told me that when they were still six or seven years old, they were already taken to work on their family's "five per cent land" because their parents had to spend most of their time working for the co-op. Interviews with former leaders of Giao co-operative reveal that more than one-third of household incomes of the coop's members came from the family economy.

Within the family economy, animal husbandry also played an important role. The co-op members were not, however, free to decide whether they should raise animals. Compulsory deliveries of pig dung imposed on each household imply that they had to raise a certain number of pigs, and this was computed on the basis of the area allotted and the quantity of paddy received yearly as remuneration. 39

Organization of work in the co-operative and the position of child worker

Labor force in the co-operative of Giao village was organized into two major groups. The first group consisted of specialized work-teams responsible for a particular activity, working directly on the farm (plowing and harrowing, transplanting, weeding, fertilizing, crop protection). The second group included irrigation teams, animal husbandry teams, small mechanical teams and subsidiary occupation teams.

We could not find from official local sources any mention of children's involvement in the specialized work-teams. However life stories and interviews with villagers reveal that in some cases, children were admitted to work in these teams when they were still under 16. Officially, the teams could only admit laborers at working age (16 or older) but these respondents said that they were accepted because their households had

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39 A report by the Central Committee for Agriculture of the Communist Party of Vietnam indicates that the proportion of household incomes from collective economy in the Red River delta was about 40 per cent. This rate was reduced to 27 per cent in the 1976-1980 period. Agriculture was still the largest source of peasant household incomes (Ban NNTU, 1991:218).
Within the production brigades, we found that children were mainly involved in work of a temporary nature. Their main tasks were to carry out temporary projects such as preparation of beds for cultivation of sweet potatoes or sowing of maize, getting rid of rice parasites and serving in special production campaigns. Many respondents said they did take part in some types of work such as growing and harvesting sweet potatoes organized by temporary labor groups composed of workers of different age groups. Children performed light tasks such as gathering tubers while adults did the plowing and transporting crops home. A former head of production brigade estimated that the proportion of child workers taking part in such temporary projects was about 10 to 20 per cent of total labor force. Work in these labor groups were not regular because the groups were set up only temporarily, lasting from several days to a few weeks and were dissolved when the work was done.

In order to utilize fully the labor force within the production brigades, co-operative members were divided into two types, called lao dong chinh (main laborers) and lao dong phu (assistant laborers). Main laborers included those aged from 16 to 55 (for females) and to 60 (for males) while assistant laborers were persons older than 55 (females) and 60 (males) and those younger than 16. Main laborers were classified into various categories: strong workers (group A), workers of middle strength (group B), nursing mothers and weak workers (group C). Such a classification of labor formed the basis for work distribution (dieu cong), aimed at “utilizing all available labor force” (DBLD 1993). Tasks on the farm (plowing, planting, harvesting to name a few) were called lao dong truc tiep (direct labor) while other activities such as management and services were regarded as lao dong gian tiep (indirect labor).

It was expected that each category of worker would contribute a definite number of compulsory workdays per year for the co-operative. For instance, workers of group A were expected to contribute 230 - 250 work-days while those of group B was to work between 150 and 200 work-days. Those who did not work enough for the co-operative might be penalized. Assistant workers were not required to contribute a fixed number of workdays per year. They were encouraged to take part in craft teams or gardening where they could earn indirect work-points. As young assistant workers, children were often involved in two types of work: 1) miscellaneous tasks in temporary work-teams or contracted pieces of work and 2) tending buffaloes and cattle for the coop.

The payment system for the coop members was various. I could be based on a fixed daily payment (cong nhat), which was applied irrespective of the work done but on the basis of 8 hours working day, or based on piece-work (cong khoan), which was applied to the worker for each piece of work done individually and to the group for work requiring
the co-operation of several workers. Payment of this type was made on the basis of the quality and amount of work done.

As the jobs involved in crop-growing varied in nature, and conditions of production differed from one job to another, the head of work-teams had to base his judgment on *chi tieu* (work norms) fixed by the coop to evaluate the work result. Work norms were calculated in *cong diem* (payment points). For instance, the coop regulated that transplanting one *sao* (360 sq.m.) was paid 6 points, so if more *saos* were transplanted, more points would be paid accordingly. These work-points were paid not on the basis of work time or work amount but on work units. Such a way of payment encouraged peasants to pay more attention to payment points than the work itself. Consequently, work enthusiasm declined considerably.

During the second half of the 1960s, a new form of labor management appeared in Giao cooperative, called *ba khoan* (the household contract system). *Ba khoan* was a kind of contract signed between the production brigade and coop members. This new system was based on three main points: 1) households were responsible for their products or production based on the standards set by the co-operative; 2) production costs such as seeds, fertilizers, insecticides, fodder for draft animals, were calculated on the basis of specific norms set by the co-operative; 3) workdays and points were paid accordingly by the brigades.

With this contract system, the brigade transferred part of production activities to peasant households, aimed at “making use of its manpower as best as possible while the co-operative retained the right to dictate the terms of cultivation”. In practice, the application of the “three points contract system” was flexible. The brigade simply redistributed rice land to its members and households farmed for own their account and paid part of the crop at harvest time according to rates fixed in advance. It was said that peasants "breathed more easily" under this system because they could keep part of the products that exceeded the contracted quota. As far as labor utilization is concerned, the production would not interfere with its system of workpoints and workdays but rather leave them to households. Respondents told me they achieved better yields as all available labor force of the household, including children, was mobilized to work on the farm. Production inputs, mainly labor-intensive, were concentrated in paddy cultivation. This led to an increase of children being involved in the household labor force. The contract system did not, however, exist for long. It was criticized as “a return to small scale individual farming, contrary to the principles of socialist management of the co-operative” (DBLD 1993). The *Khoan* system then reappeared as a contract form for specific jobs for short periods of time, handed out to individuals or fixed labor teams, known as *khoan viec* (contracted tasks). Major jobs such as plowing, harrowing, planting, weeding and harvesting were normally assigned to fixed labor teams under a contract. Other tasks like
watering, clearing the rice-field borders, pulling rice seedlings and hoeing the fields that could not be plowed by tractor or draft animals, etc.) were distributed to individuals. Certain tasks (watering, weeding, pulling rice seedling) were also assigned to households without main laborers so that their children or the elderly could take part to earn “work points”. While there was no information on children’s participation in plowing and harrowing teams, many female respondents said that they did take part in labor teams contracted to work in planting, weeding, transporting and harvesting when they were still young (under 16). The production brigades slit its labor force into work teams each consisting of 10 to 15 persons. A few young girls were put into various groups and these worked alongside other women as apprentices. Boys were expected to take part in such tasks as tending buffaloes and cattle, watering and transporting but no information was given about their participation in fixed labor teams together with male adults.

When I interviewed the former chairman of Giao co-operative, I found some notebooks called so ghi cong diem (workpoints records) of the plowing team (doi cay) recorded in the 1970s, which was still kept in his house. These notebooks did not give any indication of children under 16 working as members of the team, but talks with the former chairman and others who tended buffaloes for the co-operative gave me some ideas how boys took part in these plowing teams. Normally a plowing team consisted of five or six members who were male adults and four or five draft buffaloes/cattle. Boys tending buffaloes were assigned to serve specific plowing teams. Their tasks were to take care of the buffaloes while the ploughmen were working. These boys got up early in the morning, fed the buffaloes, took them to the fields and delivered them to the ploughmen. While the ploughmen were working, the boys went to cut grass and prepare food for the buffaloes. During the lunch break, ploughmen came home for a short rest while the boys took care of the buffaloes. In the late afternoon the boys again took charge of the buffaloes, giving them food and washing them. As my respondents recalled, tending buffaloes for the co-operative was no easy work. They had to work hard during the working seasons and look after buffaloes with a great care. If the buffaloes under their care were sick or not able to work, the tenders had to give them back to the co-operative. In case of neglect and the buffaloes under their care caused damages to the co-op’s property, penalties in various forms would be applied.

Children tending buffaloes were organized into a specific team called “hop tac xa mang non” (co-operative of young persons), functioning as a volunteer team promoting the tenders’ responsibility to the co-op’s buffaloes. This “co-operative of young persons” regularly held annual competitions among tenders to choose the best who would receive awards from the coop.

Generally speaking, draft cattle tending was assigned to households with numerous children or those without a main laborer. The production brigade would re-assign this task
after 3 or 4 years to ensure "equality" among the member households. In Giao village during the period of collective economy, there were about 20 draft animals and some calves tended by children. Earnings from this task were about 120 work-points (for a calf) and 180 work-points (for a buffalo) for a period of six months, which was equal to the average income of a main laborer for the same period.

Analyzing the organization of work under the co-operative system sheds some interesting light on the position of child labor during that period. While the collective economy was dominant and sources of work in that economy was well controlled by the co-operative, the family economy did co-exist with the "five per cent land". In principle, production brigades accepted only laborers at working ages (16 years upward) but in reality, younger children were also assigned to do some specific tasks within the work teams. Others worked as retainers of their household adults in "contract work". Obviously within the so-called "family economy", child labor was encouraged for raising more household incomes, but with such a small area of land, there was not much work for children to do although some households might cultivate three crops per year.

Another form of child labor outside the co-operative and family framework was work organized by schools and the Young Pioneer, such as pest control and anti-drought campaigns and other special actions at peak harvest time. Children were also required to work on school farms half a day per week and on weekends, mainly to learn farming skills or to raise public budgets. Work of this sort had a more symbolic rather than practical character and was practically abolished after 1978.

Generally speaking, one can say that child labor under the co-operative system was not so widespread as today. Labor management by co-operative and sources of work within a mono rice-culture did not provide many opportunities for children to be put to work. A question still remains to be answered: to which extent were children involved in work under the co-operative regime and how were they paid?

Available data from Giao village was insufficient for me to quantify the workdays contributed by the local children in the past, while no reliable sources or official documents exist in this matter. Based on a survey conducted among 300 co-operatives, including those in the province of Hai Hung of which Giao village was a part, on the use of agricultural labor during 1970-1975, it was estimated that laborers under 16 contributed on average 104 labor days per year, compared to 200 labor days for adults, and their labor was valued at 44 per cent of adults (see table below).
Table 5.1. Children’s participation in farm work as compared to that of adult workers (Calculated on the basis of workdays and earning points by person per year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers by age groups</th>
<th>1971</th>
<th>1973</th>
<th>1975</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Days</td>
<td>Points</td>
<td>Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers age 16-60</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female workers</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers over 60</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers below 16</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The above statistics did not, however, differentiate the proportion of children involved in the co-operative labor force, the specific age and gender of these children and whether they were full-time workers or combined work with schooling. We therefore have no way to quantify the extent of child labor under the co-operative system, but data obtained from interviews with Giao people indicate that the number of children involved in farm work was relatively small.

Generally speaking, the system of payment was based on work norms set up by the co-operative. For the type of work paid by fixed daily basis, payment ranged from 7 points to 15 points for an 8 hours workday. Workers with skills and doing heavy tasks were paid higher than those who worked with low skills and doing light tasks. According to this system, child workers were always at the bottom of the pay scale, accounting for about one half to two thirds of payment for adult labor. In case child workers formed part of a work team, their performance would judged by members of the group who would decide on eventual payment. Such a way of collective evaluation known as barng cong (public evaluation of workpoints), was often carried out after the workday or when the contracted tasks were completed. In this system, child workers generally received fewer work points than the average workpoints received by adults doing the same job.

Data on children’s work in the agricultural sector collected at the village level suggest that the labor regime managed by co-operative did not give children many chances to work on the collective farm. For more than three decades under the collectivization, the economy of Giao was concentrated on rice growing. Animal husbandry did not develop as a major branch of agricultural production as one might expect while craft manufacturing was at a standstill. Annual reports by the co-operative of Luong Dien give a clear cut
picture of a surplus of agricultural labor right under the collective system, despite the fact that part of village young men were drafted into the army.\textsuperscript{40} Strong (able-bodied) laborers at working ages had work for only 190-200 workdays per year instead of 250 days as legally fixed. Work was not enough, and because of lack of incentive, co-operative members worked only 4 or 5 hours per day on average instead of the regulatory 8 hours. Rice mono-culture also created a chronic under-employment during the period between two harvests. Furthermore, strict labor control by the co-operative tied peasants so closely to the collective that there was no space for economic mobility and diversification, which had existed before the implementation of collectivization. It is interesting to note that most life stories recalled by villagers often spoke about the miseries and difficulties they suffered during their childhood, the daily struggle against starvation and poverty. It turned out that catching fish, crabs, shrimp and gathering wild vegetables, gleaning rice or sweet potatoes left over in the coop’s fields after harvesting were the main source of children’s work during the collective period. Such activities were so popular that almost everyone when talking about their childhood preferred to start with telling stories of catching crabs\textsuperscript{41} or tending buffaloes. These activities occurred haphazardly and quite often, were aimed at improving the family’s daily diet.

Most children started to do some simple farm work for the co-operative at the age of 12, while girls tended to start earlier than boys. There was an increasing trend to involve children more intensively in farm work under the contract systems set up by the coop, the \textit{three points contract} in the second half of the 1960s and particularly, the \textit{output contract} system (\textit{khoan san pham}) applied in the early 1980s. In the family economy, children were put to work at an earlier age, at the average age of 10. Although there is no clear-cut division as regards the nature of work between girls and boys in farm work, girls tended to do more in planting, weeding, fertilizing while boys took part in tending buffaloes, transporting and watering. Both girls and boys were equally engaged in harvesting. The idealization of children’s roles in society and the high rate of school attendance during the period of “socialist construction” imply that productive activities taken up by children on the farm were more symbolic and had a apprenticeship character rather than being absolutely vital for the survival of their families.

\textbf{Decollectivization and intensification of child work}

By the late 1970s, collective agricultural production in the Red River delta fell into

\textsuperscript{40} Between 1962 and 1975, 728 men and 43 women from 353 of a total 927 households of the co-operative of Luong Dien had joined the army, among whom 101 persons died in battle. The co-operative made a contribution of 7,628 tons of paddy and 279,289 kilograms of meat to the government (DBLD 1993:122).

\textsuperscript{41} These crabs lived in small holes deep in the rice fields, canals and ponds.
a state of severe crisis. In coping with economic difficulties, the government gradually came to acknowledge that family-based production rather than collective work was a better route to improve living conditions. As early as 1979, co-operatives in Hai Phong and in many parts in the Red River delta applied a new system of output contract to peasant households, known as khoan san pham. This was in fact a return to the contract system which had appeared in many agricultural co-operatives during the 1960s, then strongly condemned by the CPV. This time the CPV accepted it as a good remedy to improve the situation. In 1981, the shift in agricultural production system was officially endorsed by the Party Resolution No. 100 which allowed individual households to cultivate on contracted land. In return they had to deliver a specified amount of products for the co-operative, but could keep any production surplus. This system of contract became most common after 1986 when the Communist Party’s Sixth National Congress officially adopted the market-oriented economy. In 1988, co-operatives started to distribute land to peasant households under the contract system. The workpoint system had disappeared by then. In 1993, the Law on Land officially allowed the distribution of land to peasant households for a long-term use of 20 years or more.

Since the collective regime was abandoned and household was redefined for the first time after 30 years as a “unit of production”, the land-use rights were returned to individual households. There followed dramatic changes in the rural economy in the Red River delta. As shown by a number of studies on rural transformation in Vietnam after doi moi, this new system encourages peasants to enhance production inputs, mainly labor intensive. As the new system liberated the peasants from all restraints by the collective regime, they began to make their own decisions concerning household production strategies as well as labor division within the household, thus having a direct bearing on the utilization of child labor. There are at least three structural factors emerging under the doi moi that affect directly the patterns, extent and nature of children’s work in the agricultural sector.

First, the structure and mode of employment are now changed allowing male laborers to search for work elsewhere in non farm sectors while the majority of women stay behind doing farm work, a phenomenon that is labeled as “refeminization of agriculture” (Werner 1997). In that sense, children, particularly girls, are put to work alongside their mothers.

Secondly, when the collective regime was abolished and land was redistributed, peasants suddenly realized that arable land per capita was very small. Rice land was torn into various small pieces for allotting to individual households. Labor surplus and small

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42 A similar trend of feminization of agriculture is also found in rural China since the agricultural decollectivization was applied. Details are reported by T. Jacka (1997), and E. Croll (1995).
patches of land did not encourage peasants to modernize farming techniques but rather induced them to go for the labor-intensive option. Children as an available source of household labor were readily put to work.

Thirdly, labor, which was not regarded a kind of commodity under the collective period, now became a special item that can be sold in the market. The economic diversification with the emergence of non-farm sectors such as small-scale industries, family crafts and services absorb more labor. At a more general level, the gap between the rich and poor has been widening and children of the poor are expected to leave school at an early age for good because their parents could not afford education costs. Child labor in the agricultural sector occurs not only within the family context but is also for hire elsewhere.

The following is an attempt to analyze trends of children's work in the agricultural sector of Giao village.

Farming is a feminine affair

The shouting from downstairs woke me up early one morning when it was not light yet. The mother's voice sounded very loud and angry: "What kind of a girl are you? Is that the way you repay me for all my efforts to bring you up? If you want to stay alive, just go and bring those bunches of rice seedling to the field for me right now."

I looked at my watch: it was 4:50 in the morning. Then I knew the cause of the uproar. The house then fell back to sleep again.

In the afternoon, when the little girl named Chi, aged 13, was back from the field, I approached her.

- Chinh: You were punished this morning, right?
- Chi: (a little shy) Yes.
- Chinh: Why was your mother so angry with you?
- Chi: I was asked yesterday to prepare 30 bunches of rice seedling for mother to plant this morning. I didn't finish the job but left the field earlier for a feast at my uncle's house.
- Chinh: Why didn't your brother do the job?
- Chi: He said farming is a female's affair, not for males like him. He'd rather work for wages. When he worked on the farm, his friends joked at him, calling him a woman.

As briefly reported in chapter 3, among 376 households of Giao village under the survey, 99 per cent of households were still working on their allotted rice land even though 96 per cent of households had one or more members earning extra incomes in the wood trade.

Household survey data reveals that under the coop management, no children between the ages of six and ten had to work on the farm, except in such jobs as tending buffaloes or performing Young Pioneers' specific tasks aimed at encouraging the coop's production. The earliest age for girls to follow their mothers in planting rice seedlings was 12. Boys started farming activities even later, at the average age of 13. Economic reforms had a great impact upon the division of household labor. My observations at the village level indicate that a part of labor force (mainly male labor) began to move to the non-farm
sector (including seasonal migration) to seek better incomes, while the bulk of farm work was passed on to their wives and children. Sectoral analysis of labor force (from 16 to 60 years of age) among 38 households in Giao village in 1995 indicate that while 98 per cent of female laborers were regularly engaged in household farming activities, only 21 per cent of male laborers took part in farming, often on harvest days, and 41 per cent of them did not do any farm work during that year.

A similar trend was found among their children. In an intensive study of 73 children aged between 8 and 15 in the same sample of 38 households, 42 per cent of them participated regularly in their household farm work, 80 per cent of these children were girls. Another 46 per cent helped parents on harvest days and 11 per cent did no farm work in the year I was in the village.

The extent of children's participation in farm work since the reforms varies according to their ages and gender. Half of children (53 per cent) in the age group between 8 and 12 (all of the girls in this group) performed some or most farm tasks together with adult household members. In the age group between 13 to 15, only 33 per cent of them (92 per cent of the girls) were regularly involved in farm work. The rest of the children was more or less engaged in woodcarving and only some of them joined their parents on busy harvesting days.

Although the measurement of children's work by time allocation is problematic as it ignores productivity, the social organization of tasks, specialization and other elements (Munroe & co-authors 1984), working time is still used as an unit of measurement of the intensity of children's work (Nag et al. 1978:300; Weinrich 1975:89). However, as suggested by Reynolds (1991:91), "the study of children's work must take cognizance of seasonal changes in labor demand and food supply".

The most striking feature of wet rice cultivation in the Red River delta is its seasonal character. The highest demand for agricultural labor in the year is concentrated in the months of May, June, July and November, December, January. During these months, peasants harvest the crops, prepare the soil and plant the next crops. Besides the two main rice crops, peasants have the subsidiary crops (known as vu dong, the winter crop) to worry about. They tended to grow vegetables such as tomatoes, cabbages, potatoes, sweet potatoes, beans and maize. While other villages in the region relied on the winter crop as extra sources of cash, Giao villagers' winter produce was used for household consumption and poultry feeding. The area of winter crop cultivated by households took up only two per cent of the total arable land of this village.

Seasonal factors in farming demand that certain tasks must be done at specific periods when work load is much more intense than usual and where children's labor may be required especially at peak demand.
In order to concentrate on children's involvement in farming at peak periods as well as in their daily activities on the farm, I categorize the main farm activities into three major groups of tasks:

- Group 1: plowing, hoeing, harrowing, ground softening and clearing field mounds.
- Group 2: seeding, transplanting, growing, watering, weeding, fertilizing, and exterminating pets and rodents guarding rice/vegetables fields.
- Group 3: harvesting (reaping, cutting, binding, transporting, sorting, threshing, drying and storing).

Only about one half of households in Giao village rented a tractor to plough their household land while all the above-mentioned tasks were done by individual households with primitive tools. On average, 6 households shared one draft animal (mainly buffaloes) for preparing soil. Households might take turns (one week each) in tending buffaloes or entrust this task to just one household and contribute payments to the tender. Payment to the tender was fixed at 400 kilograms of paddy per vu (six months) in 1995. As in the cooperative period, buffaloes were normally placed under the care of households with many children. But as we have seen earlier, girls now took over the task of tending buffaloes instead of boys who were more often engaged in waged jobs.

Households without a draft animal sometimes had to hoe the fields themselves. In case they could not afford to hire a buffalo, human power was used for harrowing. Buffaloes were normally available for hire after their owners had completed their own plowing and harrowing. In order not to lag behind in the farming season, peasants without buffaloes often asked their children to hoe before they could hire a buffalo.

During the year I stayed in the village of Giao, I did not find any children under 16 working as ploughmen or taking part in spraying pesticides. The farming activities of children were concentrated on tasks such as hoeing,\textsuperscript{43} embanking and clearing the moulds of rice fields, fertilizing, transplanting, watering, weeding, transporting, guarding crops and all tasks connected with harvesting. Some girls aged from 14 upwards began to practice harrowing (tap bua) on the rice fields, which was normally done by male adults. This may be due to long-term absence of male laborer(s) in the household. Statistical analysis of the types of work did not indicate a clear-cut difference between boys and girls' farming tasks, though girls tended to work more in transplanting, weeding and fertilizing.

There was, however, a real difference between girls and boys in the time spent on agricultural activities. Only about 30 per cent of boys living in the households under the survey did take part in farming tasks at peak periods while 100 per cent of girls were engaged in farm work during the same period. Data from 24 hour-recalls obtained during

\textsuperscript{43} Households having no draft animal often had to use their children to hoe the fields, but households who rented a tractor to plow their rice fields also had to hoe the field-edges themselves.
peak days in June 1995 from 68 children aged between 8 and 15 in 38 households give more details on work time by age group and gender. In the age group between 8 and 10, the average work time per day was 1.2 hours (boys) and 1.4 hours (girls). In the age group between 11 and 12, boys worked 2.4 hours and girls 3.5 hours while children from 13 to 14 contributed 2.7 hours (boys) and 5.9 hours (girls) per day. Up to the age of 15 and 16, children's average work time per day was 6.1 hours (boys) and 7 hours (girls), which was higher than male adults (3.5 hours) and female adults (5.6 hours). Most male adults performed tasks such as transporting crops home, threshing, sorting and drying paddy.

Obviously girls spent more time working on the farm at peak days as compared to boys and their fathers. But it should be added that besides working on the farm, girls also performed some domestic tasks such as cooking, feeding livestock, taking care of young siblings, etc. If we were to include the hours they spent for these activities, then their average working hours per day would be much higher than boys.

While some novelists continue to romanticize the country life, farming as an occupation is not desirable for most of the village children interviewed by me. Both girls and boys confidentially expressed their wish to search for a non-farm job and leave the countryside for good. In their views, it is too hard for young persons to work in the rice fields. Farming is but an endless chain of tasks, with low returns and therefore is not highly valued. Girls however tended to endure their "unfortunate status" while boys often openly mocked at farm work. The underestimation of farming was particularly visible among boys of 15-16 years of age who had been doing woodwork outside the village. For them, any activities with high remuneration were regarded as real work, the rest were just "odd" jobs.

Children attending the school of Luong Dien gave a similar view when they were asked to write about their daily work, motivation for study and wishes for their future. Most of them did not wish to work on the farm and live in the surroundings of their village. Given the choice, these children would want to escape from their rural existence. Among 116 respondents aged from 10 to 16 at the local school, 80 per cent of them said they went to school for the opportunity to escape from rural life and seek a better future in non-farm sectors.

I recall that in June 1995, I met a boy who just returned to the village from a Hanoi wood workshop to help his parents in harvesting. When I came to visit him in the evening next day, I found he was sitting on the carved bed, listening to foreign music while his younger sister was helping the mother to thresh paddy. He complained that farm-work caused him a backache and the weather was so hot in the village. He said it was a shame that the workshop was closed on harvest days, so he had to come home. Then he explained:
"I didn't want to work on the farm. When I was about 11 or 12, I often scooped water with my female cousin. One evening, after having watered the rice fields with her, I came to play games with my friends in the *dinh* (communal house). There, some boys made jokes at me, calling me a woman. They ignored me and gossiped about their earnings. I felt so lonely. A few days later, I quit school and went to work in a village wood workshop. Since then, I did not work on the farm any more, except on harvest days. My father taught me that a village boy of 15 or 16 should learn how to earn some money to entertain his friends. If you just prowl for farm work with empty pockets, your friends will look down on you".

I was so surprised to hear the confidence of this boy. His idea differed greatly from my own when I was still a village lad. I grew up during the war years and had little choice but to work on the farm, and I didn't think much about how to make some quick money like most kids today. The social environment no doubt plays an important role in thrusting children into the labor market at an early age.

Most young girls performed farming tasks under their mothers' supervision. Their intensive labor on the farm is deeply rooted in the cultural structure of gender-based labor division. Because male laborers seasonally migrate to work elsewhere, the domestic and farm tasks are passed on to them. Girls are put to work alongside their mothers because they are expected to become good wives in the future who should know how to manage the family affairs and farm work rather than earning money. Studies on impacts of seasonal migration on rural families show that the wife's position in the family did not improve much even when she could earn more money than her husband (Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh 1998, Pham Huong Nga 1997). That the girls worked more on the farm and they were resigned to their *so phan ham hiu* (unfortunate fate) was not only a reflection of children's economic role but also a function of the apprenticeship that prepare them for future adult roles.

It is interesting to add that male heads of household in Giao village often said that they were peasants and their main source of income was from farming. But while talking about their being farmers, it soon appeared that they knew little about their own agricultural production, particularly concrete details such as the exact area of arable land for rice planting or for vegetable growing, whether their household had to hire a tractor, exchange labor with others or hire extra manpower when necessary. Most of them were ignorant about the precise paddy yield, the kinds of seed planted, production inputs, types of taxes and other sorts of contribution to various public budgets. When they were pressed on such matters, their frequent answer was: "Oh, it's just odd, let my wife tell you".

**What would children do if farming is to be mechanized?**

- Tho (a girl): I must be the most miserable girl in this village.
- Chinh: Why?
- Tho: My age is the same with cai Chi (a girl friend). Yet I had to do all kinds of task such as hoeing, weeding, watering, fertilizing, planting and reaping when I was just 8 or 9. Chi only began to work on the farm a few years ago, when she was already 11.
- Chinh: So where are your parents?
- Tho: Only mother and I work on the farm. Father sometimes helps a bit.
- Chinh: How much land does your household have?
- Tho: Six and a half sao.
- Chinh: Did your mother ever hire a tractor?
- Tho: No! We even don't have a buffalo. When preparing the soil, mother just borrows a buffalo from my uncle. But just for a few days, after he already finished with his field. Mother and I hoed the rice fields.
- Chinh: Why didn't you hire a tractor?
- Tho: Mother said it would cost a lot of money, and she couldn't afford it.

Studies on children's work elsewhere suggest that changes of production techniques may affect considerably the use of child labor. Nardinelli, for instance, believes that, together with the application of laws on labor and compulsory education, the industrial revolution in Europe "gradually improved the situation of children", and "in the long run, it ended child labor by increasing working-class incomes, because as family incomes rose, child labor declined" (Nardinelli, 1990:102). In a sense, such a remark is useful to look at children's work in agricultural economies in transition. My own observations on the development of farming techniques in Giao village may provide some insights in examining the intensification of child labor in agriculture.

While talking about children's work, the elderly often used the example of husking paddy to compare the difference between the two periods, then and now. They recalled that before rice mills were introduced into the village, husking and pounding were the daily task of children, which took them a lot of time. Such work was no longer required. Villagers expressed the view that nowadays children had to work harder because of the "regression of techniques": in order to save production inputs and maximize outputs, peasants prefer to use manual power, which is plenty in rural areas, instead of mechanization. Since it is assumed that children are not completely free from parental control and influence, they are always available to be put to work. I will look further into these aspects.

While the economy has been more or less liberated after doi moi, surveys conducted in various wet-rice growing villages in the Red River delta during the 1990s indicate there have been no significant changes in the technical modernization of rice production. On the contrary, it was found that the intermediary consumption such as purchase of fertilizer, improved seeds, pesticides, irrigation cost, etc. were on decrease while the utilization of manual labor was more intensified (Didier & Florence, 1995; Le Trong Cuc & T. Rambo, 1991).

Under the co-operative system, between 1974 and 1986, 82 per cent of total rice fields of Giao village were plowed and harrowed by tractors DBLD 1993). Since the establishment of the household economy as a production unit, the area of rice fields plowed and harrowed by tractors was reduced gradually and as of 1995, tractors prepared only 50 cent of total rice fields. In neighboring villages of Giao such as Binh Dien and Luong, the proportion of rice land prepared by machines was reduced to 20 per cent.
Particularly, 100 per cent of the rice fields of the village of Thai Lai were not plowed by tractor. Instead of machines, peasants used draft animals (buffaloes and cattle) and human labor to prepare the soil. Households without draft animal hoed their fields themselves. In some instances, several households even used human power to harrow paddy fields because they could not afford hiring a buffalo or a tractor.

Some leaders of Giao village explained this regression as a consequence of land allocation, which divided rice fields into tiny plots for individual households. He added that payments for hired tractors caused some troubles too. In the past, the co-operative paid the tractor team via its credit system. But now individual households had to pay in cash, which they could hardly afford.

The utilization of water supply in farming is another example of the decline of technology in farming. Under the co-operative management, 62 per cent of total rice fields was served by an elaborate irrigation system, and the rest by pumping with small machines or by hand. In 1995, water was carried into the main canals and the farmers scooped water by hand from lower fields to higher fields themselves. Some households even dug small ponds in the middle of the rice fields to store water for their own use.⁴⁴ One big change was the disappearance of specialized brigades for providing rice seeds and pesticides, for irrigation and protecting cultures. This led the farmers to take personal charge of their crops, which were previously done by trained technicians with semi-mechanical means.

As a result, the disorganization of collective services and regression of mechanization in farming led to an increasing trend of labor intensification. Draft animals and human power are now mobilized to work instead of the tractor. Transportation of manure to rice lands, water scooping and weeding are all carried by hand in replacement of machines and other means. Labor utilization has increased at a rapid pace. How can one explain this reverse development in agricultural production? The cause obviously lies in the relative surplus of agricultural labor and rationale of peasants.

According to the villagers' calculations, to produce one crop on a plot of one sao (360 sq.m.) of rice field, an average of 20 labor days was required.⁴⁵ Based on the area of rice land held by households, labor requirements on the farm and the household labor force, I shall attempt to estimate the labor demand for agricultural production in Giao

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⁴⁴ A similar situation was also found in a neighboring village (Nam Sach, Hai Hung) by Didier & Florence (1995).
⁴⁵ The range was between 15 and 25 labor days per sao/crop. Estimation by the Agricultural Division of Hai Hung province, which serves as guidelines to farming, is 17.5 labor days per sao (BQLHTX Hai Hung, 1986). The estimation by a research team in a village of Thai Binh province is only 8.4 labor days per sao/crop. This estimation is not however itemized yet. (See: Le Trong Cuc & T. Rambo 1993:109). The high labor input invested in rice land is understandable because the amount of rice land is fixed at a low rate per capita, and therefore the only way to increase paddy productivity is the intensification of labor.
village. If an average household of five persons (having two main laborers) was allotted an area of 2660 sq.m., the family would need only 144 labor days to complete the necessary tasks for a six months crop. As we can see, there was just enough work for one main laborer. The relationship between rice land, labor demand and household labor force seems to indicate a low demand for agricultural labor. However, this low demand of labor does not mean that there is less demand for child labor in farming. On the contrary, this demand becomes greater than ever. A further examination of rice production in Giao village will help illustrate this point.

The state of farming in Giao village is precisely expressed by a local saying lay cong lam lai (using labor to make a profit), which means that farming is not a profitable trade, because it gives low return for hard labor.

Average proportion of rice land per capita in Giao village is relatively low, only 529 sq. m. per person (or 2,533 sq. m. per household), compared to an average of 572 sq. m. per head for the Red River delta (TCTK, 1995:74&299). It should be noted that this proportion has dramatically changed during the past 60 years. In 1931 the average rice land per head was 3,299 sq.m. compared to 529 sq.m in 1993. While the average paddy yield per capita did not change much, (327 kilograms/person in 1955 compared to 370 kilograms/person in 1993), paddy productivity has increased remarkably, from 1,600 kilograms in 1955 to 7,000 kilograms per hectare/year, thanks to the improvement of the irrigation system created by the collective regime.\footnote{46}

In 1995, the average paddy productivity was between 120 and 150 kilograms per sao (360 sq.m.). However, after the deduction of production costs such as agricultural taxes, water supply and various kinds of contribution, the quantity of paddy left for producers was only 50 or 60 per cent of total yield. The Table 5.2 will itemize the total production costs of rice growing.

Table 5.2. Rice production costs in Giao village (dong/sao/crop)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Average costs</th>
<th>As percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Taxes and fees</td>
<td>45,648</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Contributions to various public budgets</td>
<td>18,400</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Material costs (seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, etc.)</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Labor costs</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total costs</td>
<td>236,548</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *dong*, a local currency. In 1995, one US dollar was equivalent to 11,000 dong. One sao is equal to 360 square meters.

\footnote{46}{For more details about agrarian changes in Giao village, see chapter 3.}
Source: Own data collected in Giao village, based on interviews with 38 households.

As indicated above, the total production cost (including taxes) to produce paddy on one sao per crop takes about 40 per cent of total yield. This means 60 per cent of total yield are left for 20 labor days. In 1995, the price of one kilogram of paddy was between 1,800 to 2,000 dong. The average return to a labor day is about 3,500 to 4,000 dong, equivalent to two kilograms of paddy. Assuming that the peasants had to hire extra labor or machines to work on their rice land, the total yield left for the household is surely much less. In such conditions, peasants on one hand had to utilize all available sources of household labor force to work on the farm, which helps minimize production inputs, but on the other hand, they also tried to maximize their share of land and other means to produce sufficient food. A research team working on Nguyen Xa village located in the heart of the Red River delta reported that peasants also used manual labor instead of that of draft animals to save a bit rice straw. As they put it:

There is a direct competition between use of rice straw as fodder for buffalo and as cooking fuel [...] The farmers keep fewer buffalo than they need to plow all of their fields. In place of buffalo, a team of men and women sometimes hitch themselves to the plows and harrows with ropes and drag them through the heavy soil using human muscle power alone. The farmers have opted to substitute their own labor power for that of buffalo thus maximizing the share of biomass energy available for direct human use in the short term” (Le Trong Cuc & Terry Rambo 1993:xvi).

For peasants, children are, without a doubt, a valuable source of household labor. Their labor is particularly important for poor peasants in reducing production costs. This was clearly explained by a farmer when asked why he did not hire a tractor but instead used his little children to hoe the fields:

It is not a matter of modernization or preference for the tractor. The problem is that if I hire a tractor to work on my land, what will my wife and children do. They need food to eat too.

Work for wage: children’s employment in agricultural labor market

Just returning from the rice field, Chi came straight to his father: “I want to go to extra class this afternoon. Examinations are coming soon but I haven’t studied hard enough.” The father: “Just go! Work here is endless. Let’s look for somebody to take care of the buffalo”. But the mother suddenly shouted: “Stay! There’s much of work still to be done: Tending the buffalo, getting vegetables for the pigs, and scooping water for rice seedlings. If you go, who will help me do these chores?” The father responded: “Maybe we can go to our neighbor and borrow his girl for a while. We’ll pay her two thousand dong.” The mother argued: “With such little money, even a dog wouldn’t do it. At least five thousand, but you’ll get a bad reputation for taking advantage of our neighbor’s kids”. The father relented: “OK. Go to the market and hire a worker. It’s better to look for a girl”.

For the year I stayed with my host family in the village, I often heard such arguments between the husband and his wife regarding their small girl’s work. Once, while drinking tea with them, I asked my male-host why he preferred to hire a worker

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47 Five thousand dong is equivalent to 40 $US cents in 1995.
instead of asking his daughter to work as others did and why he'd rather prefer a girl than a boy. His answer was that no boys would want to be hired to do farming work since such odd jobs (*viec linh tinh*) were suitable only for girls. According to him, girls were not demanding while adult workers usually asked for higher pay even for doing odd jobs. He blamed his wife for putting their daughter to work: "My wife just thinks of work. She does not care much about our children's schooling. That's why they're so ill-educated. Chi is our youngest daughter, she should go to school". But his wife disagreed: "What study, she's just a lazy girl! She always finds excuses to get away from housework and play with her classmates in the neighboring village. My husband's attitude may poison our girl." Talking to me, Chi said: "A lot of laborers are waiting out there, and cheap. Last year, my mother sold one ton of paddy and two pigs. We have more than enough to eat, but mother just wants me to work". Chi told me she did not want to stay home all day "listening to mother's songs". 

I learnt from these conversations that some peasant households in the village started to think of hiring laborers to work on the farm or doing housework as a temporary solution. When such needs became apparent, the so-called "*cho lao dong*" (labor market) came into existence in Giao village. It was here from the early morning till evening, a number of laborers, mostly women and their young daughters from the surrounding areas came and waited to be hired. The place they gathered was near the village communal house (*dinh*), where a small market selling daily necessities also recently emerged. Most of the workers looking for jobs to earn extra incomes were peasants who had finished tilling their own pieces of allotted rice land. They were to be hired for such tasks as plowing, tilling, weeding, watering, harvesting, gardening and running house chores. There were two forms of payment, by piece of work or on a daily basis, in cash or kind, but most workers from outside the village preferred immediate payment after the work had been done. As I could observe, some mothers working together with their daughters preferred to be paid by piece of work, particularly for such tasks as transplanting, weeding, scooping water or harvesting. However, jobs like these were not always available. If a villager needed someone for odd jobs for a few hours or a whole day, he would just pick someone hanging around the "labor market". For example, the farmers of Giao used a two-person water scoop to transfer water from the main canal into their paddy fields. Since water pumping from the co-operative station was operated on certain days every month, if households had only one laborer available on those days they would need to hire an extra person to do the task.

Children were hired to work not only because they were "obedient" and cheap but also because of the lack of manpower created by the absorption of male laborers into

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48 In her word, "*ca nhac*", literally it means "sing a song". This is a slang word used by village children to allude to such abuses as insulting and scolding by their parents.
woodwork. For this reason, labor exchange between households sometimes occurred in
case they could not find extra labor. The regular absence of male laborers on the farms of
Giao village gave peasants and children from outside new opportunities for work.

Wages in the agricultural sector were not so attractive as in woodwork. Most
children working as temporary laborers could earn about 5 to 7 thousand dong per work
day (compared to 10-15 thousand dong by adult worker). In case they were hired to
work for the whole day, their employers usually offered them one meal. If they worked
as their parents’ retainers on pieces of work, they received no payment at all.

Apart from those children coming to the village from outside to look for jobs, some children from inside the village were also found working on the farm for wages. Among 68 children aged from 8 to 15 coming from 38 households under my survey, 19 percent of them at one time worked as waged laborers for the past six months and all of them were girls from 13 years of age upwards. Talks with these children reveal that work on the farm was rare, unstable and was available mainly in the periods of tilling and harvesting. For the past six months, the duration of work for wages of these girls ranged from 7 to 18 labor days. Most children interviewed by me considered this kind of work as a way “to kill time”, not a real source of income:

Mother and I do not have much to do on our own farm. I do not want to hang around. That’s not
good for a girl. The neighbors often find that I have a lot of leisure time and ask me to help. Whatever task I can do, I do. Wage is not important. Everybody says I am a good girl. My
mother often says: You can keep your own earnings for yourself, buy the things you like. But that is just only talk. If I get any money, she would borrow it and surely it won’t be given back. (Tin, 14 years of age).

While children working in the wood trade preferred getting jobs far away from
home, most children engaged in farm-tasks as hired laborers worked within their village
and in surrounding areas. Apart from kids from outside looking for jobs in the village “labor market”, employers and employees knew each other quite well. However, there was an unspoken rule that one should not hire children without their parent’s consent. It was common that before “borrowing” a child to work on the farm, the employer would come to talk with the child’s parents first. I once witnessed a village woman who came and asked the permission from a girl’s parents. This is what she said:

I should like to have some ndoi (words) with both of you. Please allow us to borrow your
daughter for a few days and let her help us to finish transplanting some sao of rice fields. We do not have a daughter while boys are hopeless. We will take care of her and when the work is
finished, we will surely pay her well.

This formality was strictly observed by the villagers. It was said that the formal
procedure is made because on the one hand, it shows “mutual respect” among adults,

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49 Instead of saying “thue” (to hire), the villagers often use the word “muon” (to borrow) which makes the business of “buying and selling” children’ labor much simpler.
and on the other hand, it helps avoid abusing children and keep good relationships among local families. It is customary to deal with parents rather than with the child whose labor is at stake. And once the parents say “yes”, the matter is settled. It seems that formally children are not in a position to bargain about their work. However, in many cases, conditions of work were usually arranged in advance with the child worker, and the employer normally comes “to have some words” with the parents when things had been fixed.

There was not so much information available concerning labor disputes or children’s abuses by employers although some children reported they had been beaten by their parents for refusing to perform a certain tasks or for neglect while at work. The most common complaint from child workers was that their wages were not always paid on time. Employers preferred to pay them at harvest time and mostly in paddy. Working children disliked this because, according to them, their parents would be able to control their earnings more easily.

A close examination of children’s waged work suggests that the demand for child labor in the agricultural sector was not high and the source of farm work was not substantial enough to improve family income. However work for wage was a new development in farming in comparison with the recent past when labor was strictly controlled by the co-operative system.

Previously I have pointed out that there has been a great decrease of male laborers in the farming sector due to their switch to non-farm work. The regular absence of men has put the burden of farm work on women and girls led to an increasing need of labor exchange among households. My investigation on children’s economic activities reveals that their labor was used mainly in this fashion. Particularly at peak season, household labor force was stretched to its limits while a number of tasks such as watering and transplanting had to be done in co-operation with others. However, labor exchange mostly occurred among relatives. In a sense, labor exchange is the best way to concentrate work force to finish certain tasks in the short term, mainly with the help of children. However, the children themselves were often confused when it came to differentiate such concepts as “exchange” (doi cong) and “help” (lam giup). As they saw it, they worked basically out of "love" and did not expect anything in return. But I often observed that households receiving “help” always returned the favors by lending their labor when the time came. This could only mean children’s labor was valued as a kind of barter deal even though villagers tended to consider it as a kind of moral obligation in helping one another.
Conclusion

I have presented my research findings of children’s work--with emphasis on patterns and changes--in the agricultural sector of Giao village during the past four decades. At least three new trends of child employment in agriculture can be observed. First, children’s work on the farm is intensified since agricultural de-collectivization was applied. Secondly, although children’s employment for wage in agriculture is not rampant because of its low demand, their labor is now considered a kind of commodity that can be sold in the labor market. And thirdly, work on the farm today is dominated by women and girls.

Ever since the first land reform was launched in Giao village (1956) and subsequent campaigns which established the collective agrarian regime, peasants who did not work directly on their farm but instead hired others to work for them would be condemned as "feudal" reactionaries having to face dire consequences. This is something of the past and the idea of a child working for someone else on the farm would pose no problems for most villagers. Khi doi, dau goi phai bo (when you're hungry, you'll have to crawl), the head of Giao village quoted an old saying as he explained to me the phenomenon of children entering into labor market. Without a doubt, the problems of child labor and poverty are intimately related, but beyond that, one can perceive a change in popular attitude towards children’s employment in a fast-changing socio-economic environment.

Under the collective regime, production brigades directly controlled the labor force. An analysis of the work organization within the agricultural co-operation would be necessary to help understand the situation of child labor in this period. Thus cooperative categorized children as “assistant workers” who were not obliged to work on the farm. Data obtained from interviews with villagers who grew up during these years indicate that children did take part in several types of work but in actual fact, their involvement in the coop’s work was only haphazard, temporary or under the guise of retainers of their family’s “contract tasks”. Most of them started to perform farm tasks at the age of 12 or older. Girls seemed to start working on the farm earlier than boys. Tending buffaloes and taking part in work for temporary work-teams were the main part of children’s work. Within the family economy, children were also put to work on pieces of "five per cent" land where household’s labor force was intensified to raise more incomes. However, it should be noted that besides the coop’s labor control, rice monoculture and low average land per capita in the Red River delta were among the reasons supporting the contention that children were not burdened with work during the years of collective economy.
Decollectivization and redistribution of rice land to individual peasant households after Doi Moi brought about a great upheaval in the rural economy of northern Vietnam. Economic activities were increasingly diversified with the rapid development of non-farm sectors, particularly small-scale industries, and the intensification of seasonal migration of male laborers to urban settings in search of work. These new developments were taken into account while examining children’s work in agricultural sector of Giao village. With the labor division among peasant households, children are regarded as a real component of the labor force to be put to work, which was different from the time of the co-operative. Children start to work on the farm at an earlier age than before. Older children even look for opportunities to sell their labor elsewhere outside of households. However, the brunt of farm work today is borne by girls rather than boys. This trend is a result of the absorption of males into waged jobs in the non-farm sectors, which leads to the so-called phenomenon of “refeminization of agriculture”.

Under the work-point system of remuneration, one had no choice but to work on the farm. The gender division of labor at that time was mainly based on the views of “light or heavy” work in which women and children were assumed to do “light” work. For many villagers of Giao, work for wages in the wood trade nowadays represents a source of envy while farming was regarded as a lowly occupation, particularly in the eyes of young people and children. The gender division of labor tends to keep women and their girls behind on the farm while men and boys go searching for waged work elsewhere. Girls become their mothers’ subordinates as they are supposed to be trained to play the future role of wives within the family context. For some girls, this "predestined" role is something of a “undesirable obligation” which they could not avoid. Most rural people do not regard such a gender-based division of labor a discrimination against girls but rather a natural thing preparing them to be proper wives and mothers in accordance with age-old traditions.
Introduction

Much has been said about the sad fact that children in the developing world are often found in small “sweat-shops” where they work as cheap labor or apprentices. Their work is usually considered as “supplementary”, sometimes unpaid, and whatever meager wages they receive often go directly to their parents or relatives. Little attention, however, has been given to changes in the organization of production in small-scale industries, the dynamic interrelation between the labor market, socio-economic changes and local responses to such changes and how they affect children’s work. This is perhaps partly due to the lack of academic interest in the linkage between historical analyses and empirical observations on the economic role of children. The recent changes of agrarian regime in rural Vietnam offer a unique opportunity to look at rural children’s work in the conditions of a changing economic system. As analyzed earlier, these changes have freed peasant households from collective constraints and enabled them to manage their small allotted land, while a free labor market has emerged with undesirable effects of rural unemployment. Meanwhile rural industries have fast developed and their products are not only for domestic consumption but also aimed at lucrative export markets.

This chapter is to examine children’s work in the wood trade, a traditional craft of Giao village. It suggests that the nature of children’s work has changed since the wood trade became more commercialized with the emergence of entrepreneurs and the contracting-out system. The chapter will concentrate on production organization, the position of child workers, their working conditions and earnings. It will try to provide an understanding of different aspects of children’s role in small rural industries, viewed from a three-way relationship between child workers, their parents and employers.
Development towards a commercialized craft

The wood trade before collectivization

Although wood carving has a long history in Giao village, dating back several hundreds years, this trade did not change much in its production methods until recently. In the past, wood carvers usually worked far away from home. As different from other types of family crafts where craftsmen worked at home, wood carvers normally looked for jobs in public constructions such as communal houses, pagodas, temples, royal palaces or big houses of the rich. Their popular products were wooden fine arts, such things as pictures, statues, items of worship and internal decorative objects. Besides the popular products such as statues of Buddha and various deities, wood carvers mainly produced items inspired from Chinese classical stories, particularly paying attention to the four supernatural creatures (long: dragon, ly: unicorn, quy: tortoise and (phuong: phoenix) or the plants representing the four seasons (tung: pine, cuc: marigold, truc: bamboo and mai: apricot).

Traditionally, wood carvers were organized into different work teams, known as phuong or hiep tho (guild or association) including a foreman (tho ca), craftsmen (tho ban) and a few trainee assistants, called pho nho (little workers). The foreman was responsible for the whole activities of his group: finding jobs, organizing the production, and dealing with the problems related to the work-place. Generally, such an organization was suitable to mobile work where wood carvers only sold their skilled labor and rarely produced for sale.

While at work, workers were under the foreman's supervision. Each group of wood workers normally consisted of carvers (tho cham) and carpenters (tho long) whose duty was to reassemble carved objects into finished products. Assistants were young trainees, often the son(s) of the foreman or fellow workers who assisted them with odd jobs such as shopping, cooking and sometime taking part in simple tasks. Because these “odd jobs” were relatively heavy so assistants were mostly older children from 14 years of age upwards. For their work, assistants were not paid, except daily meals and some time a little bonus.

The guild of carvers (hiep tho) was loosely organized, mainly based on verbal contracts for certain tasks and their affiliation lasted until the contract was finished. Apart from the kinship relations which formed part of the guild, the social foundation of the guild was collegial and hierarchical based.

As recalled by a number of life histories, craft men of Giao village in the past usually came home on harvests and special occasions such as Spring holidays (Tet).

50 Phan Gia Ben (1957) categorized artisans in the colonial Northern Delta into five different groups,
Their wages were normally paid on a daily basis or per piece-work, depending on the verbal agreement between the foreman and the employer. Earnings from woodwork were mainly to support the family. There was no woman involved in this work. Various sources of data indicated that wood carvers from Giao village had participated in building royal palaces in Thang Long (Hanoi) under the Le dynasty (18th century) and later in the capital of Hue under the Nguyen rule (Tang Ba Hoanh, 1984; the Vu family record).

The wood trade under the cooperative regime

Life histories show that the wood trade stagnated somewhat during the two wars against the Japanese and the French (1941-54), and the decline of the wood trade continued afterwards. The stagnation of the wood trade during the period of 1956-1980 can be explained by various reasons. As reported, there was almost no demand for wooden carved products in this period. The land reform launched in the village (1955-56) and later, since 1958, the movement of collectivization, brought about great changes in people’s lives. Public constructions were called off, rich families were wiped out and religious activities were curtailed or prohibited. Public works of a religious character concerning communal houses, pagodas and temples were negligible.

While the products of wood carving lost their market, wood workers themselves were regarded as subjects to be re-educated. According to the socialist reformers, artisans were generally considered as having liberal attitudes and being inclined towards private ownership. They should therefore be put under the overall administration of the co-operatives and the commune committee (Ban NNTU 1962:1). Under the communist party’s guideline, the artisans were advised to join the collective production teams where they worked as non-farm workers in the framework of agricultural co-operatives, producing construction materials, building public works and sharing the coop’s crops.

Though the private sector and family economy were not encouraged, some activities such as petty trade and family crafts were discreetly carried out on a small scale. For instance, some carpenters of Giao village, in spite of the cooperative regulations, produced household utensils for sale or on the orders from local clients. Petty trade of rice and agricultural products was widespread among villagers, making use of the station of Cam Giang located near the village, midway on the road linking Hanoi and Hai Phong. Villagers recalled that their children were actively engaged in this

including: a) mobile artisans, b) artisans producing goods as hired workers, c) artisans producing goods on the direct order from their clients, d) artisans producing goods on subcontracts, e) artisans producing goods on their own for sale. According to his classification, most wood workers of Giao village belonged to the group (a) and (b), who seasonally migrated to search for work away from home as hired workers.
illicit business to avoid the scrutiny of the tax authorities. They were asked by their parents/relatives to transport goods packed in small bags which they placed under the seats on the train and delivered them at the destination.

Notwithstanding these minor activities, non-farm economy and services were severely curtailed under the cooperative regime. On the one hand, work outside the cooperative confines was closely controlled but on the other hand, the people’s low living standards during the wartime put a brake on private economic activities. The underdevelopment of the non-farm sector and family industries during this period implies that the opportunities for children to work under the co-operative system were quite low.

*Economic reforms and the revival of wood trade*

The revival of the wood trade in Giao village was due to socio-economic changes in northern Vietnam, starting with the severe crisis of collective economy which led to the initial reforms in agriculture (1979-1985). Economic difficulties also led to a relaxation of labor management whereby peasants could search for work outside the coop, particularly in non-farm sectors. In addition, low returns from collective farming induced former wood workers to return to their own craft in order to supplement their meager incomes.51 Moreover, the demand for wooden furniture was also rising as a result of the expansion of domestic market after the liberation of the South in 1975.

The process of restoration of the wood trade in Giao village can be divided into two stages: the period of recovery (1979-1989) and the period of consolidation (from 1990 to present, 1995).

In the early 1980s, some households in the village made use of their free time from farming to produce such household furniture as beds, cupboards, tables and chairs for sale. The bestseller at the time was a cupboard in traditional style with sophisticated carvings as decorations—a symbol marking well-to-do families in previous times. For only a couple of years, households producing wooden furniture for sale became wealthy quite quickly. They however had to pay a high price as they were condemned by local authorities for violating government policies. One head of family was put in prison, two others were suspected of having built their big houses from "illicit financial sources". Despite the persistent policies against family crafts, wood workshops continued to

51 A similar situation was found among peasants of the Philippines who had little income from agricultural production and became artisans working on crafts, (see R. Rutten, 1993).
expand and many parents wished to send their children for apprenticeship with the hope that they would help improve the household income.

As of 1995, data obtained from my village survey reveals that 341 of 376 households had one or more member involved in the wood trade. There were 524 workers earning regular wages in wood work, among whom 17 per cent were children under 16 years and 10 per cent were female workers. Fifty four per cent of the wood workforce worked far from home. My survey shows that about 78 per cent of migrants from Giao village worked in Ho Chi Minh City and in other southern provinces, some 1700 kilometers from their home village. The rest of the migrants worked in Hanoi and in the northern provinces. Money was sent home through work-mates or brought home during the Tet holidays.

The organization of production in the wood trade of Giao village can be categorized into three major patterns, as follows:

- Independent artisans who worked on their own, mobile or at home, producing goods on direct order from local clients.
- Household-based workshops which mainly used the family labor force, working on subcontracts and/or producing goods for sale.
- Enterprises which mainly used hired laborers, producing goods for the domestic market and for export.

In the first two types of production, artisans were still basically farmers who did wood work to supplement their household incomes. They bought materials, used their own labor force and marketed their own products. At peak demands, they might hire extra hands or use subcontracts elsewhere, but this rarely occurred. Production was usually at a small scale. Labor demand was limited, and so was capital. Lacking capital, independent artisans preferred direct orders from their clients who were willing to pay a part in advance with the rest to be settled when the contract was finished.

The third form of production emerged in the early 1990s, with the appearance of the “merchant-entrepreneurs” who enabled the wood craft of Giao village to have access to a larger market. It was apparent that mobility has been an important factor in the wood craft since the country’s economy was shifted to the market mechanism. Due to the relaxation of state control over the private economic sector in rural areas, some craftsmen took the chance to expand their production, aimed at manufacturing high quality products to meet the increasing needs of the newly rich, tourists and exporters.

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52 Those who had held a stable job in the wood trade for six months in 1995 were grouped in this category. Children working basically within their households while attending school and receiving occasional earnings were not included in this group.
and they themselves soon became entrepreneurs.\textsuperscript{53} An entrepreneur often ran his workshop in the village where carvers were hired locally. Because his products were mainly sold in urban areas, he usually established extra facilities there and brought in workers from the village. This created a new situation in the labor market regarding wood products. By setting up a 'putting out' system in the village, an entrepreneur could mobilize a large number of workers at short notice and at wages lower than those prevailing in the urban areas. Recently, some foreign investors and state enterprises started to cooperate with village entrepreneurs in producing and exporting wooden carved products. In this process, entrepreneurs have become the intermediaries between investors/exporters and village workers. Wood workshops established in the big cities (Hanoi, HCM City) with foreign capital investment attracted an increasing number of young carvers from Giao village because of the high wages they paid. Entrepreneurs from the village recruited carvers (adults and children) to work for their urban workshops. Obviously, the emergence of entrepreneurs in the wood trade changed the production patterns of wooden carved furniture in Giao village, creating an intensification of wood workers' seasonal migration and of children's involvement in this trade.

Most entrepreneurs working in wood carving of Giao village were former foremen although their ages might not be high, just between 25 and 35. To begin, an influential foreman usually started his business by establishing his own workshop, hiring workers, recruiting trainees, and working on subcontracts. After some time, he directly worked for the investors/exporters and built up his agents' network in the cities. Since having to manage workshops both in the city and in the village, entrepreneurs who no longer worked as a foreman took on the role of employer/entrepreneur.

As of 1995, there were eight entrepreneurs who had established good connections between the wood workshops of Giao village and those in the cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Many independent artisans and household-based workshops in the village received sub-contracts form these eight enterprises and their products were transported to the cities for sale and export. A good number of village wood workers were also recruited by these entrepreneurs to work for their shops in the cities.

The production relationships in the wood trade have consequently changed since this traditional craft became commercialized.

\textsuperscript{53} The term “entrepreneur” used in this study refers to those who are mentioned in local language as “cai thau”. These cai thau mainly organize, manage and assume the risks of the wood business they set up but sometime also take part directly in work.
First, instead of the old-fashioned production by independent workers, manufacturing of wood carving began seeking higher commercial profit by establishing close links between the village and the cities, between the family craft holding by peasant households and the dynamic market at the national and international level. In a sense the family craft came under the influence of various factors of the market forces such as capital, materials, investors and exporters.

Secondly, the artisans became part of the cycle of commercialized production. Mobile groups of wood workers headed by the foremen were now no longer active. The foremen themselves became employees working for entrepreneurs. They could be hired to work directly in the entrepreneur’s workshops or took sub-contracts home and hired his own workers. These subcontractors preferred to use free-lance and female workers, and particularly young trainees at cheap wages.

Thirdly, the production system in the wood trade became more fragmentary with various types of manufacturing and labor relations. The trade gained greater dynamism due to the expansion of family enterprises and export/import activities. Attractive wages in the wood trade and its contract putting-out system provided farming individuals and their children opportunities to enter the employment market. And one could assume that children’s exploitation in these types of work might be less flagrant than those derived from the household-based production.

Although the entrepreneurship system assumed an increasing importance in the wood sector, the running of business was mainly based on family ties. This was particularly true in the management system of small industries in rural areas where relatives were widely employed in the entrepreneurs’ business. For instance, woodworkers and brokers working for an enterprise came mainly from the ranks of paternal or maternal relatives closely related to the employer while the supervisor at the workshop normally was the employer’s own brother or sister. In many cases, entrepreneurs ran their business through the kinship network. Trusted relatives were normally authorized to manage the production at the village workshops on behalf of the employer who were living in Ho Chi Minh City, such activities as ordering sub-contracts, collecting and transporting goods, and paying workers. Many parents wanted to send their children to work under the supervision of the foreman belonging to the same lineage, who according to them, were more reliable.

Such kinship-oriented relations were not only based on mutual trust but also had an economic motive. Workers owed their jobs to their entrepreneurial relatives, who were their employers. These, in turn, made use of this kinship relation for their business advantage. During my field study at the village of Giao, I often observed the practice of late paying of wages, the victims of which were mainly employers’ relatives. As a rule,
employers usually paid in advance part of wages and the rest would only be paid after the goods had been sold. This practice brought obvious advantages to the employers. Instead of borrowing money from the bank, they could take advantage of pending workers' wages for intensive investment. And since these workers were more or less closely tied with their employers, they hardly complained. In fact wood workers of Giao village mentioned two kinds of wages, *tien tuo* (fresh/quick money) and *tien heo* (withering/slow money). Those workers who were prepared to wait until the products were sold would receive full pay and those who wanted to be paid quickly might get a little less than that. It is interesting to add that most of services supplying necessities of daily life such as foodstuff, health care and tailoring, etc., also depended heavily on wages from the woodwork trade. Villagers bought things on credit and paid their debts after receiving wages from the employers.

Wage rates were influenced by the agricultural cycle as well. Between harvest times, wages were normally lower, particularly for unskilled jobs because labor supply was higher than demand.

Wood workers' wages were mostly on a daily basis or per job, depending on the agreement between employer and worker. However, wage rates were based on the worker's skill levels and the jobs done. Carvers capable of creating good designs and working on complicated objects such as statues and pictures got the highest wages. Those who worked as refiners and varnishers got lower pay, but a little higher than those assembling carved objects into the final products. The average wage for a labor day (about ten hours of working) in the wood trade in 1995 was as follows:

- Designer (*duc vo*): 35 - 50 000 VND per day
- Refiner (*got lai*): 15 - 20 000
- Polisher (*danh bong*): 7 - 10 000
- Varnisher (*danh dau*): 15 - 20 000
- Engruster (*kham trai*): 15 - 20 000
- Assembler (*long*): 10 - 15 000

In general, wage rates in urban workshops were higher than these, ranging from 15 to 75,000 dong per day, depending on the nature of jobs.

Generally speaking, wages in cash were preferred but wages were also paid in kind, often consumer goods such are TV set, cassette player, bicycle, motorbike and wood material.
Hard wood such as *po-mu* (*forkieniahodginisii*), *trac* (*delbergia cochinchinesis*), *mun* (*ebony wood*), and *lim* (*erithropheum fordio*) were the main material used for wood carving. Exploitation and distribution of these kinds of wood were under state control and therefore, expensive and scarce. Most of the wood enterprises in Giao village used wood from unofficial sources coming from Northern Uplands, Central Highland, Laos and Cambodia. It was difficult to estimate the quantity of wood consumed by wood workshops in Giao village. An estimation based on 10 village workshops suggested that each shop used on average 20 m³ of hard wood and 60 m³ of normal wood per year.

As mentioned previously, the main products of wood carving in the past were items of worship (couplets, boards inscribed with Chinese characters, frescoes, statues) and household furniture (sideboard, wardrobe, carved beds, etc.). At present, besides these traditional types, woodcutting pictures, fine art statues, house decorations and gifts were produced en masse. Most carved objects made in the village were transported to shops in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City where they were to be shipped to far-flung places such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Singapore.

While the market of wooden fine arts articles expanded rather rapidly, carving techniques remained almost unchanged. Only a few modern tools were added to the old craft such as the frame saw, polishing and varnishing machines and various kinds of wood glues.

A drastic change in the wood trade concerned its labor force. In the past, only male members from a small number of village households were engaged in woodwork. Nowadays, about 90 per cent of all households were involved in the wood trade, making up two thirds of the total village labor force, among them many females and children.

In brief, wood carving of Giao village has evolved in a haphazard manner over the past five decades. It almost disappeared under the collective regime (1958-1979), gradually recovered in the pre-economic reform period (1980-1985) and developed strongly ever since. Changes in the wood trade could be seen in such aspects as manufacturing scale, production organization and the nature of labor relations. Wood carvers of the past were mobile men working on direct orders from clients. At present the woodcraft industry became strongly dependent on the emerging class of entrepreneurs who seize new opportunities of a wider market both domestic and foreign. And while village workshops started to do subcontracting work for urban enterprises, many peasants still regarded these activities as of secondary importance after farming.

The revival and development of wood craft were a positive response of the peasants to the policy of decollectivisation, in coping with the scarcity of productive resources, low returns from farming and under-employment. One can assume that wood
craft has created more employment opportunities allowing farming households to shift to non-farm for additional sources of income and consequently the household labor force was maximally mobilized for cash earnings.

It should, however, be noted that the case of Giao village was not unique. While Giao villagers were proud of their long standing wood craft tradition, wooden furniture manufacturing was now popular in many surrounding villages, which together with Giao formed an important center of wooden furniture industry in the Red River delta. With so many players in the wood craft game, pressure was bound to rise, the competition became fiercer, challenged further by the whims of market mechanisms. In this context a study of child labor in Giao village should not be separated from the larger context of the Red River Delta.

Child employment in the wood trade

In terms of quantity

As discussed previously, production of wooden carved furniture was performed in various ways, by independent artisans, households and enterprises. In reality, these types of production were fraught with uncertainties. Some family enterprises had, at their peak, 20 or more workers but maybe a few months later, their workshops might dissolve and workers all gone away. The vagaries of the wood trade largely depended on hardwood supplies, wooden furniture export markets and tax policies rather than labor supplies. Because of this, most households involved in woodwork kept their rice land and continued to regard woodwork as of secondary importance after farming. Uncertainty in the manufacturing organization and the mobility of woodworkers made the survey of working children in this trade more difficult. In order to understand the extent and nature of children’s economic activities in the wood trade, I conventionally grouped the children doing woodwork into two main categories for observation: group 1 included those children who worked within the household, under the direct supervision of their family members; and group 2 covered children working in enterprises and workshops owned by employers/entrepreneurs.

Child workers in the household-based production (self-employed households)

After having obtained general information from the households survey, a group of 36 households doing woodwork independently or taking subcontracts from their entrepreneurs was selected for an intensive examination of their children’s involvement in woodwork. 73 children at the age between 8 and 15 living and working in these households were interviewed.
The findings indicate that only 42 children (57 per cent of total number of children under the survey) were involved regularly in their households’ woodwork (details are shown in Table 6.1). Among them, 12 per cent were female. About 48 per cent in these household-based shops worked part-time outside school hours and 52 per cent worked full-time. Only a small part (2 per cent) started their working life from the age of 8 to 10, began with simple tasks for a few hours per day. Almost all children began to take part in the wood trade as trainees at the age of 11 or 12 while spending half a day in school. It is worth noting that 72 per cent of children at the age of 13 and 14 started to work as full-time workers while 28 per cent were still spending half a day at school.

Table 6.1. Children involved in woodwork at 36 self-employed households (net number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Total number of children under the survey</th>
<th>Of which, girl</th>
<th>Number of children found working in the wood trade</th>
<th>Of which, girl</th>
<th>Part-time child workers: Boy</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Full-time child workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 - 10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>52% [F: 0%]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own survey in 1995.

The finding shows a considerable variation between girls and boys in the extent of their involvement in woodwork. Only a small number of girls were found working regularly in workshops while no one worked as full-time workers at home. Girls started to learn the trade at the age of 13-14 while boys began earlier, most often between 10 and 12, and when they reached the age of 15, most boys were committed to take part, part-time or full-time, in woodwork.

In this type of production, children contributed directly their labor to the household’s incomes and their work was not paid.

Child woodworkers in entrepreneur-owned workshops

At the enterprises and workshops owned by entrepreneurs, the extent and nature of children’s work were quite different from the household-based production. Among 11 workshops under survey, we found 81 children under 16 years of age who were regular
workers, making up 60 per cent of the total workers performing in these shops. Most children worked under the guise of trainees. Over 60 per cent of child workers aged between 8 and 15 worked full-time and 64 per cent of them were unpaid workers. About 36 per cent of child workers who had been working in these manufacturing units for more than two years were paid, mostly in the forms of an allowance or a bonus. Girls took up 23 per cent of total working children. The children who came from outside of the village made up 42 per cent.

Table 6.2. Child woodworkers in 11 entrepreneurs' workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Sex group</th>
<th>Work time</th>
<th>Payment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Of which, girl</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 - 10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As percentage</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own survey in 1995.

The above figures give a general view of the situation of working children, which may help elucidate the nature of their work in the wood sector. At the village level, my own survey of 376 households in 1995 indicates a total of woodworkers who earned regular wages in wood work was 524 persons, among whom 17 per cent were children under 16 years of age and 10 per cent were female workers. This only took into account those who had held a stable job in the wood trade for six months or longer in 1995 while children working in unpaid or underpaid jobs and those working within their households were not included. My own estimate based on household survey indicates a figure of about 300 children under 16 working as apprentices in the village. Among them one-third came from outside of the village. If we take all these children into account, working children under 16 made up 40 per cent of the workforce in the wood sector of the entire village.

In terms of education, findings in both groups reveal that half of the working children aged between 8 and 15 were no longer attending school. However, it should be noted that a majority of children working at their household-based shops were still attending school whereas 60 per cent of working children in enterprises did not go to school. At the age of 15, eighty two per cent of working children in both sectors had left school for good.
In addition to this, the survey findings further indicate that while all of working children have at least attended primary school, none of them finished the secondary level. Those who finished the primary level tended to follow woodwork rather than entering the higher levels of secondary school.

Table 6.3. Education of children working in the wood trade by age group (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Child workers still being at school</th>
<th>Child workers no longer at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 - 10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 - 12</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 - 14</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Own survey in 1995, based on 154 child woodworkers.*

By categorizing child labor in the wood trade into two specific groups: 1) children working under parental supervision in the household-based production, and 2) children working under their employers' supervision in private enterprises, I would suggest that in these two forms of child employment, a close examination of such issues as job motivations, social relations at work, work-time and wages are of vital importance in order to understand the nature of children's work.

In terms of work-time, my observation shows that those children who worked under family's supervision did not perform as well as those who worked in an enterprise's workshop. Children working at home often took breaks at will and were often distracted by their domestic surroundings. Many parents complained that the children working at home made little progress in developing skills. In their opinions, to become a good carver, an apprentice should work under the supervision of a serious foreman or employer who kept a strict work/learning regime and enforced discipline. At 11 workshops under observation, the average work time was about ten hours per day. A work day lasted from 6 a.m. till 6 p.m. but children normally started a bit earlier and stopped later because they had to prepare the work site in the morning and tidy it up after work. Lunch break was between 11.30 a.m. and 13.30 p.m. At work, children were not allowed to break without permission. Some children told me they had to learn how to refrain from urinating for several hours while working so that they would not be scolded by their supervisors for work interruption.
At household work sites, work time was applied casually but on average, working hours were not less than 10. Particularly night work involving children occurred more often in this type of production as compared to private enterprises, where children were only asked to take night shift during peak periods.

Night shift normally started from 7 p.m. until 11 p.m., some time longer. During my stay in the village, I witnessed that at peak periods, some worked up to 2 a.m. in the morning. Some tasks regarded as light work such as polishing, involving women and children, was often done at night. It was common to see children falling asleep during work hours.

However, one rarely found children between the ages of 8 and 10 working on night shifts. At this age, they still spent half a day at school and only learned the skills of wood work at home or in workshops with little seriousness. They were however encouraged to do wood work because, as their parents put it: “Just something for them to do instead of playing under the sun without supervision”. Contrary to their parents’ view, children at this age could not care less. Sometimes they just left their work to play games and as I usually witnessed, most of them got punished for their misbehavior.

Girl workers were not highly valued. What they did as wood workers was regarded as “extras”. Most of them reported they had to fight against the parents’ will to learn the trade. Parental attitudes were best illustrated by the fact that girls were often interrupted from their wood work to do house-chores or to help on the farm while the boys were left alone. It was true that the parents expected more earnings from the sons rather than daughters. This helps explain why girls spent less time on wood work than boys.

A close examination of work-time by child workers based on periodic visits and 24 hour recalls reveals more details on their working conditions. There was little difference in work time according to the children’s ages although younger children aged between 8 and 12 work a little less than older children. Full-time child workers worked on average 67.2 hours for boys and 53 hours for girls per week. For those who worked part-time, their average work time was 25.5 hours for boys and 23 hours for girls per week.

Child workers had no periodic holidays. They only took days off when they fell sick, or on important family occasions and feasts such as Tet. However, working days were sometimes canceled for lack of materials or because of slow sales. On these days,

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54 Tet (Spring Festival) is the main holidays for wood workers. These holidays often last from the last week of December to the third week of January in the Lunar Calendar. During these four weeks, wood workers spent their time visiting relatives, friends or simply enjoying themselves with various entertainment.
child workers were allowed to “relax”. During harvest time in May-June (vu chiem) and October-November (vu mua), part-time workers and girls were released from woodwork to help in the field.

Child wood workers, particularly boys, preferred to spend their free time to enjoy karaoke, billiards, electronic games, gambling and happy hours in “village bars”. Actually, such entertainment as karaoke, electronic games and billiards were introduced recently after the wood trade brought a degree of prosperity to the village. These were mainly aimed at village youths who worked in the city and took their holidays at home.

**Work relations**

Earlier in this chapter, I have discussed the hierarchical relations in the wood trade, according to which wood workers were divided into three categories: foremen, fellow workers and trainee assistants. I also pointed out that the emergence of entrepreneurs has changed the labor relations in wooden furniture manufacturing. In the past, wood carvers worked on direct orders from their customers and work relations among a group of wood carvers were basically those of colleagues. Today, standing between workers and customers were the brokers who actually controlled the whole business. From this starting point, I will further delve into the position of child workers in the wood trade.

At the outset, we should make clear that there are two kinds of wood workers doing different jobs. *Tho cham* (wood carvers) who create the carved objects and *tho long* (carpenters) would reassemble these carved parts into a complete object. Generally speaking, there were about 20 per cent of woodworkers who worked as assemblers. However, all children working in the wood sector were found to be carvers. Carpentry was not attractive for them because the work was heavier and wages were lower.

The main process of wood carving consist of wood selecting, designing, refining, polishing and varnishing. Most child workers were only involved in refining and polishing. Normally, the foreman makes the design of the objects first and child workers then refine them. Only a small number of child workers, mainly boys at the age of 13 - 15, were able to carve such complicated objects as statues and wood-cut pictures. As a rule, those who could independently make designs were highly regarded by their fellow workers and got regular pay. Refiners and polishers, regardless of their age, were considered as assistant workers and had lower pay. Similarly, the foreman’s qualification depended entirely on his skills, so that a highly skilled worker at the age of 16 or 17 could become a well-paid foreman himself. A striking feature of wood carving was that a foreman needed a number of assistants to do such tasks as refining and
polishing because these jobs took a lot of time and patience. This explains why there were so many trainee assistants at a wood carving workshop.

The fragmentation of wood worker's wages based on degree of skill provides some important implications for explaining labor relations in the wood trade. In many household shops, the head of household formally ran the wood business but because he was not a wood carver, so in fact he only worked as an assistant for his "little" son who knew how to carve. In case the son would leave his household and go to work for others, the household shop would have to shut down. Generally, children who worked for their households contributed directly to household incomes but they were not paid. In order to keep the children to work at home, parents often provided them with incentives such as pocket money, bonus and new clothes. Unfortunately for them, teen-age workers usually opted for working away from home where they could get paid properly and enjoy their own freedom.

Although one may see a fusion of friendship and kinship ties through work, the relationship between child worker and employer often goes beyond that. In its nature, this is the one between labor and capital, as found somewhere else in Asia (Lai Ah-Eng, 1982:581).

Generally speaking, child workers employed to work in workshops were under the direct supervision of a foreman/master. As assistant workers, children were assigned to do certain tasks, from simple chores to more complicated work. In the early stages of their apprenticeship, they performed those tasks usually done by unskilled laborers. For example, after carving an object, the foreman needed someone to refine and polish it with care, and this was done by a child assistant. As an employee himself, the master did not control assistants on his own. He was however authorized to use assistant workers for a particular job. In terms of labor management, the children were controlled by both master and employer. These two persons were entitled to punish trainees if they made mistakes or misbehaved. Working children told me that when they did something wrong, they would leave the work site quietly and come back later with their parents or relatives to apologize or indemnifying the employer for any material loss or damage, which may help avoid the punishment.

Recruitment of trainee assistants was done through family relations or other acquaintances. There were no official standards of working regulations. Agreement on working conditions of children was often made between employers/masters and their parents. Such relations were built on trust and moral ethics rather than legal regulations, and they were considered sufficient guarantee for children to work. Employers would not accept children without sponsors because they had to make sure trainees who came from afar were reliable enough to be allowed to stay in their house for a long period.
Living far from home, working children from outside village were rather vulnerable and their well being totally depended on their employers. As I have often observed, these children tried their best to please their masters and employers. They worked hard with hope that after a few years of training, they would become carvers and earn a living for themselves. In our confidential talks with employers, masters of wood carving told me often they taught children not only carving skills but also “the way of real men”. These premises turned out to be quite blurring, often leading to abuses because “turning children into the real men” might mean forcing them to do all kinds of tasks outside wood work, such as running house chores, taking care of their bosses’ young children and farming.

In brief, labor relations in the wood trade were not based on work alone. Other factors such as kinship and acquaintance, the relationships between master and learner, between employer and employee all played an important role, and which were sometimes the deep roots of abuses. Additionally, child workers, regardless of their skills, were always treated as premature kids. They were called pho nho (little workers), the lowest rank in the hierarchy of the wood trade. This implies that child workers could not expect to receive the same treatment as their adult work mates.

Work for wages

Apart from those children who worked for their households as unpaid workers, the proportion of child workers actually paid by their employers in 11 workshops under my survey was relatively low, only about 36 per cent of total working children. So the majority of these children worked as unpaid trainees.

For those children who worked for wages, their earning rates varied considerably, depending on their skill-levels and the quality of products they made. In principle, wages could be paid on the daily basis or for piece-work, but generally employers preferred to pay them on a daily basis. In their opinion, such a way of payment allowed them to secure good quality for the work done. The child workers were in no position to bargain with their employers about their pay.

A child worker at the age of 14-15 who worked as designer/refiner could earn an average wage of 20,000 dong per workday, which was about two thirds of the wage of an adult doing the same job. Trainees with experience of two or more years in woodworking earned about 10,000 dong per day, while female workers who did polishing jobs earned about 7,000 dong per day. Because wage rates did not depend on age but on skill, adult workers who did simple tasks might get lower wages than child workers who worked with their skills.
Usually, trainee assistants were unpaid workers, but they were also offered a small amount of cash as bonus on special occasions, especially when sales were good.

Previously, I have remarked about the children’s weak position in bargaining with employers. In fact they had no power at all to negotiate about their position as employees. Such issues as wage rates, forms of payment and working conditions were often contracted between their parents/sponsors and prospective employers. In order to avoid a bad reputation as exploiter of children’s labor, and taking into account a number of relationships among adults (relatives, acquaintances, neighbors...), employers did not make direct contract with working children. Both parents and employers preferred that wages should be paid directly to the children’s parents. Apart from some advance payment, employers normally retained the rest of children’s wages for their business until the end of year. Meanwhile parents exerted direct control over their children’s wages. A mother told me how she felt about children’s earnings:

“We know better how to use money for the right purposes. Children are to help their parents. Who knows, their earnings may not be enough for their own consumption. Don’t get the idea that we parents will spend their money for our own needs, we only worry about them”.

The fact remains that most working children wanted to get paid directly. Some of them reported they sometimes had to use their own “weapons” to get part of the wages. One key informant told me normally he dared not ask his parents for money, but once he was sent to work far away from home under the conditions agreed by his parents and employer, he would ask the latter for some advances. If this demand was not met, he would leave the workshop or keep staying in bed. Though this ruse was often used with little success, it reflected well the position of working children and their labor relationships in the woodwork sector.

During my stay in the village, I heard stories of apprentices who sought a freelance job elsewhere at night to earn some pocket money. This was however not a common occurrence. Most child workers tried their best to work for their masters with the hope of becoming a real carver after three or four years of training. It was obvious that obtaining professional skills to earn a living was the most important thing for the children (and their parents) because they could not expect to learn these skills at school or on the farm. For many families in the village, the wood trade represents a way to achieve prosperity. This aspiration was reflected in the children’s ideas how to spend their earnings. Based on my detailed notes taken from confidential talks with working children, 83 per cent of the children working in 11 wood workshops said they would keep part of it for themselves, and only three per cent said they would keep it all. In more detail, 59 per cent said they wanted to contribute money to their parents’ plans to build a new house or to improve home comforts (such things as television, cassette player, motorbike). About 26 per cent of children (42 per cent of girls) wanted to spend money on new clothes, shoes and good food. Five per cent (only boys) wished to spend
their earnings on snacks, traveling and entertaining their friends. Most boys were relatively ambitious on spending their earnings for such “big things” like housing, buying expensive consumer goods while girls were less ambitious, saying that they wanted to keep money for themselves.

Children’s ideas on how to spend their earnings offer interesting insights into their motivation in seeking work. They tend to say little about “earning a bowl of rice” but rather more about improving their living conditions although in reality, earning money to cover the cost of their daily meals was of primary concern for most of them. There was ample evidence that children’s earnings played a central role in changing the economic situation of individual households. Villagers often mentioned children’s employment in the wood trade as a source of envy. Competition among villagers to improve their living standards and the attractions of a new life style encouraged both parents and their children to seek employment in the market economy, in this case in wood workshops.

Although children rarely mentioned how they spent their own money, my observations indicated that boys spent it on gambling, smoking, drinking, snacks and other forms of entertainment (karaoke, cinema etc.) Girls preferred to spend money on new shoes, clothes and school expenses. Some of them invested in raising their own livestock but many girls complained that their parents just took their chickens, ducks, geese and pigs and never paid them back in cash.\(^{55}\)

**Job mobility**

I have discussed the increasing intensification of seasonal migration in Giao village where male peasants/craftsmen left their village and searched for jobs in urban wood workshops for long periods of time. It was the foreman/entrepreneur who played an important role in linking the rural craftsmen with the labor market in urban settings. This was also true for child workers engaged in the wood craft industry. However, while adult workers were attracted to the urban workshops for their high wages, the mobility of child workers was more complex. As far as geographical mobility was concerned, we could distinguish two different flows of children’s migration: the first involved children who moved into the village for apprenticeship; and the second involved children who moved out of the village to urban wood workshops. Viewed from the perspective of job mobility, we can see a upward direction among working children. They generally moved

\(^{55}\) As a popular custom in many rural areas of the Red River Delta, girls are allowed to earn money from extra sources and keep for their own, called “von rieng” (own money). When married, they can bring their wealth to the husband’s home as dowry.
from the status of apprentices to that of waged workers, and after a training period in the village, they can be employed to work far away from home.

Regarding the flow of in-migration, my estimation based on surveying the village wood workshops indicates that 42 per cent of apprentices were from outside of the village. Most of them came from the surrounding districts of Hai Hung provinces, but also from neighboring provinces such as Ha Bac, Hai Phong and the northern mountainous provinces of Lang Son and Lai Chau. Surprisingly, some children from remote southern provinces such as Gia Lai and Lam Dong were also sent to the village to learn the trade.

Most working children who moved into the village for apprenticeship were from peasant families. They were sent directly to the village workshops through the network of acquaintances and relatives. Some of trainees were picked out by fine-art wood galleries to work for them after training. There were no children who came to the village in search of jobs on their own. Only a few girls came from outside the village for training. Most of these girls were between 12 and 16 and all of them had stopped going to school.

While child migrants moved into the village for apprenticeship, others moved out of the village to work for wages. My village survey in 1995 indicated that about 17% of wood workers who seasonally migrated to work elsewhere were children under 16 years of age. In the years of 1996-1997, I several times visited urban wood workshops set up by the entrepreneurs from Giao village in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to get more insight into the life and work of child workers there.

There were not so many children below the age of 15 moving out of the village to work for urban workshops as compared to those children who moved into the village for apprenticeship. Most children recruited to work in urban workshops had to spend some years as trainees in the village workshops before they could become qualified to work for wages. Only a few girl-workers were found working in urban workshops. One reason for this was the parents’ desire to keep their daughters at home to enhance the prospects of their marriage. Many foremen told me since living costs in the city were quite high, they had to limit the number of child workers in their workshops. But there were still child workers under 16 working in the city. There were two types of working children who migrated from the village to urban shops. The first group consisted of paid child workers who were recruited through verbal contracts between the foremen/employers and their parents. The second group included unpaid child workers still working as trainees. They were brought to the city by their masters who took care of their living expenses except wages.
Like in their home village, the “little workers” in these urban shops were mainly assigned such tasks as refining and polishing carved objects. They ate and slept right at the work site, usually in temporary shacks rented from the local owners. Employers or masters’ wives often cooked for the entire group. Food costs were normally deducted from the workers’ wages.

While talking to employers, I often heard them complain about child workers under their responsibility. They said it took lots of efforts to manage these child workers, and there were always professional risks and sickness which could be costly. On the contrary, children did not seem to worry much about the “money first” principle. Rather it was an excitement for them to work in the city, far from parental control. They were proud of their ruses to press their employers for advance payments so they could enjoy themselves, threatening to go away or work elsewhere if their demands were not met. This was in line with their parents’ complaints that children often neglected to send money home and some of them even returned home with nothing but debts. There was no doubt a high mobility of child workers moving between jobs. Nardinelli’s study assumes that children migrated to those areas where their wages were highest (Nardinelli, 1990:86). However, we should add that working in the urban settings was an attraction in itself for many young workers. Besides the wage rates which were normally much higher than those paid in the village, children also wanted to experience the excitement of the city lights.

Learning a trade for life: child workers, employers, and parents

Generally speaking, children’s work in skilled trades is normally linked with the history of apprenticeship. Studies on child labor in past Europe (Nardinelli 1990, Weissbach 1989) or working children in contemporary India (Burra 1995), Senegal (Moric 1982), Indonesia (White & Tjandraningsih 1992), and elsewhere (Goddan and White 1982), etc., regard the apprentice as a potential source of children’s exploitation. Nardinelli however adds that certain factors such as custom, law, and the bargaining strength of parents helped to reduce potential abuse of apprenticeship. He also assumes that exploitation of apprentices in skilled trades was not severe (Nardinelli 1990:87). However, this hypothesis is not backed up by empirical data while Burra’s observations of Indian gem polishers contrarily suggest that apprenticeship training is only a disguise of child exploitation (Burra 1995:90).

Observations on child labor in developing countries generally indicate that children are popularly employed in fine-art crafts and family workshops as apprentices. Unfortunately, there have been few comprehensive studies on the problem of children’s’ apprenticeship. This part is to provide more empirical data to better understand this aspect of child labor. It suggests that it is the shift to a market economy that led to a commercialization of apprenticeship in the wood trade. Since this business brought the
employers a good deal of profits, therefore, the main motivation of expanding apprenticeship was to raise incomes by using children's labor. Having said this, one should not forget that it was the parents themselves who wished to give their children a chance to learn professional skills, enabling them to cope with an increasingly fragmented labor market.

_Employers: “We bring them a good future!”_

There was a story widely circulated among Giao villagers relating to wood carving: A hundred years ago, the founders of the wood trade held a ceremony at the communal house. They swore to the village spirit guardian that they would not pass on the wood carving skills to anyone who was not native of Giao. Those who violated this pledge would be punished by the deity. The attendants of that ceremony hammered a nail in the main pillar of the communal house to affirm their pledge.

For the wood carvers of Giao village in the past, to keep this oath was a sacred duty. And this old story is still retold today as an attempt to protect the technical know-how of carving from outsiders. It reflects the monopolistic character of wood carving guilds of Giao village that dated back from many years. It also suggests that the apprenticeship for commercial purposes in this trade was not so popular in the past. To gain more insight into the anthropological aspects as to how and why this tradition of the wood trade was broken, I will present a brief description of the conflicting views among those concerned on the question of apprenticeship.

A strong revival of the wood trade after the economic reforms and the wealth it generated has diminished the sacred character of the old pledge. Hundreds of children from various areas have come to the village for apprenticeship. In 1990, the _Association of Giao Village Carpenters (Hoi Tho Moc)_ was set up, aiming at protecting the wood carvers' interests. The first action this association undertook was to turn away children who came to the village from outside to learn the trade. This action however went against the masters/foremen's interests and was strongly resisted. The conflict became so serious that the local Communist Party cell had to hold a meeting to discuss the matter. The foremost topic for discussion was what practical usefulness these apprentices could bring about and why children did not come to the state schools for training but instead heading for Giao village?

The argument of the open-training supporters was that the expansion of training not only contributed to the development of rural industries as set by the Party policy but also maintained the traditional craft that had almost fallen into decline and needed new
stimulating forces. Furthermore, it would create more jobs and raise incomes for many villagers.

Opponents of the open policy argued that the masters/foremen were solely motivated by financial gains in exploiting children's labor and had little to do with wood carving revival. Moreover, they argued that extending apprenticeship for all would devalue the fame of wood carving of Giao village, breaking the distinct features of Giao carving school, and paving the way to mass production of objects of little artistic value.

The struggle put up by the Association of Carpenters against open apprenticeship had an important significance if one was to understand the socio-economic aspects of apprenticeship training and the utility of child labor in wood carving. Based on direct observations and talks with working children, their parents and employers, I will further analyze their views and motivations on utilizing child labor in this commercialized craft.

The argument that apprenticeship in wood carving made a good contribution to reviving with new vigor a famous traditional craft, which almost disappeared for many years, was supported by some press reporters who visited the wood workshops (Do Quang Dan 1994, Thanh Sang 1994, Xuan Ha 1992). These reporters contended that it would be better to put those children who left school at an early age to work instead of doing nothing because without proper supervision, they would be easily drawn into social vices such as gambling, drinking and smoking. Others opined that children should be regarded as a potential labor force to meet the increasing demands of the market economy, while ignoring the prospect of their long-term development (Le Ngoc Hung 1998:40). Master-craftsmen and entrepreneurs were praised for admitting children to work so that they could learn a professional skill and earn money (Huu Duc 1992). This would ensure the smooth development of social order and public security. Among the villagers I talked to, such arguments in favor of apprenticeship training were particularly well received by the employers.

In giving prominence to their training, employers always stressed the advantages of sending children to their wood workshops. According to them, sending children to work was to enhance incomes for their families and themselves. If the children did their best in training, they would soon earn money to support their families. Even if they work for nothing, work would be the best way to keep them from hanging around. Those children attending school half a day, could spend the rest of their time learning new skills and maybe earning some money as well. When they grew up they would be qualified to earn a decent living. The masters also emphasized other aspects of apprenticeship such as learning discipline, obedience, and good personal manners.
Besides learning the wood craft, children were also required to do some odd chores like washing, cleaning and cooking, etc.

Masters/employers also talked about running their business as a moral commitment because of the costs involved. They pointed out it would take at least six months to teach a child how to do some simple tasks. Even then the quality of their work remained very low. Children often lacked patience to work on delicate objects. They usually wasted the hard wood, which was very expensive, and therefore making the manufacturing costs higher. Additionally, children sometimes left their work without giving notice, which might cause disruption in the production line. Some children were accused of stealing professional secrets and running off to work for competing shops.

Despite talking about the merits of their wood carving training workshop as a non-profit but costly business, the masters/employers often failed to explain why they kept on recruiting more child workers and opening more workshops for apprentices. A pool of information from child workers, their parents and the masters themselves helped throw some light on the matter. As it turned out employers often exerted enough control to keep apprentices in their workshops for a considerable period of time.

Generally speaking, access to apprenticeship was not free for everyone. The employer only accepted new trainees based on his knowledge of the applicant’s family background through the network of acquaintances or relatives. Such relations were regarded as a guarantee for a trainee to live and work in the employer’s house for an extended period of time.

Children coming from outside the village were preferable because they were expected to pay their monthly fees and food (in cash or kind) equivalent to about 30 kilograms of rice per month. Although this might seem a minor charge, it was in fact a considerable source of income for the employer. If an employer kept a few trainees like this under his roof, their total contributions would be enough to cover the living costs of both trainees and host family, even if the child trainees contributed nothing in terms of wood carving production. These fees had to be paid in advance on a quarterly or semi-annual basis and if the trainees dropped out, no money would be returned. Obviously, by doing this, the employer forced trainees to depend closely on him. Moreover, children coming from outside of village became more obedient when they totally depended on their hosts.

The age of apprentices was also the employer’s concern. It was said that the ideal age for learning carving is between 12 and 15. Children older than 15 were not preferred for the reason that they are not patient enough to follow a craft which normally takes them several years to grasp the basic techniques and their hands are no longer nimble. But the truth might lie elsewhere. My direct observations tend to dismiss the
myth of young children’s nimble hands. The truth is that the children older than 16 are rather independent and they would protest against mistreatments while younger children are rather obedient.

Apprentices said they were normally assigned to do simple tasks even after they had acquired enough skills through a combination of observation and practicing. In their views, the master did not want to teach them every technical know-how of carving and they were thus not allowed to work with hard wood in the initial years of training. If they wanted to learn more, they had to work harder for more years. As said, this was the best way to keep occupational secrets because the master needed the children to work as unpaid assistants, not waged workers.

Employers not only used the methods of “push” and “trickle-down” to tie down working children, they also used various means to exploit effectively children’s labor. Nardinelli assumed that “the payment of premiums provides strong evidence that apprentices in skilled trades were not exploited” (Nardinelli 1990:87). Actually, premiums were not wages and they could not compensate properly the children’s labor. Moreover, premiums were offered only a few times a year, mainly on special occasions. Premiums should thus be considered a way of encouraging children to do more for their employers.

Those trainees who worked in the workshop for a couple of years were no longer required to pay the monthly contribution. Instead, they were offered daily meals and if doing a good job, they might get small allowances. This suggests that apprentices’ labor was significantly productive because in principle, children could get paid only when the value of the work they performed was worth more than what went into their upkeep. To understand more in detail the question of how much child workers contribute to the production of goods, I will take up the process of making a cupboard as an illustration.

According to wood workers, it takes about 30 labor days to produce a cupboard with sophisticatedly carved decorations. Work can be itemized as follows:

- Wood preparation (splitting up): 4 working days.
- Having the leo (braces) and be (platform) carved: 10 working days.
- Refining the carved parts leo and be: 10 working days.
- Polishing, varnishing and assembling carved parts into a complete unit: 6 working days.

The foreman usually does some parts of work such as preparing wood, designing decorations and putting the final touches on the whole product. All of these tasks takes him about 15 working days. His assistants, mostly children, are assigned to do the rest.
If the foreman has to hire workers for the rest of the tasks, he earns only the wages of 15 working days. If he uses trainees to do these tasks, he will not have to pay them. And the wages for 15 working days done by his child assistants shall go to him.

This simple example illustrates how children's labor helped to raise the employer's income. As said previously, a wood workshop requires numerous assistants to do simple but precise tasks such as refining and polishing. This explains why so many children are employed in the wood sector. So it can be said that even though the employer was supposed to assume all the risks of business, the economic value the trainees brought to his business was evident.

*Parents: “Work makes them the real men”*

I have analyzed various attitudes regarding apprenticeship and the utility of child labor in the wood trade, viewed from the employer's perspective. It is obvious that a number of children sent to the village's wood workshops as trainees or waged workers were not from poor families, particularly those coming from outside the village. Poor parents apparently could not afford to make an advance contribution, an equivalent to 300 or more kilograms of rice for the upkeep of their child for one year. My survey among working children revealed that a majority of them (68 per cent) came to wood workshops under their parents' arrangement while only 32 per cent (among these, 58 per cent were girls) said they made the decision on their own. This reflects the parents' desire in driving their children, particularly boys, into waged jobs.

Listening to confidential stories told by the children's parents helped understand why these parents had chosen wood work as a worthy career for their children. A veteran who formerly served as chairman of the local co-operative, confided to me that if he just had one more son, his family would be much better off. He said his only son of 16 years was involved in wood work for a few years and he felt his family now was faring much better than before. Every month, his son earned about 500 thousand dong. Thanks to his son's earnings, he could afford such things as TV. He believed that without wood work, the villagers' standard of living would not be improved. And so the villagers vied with each other to send their children to work. But he worried that when his son grew up, he would not send money home. In his opinion, young children (under 16) were more dutiful than older ones. But he was worried that sending children to work at an early age might make them ill educated.

This story like many others I heard in the village was indicative of the desire of the native inhabitants to earn more income and improve their standard of living through non-farm activities, such as wood work. Peasants seemed to take these activities in
stride, after weighing the pros and cons whether to send their children to work at an early age or let them get more education, but finally decided that the family’s economic situation should prevail.

Some parents had a high regard for wood carving, an occupation in which “one’s face and head are protected from rain and sun” (mua khong den mat, nang khong den dau). This local saying reflects the popular belief that carving is a light and “clean” job as compared to farming where one has to dirty one’s hand in the paddy fields. In their reasoning, carving requires dexterity, artistic talent and patience rather than physical exertion therefore it is suitable for children. Moreover, it is a craft that could get you a reasonably good income while training costs remained affordable.

In addition to this type of thinking, some parents simply believed that work is the best way to train their children to live properly because, as they put it, “playing around is good for nothing”. They often quoted a popular saying “idleness is the source of all evils” (nhan cu vi bat thien) in their decision to send children to work.

However, most parents voiced their concern about the negative aspects of children’s involvement in work at an early age, fearing that a lack of a proper education might affect the children’s future development. Such worries seemed to be softened by the prospects of employment and earnings that would help to improve the family’s standard of living. Somehow they felt that sending children to work was to prepare them for a good future, and if the family’s economic situation was good, so would be the children’s lot.56

Although earning money is a desirable thing, many parents obviously worried that money might spoil their children, particularly those working away from home. These were often reminded of their filial duties, together with stern warning against smoking, drinking and gambling. In actual fact the child was only allowed to work away from home under condition that his/her wages should be paid directly to the parents and he/she was to be put under the supervision of the adult relatives or fellow villagers.

It should be mentioned that most professional woodworkers recognized the health hazards of their craft, which may have long-term effects on mental and physical development of children. The parents’ general attitude in this regard was rather neutral, if not one of downright neglect. Parents’ attitudes and motivations in sending children to woodwork, as presented earlier, help understand why rural children’s involvement in

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56 Children’s pursuit of material life is manifested in their preferred folk sayings such as: Van hay chu tot khong bang thang dot lam tien (A well-educated man is worth less than an illiterate boy with a lot of money); Dong tien la Tien, la Phat, la suc bat cuoc do (With money, you can be regarded as Angle and Buddha, and money made you stronger in life); Dep trai di bo khong bang mat ro di Honda (An ugly boy riding a Honda motorbike is more respectable than a handsome boy going about by foot).
this craft was on the increase. While most parents regarded their children’s work basically as a means to improve the family income, others expressed enthusiasm and pride as their children brought home money, and thus encouraged them to earn more. These contended that children’s lives would be improved as the family income increased. Some parents expressed their concerns about the children’s future in a new environment dominated by money, but then abandoned them to the luck while others declared themselves powerless in stopping their children to earn. In the context of a fast changing society, many parents became irresolute to make a choice for their children’s future. Behind their talks was a real struggle between the wish of bringing a good future for their children and the reality of survival, improvement and intermediate interests. And as usual, they finally left them “at the mercy of their fate”.57

Child workers: dutiful children?

How did the children judge their work and assess their relationship with employers? What were their motivations, thoughts and aspirations? These questions were uppermost in my mind while I did field work in the village. Previously, I have analyzed to some extent children’s motives in working for wages and their ideas how to spend the money. Based on information gathered from many conversations I had with working children in the village, I shall try to elucidate the child worker’ moods, aspirations and feelings.

I often heard parents saying that sending children to the wood workshops was mainly to keep them from playing in the sun, which may harm their health. This simplistic explanation seemed to be at odds with the realities of the working children who often reported that if they did not work properly they would be punished. Work for them is decidedly not play.

Case of a 15 year-old boy:

Tin was a wood worker of 15 years old. He learnt wood carving when he was 10. His father worked as an “exported worker” to Bulgaria. In 1990, he was sent back to his home village. He then died in a traffic accident in HCM City in 1995. Tin’s mother tilled the rice land allocated to her household of four persons. Tin’s two sisters, 18 and 16 years of age, no longer attended school, the older worked as a seamstress in the village and the younger helped the mother in the field. Let listen to Tin’s story:

That year I was attending the fourth grade at the village school. My father one day told me that boys of my age who spent their days for fun were no good. He then took me to Mr.

57 A closer look to the parents’ confidence in their children’s work may show that the belief that “as family incomes rose, child labor declined” (Nardinelli, 1990:102) sounds too much rational.
Nung, one of his close relatives and asked him to teach me wood work. My father said this trade would help me to earn money. During the first months, I didn’t feel well. Wood dust constantly caused sneezing and itchiness, making me often feel out of breath. I felt weary after work and had little appetite. But then, all became normal after a certain period. I worked half a day while still following classes at school.

A year later, Mr Nung left for the South and I was transferred to Mr. Thau’s workshop. It was here that I learned how to carve simple things. But Mr. Thau was so rough. Once working on a very thin carved object, I unfortunately broke it, so he beat me and heaped insults upon me. He did the same with my work-mates anytime he found their work was not to his liking. But all of us kept our mouths shut for fear of punishment. Things did not go well with me when I again broke another object. Too frightened, I glued the broken pieces together and left the workshop. I dared not to come home, so I went to my aunt’s house in neighboring village. Next day, my mum came to me. She took me to Mr. Thau and made me apologize to him.

After that event, I did not go to school any more and started to work full-time for another workshop. There I got the chance to work with new and complicated models. After a few months working as a trainee, I got paid at the rate of 100 thousand dong per month. Work here was much more difficult. Workers were not allowed to trade jokes at work and they had to be on time, just like in the state-owned factories. Once Mr Manh (the employer) found I left the work site to watch my work mates processing a new model behind the house, he hit me.

Having worked with Mr Manh for about one year, I was sent to work for Mr Thep. This was a largest workshop in the village with many workers of my age. My mother said being admitted to work here was a good chance for me to learn more skills of carving. But even there I did not have time to think about good or bad. Work took me more than ten hours a day, and many times we were asked to work on night shifts. Apart from this, we had to study new models during breaks to work on them later. We actually didn’t have time for rest. When somebody came late, his wages would be deducted. Although wage rates were higher, they were paid out only once or twice a year. Working conditions were so tight. I even had to learn how to suppress the need for pissing for hours during work. I often got headache and eye problems. Worrying about my health, my mother took me back to work at home on sub-contracts for my former bosses. At home, I did not have many orders but I was free to do what I wanted. My mother said I needed to get more work to buy this and that but until now, our house is almost empty.

Tin told me this story in a nonchalant manner as if it was a matter of no importance. Perhaps Tin thought every child worker had similar stories. He did not talk much about abuses but rather, about the hardships he experienced with work. Through the whole story, one can understand the uppermost concern, which is repeated time and again, with work constraints and employers’ contempt towards working children. In his thought, work was somewhat boring and tiring, without rest and fun. In his experience,
he and other child workers were always haunted by punishments with scolding and beating.

Tin’s story and the available information from other working children reveal that the relationship between employer/master and child workers was paternalistic and children’s abuse at work occurred quite often. Though being mistreated, children normally did not tell their parents about how they were treated at work. Some said they were too frightened of their master’s power to report these incidents. Being little workers, they felt a dependent status and weak position to bargain. Hierarchy and parental control were constraint factors imposed on working children. That is why workers like Tin dared not to break working time even for pissing!

The strongest motive for children and their parent in learning the wood craft is to use it as a means to improve the household economy. The children were particularly proud of the money they earned. Although most of them gave money to their parents, or even when they worked without pay, they knew that by contributing their labor to raising the household incomes, they had achieved a certain power which adults could not ignore. Here is a confidential story told by Thiet, a worker of 13:

When I didn’t have to work, it was very hard for me to get money from my parents, even a few cents to buy petty snacks. My mum’s answer always was “No! I simply don’t have it. I am not a money-producing machine. If you want money, why don’t you go out and earn it yourself. Just look at your neighbors’ kids. They’re about your age, and they’ve earned enough money to build a house for their parents. What do you do for me then?”. She then started her ‘eternal song’, complaining that her children made her suffer. I felt so shameful hearing her talk like this. You know, the most dreadful thing for me was to open my mouth to ask my mum for some money to cover school expenses. But since I was able to earn a little money, I could easily get money from my parents. They no longer complained that I was a parasite exploiting their labor.

Unlike boys, girls were not encouraged to learn the wood trade. In the past, this was explained as a way of keeping craft secrets (girls would pass them on to future husbands) but surely this is no longer true today. In reality, their parents’ rationale had a lot to do with preventing them from learning the trade, reflected in a local proverb: “A daughter is someone else’s child”. This means that once she gets married, she would serve her husband’s family, so she should learn the art of home making instead of learning a craft. The tradition for a wife to live in her husband’s house after marriage deters parents from “investing” in their daughters. Furthermore, girls are regarded as their mother’s helper in the house and on the farm. Their involvement in wood work would deprive their mothers of essential help. Apart from this, a girl’s good reputation is always at stake in the rural community. Those girls who left home for work in urban areas were not highly appreciated and it would be hard for them to get husbands among the village boys. Girls and their parents had to keep in mind the “woman’s place” if they were to enter the wood craft. This is however not a decisive factor today. A number of girls ignored their parents’ advice and went to learn the wood trade on their own.
Case of a 13 year girl:

Since dropping out of school and staying at home to help my mother, I had to face with questions like: what job did you do today and how much did you earn. In the evening when I met my (girl) friends, these questions again and again came up. This made me burning with impatience. They earned money and purchased new clothes and make-up while I spent the whole day at home doing boring chores like cleaning, washing and cooking. Yet my parents always scolded me, treating me just like a servant. Since August last year, I followed Que (a girlfriend) to work in the Dung’s workshop. I knew some girls at my age were learning the wood trade there, so I decided to try it myself. At the beginning, my father was so angry with me that he took me home and beat me. But I just went on. Now he leaves me alone. He allows me to learn woodwork with only one condition: finishing all house work before doing wood work! But it’s all right with me.

My mother once asked me: Being a girl, what’s the use of learning a trade? But I thought if I work, I could earn money myself and I would not bother my parents any more. I will have freedom to buy things for myself. Although girls earn less than boys, at least it’s my own money. You know, before whenever I asked my parents money to buy something, all I got was abuse. Now I want to earn my own money. After the training here, I plan to go to Saigon and work for my uncle there.

I have observed that most girl workers were assigned to do simple tasks such as refining and polishing with low pay. Like the girl with the above story, most girls who took up wood work did it on their own and for themselves. They wanted, above everything else, to earn money, to have a chance to get out of their village and free themselves from restrictive family ties. This may be indicative of a change in attitudes regarding the women’s role in rural society.

Whether boys or girls, they all had their own reasons to enter the wood trade. Their stories help find some common patterns of children’s entry into the labor market. As we have seen, the most popular reason was to have a job to earn money to meet their personal needs such as clothes, shoes, or simply some pocket money. In rural areas where rice culture was the only source of cash which often fell short of household and individual needs, the wood trade represented a welcome opportunity for earning extra income.

My empirical observations also reveal that from an early age, rural children already started thinking about sharing family responsibilities and helping their parents. While still quite young, they expressed the wish to prove their worth to their peers later in life. In their stories, they talked about how they would one day be able to improve the family’s living standards, purchase expensive things, even build a new house for their parents etc. Such thinking suggests the long tradition of children’s filial duty imposed by Confucianism for many centuries, and which still runs strong in today’s society. In all
fairness it should be stressed that the money motive should not be considered as the overriding factor. The whole process also has something to do with the social and moral fabrics which places emphasis on children’s duty towards their parents. 58

Most girls and boys said their entry into the wood trade was one way to escape the monotonous world of farming with hard work and low returns. There were, however, differences between girls and boys’ motivation with regard to work. While boys were prepared to take on the future by learning a trade, girls tended to take woodwork as a temporary measure. Boys dreamed of high salaries and adventures far away from home while girls wished to get rid of their domestic environment, dependent status and ethical codes imposed on women. Such factors were constantly impacting upon children’s work that should not be ignored.

The effects of wood work

Much emphasis in child labor studies has been placed on such issues as children’s exploitation and abuses and the hardships of their working life while there are still precious little empirical study on the impact of typical work situations on the physical and mental development of working children. This may be due to various reasons. It seems that social researchers prefer to leave the task of determining the effects of work on children to the pediatricians. Moreover, the distinction between different types of work, and the assumption, for example, that domestic or farm work is “healthy” while waged/industrial work in workshops is harmful often tend to overlook the question: what impact does work have on children’s lives. 59 In practice, it is difficult to draw a clear line as to what kind of children’s work is acceptable and harmless and what not (White 1996:10). Such an approach often assumes that children who work with their family are far less subject to abuse than those who work away from the home, thus assigning them lower priority (Myers 1989:15). It is obvious that the lack of scientific evidence and observations has made the assessment of the effects of a specific work on children’s development very difficult. In this connection, data collection from empirical studies is of vital importance.

To have a deeper understanding of working children in the wood trade, this section presents some examples of how the people concerned—child workers, adult workers and local health staff — talked about the hazards of woodwork.

58 Chapter 7 will further elaborate the concept of children’s filial duty to their parents in the Vietnamese society and how it impacts upon their daily activities.
59 For instance, according to Shah, “by working along with their parents or older siblings, they learn various skills without any ill treatments and prepare themselves for adult life. Work of that type is practically free from harmful effects and can be interesting, educational and socially useful” (Shah 1996:5). Such an argument is shared by the ILO (1993) and George (1990).
When I for the first time entered the village of Giao, I was mildly amused when the children started calling me “sep” (chief). They followed me everywhere as if I was a subject of curiosity. They burst out laughing when I told them jokingly that I was no chief but a woodworker who came looking for a job. It was the way they talked and joked about me that drew my attention to the effects of woodwork on the children’s health conditions. Their idea of a wood worker was someone who looked as thin as a reed, often bowing his head and with his back bent at a dangerous angle. I brought the children’s stories to Vu, the local doctor who was in charge of medical service in Giao village. Interestingly, Vu taught me a lot about diseases suffered by workers in wood work. He told me most wood workers suffered from chronic illness such as backache, paralysis, neurasthenic, allergy and headache. His logbook filled with case histories, showed ten villagers with tuberculosis. In the last few years, 6 villagers died from stomach cancer. Vu added that accidents involving wood work occurred very often.

Talking with working children, I found that most of them were having health problems. They were all thin and it was very hard to guess their ages accurately. They said they had little appetite after sitting for long hours on the ground in just one fixed position, with their eyes constantly glued to the carved objects. Furthermore, they said they often felt tired, dizzy and had problems with their stomachs. All children interviewed by me said wood dust caused them skin disorders: itchiness and pustules were commonplace. Certain kinds of wood gave out unpleasant smell that caused them headache. In addition, working with primitive instruments and without safety measures often led to accidents at the work place.

My discussions with the local doctor helped shed further light on the health aspects of child wood workers. According to him, one should regard wood work as a harmful occupation to children’s health although the detrimental effects may not be immediate but rather in the long run. These are:

- **Back-ache and curvature of the spine:** Typically, wood carvers had to sit on the ground for about ten hours each working day. Their body was bent constantly while their eyes had to be fixed on the objects being carved. The medical doctor believed such a sitting position for long hours every day would cause inevitable damage to the skeleton, particularly among young children. Moreover, sitting in one position would hinder blood circulation and often caused the legs to go to sleep.

- **Astigmatic eye condition or amblyopia:** Generally speaking, wood carvers had to deal with very complicated and detailed designs. They had therefore to concentrate not only their mind but also their eyes constantly on the carved objects. Fixing one’s eyes on the very thin and detailed objects for long hours would surely cause affections on the visibility.
- **Skin diseases:** Itchiness and pustules were popular complaints among wood workers. It was said that various kinds of dust, including wood dust and metal/glass dust mixed in the sand paper caused these disorders.

- **Respiratory diseases such as bronchitis, sore throat, headache and other allergic inflammations:** Wood workers believed that poisonous substances exist in some specific hard wood such as *lim* (ironwood), *trac* (cypress wood) and *po-mu* (a kind of pine wood), which caused allergy while working with them. The smell coming from these kinds of wood was said to have direct effects on the human nervous system causing severe headache. Some child workers said they felt out of breath while working with such kinds of wood.

Apart from health-related considerations, there was evidence that most working children were afflicted with nervous stress caused by social factors such as a constant anxiety that something might go wrong with their work, which might result in scolding, beating or outright firing. Such tension generally made children feel exhausted, leading to a syndrome commonly known as “stress” and even nervous breakdown.

Actually, most adults interviewed by me recognized more or less the negative effects of wood work on their children. However, the rather high income from the trade was often the main reason for them to “turn a blind eye” (*nham mat lam ngo*). Talking about children’s health, parents often quoted a popular saying “*sinh nghe, tu nghiep*” (to be born into the trade and to die for the trade) to argue that their ancestors worked for hundreds of years with this wood trade, why should the children drop out now? “For heaven’s sake, don’t try any nonsense! Many generations from my family worked with the wood trade, and nothing ever happened. Let them do their job, all will end well!”, an old wood worker with a number of trainees told me. He compared his wood work with a life buoy which saved many families in the village from poverty. As he put it:

> I’m not so stupid that I don’t know how poisonous hard wood dust is. If you want to know how it affects children, do a test yourself. The most poisonous is ironwood dust. I once threw saw dust to my pigs, I saw blood come out of their noses. If pigs sweat out blood, how about children? But there is no other way, one has to make a choice between hunger, misery and having something to eat and something to cover one’s bodies.

Even though they knew quite well the harmful effects of wood dust, few children bothered to take safety precautions during work hours, saying that they felt uncomfortable to work in them. Employers at wood workshops tend to regard means of safety precaution the matter of workers, not themselves.

The examination of wood work effects upon working children in Giao village raised some questions about the health situation in the craft villages of the Red River Delta more generally. The recent expansion of family crafts and small-scale industries in
this area was regarded as a positive response to government economic reforms in the countryside. The environmental consequences of this rapid development have not been fully assessed as yet. A number of field reports suggested that as rural pollution was getting worse, there was also an increase of some typical diseases reported in specific craft villages. A survey of the health situation in various craft villages therefore would be helpful to determine disease patterns in specific villages. For example, medical consultants believed that wood dust and toxic materials were the causes of various allergies, skin and respiratory diseases, headache and chronic rheumatism reported in Giao village. As said earlier, most children worked in small-scale industries, family crafts and other informal sectors. The children's underweight and physical weakness can therefore be examined in relation to the nature of their work, taking into account such factors as age, physical exertion, duration of work, nervous tension, social pressures and environmental conditions at work.

From a health-care point of view, it should be noted that the mobility of people in the craft villages was particularly high. Previously, I have mentioned that the flow of _in and out_ migration of children was on the increase since the wood trade had become commercialized in Giao village. This situation might increase the potential of disease transmission among the craft villages compared to "regular" types of village.

One should not underestimate the effects of social behavior on working children in rural industries. Tension at work and the masters’ authoritarian behavior, particularly the way they punished their trainees were always potential causes of stress among the little workers. Furthermore, the social environment of craft villages was different from that of agricultural ones. Because of high population mobility, social pollution such as the abuse of alcohol and drugs, gambling...was commonplace. Living and working in such an environment, children were the most vulnerable to be victimized. As suggested by medical sociologists (Locker 1991:18-30), social factors, environments and behaviors are also causes of illness that should not be ignored while considering various aspects of child labor.

**Conclusion**

I have examined the ups and downs of the wood craft in Giao village, which had become commercialized recently, and children’s involvement in this trade. As indicated,

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60 A survey conducted in some craft villages of Hung Yen province revealed an alarming state of pollution in these villages. For instance, lead pollution found in the village of Dong Mai, specializing in metal craft, is 4.3 mg of lead in one kilogram of soil, 46.4 mg in one cubic meter of air and 0.04 mg in one liter of water. Examination of 32 artisans working in this village showed that 78% suffered from respiratory diseases, nervous breakdown, head aches and chronic rheumatism. (Huong Giang, _Kinh Doanh & Phap Luat_, Business and Laws, 12.11.1998).
agricultural decollectivisation in northern rural Vietnam has opened a new opportunity for the revival of traditional crafts, among which the fine-art wood craft. Unlike the past, the wood trade today has developed on a much larger scale together with the expanded export market of wooden furniture, mainly in Asia. Furthermore, work organization and labor relationships in the wood trade were much different from the past. In previous times, hierarchical and collegial social relations were at the core of the wood sector. Nowadays, with the emergence of new forces including investors, exporters and entrepreneurs, social relations between employers and employees in the wood sector have been substantially changed: they were mainly controlled by capital-related factors. It was in such a social context that my study of children’s entry into the labor market was conducted.

My research findings indicated that working children made up about 40 per cent of total labor force in the wood trade, most of them worked as trainee assistants. Village children started to make acquaintance with wood work at a rather early age, a small number started at the age of 8 while the majority started between 11 and 12. Normally, it took a child from three or more years to grasp some basic skills of wood carving. A comparative analysis between children working at home, under the supervision of their parents/relatives and those employed to work in private workshops yielded some remarkable statistics. In both sectors, the majority of children worked full-time, varying from 52 to 60 per cent as compared to the part-time child workers. Most working children, about 60 per cent, no longer attended school, and more than 80 per cent of them had left school for good at the age of 15. Generally speaking, the proportion of waged child workers was low. In the household sector, working children were generally not paid while in the larger enterprises, only about 36 per cent were paid, in full or in part. In the household sector, girl woodworkers made up only about 12 per cent while this was 23 per cent in the manufacturing sector. About 42 per cent of children working in enterprises came from outside the village. It was interesting to note that both children and their parents preferred the large workshops rather than a master’s home, despite harsh discipline and the long hours. In the parents’ view, their children would make good progress with enterprises where they had to work harder, more discipline was imposed and there were opportunities to learn new models.

“Many employers became rich thanks to their trainees”, my host in Giao village put it in no uncertain terms. As pointed out earlier, employers preferred to employ children as apprentices rather than waged workers. Relations such as friendship and family were often involved, and apprentices were coerced into working for their masters/employers for a couple of years as unpaid workers. It was these unpaid working children who helped employers reduce their production costs, making their goods more competitive on the market, and thereby increase their profits. On the other hand, the close links between foremen/masters and apprentices facilitated job mobility in the
wood trade. The development of wooden furniture manufacturing in the village enhanced the exchange of commodity between urban and village workshops, helping generate more employment for rural dwellers. Furthermore, urban-rural relationship of the wood trade intensified the geographical mobility of wood workers. Children were absorbed in the web of wood sector as well. From elsewhere, they moved to the village of Giao for apprenticeship while others migrated out of the village, heading for urban workshops in search of higher wages. Labor mobility in the wood sector reflects the impact of on-going stratification of the labor market where rural children were flocking into non-farm waged sector (Nardinelli 1990:86). The mobility of wood workers also reflects a potential labor surplus in agricultural sector where peasants worked on their small plots of rice land with low returns. This help explain why the hardships of trainee assistants in the wood sector were evident, still learning a trade for making a living was greatly desirable for both parents and children.

The low ratio of girls in the wood sector indicated a difference in attitude between boys and girls regarding work where boys were more geared toward waged work than girls. However girls' participation in this trade was symptomatic of something of an upheaval in the work force. It should be emphasized that non-farm work, led by wood work, was becoming an important source of family incomes in the village of Giao, fueling the peasants' desire to improve their living conditions. Parents sent their children to the wood trade with the rational wish to launch their children on a profitable career path while trying to improve the family’s living standards with their earnings. Most children, however, entered wood work just to earn money for themselves. In fact, many parents told me that earnings by kids under 16 were “more solid” than those of older children. By this they meant older children tended to keep wages for themselves instead of sending money home. In order to control their children’s wages, parents often negotiated in advance about payment with the employers.

Children’s motivation of entering into waged employment also suggests changing attitudes of rural youngsters vis-à-vis traditional ethics. Their preference to work away from home and to satisfy their own needs is a testimony of the general attitude of the young generation to be free from old norms, social constraints and family obligations. Work for wages to cover one’s own needs was particularly popular among those girls who dared to go against their parents’ wish not to take up wood work. Although dowry was no longer a prerequisite for marriage, girls who were able to save and bring their wealth to the husband’s family were highly appreciated. Girls who worked away from home or seasonally migrated to urban areas in search of work were not highly valued in social terms.
Contradictions inherent in children's work, their earnings and social roles all reflect the socio-economic changes taking place in the rural landscape since the market mechanism was introduced and children's employment is only part of that process.
Chapter 7

BETWEEN OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS: THE CHILD, CHILDHOOD AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Day con tu thuo con tho
(A child needs to be taught at an early age)
(Local saying)

Introduction

Despite the recently increasing number of studies on child labour, an essential aspect of children's work has been virtually overlooked: the socio-cultural context within which work takes place. Such studies tend to bear a "rational" character, based on economic hard facts, and mostly neglect the cultural aspects, which in fact influence greatly the extent and nature of children's economic activities. Among these factors, cultural constraints, attitudes to children and their roles, and social institutions are particularly important to understand the meaning of children's work as well as the process of their acculturation and socialization (Rodgers and Standing 1981:23). Although such moral-cultural factors are not visibly exposed in daily work, they actually play an important role in influencing decisions made at the household level concerning utilization of child labor.

Going beyond the economic explanation of children's work regarding children as an economic asset of their parents, this chapter will further analyze the social attitudes with regard to the child, childhood and their potential influences on activities of children in the context of social change.

The Vietnamese culture is traditionally influenced by Confucian values, especially in education and family organization. However, there are few studies on the influence of Confucian doctrine vis-à-vis children's socialization in Vietnamese society. Questions can be raised, for example, like what is the position of children within the family in modern Vietnam? How did the social attitudes to childhood change during the decades of socialist transformation? What is the prevalent attitude to children's socialization nowadays? How does the traditional concept of childhood as well as network of children such as family, kinship, village community and society at large influence children's life and work?

This chapter does not intend to deal with all these questions. It will however raise some issues such as the high fertility rate and child labor, the cultural structure and the social values of children, which have been touched upon by various studies on Asian peasant societies. During my field research, I have tried to put these aspects in the context of Vietnamese society and re-examine such controversial issues. Indeed, my
observation was directed at daily interaction among the children and their parents, siblings and relatives. These daily practices and behavior were then examined in relation to social attitudes, norms and ethics, which were prevalent among the villagers. Confucian ethics, which served as inspirational models nationwide in the past were considered together with several life histories of Giao villagers to understand the concept of childhood in pre-revolution era. The knowledge I gathered during one year staying in Giao village and my own childhood spent in a village near Hai Phong during the movement of collectivization are helpful in studying rural childhood in the context of social change. The available data suggest that children play an important role in the socio-cultural life of the Vietnamese. Traditionally, the emphasis of Vietnamese childhood was on obligations rather than rights. And this does not seem change much during the period of transition [towards socialism] and still remains as an important factor of the socialization process of children at present. Consequently, an attempt will be made to define the status of the child in the family, identify the obligations that their status requires, social values of children and the changes through times. By providing such an ethnography of childhood, I hope it will supplement a comprehensive view to children's work.

Lineage, family and children

Deeply immersed in a rural community, which entails a web of socio-economic relationships, the peasant as an individual does not seem to exist independently. In all likelihood, there are always memberships of a number of social networks functioning within the village. Like many other Vietnamese villages in the Red river delta, Giao village was traditionally formed on the basis of integration of multi-components, which may be called sub-structures (Tran Tu 1984). These sub-structures consist of a number of sub-village communities. Among them are residential communities (ngo and xom), the neighborhood of the same hamlet and alley ways, blood communities (patrilineage or dong ho), religious communities (village guardian spirit cult or tho cung thanh hoang; Christians or Thien chua giao and Buddhists, Phat giao), gender communities (organizations for males and females, such as giap-- an organization of male and age groups and hoi chu ba-- elderly women's Buddhist association) and many other guilds and associations like phuong nghe nghiep (craft and trade guilds), hoi ho (credit association), hoi dong nien (the association of the same age people), hoi tu van (the association of Confucian scholars), etc. Through many years of revolutionary movement, apart from a few associations like giap and hoi tu van that disappeared, 

61 This phrase, textually: qua do len chu nghia xa hoi, has been widely used in official documents of Vietnam government, referring to a period that, according to socialist theory, is an early stage of the process of socialist construction.
almost all of these organizations have shown their resilience and have become active with renewed vigor since the economic reforms of the early 1980s while having to contend with so many relationships. However, for Giao villagers, the family appears to be of the foremost importance of their life. It is significant to note that the native term *gia đinh* (family) refers not only to a nuclear family consisting of a couple and their children but also to a relatively larger unit known as *chi ho* (extended family) including grandparents, their sons’ families and grandchildren. Although there has been a strong tendency of nuclearization of the family in recent years, this latter form of family still plays an important role in the life of Giao villagers. Therefore, to understand the position of children and their social values, one should not overlook the structure of the family within which a child was born, raised and developed.

Traditionally, Giao villagers belong to different lineages (*dong ho*). The organization of lineage is based on the male-oriented model with favored sons and other patrilineal relatives. Under the local customs, marriages within the patrilineage are strictly prohibited. Although in recent years, the trend of marriage with “outsiders” was increasing, village endogamy was still strongly supported by elders. The preference for marriage among villagers was primarily based on the traditional attitudes such as mutual understanding, convenience and particularly, marital alliance within the village. Consequently, village endogamy creates a complex and interlacing linkage among the villagers. In such relationships, children are taught at an early age to recognize who is who in the system of complicated kindred relationships. Bad behavior to relatives, particularly to senior ones is hard to forgive. In order to understand clearly how the kinship relationships impact upon the position of the child within the family in general and the childhood in particular, an attempt will be made to gain more insight into the structure of patrilineage and the family.

*Patrilineage (dong ho)*

The Vietnamese kinship system is formed on the basis of the male-oriented model, called ho, *dong ho* or *gia toc*. The members of ho share a common ancestor (*thuy to*, the founder), whom they have an obligation to worship and expect to be blessed by. A patrilineage normally consists of a number of branches (*chi ho*). As a principle, worshipping the common ancestors is the responsibility of the head of patrilineage

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(truong ho) while the branch members only worship the ancestors counted from a
couple of the fourth generation (tu dai) down to the head of branch (truong chi). This
division in fact reflects the various levels of kind relationship in the patrilineage.

Before agricultural collectivization (1958), most patrilineages of Giao village
had some plots of land, called ruong huong hoa (cult-portion land) to cover ancestor
cult expenses. The cult-portion land was under the management of the lineage’s head
and it was not allowed to sell such land. Since the establishment of co-operatives, this
sort of land was collectivized. All the ancestor cult expenses were since then to be
contributed by the patrilineal families.

The patrilineage normally has a gia pha (family record) in which names,
professions, dates of birth and death of ancestors were recorded from generation to
generation. Some family records even spent a large part to mention about the history of
the lineage, which aim at teaching offspring to follow the ancestor’s steps. The most
important activity of a patrilineage is the common ancestor’s death anniversary (gio to).
On this day, the male members are expected to come to the ceremony held at the
ancestral hall (or at the patrilineage head’s house). After the ceremony, they will have a
collective meal, reminding the children about the achievements of the ancestors
concerned and discuss the common activities of the lineage.

The patrilineage members feel an obligation to provide mutual assistance,
materially and morally, particularly on the occasions of wedding, house-warming,
funeral and harvesting.63 Exchange of labor and production tools among households of
the same lineage are more common than with others. Since the wood trade became
commercialized, the form of enterprises based on family relations was preferred.
Children engaged in apprentice of wood carving were mostly sent to foremen who
belonged to their kin. Disputes among individuals often took the family’s involvement
and sometimes became disputes between patrilineages.

Undoubtedly, the kinship system, as a social network, has an important
significance in daily life of Giao villagers. However, the relationships among kinship
members are not homogeneous but stratified.

While the term ho is used to refer to a common kindred, there is a distinction
between father’s patrilineage (ho dang cha or ho noi (inner ho) and mother’s
patrilineage (ho dang me or ho ngoai (outer ho). Within this bilateral relationship, there
is also a distinction between distant relatives (ho xa, referred to members of the same
patrilineage but different offshoots) and close relatives (ho gan, meant members of the
same patrilineage branch). Furthermore, kin relationship is distinguished in ho ruot in

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63 This mutual support is often explained by a saying: “giot mau dao hon ao nuoc la.” (a drop of kinship
particular and ho in general. For instance, siblings who were born of the same father and mother are called anh chi em ruot (full siblings), in contrast to anh chi em ho (patrilineal/matrilateral same-generation cousins). While “the bilateral distinction of ruot and ho relatives, among others, suggests the implicit recognition of the importance of bilateral and nuclear familial relations” (LuongVan Hy 1989:747), it also does, in fact, point out an implication of different degrees of obligations and right between ruot and ho relationships. For instance, for a child, his/her cau ruot (mother’s blood brothers) are more important than his/her cau ho (mother’s same-generation male cousins) and in turn, cau ruot surely feel they have more rights and responsibilities with regard to the chau ruot (nephew/niece born by their blood sisters) than chau ho (born by mother’s same-generation cousins).

In order to highlight the ethnographic significance of the kinship system, let me take the case of Vu Xuan lineage as an example.

At the Vu Xuan ancestral hall, a family document is still preserved in which historical events of this patrilineage, dating back to the 18th century, were recorded. According to this document, the Vu Xuan family was granted by the King (Le dynasty) some land in the area now called Giao village for their work in building royal palaces in the capital of Thang Long (Hanoi). From a family of five sons in the 18th century, the Vu Xuan has developed into five branches with 326 members (186 males and 143 females) in 1995. Apart from female members who got married and settled down with their husbands elsewhere, Vu Xuan family members nowadays make up 33 households within Giao village.

To get more insight on kindred relationships of the Vu Xuan family, my observations have been primarily focused on two households. The first household is headed by Vu Xuan Huan, 74, who was my village host. The second one is headed by the 70 year old Vu Xuan Bech. These two households reside next to each other in the same neighborhood.

According to the patrilineal order, Vu Xuan Huan. is the father’s same-generation male cousin (chu ho) of Vu X. Bech. For this kin relationship, Bech’s children have to call Huan ong ho—ho grandfather, and Bech’s grandchildren refer to Huan’s grandchildren as chu/co (ho—father’s same-generation male/female cousins). Such kinship person-references do not depend on chronological ages but on the father’s position in the patrilineal hierarchy.

Indeed, the complicated system of references in the patrilineage reflects not only the male-oriented model of the patrilineage but also the status and obligations of its

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blood is even much more precious than a pond of water).
members. In the context of a household, labor division and behavior among the household members also reflect the gender relations and their status. In the Huan’s household for example, the ancestral altar and surroundings are an almost exclusively ‘male area’. Huan’s daughter in-law rarely came and sat in this area. Every morning, Huan’s daughter in-law got up earliest, at about 5 a.m., and as usual, woke up her daughters. While the females were doing their household chores such as cooking, carrying water, washing clothes, cleaning up, feeding pigs and livestock, the male members kept sleeping. They only got up when the breakfast was ready and the house was already tidied up. In daily meals, Huan, his only son and sometime, the eldest grandson were sitting at the dinner table while his daughter in-law and the children always sit on the floor. This practice did not change during the year I stayed in the house.

On occasions when common meals held at Huan’s house were attended by Bech’s family members, differentiation between the senior and junior branches as well as gender could be observed through the sitting arrangement. Bech’s wife, though old as she was (72 years old) always insisted to sit together with Huan daughter in-law and her peers. Bech’s grandchildren often took part in serving food, drinks and at the end, did the washing up. They willingly did these chores to show their respect to the senior relatives who might younger than themselves. Disputes between Huan’s and Bech’s grand children were usually solved in favor of Huan’s grandchildren, who were of the higher branch in the patrilineage.64

Sons and the eldest son

Kin relationships based on the male-oriented model put sons, particularly the eldest son, in an important position. Previously in chapter 3, my survey points out that while a majority of households in Giao village was based on the nuclear formation consisting of parents and their children (69 per cent of total households), 30 per cent of the households still counted three or more generations under the same roof. My conversations with the villagers revealed that the old fashion, which regarded a big household as a symbol of the solidarity and happiness is still popular among elderly people. In the past, the household formation in which four or five generations lived together under the same roof was encouraged by the Confucian ideal and the State.65

64 Local proverb: “Be nguoi con nha bac, lon xac con nha chu”, meaning “though young as [he/she is], he/she is the child from the higher patrilineal offshoot; though old as [you are], you are only the child from the lower branch”.

65 Feudal states, from the Le to Nguyen dynasty (the 15th till the first half of the 20th century), commended this as an ideal symbol of family happiness and set up special awards for the families who kept up its recommendation.
Since the August 1945 Revolution, however, this symbol has lost its legal and political support. It is interesting to note that most three generations households of Giao village today were headed by the eldest sons, who after having married, resided in the same household with their parents and unmarried siblings. Younger brothers were usually supported by their parents to build a new house and established separate households after marriage. The eldest son normally continued staying with parents. He would inherit from his father not only the estates but also the obligations to worship the patrilineal ancestors. For this obligations, the eldest son was carefully looked after by his parents from an early age. He was referred as *dich ton* (the eldest son who will inherit and continue the lineage). Such ceremonies of marking ritually important dates in the life of young children as *day cu* (full-day old), *day thang* (one full-month old), and *day nam* (one full-year) were often prepared with great care. From his early age, the eldest son was usually sent to patrilineal activities to get acquainted with his prospective role.

For families with a number of sons, the youngest son was often at a disadvantage compared to his older brothers. This was often true since the age gap between older and younger children was rather large, the youngest son often grew up when his parents were already aged while the elder brothers had established their own families. Because of this many mothers tended to show more love to their youngest son as a compensation for his material disadvantage. The local saying expressed this trend as *giau con ut, kho con ut* (For better or for worse, the parents prefer to stay with the last-born son). Families with only one son always show a particular indulgence to him. The only son was often exempted from manual labor and household chores well into boyhood while his sisters might be put to work much earlier.

At advanced aged, parents seem to expect more from their sons rather than daughters although practically, there is no evidence of discrimination against daughters. These expectations, particularly from son(s) is manifested in the way parents try to offer the best of care to their children in the hope that they will gain better life in the future and “to shed glory on the race”. As parents of Giao village often said: “A family where the son fares better than his father is the one blessed with good fortune”.

**Daughters**

“*Daughter is someone else’s child*”, this common expression indicates that daughters had a lower position in the family compared to that of their brothers. In chapter 4, I have indicated that girls started to do house-chores earlier than boys. This domestic orientation of girls was deeply rooted in the social attitudes towards women’s

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66 This is from a local saying, textually: “*Con gai la con nguoi ta, Con dau moi that me cha mua ve*” (A
prospective roles within the family. The principle of patrilocal residence after marriage put the women in the position of an ‘outsider’ in the paternal kinship system (a local saying said: *nu nhi ngoai toc*, females are outsiders of the patrilineage). Starting with marriage, the voice of daughters were no longer influential in their parents’ household although they still maintained contact with their own relatives and observed various obligations with regard to their parents and natal patrilineage. Girlhood was primarily considered a process of socialization or apprenticeship. Alongside her mother, the daughter had to learn how to manage domestic tasks, which required her to show obedience towards her future in-laws. The success of a woman, in the eyes of her in-laws, would depend on how she managed domestic affairs and whether she would give birth to sons for her husband’s family. In Giao village, the local custom also allowed the daughter to inherit the property from her parents while dowry was not essential. Those who had no sons also accepted that the son-in-law would reside with the wife’s parents. However, matrilocality is not a preferred mode of living for most males, as this saying reveals: *Trai o re nhu cho chui gam chan* (son-in-law living at his in-laws is just like a dog living under the pantry).

**Half-siblings**

Although prohibited by the current Law on the Marriage and the Family, polygamy is generally tolerated by local custom. For instance, among the living married men of the Vu Xuan patrilineage, there were 12 with two wives and one with three wives. The main reason behind this is the wish of having a son to ensure the continuity of lineage and to carry on the cult of ancestor. In terms of lineal continuity, a woman would feel secure only when she gives birth to a son for her husband. Otherwise, her status would be vulnerable in her husband’s family. In a polygamous family, the children’s status depends on their mother’s position. According to local customs, children of the second wife have to refer to the children born to the first wife as their senior half-brothers/sisters (*anh/chi cung cha khac me*), regardless of their ages. If the first wife has no children, children of the second wife have the duty to take care of her with due respect. In case the first wife has no sons, the eldest son born to the second wife is bound to inherit the parents’ estate and ensure the continuity of lineage and ancestral worship.

dughter is someone else’s child, a daughter-in-law is a real child bought by the parents).

67 According to Dao Duy Anh (1938:125), polygamy was not only a means to beget a son to perpetuate the lineage, in his times it also served other purposes, for instance, well-to-do people needed more household members to manage their estates. It was also a sign of prosperity to have many children among the upper class.
However, acrimonious disputes among children of polygamous families were often mentioned by the villagers. Abuses of a defunct first wife’s children were subjects for village gossiping.

**Adoption**

Adoption has been a popular practice in Giao village in the past as well as at present. However, two forms of adoption should be distinguished, namely *lap tu* and *nhan con nuoi*.

The first one, *lap tu*, was a form of “nomination of a male heir”. This custom aimed at ensuring the continuity of lineage. According to this custom, old spouses without a son/child would look for a boy from their patrilineal relatives and adopt him as a son. A boy from outside the patrilineage is not accepted by custom. The son by adoption as a male heir has the full status of a son by birth. Nomination of a male heir was more popular in the past. This custom was linked with Confucian ideals and supported by law. At present (1995), only one couple of Giao village adopted their nephew as a male heir while a few childless couples accepted their nieces by adoption. It is however worth adding that a study by Trinh Thi Quang (1984) in a village of Thai Binh reports that among 400 households under the survey, 16 childless couples adopted children for the same reason of ensuring the continuity of patrilineage.

The latter, *nhan con nuoi* (accepting a child by adoption), was more popular. This was provoked by various reasons, emotionally or rationally, and was not linked by blood relationship or gender. Under the current legislation, children by adoption have equal rights as those of children by birth but in practice, it is not always so. Several families in Giao village who adopted children said that adoptees were not reliable. Some of them wanted to keep a bilateral relationship or left home when growing old enough. While the life stories of adopted children in the colonial period often mentioned about the miseries they suffered, little was heard about complaints of contemporary adoptees. However, Mai Huy Bich’s observations (1991; 1993) at various villages in the Red River delta suggests there exist some forms of economic exploitation of children by adoption.

**Childless means undutifulness**

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68 This phrase, in Vietnamese: “khong con la bat hieu”, which is widely circulated among Giao villagers and often quoted by them while talking about their fertility practice, is actually extracted from a classical Confucian ethics: “Bat hieu huu tam, vo hau vi dai”, meaning that “among three acts condemnable as undutifulness, to be without a son to continue the lineage is regarded as the first and foremost guiltiness”.
Considering the influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese society, Dao Duy Anh came to a conclusion that all Vietnamese, in their whole life, "breathe Confucian atmosphere, drink Confucian milk, eat Confucian rice, and live until the last day the Confucian ritual cycle" (Dao Duy Anh 1994:23). In his opinion, Confucian ethics, for many centuries, were embedded in the legal system with strong support from the state. These ethics were further strengthened by the male-oriented structure of the Vietnamese family system. A well-known Confucian text, the Book of Rites (Kinh Le), regulates that the man has seven reasons to abandon his wife, among them:

1. Childlessness (không con);
2. Lewdness (dam dat);
3. Disrespect to her in-laws (bat kinh voi bo me chong);
4. Garrulousness (lam dieu);
5. Kleptomania (trom cap);
6. Jealousy (ghen tuong);
7. Malignity (ac tat).

In Confucian ethics, childlessness is the primary reason for a woman to be repudiated (Dao Duy Anh 1938:117-118). This section will deal with empirical data to examine the question whether and to which extent the remnants of Confucian ethics on 'childlessness' still influenced fertility practice in Giao village.

**Cases of childless married couples**

In Giao village, there were a few couples who had been married for a long time but did not have any children. These cases could provide insight into the question of how important children are to the family and lineage. They point out very clearly that as long as children are not born, married couples find their lives meaningless. Apparently, looking at cases of childlessness is, in my opinion, a good way to see how children are socially valuable to their parents. My attention was focused on three 'infertile couples', who were willing to confide their stories to me. To understand the significance of ethnographic cases in relating to socio-cultural framework of a larger context, these cases are then connected to the "climate of public opinion" within the village.  

**Case 1: 'Something wrong with their machines'**

Pham is a veteran who participated in the war against the Americans in southern Vietnam. He returned to Giao village in 1975 and got married the same year. After 6

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69 Informants in these stories are kept anonymous.
years of married life, the couple had not produced any children. Pham’s wife felt a life without children as something meaningless, so they decided to divorce. In 1986, Pham remarried with a former comrade in-arms. Up to now (1995), the second marriage produced no children.

Concerning his first marriage, Pham said he did not believe in supernatural forces. For that reason, he had never sought a consultation with a priest for a propitious date and never thought of making offerings to the deities on his wedding ceremony. Pham’s parents thought that their son’s wedding ceremony had been held on a day of ‘ill-omen’ and his childlessness was a severe punishment by the deities. Following a local custom, they decided to arrange re-marriage (cuoi lai). To do this, Pham’s wife was asked to return to her native home for a few days before the ‘re-marriage’ was to be carried out. After consulting the fortuneteller on a ‘good day’ for wedding, Pham’s mother and some patrilineal relatives were invited to bring the ‘bride’ home. The traditional rituals of wedding ceremony such as praying to the ancestors and preparing the bridal chamber by a patrilineal woman with a large family were strictly followed.

This symbolic ‘re-marriage’ did not, however, change their situation. Pham’s first marriage ended with a divorce a few years later as a consequence of infertility. Unfortunately, Pham’s second marriage was again childless. In doubting his capability of having a child, his father confidentially advised him to allow his wife ‘at large’ (tha co), so that she might get pregnant by some one else. 70 Pham said he did not care much about that but it all depended on his wife’s decision. He often became angry when he heard joking comments that something was wrong with his ‘machine’.

Case 2: ‘A heirless family’

Vu is also a veteran. He was the only son born into a ‘notable’ family of Giao village. For many generations, the Vu lineage dominated the village politics. His grandfather occupied the position of village’s first notable (tien chi) for many years and his father was the village mayor (ly truong) under the colonial regime. Vu married in 1973, after his graduation from secondary school. As he told me, he was not yet in love but he accepted the pre-arranged marriage with a village girl ‘to please the parents’. Vu’s father was well-known in the village for his ‘great learning’. He was one of a few men who could read Confucian texts such as the Four Books (Tu Thu) and the Five Classics (Ngu Kinh). To arrange the marriage for his only son, he himself searched for a number of old horoscope books and selected a ‘propitious day’ for the wedding ceremony in the hope that the marriage would produce many sons. Unfortunately, after

70 Leaving the wife ‘at large’ was an old custom of Vietnamese, local people named it ‘tha co’. According to this custom, the husband tacitly allows his wife having relation with another man to get pregnant. A folk saying confirms this custom; ‘Ca ao ai vao ao ta, ta duoc’, meaning that ‘If a fish comes to my pond, it is
Vu’s father became overwrought with anxieties about the family’s future and fell ill. He wanted Vu to marry a second wife but Vu did not follow his advice. In a fit of deep depression, Vu’s father threw all his Confucian texts into the pond. Some years later, he passed away. Vu’s wife lived in a state of nerve-racking situation. She worked very hard to forget about the qualms of conscience about her infertility. She wanted her husband to marry a second wife or adopt a child but Vu refused to do so.

Vu told me a story, which is to use his words, a ‘resentment following him till his death’. Once upon visiting a friend, he put his newly purchased Honda motorbike at a shop near the gate of the village. While he was talking to his fellows inside, children flocked to his Honda and unfortunately, the bike fell down. Its lamps were broken. Being angry with the children, he slapped down on them and whipped the boy who pushed his bike. Just after his getting home, the mother of that boy followed and lashed out at him. In her words, Vu was a ‘blockhead man’, ‘a son of unhappy and heirless family’. She shouted: “You had have no child, how can you love children. Your forefathers had ruled this village for generations. They sowed such ‘good seeds’ that’s what you are reaping now!”

These abuses were a great shock to his mother because of being labeled as an ‘heirless family’ (gia dinh tuyet tu) was a terrible affront to the dignity of any villager.

**Case 3: ‘Selfish people’**

Hoang came from a family of poor woodworkers. Since the wood trade became a boom in Giao village, he moved into wood trading and became a well-to-do entrepreneur. He often traveled back and forth between the uplands and the cities to supply hard wood for the workshops. He owned a two storied-house at the best location next to the village gate. Looking at him, one might have an impression that he was a happy man. But this was not to be the case. The most terrible misery he suffered, as he told me, was that his wife could not produce a child after almost 20 years of married life. He often stayed away from home. Rumor had it that he got a concubine elsewhere. Hoang’s wife said that without a child, she had to bear strong pressure from her in-laws. They often talked about her and her patrilineage as ‘selfish people’ and her being childless was a retribution (qua bao) for their selfishness. To overcome this, the best way to do, in her parents in laws’ advice, was to pray for a male heir. Following their advice, she had made several pilgrimages to the Perfume Pagoda (and also the temple of Deity Tran)71 with the hope that Buddha would bless her with a child. Under the

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71 Perfume Pagoda (chu Huong) in Ha Tay province, famous for its “sacred responsive”. The temple of Deity Tran, i.e. Tran Hung Dao, a well-known historical figure against Mongol invaders in the 13th
guidance of a priest in the Perfume Pagoda, she had performed a number of symbolic acts. For instance, she was asked to drink some drops of ‘holy water’ coming from the Goddess’s breast and to touch the ‘head of male heir’ (xoa dau cau), which meant that she accepted the milk from the Goddess and invited the heir to come home with her. On the way back home, believing that the heir (cau) was accompanying her, she dropped money down to the streams and along the road “to offer the male heir some pocket-money for petty snacks”. Before getting into the buses and boats, she always bought an extra-ticket for the cau. For many months after pilgrimage, she continued to practice more ‘symbolic acts’. While preparing the daily meals, she usually laid an extra bowl and a pair of chopsticks on the tray “to invite cau to join her. All these ended in failure.

There were no children, Hoang’s parents kept administering him: “you earned a lot of money, but for what if you don’t have a child to take care of? Think about your parents, your family and your lineage!”

Hoang’s wife told me that she felt guilty for her childlessness and she insisted that she would do all she could to get a child.

Under the ancestors’ shadows

Lineage continuity versus family planning

The cases briefly presented above indicate that long-standing traditions and Confucian ethics still exert a strong influence on fertility practices of Giao villagers. While it is hard to deny the major changes in gender relationships during the past five decades, the way in which ‘villagers talk and do’ suggest that the structural factors of kinship system, such as a strong male-orientation and the ideal of the continuity of lineage, do not seem to change. Within her husband’s family, the wife’s role becomes significant only when she could produce son(s). The motivation of having a son was so strong that one was willing to go beyond the official limits to achieve the goal. Field surveys conducted in the Red River delta show a remarkable change in the desired number of children during last ten years as indicated by Nguyen Lan Phuong’s survey from the same village of Thai Binh province in 1984 and in 1994. In 1984, 59% of respondents said they wanted at least three children, 16% wanted to have more than four. The 1994 revisit reported that the rate of respondents wanting three children decreased to 14% while almost no respondents wished to have four or more children. It is interesting to add that in 1984, no one wanted to have just one child. In 1994, this rate rose to four percent. It should be, however, noticed that no respondents said they wanted

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century. He is worshipped in many places in northern Vietnam.
no children (Nguyen Lan Phuong 1995:49). While a majority of peasants wanted to have a family size with two children, 88.3% of women and 86.8% of men said they wanted to have at least one or two sons (Tran Lan Huong 1995:53-54). This may help to explain why family planning has often broken down at the household level, before it could be implemented nationwide.

Family planning was recognized since the early 1960s. In 1961, the government issued the first decree regarding the education of fertility practice among the people (Dec. 216/CP, 26.12.1961). Two year later, in October 1963, the government officially attacked the 'feudal attitudes towards fertility practice' and started to control birth rates (Dec. 99/TTg). However, birth control policy only became a topical issue during the years after the war (1975 onward). Decree no. 29/HDBT, issued by the Council of Ministers, officially stipulated that a couple should have a maximum of two children. A number of strong measures have been proposed to control birth rates. For instance, administrative sanctions were to be imposed on those giving birth to a third child, ranging from paying a fine to being dismissed (for state-run workers) or expelled from the Party (for CPV members). Free contraceptive services were established at the village level to ensure the achievement of family planning program (Vien TTKHXH 1995:48-72). Contraceptive knowledge has been widely promoted by public media and local communication networks. The family planning targets were particularly aimed at densely populated areas (Vo Quy Nhan 1991:115).

In Giao village, various administrative measures were applied for those breaking family planning regulations. Spouses who gave birth to a third child were to pay a fine of 150 kilograms of paddy. In case of fourth child or more, fines increased to 300 kilograms of paddy. Those villagers who worked for state-run sectors or engaged in government -paid jobs had to adhere strictly to family planning policy. Three village teachers were dismissed and several party members were expelled from the Party for breaking family planning regulations during the 1990s. However, these strong measures seemed to have little effect on couples who had no sons. Empirical data from Giao village suggest that the pursuit of having son(s) for continuity of lineage still strongly remains and is one of primary causes of high fertility rate in rural areas.

According to the health services of Luong Dien commune, in 1995 there were 96 people from Giao village who used contraceptive devices, among which 12 (five men and seven women) accepted sterilization. The Intrauterine Device (IUD) was widely used as a main method of contraception for women in Giao village while pills and condoms were used to a lesser extent. Abortion was rather common with 75 cases in the

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72 By focusing on the peasant motivation of having children, Nguyen did not provide the actual average number of children per household in 1984 and 1994, which might be useful for understanding the fertility decline between the two periods.
two-years period of 1994-1995. A cadre in charge of village family planning reported that it was difficult to know exactly how many percent of women at fertility ages were still having IUDs. This cadre said only spouses who already had one or more sons used contraceptives or underwent sterilization. Side-effects in using contraceptives were commonly reported among villagers.

Recently, local authorities particularly encouraged men with two or more sons to accept sterilization. However, conversations with villagers indicated that popular opinion was not in favor of this method. Many men said sterilization would make the body fat, lose sexual drive and change accent. Some even equated sterilized people with a castrated animal or old eunuchs. Moreover, a corrupt bureaucratic system was a considerable hindrance to family planning policy. The medical staff I talked to mentioned that there was a big gap between statistics reported by local authorities and the actual number of people using contraceptives. By exaggerating these statistics, the cadres in charge could reap extra benefits. On the one hand, they might get a quick promotion for their ‘remarkable achievements’ in carrying out the state policy. On the other hand, more medical supplies, free of charge for local family planning, would be forthcoming ‘to meet local demand’ but as usual, no one knew how these extra resources were used. When I was in the village, people often mentioned the case of Giang as a typical victim of such corrupt practices. Seriously affected after a sterilization operation, she could not afford proper medical treatment. Her case was reported to the district level for urgent assistance. Three months later, after many inspection tours and meetings, she was given five bottles of penicillin, which she did not need any more.

In terms of costs, changes of the economic system had apparently influenced people’s fertility attitudes as well. Before the economic reforms, children’s education costs and health care were totally or partly subsidized. These expenses were now passed on to the peasant households. Undoubtedly, people felt an increasing financial burden on their children’s care, which consequently forced them to rethink about the number of children they should have. However, as pointed out earlier, most people would feel satisfied only if they could get at least a son. In pursuing this goal, many men and women were willing to accept any administrative punishment. Particularly, the motivation of having many sons was most obvious among families where the father was the only son of his lineage. These men were under the intense pressure from their parents and relatives to have more than one son. Among the households in my neighborhood at Giao village whom I knew well, I found that out of 14 male households head with five or more children, 11 of them were themselves the only sons in their families. Vu Dan, one of them, told me the following story. Once he had been party member and served as deputy head of Giao village. But he had to step down and paid a
fine of 300 kilograms of paddy after the birth of his fifth child, a son. After that, he asked his wife to undergo sterilization. Unfortunately, his parents found out and stopped her. From that day, Dan’s father often runs down his daughter in-law with innuendoes by telling his grandson with loud voice: “Good boy, stay with me for your dad and mum are going to the clinic to get castrated (di hoan).

Impact of fertility decline

Annual population growth rates in Luong Dien commune of which Giao village is a part indicates a decline over the past thirty years, falling from 3.5 per cent in the 1960s to approximately 2.0 per cent in the 1990s (DBLD 1993). The average number of children born to women also give some ideas into the fertility trend. The Family Planning office of the commune reported that currently married women aged between 45 and 49 had on average more than five children while women aged between 30 and 39 had an average of three children. The average number of births per woman was about 3.2. This small sample is supported by a national survey on the fertility trend over the last years. The inter-censal demographic survey shows that the fertility rate has declined over the last six years, from 3.3 children in 1988 to 3.0 in 1994 (TCTK 1995:20). This decline is partly attributed to the family planning campaign that has been enforced with increasing intensity by the government since the 1980s. Furthermore, socio-economic changes play a major role in the fertility decline. In the past, an abundance of children was considered a testimony to family happiness and was greatly appreciated by society at large. In village life where competition among lineages was a common place, families tend to strengthen kinship alliance by having more children. Moreover, due to lack of social security for elderly people, children are an important source of support for their parents in old ages. Nowadays, the fertility motivations seem to be changing. Decollectivization and land re-distribution have given young spouses more autonomy, relatively free from the constraints of the larger family, which was implicitly supported by the collective economic system in the past. The economic liberation of young nuclear families allows them to make a choice of having fewer children. The policy of per head-based land distribution also allows elderly the right to use their own allotted plot, which they can lease out to get a part of the benefits without their children’s support. For these reasons, the family size of two or three children is mostly preferred in the countryside today.

73 The 1989 Census reports that the rough birth rate in the whole country for the period 1955-1959 was about 45.0 per thousand. It decreased to 38.0 per thousand in the period 1970-1974 and fell to 31.0 per thousand in the period 1985-1989 (TCTK 1991:98).
Table 7.1. Age-specific and total fertility rate in Vietnam between 1989 and 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>0.197</td>
<td>0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>0.209</td>
<td>0.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total fertility rate 3.8 3.1


Hareven (1989) suggests that demographic change has considerable impact on the position of children in the family (Hareven 1989:15-36). This notion can be useful when looking at the case of Giao village, where household size was in the process of nuclearization and number of children in the family was decreasing. As a consequence of change, the age gap between the eldest and the youngest child became shorter and child care should be better. My interests are not solely to focus on demographic change but also to understand how this change has an impact on the children, viewed from their social values. An ethnographic overview of local customs regarding child care would help to gain more insights in this respect.

God's children and god's custody

Commending children to the god's protection is a long standing custom of Vietnamese.74 In the past, those children who were not healthy or the only son of his

74 The term 'god' used here commonly refers to a number of supernatural forces and historical figures worshipped by people. In Giao village, a majority of children was recommended to Duc Thanh Tran, i.e. Tran Hung Dao, the famous marshal under the Tran dynasty fighting against Mongol invaders in the 13th century; Duc Thanh Giong, a mythic heroiic against northern invaders; Goddess Mau, Duc Thanh Mau, i.e. Mother Lieu or Lieu Hanh, a mythic character who was believed to be the Creator; Duc Thanh Phu ung, i.e. Pham Ngu Lao, a historical character in the resistance against the Mongols in the 13th century; The village Guardian Spirit, Than Thanh Hoang, a mythic hero; and Buddha (Phat).
parents might be ‘offered’ (ban)\textsuperscript{75} by their parents to the child-guardian deities with belief that under their custody, these children would be protected against evil forces. According to this custom, the parents have to invite a priest (\textit{thay cung}) to prepare a ‘contract (\textit{khoan}), written in classical Chinese, in which are indicated the name of the child, his/her date of birth, the duration of protection and several pledges. The duration of this ‘offer’ is to be decided by the parents themselves, ranging from a few years to the whole life of the child. When the period under the contract comes to an end, the parents will hold a ritual to take their child back or they can extend the contract for an other period. The ritual should take place at the temple or pagoda where the child is to be consigned. Under the contract conditions, once the child is offered to the guardian deity, the child shall be considered the deity’s child (by nominal adoption) although in reality, the child continues to live with their parents at home. However, parents and other siblings are not allowed to abuse such children, or commit such things as beating, scolding or making them do heavy chores. And when such a child gets really sick, the parents have to pray to the Deity for his blessings. If death occurs, this must be regarded as the will of the Deity who takes the child away with Him.

As far as Giao villagers could recall, the practice of “offering the child to the Guardian Deity”, was strongly censured by the revolutionary authorities during the 1960s-1970s, because it was considered a “feudal practice” to be abolished. Since the early 1980s, this custom has been gradually revived and recently, it became socially quite acceptable by the villagers. Apart from those children who had been previously “adopted” elsewhere, there were more than one hundred children in Giao village offered to various Guardian Deities and the Lord Buddha during the past ten years. Their files and joss-stick bowls were preserved at the village pagoda and the communal house.\textsuperscript{76} The intensification of this practice today not only emphasizes the social value of children but also reflects the growing importance of the religious revival. It goes on to show that parents, having fewer children than before, feel more vulnerable about losing them, and therefore turn to supernatural forces for protection.

In 1995 I was invited to take part in the ritual of ‘commending the child to the Guardian Deity’ organized by my host family in Giao village. The child who was being sent to the village Spirit Tutelary was a girl of three years of age. She was quite healthy. Because her parents were still young, the ritual was held by her grand-parents. As far as

\textsuperscript{75} The local people used the term \textit{ban khoan} (sale by contract) or \textit{gui con vao cua thanh} (commending the child to the deity). These terms symbolically mean a special ritual of sending children for the child-guardian protection. In some cases, children might also be ritually adopted by other families who have raised successfully a large number of children.

\textsuperscript{76} This number was provided by the monk in charge the village pagoda. The village headman was shocked by this high figure. According to him, before this custom was banned in the 1960s, only a few children of Giao village, who were in conditions, were commended to the deities.
I could see, the offerings to the Tutelary God included sticky rice, a cooked chicken, a bottle of rice liquor, betel and areca-nuts, bananas and golden joss-paper.77 Two copies of the contract previously prepared were also put on the same tray, one of which was to be burnt after the praying ritual. The ritual was first held in the communal house by the priest and after that, at home. Praying to ancestors was also done by the family head.

Close relatives and friends were invited to join in a meal with the family. Guests brought with them gifts for the girl (toys, cakes and clothes) but more often, money, rice liquor and beer to congratulate the girl who was from now on under the God’s custody. There was nothing special about the girl except she wore good clothes on that day. According to local belief, one should not make remarks on the girl’s beauty and health for fear that the devils might hear about these and pester her.

The girl’s father explained to me that he did not expect much from this custom but added: “What can I do? Most children of this village are under the Deity’s custody, why shouldn’t we. I’ve got only two children, if something happens to them, I would live in regret the rest of my days!”

Generally, it takes a few hundred thousand VND or more to organize such a ritual.78 For many village families, these expenses were rather high. However, they did not complain about the costs because they felt contented for ‘having fulfilled duty towards their kids. And the children themselves wanted to be sent to the gods because in their opinion, being the god’s children, they would not be badly treated by their parents.

Besides the custom of ‘sending children to the gods’, praying for having a male heir (cau tu) is also a common practice nowadays in Giao village. Birth control policy causes young couples to think hard about the number and gender of children they wish to have. Those who have no offspring often turn to supernatural forces. They went on pilgrimages to well-known pagodas and temples to pray for a male heir.

Considering the increasing revival of rituals in northern Vietnam, Luong Van Hy came to the conclusion that economic reforms had a major impacts on local ritual practices while the state relaxed its controls (1993:259). This remark is quite relevant to the case of Giao village. It is however, worth adding that the revival of these old practices reflects a weakening of the socialist ideology, as the result of a legitimacy

77 I was told that the offerings were not necessarily the same but depend on the Deity to whom the child will be commended. For instance, in keeping with Buddhist doctrine, offerings to Buddha must be vegetarian food (co chay), including fruits, flowers, truncated cone shaped cakes (cooked sticky rice), meat is not allowed. Offerings to Goddess Mau, besides usual things such as sticky rice, golden joss-papers, flowers and fruits, other things made of joss papers (clothes, hat, etc.) with different coloration, should be included.
78 Nguyen Thanh Binh, in her article on “Another Form of Selling Children” described this custom in Cam Binh district, Hai Hung province as a costly ritual which burdens the peasant household’s budget. See Nguyen T.B, Phu Nu Viet Nam, 26 September 1993, p.3.
crisis among the masses when the planning economic system—the back bone of such ideology, has been in decay. The intensification of rituals regarding the raising of children as described above reflects a revival of the past (Kleine 1995), further influenced by the general trend of fertility decline. From this emerges new ideas about the value of the child not merely as a personification of family/patrilineral continuity but also as an individual who needs to be protected against unforeseen calamities.

**Filial duty and childhood**

In this part I shall examine traditional values attached to the role of children, which was imposed by Confucian ideals for many centuries. The analysis first documents some popular texts referring to these; a presentation of the empirical data resulting from field research in Giao village will be followed to show how these values were put into daily practice viewed from the perspective of social transformation.

Pre-modern Vietnam was characterized by the monopoly of Confucian doctrines, particularly in the fields of state management and education. The state laws under the dynasties of Le and Nguyen (from the 15th to the early half of the 20th century) incorporated the basic principles of Confucian ethics into the administration of society (Phan Dai Doan 1992:5-7). These laws especially emphasized family morality, such as relationships between the husband and wife, parents and children. The absolute authority of the father within his family was recognized by laws, as pointed out by Dao (1938:116):

1. The father, as the family head, had full power to manage all property of the family.
2. The father had an explicit ownership of his wife/wives and children. He could mortgage his children or force them to work for wage.
3. The father had full rights as regards to his children’s education and marriage.

Under these laws, children were regarded as their father’s properties and therefore, they had to fully comply with his authority. Being children, they had no rights at all.79 The Gia Long Code (Nguyen dynasty), for instance, regulated that the father had

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79 Confucian ethics such as Three Principles (Tam Cuong) emphasizes the absolute power of the father over his children, of the husband over his wife and of the King over his people. Five Ethics (Ngu Thuong) discusses love between the father and his children, loyalty between the people and the King, the respect of the wife for her husband, hierarchical order between older and younger brothers/sisters and trust among friends. These classical principles of Confucianism were transliterated into Nom (modified Chinese-Vietnamese) in the form of rhythmic prose for learning by heart. In Giao village, some families still kept these books, such as Nhi Thap Tu Hieu, (Twenty four filial duties of the children), and Huan Dich Thap Dieu (Ten Commandments). These works were also used as text books in the past.
the right to hire out his children. In case the child was beaten to death by the father, the father would be only punished with 100 truong (lashes of wooden stick), (Dao Duy Anh 1938:122). These regulations were principally based on a key point of Confucian ethics, namely dao hieu (Filial Duty). Filial duty was regarded the primary virtue of children towards their parents (Vu Ngoc Khanh 1985; Vu Tuan San 1995; Dao Duy Anh1938). On the one hand, filial duty regulated children’s obligations to take care of their parents (and grandparents, if any) in order to repay their labor in raising the children. Caring for the parents means that children should dutifully provide adequate material means and pay special regards to their parents. These were to be manifested in respectful attitudes and regular visits to their parents. On the other hand, filial duty emphasizes children’s obligations to obey their parents. For instance, children were not allowed to argue with their parents or bring legal actions against them regardless of how badly children were treated. Furthermore, children were not allowed to leave their parents or divide the family’s property among themselves while their parents were still alive. Children’s marriages were to be arranged by their parents irrespective of their wish. 80 Those who did not follow these ethics would be punished by the law. 81 Together with strict regulations on the rights and obligations between the father and his children, Confucian ethics also emphasizes the different status of son(s) and daughter(s), which were compiled in text-books and translated in rhythmic process for popular circulation.

There is no doubt that before 1945, Confucian ethics play a dominant role in the family realm. The following questions now can be raised: 1. How were these Confucian ethics brought into daily practice before the socialist transformation? 2. Is this legacy of the past is still prevailing?; and 3. To which extent may the remnants of these ethics influence the socialization of children?

In order to gain more insight into these issues, I now proceed to examine closely the case of Giao village.

The life stories of villagers suggest that children’s socialization in the pre-revolution period differed considerably, depending on gender and class. Boys from well-to-do families usually started to go to school between eight and ten years of age. Their schooling lasted about 10 to 15 years, until they were capable to participate in village/state affairs. The main goal of their schooling was to join the village leadership. As far as villagers could remember, most of education activities in Giao village before

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80 At present, elderly people still prefer to use this old proverb “cha me dat dau con ngoi day), which literally means that children have to sit at the place arranged for them by their parents.
81 According to Dao Duy Anh (1938:123), Gia Long Codes (early 19th century) regulated that children who did not take care of their parents or abandoned their parents were to be punished by beating (80 lashes of wooden stick). Children who did not pay respect to their parents were to be prosecuted. Tu Duc Codes (operating from the late 19th century until 1945) even punished not only undutiful children but also the village mayor and the head of patrilineage for their neglect (Phan Dai Doan 1992:6).
1945 were provided by *thay do* (village teacher of classical Chinese) because access to French-styled education was limited for village children. Even in a traditional form of education, only a few well-off families could invite a teacher to give tutorials for their children at home. Boys usually started their first lessons with a popular text called *Tam Tu Kinh* (the Trimetrical Classic), was composed in Chinese in three characters style and used as the main text for primary pupils.\(^2\) After a few years of getting acquainted with Chinese characters and learning by rote the text of *Tam Tu Kinh*, (others said, however, that they started with *Tam Thien Tu* (Three Thousand Words), and works such as *Minh Tam Bao Giam* (collection of Chinese wisdom sayings) and *Minh Dao Gia Huan* (Family Instructions), which included Confucian teachings on relations among family members. Only a few elderly people from well-off families said they had studied some higher texts like *Tu Thu* (Four Books), *Ngu Kinh* (Five Classics) including *Kinh Le* (Book of Rites). As explained earlier, Confucian education under the late colonial period had all but vanished while the colonial state did not provide easy access for village children to modern education. For this reason, studying Chinese classics was primarily a way of training for future social behavior. Those who wished to become civil servants had to go to the district school to study French. The available information on education in Giao village points out the important fact that Confucian ethics still remained an important tenet of education at the village level under the colonial regime.

As a rule, boys from well-to-do families were not encouraged to do menial work. Reading books, for them, was the only thing worth pursuing. Mr. Phung (72 years of age) recalls:

I was born into a family that had been rather well-off for generations. My father was a village notable (tien chi). I was a son of my father’s third wife. As the youngest son, I was pampered by parents and other family members. When I was about 8 years old, my father invited a teacher from Nam Dinh to stay in our house. We called him *thay do Nam* to distinguish from *thay do Nghe*—the other teacher from Nghe An, who was also teaching in the village at the time. Several boys from our relatives also joined the class. I had to do no house-chores except studying. I had studied with four different village teachers of Chinese and then went to the canton school for studying Vietnamese script (*quoc ngu*) and French. I married the first time at the age of 14 although I attended school until I was 21 years of age. That year, my father was already too old. He called me back to the village to take a job as a village land registrar (*chuong ba*).

While mental labor was regarded the only work worthy of well-to-do families’ boys, the girls seemed to be at a low education level. No female respondents said they could read Chinese classics. This does not, however, mean that they did not receive a Confucian education. Girl’s education was mostly conducted at home by their parents.

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\(^2\) It is not clear since when this Confucian text-book was introduced into Vietnamese society. Vu Ngoc Khanh suggests that it was perhaps used as a primary text-book in Vietnam around the 17\(^{th}\) century. According to Dardess (199:80), *San-tzu ching* (Trimetrical Classic) appeared in China as early as the 13\(^{th}\) century, composed by someone unknown.
Most elder women of Giao village today still remembered very well the Three Follows (Tam Tong) and Four Virtues (Tu Duc)—Confucian ethics, which were emphasized on the role of women in the past.\(^{83}\) Some of them could even cite by a heart long rhythmic prose telling what a girl should do to show her filial piety. Girls from well-off families were asked to learn by rote commandments for women, which were transliterated into Vietnamese in the form of poems and songs. They were also taught the principles of filial piety. Particularly, the emphasizes of girl’s education was on domestic oriented roles and closeness between girls and boys in daily relationships is out of the question. The Confucian proverb *nam nu thu thu bat than* (boy and girls are not allowed to be close) was still well remembered by village women. The Confucian virtues imposed on girls and women a dependence upon men throughout their whole life. And this dependent status was applied to girls born of poor as well as rich families. A story told by Mrs. Binh shed some light on this:

That year I was about 13 years old. My father was a former village mayor (*ly cuu*). In the house, we had servants, live-in workers and four draft buffaloes. Born to a notable family, my father usually joined gambling and opium smoking sessions with other influential men in the village. He wanted to get back his position as a village mayor. One day he came home looking very pale. He told my mother that he owed big money to mayor Khai. He had to marry me off to mayor Khai instead of paying his debt. My mother was silent, she then cried quietly. As a second wife to my father, she had no right to oppose his decision. And no one asked me if I wanted to get married with mayor Khai. A few days later, I was given a new set of clothes and was taken to mayor Khai’s. I became his concubine, no wedding and no normal rituals. My life was then burdened with all kinds of house-chores and farm work for his family. As the village mayor’s minor wife, my status was not so different from that of his house-servants.

Most boys and girls from poor families had little chance of a formal education. They were usually sent to work for their landlords. Boys were seasonally employed to tend buffaloes and girls worked as domestic servants. Some boys from middle peasants were sent to the village teacher to ‘scrape up a little knowledge’ to become ‘a real man’. However, it turned out that no one could remember more than a few words learnt by rote. Mr. Vu X.H. (74 years of age) told us:

*My mother gave birth six times but only two of us survived, me and my younger sister. Besides a piece of residential land, my parents did not have rice land. My mother worked as a seasonal hired worker (*nguoi o mua*) for Truong Boi, a landlord in the village. Her daily wage was about two quarts of rice (*dau gao*, equivalent to a half of one kilogram), which was just enough for the three of us. In the days without work, we children had only rice soup. In the harvest period, my mother worked for the landlord while I went out to the farm to collect fallen grains and leftover*

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\(^{83}\) The contents of *Three Follows* are:

1. *Tai gia tong phu* (As a girl, she has to follow her father while still at home)
2. *Xuat gia tong phu* (As a wife, she has to follow her husband)
3. *Phu tu tong tu* (As a widow, she has to follow her sons.

The contents of *Four Virtues* including: *Cong* (housewifery), *Dung* (Tolerance), *Ngon* (nice
potatoes. Shellfish and crabs were an important supplement for us on hardship days between the two harvests. Apart from doing some house-chores and hanging out on the farm with other kids, I did not really know what to do until I was 13. My father then sent me to the village teacher who came from Bat Trang. Almost three years of learning Chinese with him, I remembered only a few words. Since then, my father took me to follow him in the wood trade.

After working away from home for almost a year, my father did not bring back any money. All the money he earned went into gambling. I still remembered the day when the village mayor came with his men and asked my mother to pay poll-tax (*thue than*) for my father. She had only some paddy, which was the whole for the season’s wage she just received from the landlord. So she asked me to accompany her to Sat market for selling that paddy for some cash. My father suddenly appeared. He said he would take money and pay tax for himself. That day he came home late and said he had lost all the money. My mother burst out crying. She knew that my father had spent the whole day gambling.

When I was about 19 years old, my father lost everything. He mortgaged our residential land for 140 *piasters* to pay his debt. He then married off my young sister to a stranger when she was just 15.

Despite these miseries I often heard, life histories often show that children formerly had plenty of time for playing. Their childhood was deeply involved in popular songs and folk games. These were perhaps their first lessons of life without a teacher: folk songs, lullabies and proverbs on the family, society, weather, behavior, love and so on. The abundant treasury of folk life was a source of inspiration from which they could learn the experience of life rather than from formal school.

The 1945 revolution brought about great changes in children’s life. Socialist transformation broke through the century long feudal-colonial hierarchy, took children out of their families and put them into school with a strong belief that they would be trained to become “new people” for socialism. The state rather took over the responsibility for the socialization of children from the family. Motto’s such as equality between men and women and the rights of children were regularly mentioned in rhetoric while the legacy of the old system was to be wiped out. The socialist education system was set up, replacing the village teachers of classical Chinese with their Confucian texts. The revolutionaries decided to get rid of all “feudal vestiges”, as enunciated by Ho chi Minh, the founder of the new state: The old regime of colonialists and feudalists have left bad influences in the children’s minds. We have therefore to use the new spirit and ethics to wash out such influences (Ho Chi Minh 1990:138).

The striking feature of new education was that it emphasized not only knowledge and morality but also physical training and productive labor, at least in theory. Departing from Confucian education, which emphasized children’s obligations to their parents, the socialist education particularly laid stress on teaching children to love
the socialist fatherland and to show loyalty to the communist party: The contents of education must emphasize revolutionary ethics and instill in children their love of the fatherland, socialism, sciences, labour and labourers (Ho Chi Minh. 1990:227).

The president Ho’s Five Commandments to Children (Nam Dieu Bac Ho Day Thieu Nhi), which are used as a guide-line for moral education at school, contained: 1. Love of the fatherland; 2. Love of the people; 3. Good learning; 4. Good labor; 5. Modesty, honesty and bravery. There was no single word on the family. The role of family in educating children became dim under the shadow of the state. The most profound achievement of the new education was that differentiation between males and females as to access to schooling was broken. The literacy rate of young people has been raised to a higher level than ever. At the national level, political discourse continuously expounded social welfare of children. By sanctioning the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the globalization of children’s rights has more or less been adopted by the state.84 In reality, children’s well-being has been undoubtedly improved. However, the gap between the rhetoric and reality on the rights of the child still remains to be looked at. Moreover, traditional values such as children’s obligations to their parents, the constraints of family and lineage are strongly preserved as influential factors up in the process of children’s socialization.

Previously I have pointed out that Confucian ethics and the continuity of lineage attribute to the son a special position in the family. My observations at Giao village today seem to indicate little change in this arena. Male orientation was seen as something “natural”. The custom of having a lavish party to welcome “the birth of a son” has become more popular among young spouses. Son(s) were destined for a higher occupations while daughters were often expected to leave school early to run “family chores”. Such a societal and family environment play an important role in shaping the children’s patterns of standards, values and gender differentiation. Girls might feel under great pressure and some times, they protested violently by leaving their family behind for good, such as the action taken by the case of Tuyet mentioned earlier. But more often than not, they were fame enough to accept their “female status” (phan gai)—a status that had been imposed upon them since centuries.

During my stay in Giao village, I organized a number of discussions with elderly people to understand how they think about their children today. It was interesting that most participants agreed with the impression that children nowadays are less dutiful than before, as manifested by:

84 Vietnam was one of the first countries in the world sanctioning the 1989 International Convention on the Rights of the Child. A system of state apparatus and laws has been set up to take care of legal benefits for children (Ngo B.T. 1992).
1. They dare to talk back to their parents and other elderly people.

2. They neglect to care for their parents.

3. They try to escape from their parents’ control and act according to their own wishes.

Villagers criticized the way girls were dressing and behaving, which showed, according to them, a loss of traditional femininity. Some elderly people even suggested that it was time now for legislation to prosecute the children’s undutifulness. However, while one can agree that the causes of children’s undutifulness were caused by the failure of moral education in the school system, the increasing corruption of the state apparatus and the negative impacts of the market economy, there has been little attention to the role of the family in teaching their children. Parents’ love to their children is still something stringent, as explained by a popular proverb often quoted by the villagers: “Thuong con cho roi cho vot; Ghet con cho nogt cho bui”, meaning that “if you love your child, give the rod and the stick; If you loathe your child, give sweets and tidbits”. As I have pointed out in chapter 4, such an attitude is however usually leading to parental abuse as well.

The discussions I had with the elderly and the young were useful to look at the generation conflicts in rural Vietnam today. It is obvious that the old generations, who were deeply influenced by Confucian virtues, tended to judge their children on the basis of the Confucian moral standards, which stress among other things obedience while the young generations—their offspring, wanted none of that. The elderly people’s reaction on “children’s undutifulness’ apparently reflects this contradiction.\(^{85}\)

**Conclusion**

The world of children and the role of the family and society in the process of children’s socialization are among the subject that remain relatively unexplored in Vietnamese studies. In this chapter, I have considered the social structures within which children are confined and the social values attach to them. By looking further at fertility practices and the perceptions of childhood in relation to cultural constraints from a historical perspective, I hope this will help better to understand the causes and social significance of children’s economic activities in the past and at the present. From the

\(^{85}\) It is worth noting that during the 1990s, a number of old Confucian texts were reprinted, legally and illegally. These publications were in widespread circulation in rural areas. The public opinion at the national level seem to support the revival of some aspects of Confucian filial duty, which was regarded as good for social order. This debate lasted for about one year in Dai Doan Ket (Great Unity, a weekly newspaper published in Hanoi) and was actively responded to by many more papers.
empirical data presented in this chapter, some major questions can be raised for discussion.

*First*, admitting the complex social relationships of rural life, the family and lineage emerge as the most important institutions. The male oriented structure of family and patrilineage greatly determines the different status of children. The major tenets of a male-oriented family set seniors apart from juniors and males from females. Confucian ethics consolidate these principles by emphasizing the acceptance of status, high or low, and strict performance of duties that status requires. It is true that in a Confucian culture, "it did not matter so much that one was a child. What matter was that one was a son or a daughter, older or younger than the next child, and regular family member or a child of the servant class (Dardess 1991:88).

*Secondly*, although to some degree one may agree that there is a considerable flexibility in gender role and family obligations in the Vietnamese family as compared to those of Confucian Eastern Asian family (Hirschman & Vu 1994:28), the son continues to play a central role in the Vietnamese family. Ancestral worship and lineal continuity are among the most important motivations in pursuit of having a son. Confucian ethics, which regard childlessness as guiltiness and a manifestation of undutifulness still have a strong impact on fertility practices nowadays in rural areas. Although in Vietnam, the motivation of having a son was not so extreme as in China, where "girls have less chance of surviving than boys" because of infanticide or abandonment (Croll 1995:165), it is often the main reason for inducing peasant to break the birth control policy. Further analyses on the fertility practices of Giao villagers also suggest a revision of the social value of children. Demographic studies have raised a debate on the linkage between high fertility and economic value of children in Asian peasant societies. Empirical data from the case of Giao village tend to suggest that studies which relate the fertility practices to economic values while neglecting the social values of children are at best one-sided. The social value of children is one of the main causes of high fertility as well.

*Thirdly*, today's modern world tends to emphasize the globalization of children's rights. Childhood, from a Western point of views, is regarded as a long period of human immaturity and therefore children have their rights to be helped (Woodhead 1990:60-67). On the contrary, the Vietnamese culture traditionally puts obligations rather than rights on the children. Among these are obligations of the younger towards older brothers/sisters, of children towards parents, of wives towards husbands, and in general, of offspring towards their patrilineal members and ancestors. Born and raised in such a

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86 Though rarely, I more than once found in public media (newspaper, television, radio, etc.) talks of infanticide or abandonment. It was, however, not the case in Giao village.
cultural environment, children are, right from an early age, taught to accept these traditions and obey them accordingly. Right or wrong, these cultural ties are a burden of the past working against globalisation of children’s rights in Vietnam. While rhetoric is talking loud about the rights of the child, the roots of child abuses, which are embedded in the cultural background, are often overlooked. This is indeed a challenge for a transformation from obligations to rights of the child in societies where features of conservative ethics are still deeply entrenched.
Introduction

Shortly after gaining independence from France, the new state of Vietnam immediately embarked upon an ambitious campaign to combat hunger and illiteracy. In all likelihood, this campaign timely met the aspirations of the masses for an improvement of their cultural life after almost a century under French rule which had severely curtailed educational developments. Prior to 1945, less than ten per cent of the population were estimated to be literate. Some decades later after the anti-illiteracy movement began, it is estimated that 88 per cent of population are literate (UNICEF 1990:136). This is no doubt a remarkable achievement in mass education. However, nowadays one is witnessing a severe crisis of education brought about by great socio-economic upheavals underway in the country. Available information on the current state of education revealed that the school drop-out rate varied from ten to thirty per cent annually, depending on the levels of schooling and geographical areas. In some provinces, particularly in remote areas, the drop-out rate was even higher, from 40 to 80 per cent of class enrollment. The system of public crèches and kindergartens has almost disappeared in many areas. Worse still, thousands of teaching staff also left school for other jobs (MOET 1992:11). This abnormal state of education is considered "an unstable borderline between status quo and down grading" (Hoang Tuy 1996:3). In some recent reports, a number of causes have been suggested. The first and foremost is the growing economic difficulties of large segments of the population and the lack of concern on the part of the state. Another factor is the school curricula which are deemed not suitable to meet the practical demands of everyday life (Nguyen Trong Bao 1991:5-7; Tran Van Tung 1996:3). Among the reasons for the decline, lack of pupils' efforts and enthusiasm for learning are mentioned (Truong Xuan 1989:4; Pham Tat Dong 1991:17-19). The situation has caught the attention of the country's leadership:

There exists a decline of morality and a vagueness of ideology among a number of pupils and students. In pursuing a materialistic way of life, they lack the will to lead a virtuous life for their own good and the good of their country" (CPV 1997:24).

Less attention has been paid to whether changes of the economic system, labour market demands and children's involvement in work have any impact upon education.
Therefore, such arguments as "difficulties" and "pupil's efforts in study" do not seem convincing if we look back at the long development of public education in Vietnam since its independence from the French. The fact is that economic hardship is nothing new and Vietnam at present remains one of the twenty poorest countries of the world (Marr 1988). The situation was much more serious during the war against the Americans. Even then, mass education was already well-developed. Comparative studies on public education indicate that other countries in Asia which bear similarities with Vietnam (India, China, North Korea, etc.), have managed to develop their mass education under even more difficult economic circumstances (Weiner 1991).

The empirical data collected at the village level (Nguyen Van Chinh 1997) and the preliminary nationwide survey reported by the MOLISA (1995) indicate the increasing trend of children's involvement in economic activities, pointing out that their earnings are, in many cases, not just a supplement but an important source of household's incomes. Naturally, the question can be raised as to whether the intensive participation of children in work does in fact prevent them from schooling? It is possible that almost all dropouts would join in the labour market in one form or another, at home, on the farm or elsewhere. However, the right question to be answered is whether these children are absorbed in work so that they are not able to go to school or vice versa? Further research should address not only children's work but also the attitudes of children and their parents vis-à-vis the education system and, on a wider context, general public opinion towards education.

Previously, I have pointed out that the high dropout rate at early ages might be attributed to the inappropriate school curricula which did not meet the realistic needs of the learners. From a "functionalist" point of view, one would expect that the school should be able to provide the necessary technical skills for the pupils. This functionalism has underlined, at least in theory, past policies on education in Vietnam, to the effect that most discussions and educational reforms in this country for more than 40 years now have been aimed at "integrating theory and practice, theory and productive labour" in the school system. This guideline of education has not, however, been applied faithfully in the school system as admitted by the Party itself (CPV 1997:26). The fact remains that in everyday school life, "the years of childhood are also seen as being primarily a time of study, i.e., theory" (Rubin, 1988:46). This is in line with historical comparative studies on worldwide education, which suggest that "the content of most modern education is not very practical, education attainment correlates poorly with work performance", and "schooling does not supply specific technical skills" (Green 1990:38).

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87 Such kinds of argument can be found in a number of leadership speeches and documents regarding education. See, for instance, Ho Chi Minh 1990; The Communist Party of Vietnam 1979, 1993, 1997.
Another approach to explain the vagaries in school enrollment is to study the attitudes and motivations of both parents and pupils as regards education. Negative attitudes and a low level of motivation would not only lead to a drop in school enrollment but lower the quality of education as well (Pham Tat Dong 1991; CPV 1997). Such an approach, in my view, does not seem to reflect fully the nature of the educational situation because it does not take into account the social aspects of education.

In reality, it is hard to say that demand for education is decreasing, viewed from both perspectives of private and public demands. Socially, Vietnamese has a long tradition of veneration for educational ethics (*ton su trong dao*), where "education retains tremendous prestige" and "those among them who memorize large quantities of data, achieve top marks, and receive diplomas or degrees, will be honored with high social status" (Marr 1996;19). At present, recent changes in the economic system has created a wealth of opportunities for higher educated graduates. Industrialization and reconstruction after long years of war demand a great number of a well trained workforce. For obvious reasons, the State would benefit a great deal from developing a sound educational system. Theoretically, the popular thirst for education should remain the same, if not increase, under the present circumstances.

The problem is how can one explain the reverse trend in the development of education in Vietnam during the last decade? This question was uppermost in my mind during my field research in Giao village. At the beginning, I was inclined to think that the intensive involvement of children in economic activities was one of the main reasons behind their leaving school at an early age. Therefore it came as a total surprise when many pupils and their parents told me that it was not work but the depressing state of education that made young children leave school for good. As a consequence, I had to revise my research strategy, trying to look into the dynamic linkages between the child, the state and socio-economic changes to see how and whether these factors did influence upon the school system. My findings suggest that it is the rapidly evolving socio-economic environment, including the labour market, and the state of the school system itself that made parents hesitate at the crossroads of choice regarding their children's future, between education and work. And more often than not, they opt for a reluctant decision that allows their children to leave school early and join the labour force. It seems to me that decisions concerning children's education that appear as individual actions stem primarily from a wider context of social change. As a starting point, I shall attempt to outline the major trends of dropouts at a national level. I will then focus on the local school of Luong Dien where the field research was undertaken.

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88 In the context of Vietnam, education is considered as being part of superstructure, and a manifestation of state care.
Dropouts

While one may consider class repeat a rather normal occurrence in school life which may vary from year to year, the fact that substantial numbers unexpectedly leave school before finishing the required levels is a serious problem that deserves a close inspection. Available statistics on education indicate that such a phenomenon already began since the early 1980's when several economic reforms were introduced in the agricultural sector and collective production was replaced by the "output contract system" (che do khoan). Increasing dropout rate occurred at all three levels of general education (primary, secondary and upper secondary schools) and reached a peak in the academic year of 1990-1991. These statistics particularly indicate that the majority of dropouts were at the lower secondary level, among pupils between 12 to 16 years of age.

Looking at the enrollment statistics of the primary level (age group between six and twelve), we may see an actual increase in school attendance, from 8.1 million in the school year of 1981-82 to 8.9 million in 1990-91. However, the increase of enrollment for this age group between 1981 and 1991 was only 1.1 percent per year while annual population growth was 1.4 per cent during the same period. This means that dropout must occur at the primary school.

As statistics indicated, dropout rates were already high at the very first grade of primary school, decrease somewhat at grades two, three and four and climbed again at grade five, the last grade of primary school (MOE T 1994:11-12). High dropout at grade 1 can be attributed to the collapse of pre-school system (kindergarten and creche) in many areas since decollectivisation, where agricultural cooperatives were no longer able to take care of these pre-schools, therefore depriving children of the necessary preparations to enter primary school.

Statistics also indicate the highest dropout rates occur at the secondary level as compared to the primary level. Between the school years of 1981-82 and 1990-91, enrollment at lower secondary school decreases by 14.8 per cent and at higher secondary school by 25.3 per cent.

89 'Dropout', as used in this study, refers to the pupils, for various reasons, left school before finishing a required level.
90 In January 1981, CPV permitted cooperatives to assign rice fields to individual households for farming, known as Contract 100. According to this, the household was allowed to keep products which produced beyond the level that they contractually obligated to turn over to the cooperative.
91 In the school year of 1981-1982, there were 3,170,000 pupils attending the secondary school and 710,000 attending higher secondary school. In the school year of 1990-1991, these numbers were 2,700,000 and 530,000 (Tran Kiem, in MOET, 1994:11-12).
The high dropout rates in recent years have changed the composition of school attendance within the general education system in which the number of secondary school pupils has dropped considerably. As reported by the Ministry of Education, among 100 pupils entering primary school, only 30 would continue to the low secondary and just 6 to higher secondary level (MOET 1994:12). The dropout rate varied considerably according to geographical areas. For instance, in the school year of 1989-1990, the dropout rate in Hanoi was 5.05 per cent at the primary level and 12.96 per cent at the secondary level while these rates were much higher in rural areas (see the annex to chapter 8).

Although data on education during the 1990s show an increase at a certain rate at primary and lower secondary levels, available statistics also indicate an unequal access to education for the poor children. According to the Vietnam Living Standards Survey 1992-1993, the lowest literacy rate is in the quintile one (poorest), increasing over quintiles and highest in the quintile five (SPC-GSO 1994:17). As indicated by statistics, the aggregate enrollment rates mark significant differences between income groups. These statistics tend to show that while the poorest group could manage to send their children to primary school, only a few were able to make it to secondary levels and remarkably, none of them was at the tertiary institutions. It is no doubt that costs to the family were the main reasons to explain why most poorer children fail to get beyond the primary school, which were required to pay official tuition fees under the 1990 educational law. The survey results also point out that while in quintile one (poorest), the average annual education expenditure per pupil was just 37.13 thousand dong, the quintile five spent 314.62 thousand dong annually, which is more than eight times more (SPC-GSO 1994:18).

While educational statistics at the national level indicate a high dropout rate and a decrease in school enrollment, particularly at the secondary levels, data collected at the district level also reveal the same trend. The annual report by the Department of Education in Cam Binh district of which Gia village is a part shows a common decrease in school enrollment was 12.3 per cent between the school year of 1977-78 and 1990-91. At the secondary level, the decrease was more severe, about 36 per cent.

At the school of Luong Dien where this field research was conducted, available statistics similarly point to a declining trend in school attendance (see Table 8.1).

Table one shows the situation of school enrollment in Luong Dien commune between 1985 and 1994. During these nine years, primary school enrollment increased only by 1.05 per cent while secondary school enrollment decreased by 31.5 per cent. Additionally, statistics on school attendance in Luong Dien commune seem to indicate a decrease of girls in both school levels (see Table 8.2). Their low ratio vis-as-vis boys in
school enrollment perhaps reflect not only a high girl drop-out rate but also a high possibility of their involvement in work.

Table 8.1. Number of school attendants at the school of Luong Dien commune, 1985 - 1991 (net number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Primary level</th>
<th>Secondary level</th>
<th>% of sec. pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 86</td>
<td>1614</td>
<td>1122</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 - 87</td>
<td>1539</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 - 88</td>
<td>1572</td>
<td>1141</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 89</td>
<td>1566</td>
<td>1175</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 - 90</td>
<td>1527</td>
<td>1217</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 - 91</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>1290</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 - 92</td>
<td>1587</td>
<td>1302</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 - 93</td>
<td>1512</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 - 94</td>
<td>1525</td>
<td>1188</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Reports by the Department of Education, Cam Binh district archives.
Note: Population of age group between 5 and 14 in Luong Dien Commune in 1989 was 2,304 persons, (TCTK 1989, Table 1-3:457).

Table 8.2. Proportion of girl pupils at the school of Luong Dien (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School years</th>
<th>Girl ratio</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 86</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 - 87</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 - 88</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 89</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 - 90</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 - 91</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 - 92</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992 - 93</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 - 94</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Reports by Department of Education, Cam Binh district archives.
Note: Ratio male/female of age group between 5 and 14 in Luong Dien commune was 49% in 1989 (The 1989 Census, Table 1-3:457).

The decline of the primary pupils entering the secondary school and common dropouts suggest that qualitative data are needed to understand the question of why children left school.

Leaving school for good?

As mentioned earlier, the vagaries of the education situation in recent years lead to general remarks such as decline in motivation and efforts among pupils or they have
been spoiled by "bad habits brought about by a "market economy", etc. These judgments are, however, rarely based on opinions of children themselves. In an attempt to understand the depressed state of education and children's attitudes towards education, I used a simple set of questions by asking schoolchildren: 1) Why do you go to school?; 2) After attending classes, what do you do (based on activities during the past few days)?; 3) To which level do you want to continue your schooling, how do you feel about your own life at present (happiness, sadness, hardship, etc.) and what do you wish for your future?

I then asked pupils attending grade five up to grade nine at the school of Luong Dien to answer these questions in the form of a short essay. From this sample, 116 essays were collected and analyzed. Surprisingly, children's opinions were not in line with those expressed by adults. I will try to quantify briefly the results of this survey in the table below.

Table 8.3. Pupils' motivations and desired levels for schooling in Luong Dien, 1995 (in percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivations of schooling</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Age of 11-13</th>
<th>Age of 14-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. to avoid odd jobs</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. parents force to go to school</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. to enjoy being with friends</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. to escape from rural life</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>51.1</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. to enrich knowledge</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>90.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. to have a good future</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sample survey conducted in Luong Dien, 1995.
Number of pupils who gave answers: 116 (73 boys and 43 girls), broken down as follows: pupils aged 11-13: 83 (48 boys and 35 girls); pupils aged 14-16: 33 (25 boys and 8 girls).

Initial results show that pupils at this rural school were not averse to schooling, in fact, far from it. Remarkably, 87 per cent wished to follow up to higher levels, more than 54 per cent wanted to finish the high secondary school and 17 per cent wanted to enter universities. This rate was even higher in the group of older children (63 per cent and 33 per cent). However, it is clear that more boys wanted to enter universities than girls (25 per cent as compared to 7 per cent). Those who said "don't know" (12 per cent) further explained that this is a matter for their parents to decide.

Secondly, "motivations for schooling" reflect pupils' general perception that education is a stepping stone to a better future (88 per cent). The desire for education was more clearly expressed among pupils attending higher grades (97 per cent).
Thirdly, there was a considerable number of the pupils (51 per cent) who said that going to school is a means to escape from rural life. This rate was higher in the older age group (69 per cent). This tends to reflect the dissatisfaction of older children with their present life.

Additionally, the survey points to the fact that the great majority of pupils were actively engaged in work (at home, on the farm and in non-farm activities elsewhere) after attending classes. However, it is worth noting that only about 26 per cent of pupils wanted to spend after-school time for earning money while more than 61 per cent wanted to use it for doing home work.

From this survey it emerges that most school children realized they could not expect a bright future if they were to leave school early. This perception seems, however, to contradict the fact that only a small percentage of pupils did go on to a higher level of education. During the 1978 - 1985 period, the number of children attending the last grade of the secondary level at the commune's school remained rather constant, ranging from 150 to 200. However, this number dropped sharply during the 1990 - 1995 period, fluctuating between 15 and 35. What explanations the children gave about their dropping out? To get more insight in this issue, I shall now return to the children of Giao village.

From a total of 155 children aged between eight and fifteen under the sample, 51 per cent had left school to work. None of them finished lower secondary school, except one boy still attending grade 8 at the school of Luong Dien. I noticed that most children who worked as part-time apprentices in local wood carving workshops had no time to do any homework, and they were often late getting to school. Some of them stayed away for fear of failing their exams or being scolded by their teachers. During my year staying at the village, I interviewed 79 dropouts as to why did they leave school and what did they feel about their decision. The answers I received are summarized as follows:

1. Parents asked them to stop schooling for good.
2. Parents were not able to afford tuition and other costs.
3. Influence of friends.
4. Dislike of teachers.
5. Ill-treatment by teachers.
7. School attendance hindered by wood-carving apprenticeship.
8. Desire to earn money.
9. Wish to be independent from the parents.
10. Wish to help parents in alleviating family's hardship.
11. No possible means for continuing study.

The above responses can be grouped into two sets of factors, which I shall call 'external' and 'internal'. The external factors, which have a direct bearing on the pupils' everyday life, include: 1) family, 2) school system and 3) friends. The internal factors basically consist of motivations and attitudes of the pupils themselves, based on their personal experiences and views on educational merits. These may partly play a role determining the propensity to drop out among individual pupils.

In the following sections of this chapter, I shall attempt to analyze how the external factors impact upon school dropping out. My field work indicates that most dropouts did so reluctantly and regretted afterwards, and only a few returned to school after one or two years. Most dropouts said they would like to come back to school again but they felt "too old" vis-à-vis their classmates, adding that what little knowledge they had acquired was gone for good. It is worth mentioning that alternative forms of education were virtually non-existent for these young dropouts.

As a prelude to bring the light into next discussions, I would like to quote herewith a short account of one of my interviews with Tien, a dropout.

**Question:** At which level of schooling did you drop out?

**Answer:** Half way through grade 5.

**Q:** Why did you drop out?

**A:** Because of a Pioneer's scarf.

**Q:** How? Could you tell me your story?

**A:** One day I came to school without my Pioneer's scarf. My teacher did not allow me to enter the classroom. I didn't remember where I lost my scarf. That day, I had visited my aunt in the neighbouring village before going to school. I must have lost it on my way to school. Next day, I came to school again without my red scarf. Miss Van, the teacher, decided to punish me by asking Hung, the class leader, to whip me in front of my classmates. She said I had done great harm to the reputation of our class in the school's competition for excellence. She decided that from now on I could not come back without my Pioneer's scarf. I dared not tell my mother about this because I didn't want to worry her. Next day I left home at school-time but I did not go there. I was so fed up. Since then, I never went back.

**Q:** How did your mum react to your dropping out?

**A:** She was upset. She cried and told me that since I am her only son, I should come back to school, and that she and my sisters could bear the costs for me to go on studying. But I refused and took up wood carving with my uncle.

**Q:** You intend to make a living with wood carving?

**A:** I know that with a low level of education, there is not much of a future for me. My mother always says the same thing. Some friends of mine were forced by their parents to return to school. I still feel regret to have dropped out. But I am so fed up with school. Besides my family is so poor. If I go on to higher school, I will become a heavy burden for my mother and my sisters. You see, a lot of people with university diplomas have now returned to the village and

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92 As regulated by the school system, all Pioneers Association members have to wear the Pioneer's scarf when going to school.
worked as wood carvers. They don't have enough money to buy a job (!?).

At the crossroads of choice

By mentioning 'choice', I do not intend to emphasize individual motivations of pupils and their parents concerning the question of 'work or education', which are common topics of daily conversations among Giao villagers. It is my interest however to gain insight into what is on the minds of these parents when they ponder about their children's education and their future against the backdrop of their own experiences when they themselves were still boys and girls in the village. Answering some of these questions may enable us to understand the prevalent popular attitudes towards education in the present-day context.

A sense of the past

There has been little doubt about the pivotal role of education in traditional Vietnamese society. For many centuries, together with the consolidation of Confucianism as a state doctrine in Vietnam, the educational system was expanded from the central level down to the grass roots. That examinations were held at regular intervals to select meritorious candidates among the masses to serve the country's administration at various levels was a testimony to the importance the state in feudal times attached to education. The aim of this educational system was to propagate Confucian ethics and, most importantly, to recruit qualified civil servants, generally called mandarins in former times, for the state's administration (Dao Duy Anh 1937:23-35; Vu Ngoc Khanh 1985:88-89; Nguyen Dang Tien 1993:14-16). Those with a high level of knowledge but unsuccessful in examinations might end up as village teachers whose task was to teach children "the way of a real man" (cach lam nguoi). The old values of education were still widespread among the rural communities, as shown by this popular saying:

You had better give your child some books
Rather than bequeath him a bag of gold

Although these village schools were not open for everyone and not every pupil could aspire to a mandarin career, having their children "scrape up a little knowledge" had been a dear wish for many Vietnamese parents through the ages.

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93 A cross-check with Tien's old classmates and his mother confirmed the story. At present (1995), Tien was a boy of 15 years of age. His father died a few years ago by an accident. He lived with his mother and two sisters in the village. He worked as a wood carver and his average earnings were about 600,000 dong per month. The villagers said he was one of the youngest carvers who got such high wages.
Under the colonial regime, the district of Cam Giang which included Giao village, had just one district school, ten canton schools and fourteen village schools with an enrollment of about 1,000 pupils. Giao village had one school, called "village teacher's school" (truong huong su), with 17 pupils (Ngo Vi Lien 1931:16-17).

Another popular form of basic education at the village level was holding classes at home, lop hoc tai gia (tutorials at home) as well-to-do families invited a teacher to stay at their houses and to teach the children basic classical Chinese. The anti-illiteracy campaign launched by the revolutionary government shortly after 1945 opened new opportunities for educational developments and despite two wars (1946-1954 and 1954-1975), the number of children attending school in Cam Binh increased rapidly, up to 90 per cent of the age group between eight and fourteen in 1979 (TCTK 1981:176-177). As many older villagers now still remember, they felt a great joy going to school, even though classes were conducted underground, in shelters or at the village pagoda. This craving for learning has left a strong imprint on the minds of the people, as born out by popular attitudes to this day: 1) Educated people enjoy high esteem in society; 2) Good education and a high diploma are windows of opportunity to important jobs in the state administration; 3) Intellectual work is often regarded as the most important occupation.

These attitudes have been condemned by modern educationalists as obsolete reflections of "feudal" ways of thinking:

Our pupils, as well as many others in our society, have been obsessed with the idea that once they start school, they should go on and on to the highest levels of the school system. Their only goal is to get a position in the state administration: to become a mandarin in the feudal period, a high civil servant under the colonial regime and in our times, a cadre. Failing this, they would be regarded worthless persons, to be looked down upon by fellow villagers and society" (Former Vice Minister of Education Nguyen Khanh Toan, 1995:92).

The fact remains that going to school for a chance to enter the "state affairs", meaning getting a civil service job, has been on the people's minds for centuries. In Giao village, I often heard comparisons between schooling under the 'subsidy system' and today's education. Villagers recalled young people in their village who had higher education were highly respected and often landed with good jobs as state cadres. Their livelihood and their children's future were thus secure. "Nowadays you'll have to bear all the costs to send a kid to school, but there is no guarantee of a job", they contended. A highly respected villager explained to me: "If you know that your children have a chance to become a cadre, to escape from hard, rural life, you will do all you can to send them to school. Otherwise, why should you go through all the troubles?"

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94 According to Ngo Vi Lien, the chief of district during the early 1930s, the total population of Cam Giang in 1931 was 45,175 persons. If we estimate the school age group (between 5 and 19 year old) was about 30 per cent of the total population, the number of school attendants in Cam Giang district would be eight per cent of
The risk of education

Juggling between the pros and cons of schooling was not a real problem under the subsidy economic system. Determined to train "new people" for socialism, the state took full charge of providing education facilities for the masses. In rural areas, the agricultural co-operatives were responsible for the local school system: kindergarten, creche, primary and secondary schools. Education during this period was regarded as a part of social welfare and a showpiece of socialism. Schooling was free of charge and one had not to worry about the costs of education. Graduates were taken in by the state-run sectors where they could find not only jobs but also respect.

The change from a free to a costly education forced the peasants to rethink about their children's schooling. And as it often occurs, the pressure of a hard existence generally makes them opt for a "short-run benefit" course instead of a "long-term investment" alternative. As a village confidentially told me:

I have two sons, both attending school. That costs me at least 50 thousand dong each month for tuition fees, books and so on. Apart from these, I have to feed them, buy them medicines when they're sick, give them pocket money. If I continue to invest in their higher education when they get to the age of 17 or 18 year of age, the costs will run into millions of dong, but then what for? If they can get into university, I'll have to feed them for four or five years more, something we cannot afford. And there's no guarantee of a job. That'll be a disaster. Now, suppose my two sons stop school at the age of 11 or 12 and take up wood carving at a workshop in the village. During one or two years of training, they won't cost me a cent. Instead they can earn enough for themselves. And if they're good at their jobs, they may bring an extra income to the family, say half a million dong per month. When they get to the age, say, of 17 or 18, they can have their own career as carvers. Think of this, I cannot take further risks in keeping them longer at school. (Interviews with Vu D.T., age 45, in May 1995).

Alternative options

Under the collective regime, peasants had little choice but to work on the co-operative farm. Except for a few non-farm activities (handicrafts and services) organized by the co-operative, labour was mainly utilized in the agricultural sector. Only a small proportion of the work force was employed in the state-run sectors. For children, going to school was the natural thing to do. The transformation since economic reforms

that age group, (Ngo Vi Lien, 1931:13-17).

According to the Directive No.26/CT/UBND (Hai Hung province), financial support for education at commune level were from following sources:

1. the socio-cultural fund of the commune: 10%.
2. the agricultural cooperative: 30% in cash and 40% in paddy.
3. the public welfare fund of credit co-operative: 15 to 20%.
4. Agricultural co-operative is responsible in mobilizing welfare public labor (lao dong cong ich) for building the school facilities (Ban Quan lì HTXNN Hai Hung 1986).
has likely brought about great changes. While farming still remains the major activity, other non-farm activities such as small scale industries and family handicrafts, have created new sources of income for rural families. Labour force has been channeled more and more into non-farm activities, facilitated by the fact that costs for training is not crucial because cottage industries are being revived from traditional crafts, and new trainees are directly involved in the production process. High wages offered in these activities serve as a magnet to attract more and more labour. A professional carver's earnings are considerably higher than fixed wages of a university teacher, a scientific researcher, or a medical doctor employed by the state. For instance, the monthly wage of a wood carver ranged from 400 thousand to one million dong compared to just under 200 thousand dong for a new university graduate paid by state-owned sectors.

Together with changes in the local labour market, the public attitude towards materialistic values has dramatically changed. Before the so-called "market economy" was introduced, children were kept away from earning money because money was considered as something that can demean human values. This attitude has now been turned around as "to avoid from being demeaned, one needs money!" (Hanh Nhu 1992:6). Making money, something of a taboo under the old collective regime, was now totally respectable. This was one of the key factors in parents' decision to cut short their children's education and send them to work.

Other important factors influencing parents' attitude towards schooling for their children were the limited access to middle and higher education and a high rate of unemployment among university graduates. In the school year of 1994-1995, there were 230,000 pupils applying for higher secondary school in Hai Hung province but the school system could admit only 140,000 (about 60 per cent). Meanwhile, access to university entrance was even more stringent. Some 100 universities and colleges nationwide could only admit between five to ten per cent of the applicants every year (Tran Hong Quan 1995, see also Marr 1988).

Despite rather low wages, unemployment among university graduates has been rising at an alarming rate, from 10.7 per cent in 1988, 20.3 per cent in 1990 and climbing up to 41.7 per cent in 1992 (Pham Tat Dong 1995:99). This reality is realized by many young people in rural areas, as one youngster in Giao village told me:

After dropping out, I often missed my former school, friends and teachers. It took me several months to get them out of my mind. I deeply regret having quit. But I know that if I continued to study, I would be unemployed, like my brother who after his graduation from the university, returned to village to work as a carver. There is no difference between a well-educated man and a boy with little education. This is a consolation for me with what I'm doing now (interviews with Quyen, 16 years of age).
It is this harshness of life that has given rise to a saying often cited by the village children in defending their materialistic pursuits: *Van hay chu tot khong bang thang dot lam tien* (a well educated man is worth less than an illiterate with a lot of money).

**Sharing a community life**

While observing the state of education in Giao village, I found that dropping out occurred as something of a chain reaction. From discussions I held with a number of parents and children, it seems that popular opinion around the village had an important role in influencing their decisions whether to continue or quit schooling, particularly with the case of Giao where every one is connected to each other through an intricate system of relationships. This notion occurred to me only after I had participated in a number of meetings, visits, meals and feasts held in private and public places, among the close villagers with whom I could share confidences. As a rule, the villagers always had their comments and judgments about every event that happening, based on their own thinking and they needed to share them with someone else. And as I noticed, among many other subjects of village life, children's education and their earning activities often appeared as a topical topic of idle conversations at leisure time. Although such kinds of "public opinion' were not directly addressed to anyone, they functioned like a "network of understanding and practice" within the village (Scott 1985:300). To consider this aspect of village life with respect to education of the children, two cases will be referred.

**Case 1**

The Vu is a respectable family in Giao village. Mr Vu is a veteran who served in the army for more than 15 years. He now has returned to the village and works as a farmer. Vu's wife is a village teacher. They have four children, all attending school. He told me that he did not want his children to leave school so early as others did, so he sent his eldest daughter to a secondary school in the town of Hai Duong, some 20 kms away from Giao. The reason for this "is to get her away from the bad influence of the village dropouts so she could concentrate on her study". His retirement pension could barely cover her study costs. In May 1995, he sold one ton of paddy— a year's earnings from hard work on the farm— to enable his daughter to go to Hanoi to take the university entrance examinations. After two months, he received the bad news: his daughter had failed the exams!

The fact is that if a girl fails at an university entrance examination, it is quite normal in the city. But in a village like Giao, this gives rise to much discussion and is a topic for gossip. Some people commented that Mr Vu did not know what he was doing. Why didn't he marry her off to some village boy like all the rest? Maybe he felt superior to his fellow villagers in sending his daughter to Hanoi. Others speculated perhaps his daughter was no longer suitable
for the village boys (meaning she was no longer a virgin), so he had to send her to the big city! But "with such little money (just about 1.5 million dong, equivalent to one ton of paddy), how could he expect to buy a place for his daughter in Hanoi?" Some villagers even came to me (I was known as a teacher from Hanoi university) and asked whether one could buy a place at the university and how much would this cost!

Such gossips were quite rampant among the villagers. Mr Vu was a bit depressed about these stories, needless to say. He told me he had no ambition to turn his daughter into a 'lady', just that he wanted his daughter to get on in life in a decent manner. Now he didn't want to attend meetings and feasts and even avoided friends and relatives, afraid that people would harass him about what happened about his daughter.

Case 2

Mr Van and his wife had been poor farmers in Giao village. From his parents they inherited a small cottage on a barren piece of land in the middle of the village. With 8 children to feed, their life was really hard. Because he could not afford to pay for their education costs, he decided to send his three sons to a wood workshop in the village when they were quite young. After a few years of training, the three sons followed some of the villagers to Ho Chi Minh city to look for a job. With a bit of luck, two of them landed in a workshop financed by foreign money. Every month each son could send home about 600 thousand dong. After two years, Mr Van was able to build up a big house on his own land. He was able to purchase prized consumer goods such as an electronic fan, a cassette recorder etc. and even threw in a big house-warming party. His sons told friends that within a year they would buy a new Honda motorbike.

That a poor man like Mr Van could build a new big house sent a shock wave around the village. Mothers took up Mr Van's example to tell their children: "Just look at your neighbour's kids. They're about your age and they already earn enough money to build a house for their parents. What have you done for us then in return for all we've done in bringing you up?"

Adults in the village now started telling that Mr Van's sons had golden hands, they were the "darlings of their Japanese employers', and that Mr Van was lucky for the blessings from his ancestors. Meanwhile village kids began to wonder: "If they could make a lot of money, why not us?" Many began leaving school and tried their luck in Ho Chi Minh city, though none of them achieved their dream of helping their parents to build a new house.

An education of obedience

In this section, I shall attempt to point out the vagaries of the current state of education in rural Vietnam. In arguing that while rapid socio-economic changes create a "shock syndrome" forcing peasants to re-arrange their life strategies, the educational system has proved to be 'dry and rigid' in its teaching contents and methods, which in turn has a deleterious effect on both parents and pupils. To support this line of argument, I will focus my observations on the school of Luong Dien with respect to: 1)
material conditions of school, 2) integration of educational contents and 3) current teaching methods.

The school

From a historical perspective, general education in Luong Dien commune has achieved considerable success. The first time in 1959, a primary school was officially established in this commune with 15 teachers. In the first school year, there were 209 pupils, attending grades one up to four (DBLD 1993:83). Classes were mainly conducted on the premises of the village pagoda and commune house. Until 1963, there were only nine modest classrooms built with contributions from the local population. In the school year of 1965-1966, a low secondary school was set up with a teaching staff of five. However, shortly after this, classes had again to be held at the pagoda and the communal house to avoid American bombing and then only returned to their original premises in the 1973-74 school year. By then the old school had become a semi-ruin, in dire need of maintenance. Despite all this Luong Dien school has continued to grow and was awarded with the honorific title of 'merit of socialist labour' for its success (DBLD 1993:116).

At present, the school of Luong Dien has been rebuilt and greatly enlarged. Apart from a few classrooms held within villages, it now boasts 2 two-storied buildings with 12 classrooms and three brick houses with six classrooms. It takes the children about 20 minutes to walk from Giao village to the school located in the middle of the commune. In the village itself there are some classes for young children at the first grade (six or seven years old). For those attending higher secondary school, which now falls under the provincial administration, they have to travel to the district township, 12 km away from Giao village.

The Luong Dien school becomes particularly isolated from the villages during the rainy season, because it stands in the middle of vast rice fields, and often gives an impression of being an island out of nowhere. Some teachers compared their school with 'Siberia' because it takes some courage to venture out to the school on rainy days.

According to the school headmaster, Luong Dien has never had enough space for all its pupils for many years. In the school year of 1994-1995, there were 36 classes of primary level (from grade one to five) but only 30 classrooms were available. There

96Expenditures for building school in 1963 were 11,582 dong in which people contributed 7,350 dong, 600 bamboo trees and wood, and 850 labor days, the rest costs supported by the state (DBLD, 1993:96).

97The first two-storied building was built in 1989 with a total expense of 180,000,000 dong, a major part came from OXFAM. Another two-storied building was built in 1992 with a total cost of 220,000,000 dong. The fund came from the provincial government and contribution of local people.

98As reported, it takes rural children an average time of 18 minutes for primary pupils, 22 minutes for
were 13 classes at secondary level but the school had only 12 classrooms. Because of this, six classes at the primary level had to be held on three shifts while one class at the secondary level was conducted in the cramped space under the staircase. Though the school was newly built, many of its windows had already been broken or disappeared, so that pupils often had to suffer from the cold during the winter. Most classrooms lack proper desks and benches. Sometimes pupils had to sit on the floor during class hours.

Most often the necessary number of teachers for both levels (primary and secondary) was not adequately met according to standard regulation. In fact, the primary level lacked five teachers while the secondary level needs eight more teachers.99 Because of this shortage, teachers of Luong Dien school often had to teach 39 hours per week instead of 20 hours as regulated by the Ministry of Education. Some teachers of natural sciences had to take over social science subjects which are not their speciality.

Just nine years ago, this school had a good library where teachers and pupils could come and read books and newspapers. Poor pupils could even borrow text books from this library. It no longer exists today. As the school headmaster explained to me, the budget for the library had been cut off while the staff were asked to look for other jobs. And since the contents of text-books changed so often together with educational reforms, pupils were advised to buy new books instead of borrowing old ones.

Teaching equipment were rarely used. Teachers of physics, chemistry, geography and technology called such a teaching method "day chay", meaning that one gives the children food without meat or fish. Apart from the shortage of teaching equipment, the general standard of Luong Dien school is considered to be better than average compared to other similar schools in the region.

_Curriculum_

According to a directive issued by the Ministry of Education, the number of compulsory subjects and extra-curricular activities at the primary level are 12 and 19 at the secondary level (Pham Minh Hac 1992:62-66). In reality, the teaching program at Luong Dien school was solely concentrated on the core subjects while neglecting other activities due to shortage of teachers. Besides this standard curriculum, much flexibility is allowed to suit the local situation. Subjects such as agricultural techniques, physical education/hygiene and foreign languages were taught in a rudimentary manner while secondary pupils and 73 minutes for upper secondary pupils to get in school (TCTK, 1994:24).

99 The shortage of teachers was not the specific case of Luong Dien. In the whole country, primary schools lacked about 60,000 teachers (Tran Hong Quan, 1995:93).
others were mostly overlooked. Among the compulsory subjects, Vietnamese and mathematics are highly rated because they are major examination topics.

The number of instruction hours at school regulated by MOET is 32 hours per week for primary level and 38 hours per week for secondary level. In reality, primary pupils in Luong Dien spent an average of 16 hours per week at school while secondary pupils spent an average of 20 hours per week. Despite MOET regulation that Thursday is free, the pupils of Luong Dien school were required to attend extra classes on Thursdays (hoc them) and they had to pay 8000 dong extra per month for this.

Table 8.4. Compulsory subjects and their implementation in Luong Dien school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects/Activities</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and social sciences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign language(s)*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical exercise/military training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts (drawing, music, handicrafts)*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salute the national flag (the first day every week)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic activities*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive labour*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total hours of instruction/week</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Those subjects with asterisk (*) were not really taught at Luong Dien School.
Source: Own survey

Generally speaking, apart from doing practical chores such as gardening and cleaning, children spend the greatest part of their school hours studying in the classroom. With an average of just three hours of lessons per school day, they have to spend much more time in order to learn each subject properly. A large part of study

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100 At the school of Luong Dien, foreign languages were taught from the school year of 1993-1994 at the secondary level. In 1995, there was only one teacher of English who had to teach 13 classes with more than 300 pupils.

101 A survey conducted by General Statistical Office reports that pupils of rural schools in the region of the Red River delta spent an average 16 to 22 hours per week at school, see T.C.T.K. 1994:23.
program is geared towards home-work but my observation indicated that most pupils had not enough time to do this.

The average school day for a pupil, apart from attending normal hours listening to the teacher’s instruction, includes the following activities: 1) Lining up for checking personal hygiene, proper clothing and absentees, 2) Cross-check among pupils on homework (before teachers begin with new lessons), 3) Collective singing before and between classes, 4) Physical exercise between classes.

At both levels of primary and secondary, the school organized the so-called 'lop chon' (chosen classes) in which gifted pupils were selected to follow special classes taught by good teachers. The purpose of these chosen classes is to train excellent pupils for competitive examinations at district, provincial and national levels. A few gifted pupils on special subjects were asked to attend specialized schools (truong chuyen) organized by the district where intensive programs on literature, mathematics or sciences were designed for them.

Besides their normal teaching duty, some teachers also organized additional tutorials (lop day them) to earn extra incomes. Previously, such extra teaching often took place during the summer holidays to help those pupils who fell behind in their regular school work. Recently, additional tutorials mainly in Vietnamese and mathematics were privately given by the teachers themselves and these prove to be quite popular. These extra classes were geared towards helping pupils to pass qualifying exams at different levels. Pupils who attended these tutorials are expected to pay extra fees directly to the teachers. Only a limited number of pupils followed such tutorials arranged voluntarily between teachers and those parents who could afford these. Those pupils who did not attend these additional tutorials told me they felt at a handicap vis-à-vis their classmates on such occasions.\(^{102}\)

School life

Pupils and teachers themselves often talked about their school life as something "dry and rigid". To gain more insight on their teaching and studying, this section will examine three major aspects of Luong Dien school with respect to 1) Organisation of the class, 2) method of teaching 3) relationships between teachers and pupils. These may

\(^{102}\) According to Pham Minh Hac, former Minister of Education, the Council of Ministers issued the Decree No.15 QD/CP (1981) allowing teachers to organize the additional tutorials beside compulsory classes (Pham 1990:1). In May 1993, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet decided to prohibit all forms of additional tutorial within public schools and forbid teachers using different manners to push pupils taking part in their private tutorials (Cong Bao 15/8/1993:37).
be helpful in explaining why school curriculum and school life in general have been considered as 'dry and rigid' in the eyes of so many pupils.

At this school, the average size of a class was 35 pupils. Each class was run by a teacher called giao vien chu nhiem (teacher in charge). The teacher was responsible for all educational activities of his/her class, ranging from monitoring the academic progress to moral behaviour of individual pupils. The teacher also had to maintain close contact with the parents, and was responsible for coordinating a wide range of activities of a collective nature.

The teacher in charge would appoint a class leader (some time elected by the pupils themselves) who was to assist him/her in running the daily activities of the class. The class was further divided into several groups, placed under the supervision of group leaders whose tasks were to make sure members would do their homework and carry out assigned duties in a proper manner. Competition among the groups was encouraged to achieve satisfactory results.

The Communist Youth League and the Pioneer Association were the important organizations within the school system whose membership was open only to "good" pupils.

Pupils were required to pay full attention to their teacher during class hours. At the end of a class, the teacher assigned homework to be prepared for the next class. During the classes there was hardly any open discussion between teachers and pupils. Teachers rarely attempted to stimulate curiosity or search for creative ideas among pupils who for the most part remained passive.

During a normal school year, pupils had to take a series of tests and sit at two qualifying examinations during Autumn and Spring terms in order to move up to a higher class. Academic performance alone was not the sole criteria because the final saying rested with the teacher in judging the pupils' "moral character".

Although physical punishment has been officially banned but in practice, many forms of punishment still existed, ranging from corvee labour, beating, enforced isolation or to exposure to the sun for long duration.

At the school as well as at home, the pupils were taught to show respect to their teachers. Teachers often display an aloofness towards their pupils who in turn behaved in a passive and dependent manner. At a societal level, teachers have always been the subject of veneration as emphasized by the motto Tien Hoc Le, Hau Hoc Van, which means that "learn the rites first, then acquire the knowledge". ¹⁰³

¹⁰³ This Confucian ethics date back from feudal times. During the socialist movement of 1960s-70s, such a
Previously, I have pointed out a discrepancy between the general desire of pupils and their parents to reach a high level of education and the increasing rate of dropouts. This reflects a contradiction between the individual wishes and the public demands for education. I will further argue that this contradiction is a consequence of changing socio-economic environment while public education remained rigid and inadequate to meet the demands of individuals and society at large.

Looking back at the educational reforms during the past several decades, we may see that the most sweeping change had to do with the contents of education. The first reform in 1950 paved the way to the establishment of a socialist oriented education. The second reforms in 1956 particularly emphasized the instruction of socialist ideology and morality. It was regarded as the cornerstone of the whole educational system (Nguyen Khanh Toan 1995:158), accompanied by the issue of new text-books to meet this demand. Shortly after reunification, in 1978 the third educational reforms were launched on a larger scale in which new curricula and new text-books were introduced. The number of years of general education was raised from 10 to 12 years (MOET 1993:11; Pham Minh Hac 1992:24-32).

Although no official assessments were made on the third renovated curriculum, for many observers, its teaching contents are overloaded for the primary and secondary pupils. This is particularly true for rural pupils who normally have to work after school hours and have very little time for doing home work. The new text-books have also introduced more complex subjects which often are beyond comprehension for most pupils. For instance, in mathematics the operation of decimal fraction and equation (of the first degree), a subject previously taught at the secondary level, have been introduced to primary pupils (grade 5). Solid geometrics, a rather abstract concept, is a compulsory subject for lower secondary pupils. Furthermore, a number of complex and abstract socio-political topics such as the history of communist party, marxist-leninist ideology are taught at primary and lower secondary levels. These highly complex teaching programs are not only unsuited to young pupils but also cause great difficulties to the teachers themselves. Many of them lack adequate knowledge of these subjects and have to be retrained to meet demands of the new programs. It is estimated that in the whole country, 60 per cent of teachers did not meet the required levels (Nguyen Tri 1994:11).

Why did the education reforms emphasize the contents rather than teaching and learning methods? To understand this, a further analysis on the linkages between traditional education and today's political system would yield more insight. In my

kind of ethics was the target of criticism. Today it is again regarded a good cultural tradition (thuan phong my tuc) and worth being preserved.
opinion, the contents of education have been emphasized because of the ideal pursuit towards socialism. This is a deliberate attempt of the state to propagate through public education socialist ideals, norms, values, attitudes and skills to create the coming generations of "new people" to serve the socialist revolutionary cause. Because of this, Vietnamese children have for many years felt that they were going to school for the state, not for themselves, as expressed in the following statement:

For whom do you study? You study to serve the fatherland, to serve your people, to make your country powerful and your people wealthy. This means that you have to study in order to fulfill your obligation to your country (Ho C.M. 1990:122).

Such a guiding light is repeatedly affirmed in all official documents with regard to education. Recently, this platform of education is particularly re-emphasized by the Resolution No.2 of the CPV:

Education has to hold on the socialist oriented targets in its contents and methods of training [emphasized by this author] /.../ The principal tasks and goals of education are to be aimed at training the people who deeply attach to the ideal of national independence and socialism. (CPV 1997:28-29).

Actually, the idea of going to school to serve the fatherland had a strong impact on the education movement in the early years after independence and during the war against the Americans. But the situation has been changing. If "in the past, going to school was something done with a heroic sense, now it is rather a pursuit of individual interests" (Minister of Education Tran Hong Quan, 1995:47). This constitutes perhaps the most striking change in the minds of the people. It is the Minister of Education himself who found a "problem" in putting collective interests ahead of the individual demands in the field of education, as he said: "The biggest error of our education during the past years was that the individual roles were not seriously considered" (Tran Hong Quan 1995:95).

In a study on education in the Third World, Gould suggests a linkage between private and public demands for schooling: "Did the 'chicken' of private demand come before the 'egg' of public demand, or was it created by public demand?" (Gould 1993:13). However, we may notice that these two demands might not always come together. This is particularly true of countries undergoing a transition from the centrally planned economy to a market oriented system (Carnoy & Samof 1990).

Another problem of public education is the teaching method. As pointed out earlier, there was no effort from the teachers' part to stimulate creative thinking among pupils. Teaching was mainly a solo performance by teachers, leaving little space for two way communication or feedback. This is not something unique that occurred at Luong
Die nn  schoo l alone , but rather a common feature of the entire education system, as educationalist Pham Minh Hac aptly puts it:

Teaching methodology is the most conservative aspect of our educational system. It does not seem to change in a positive way but still remains the same: the teacher reads and pupils take notes, heavy on learning by rote and light on thinking. Pupils learn in a very passive way. (Pham M.H. 1992:31).

This is again confirmed by the Minister of Education Tran Hong Quan:

We are still using the methods of the past decades, even of a half century ago (1995:50).

There was no room for allowing initiatives and creativity among pupils and students which are vital for their future development and personal growth (Tran H.Q.1995:94).

Despite its obvious shortcomings, this solo teaching approach is still commonplace at all levels of the educational system. It is deeply rooted in the conservative pedagogical methods and is difficult to change, all the more so in the light of the recent emphasis on 'learn rites first' (tien hoc le) within the school system. It is, in my opinion, a reflection of the traditional education that preaches obedience, and inherited from a patriarchal culture still prevailing within the society.

**Shifting the burden**

Commenting on the current education crisis, Tran Bach Dang, a well-known social activist, writes:

One cannot attribute the deterioration of the education system solely to economic difficulties. While this might be one of the reasons, surely it is not the crucial factor. The underlying cause is the attitude that looks down at education as something "parasitic", in such a way that its existence depends largely on the government's 'largesse' (Tran B.D. 1992:13-14).

In line with this view, I will consider the shifting of educational expenditures since economic reforms to understand how this change impacts upon education in rural areas. My central interests are focused on: 1) Teacher's salary, 2) School financial budget and 3) Educational expenditures of the peasant households.

"The teacher is a peasant whose teaching is a second job"

This statement, quoted from the Minister of Education Tran (1995:75), sounds like a humorous story, but it is quite true for the teachers of Luong Dien school. Among its 52 teachers, about thirty per cent hold a university or college degree and more than half have experienced 15 years or more in teaching. Most of them were trained and grew up during the years of the subsidy system. They had at one time cherished the ideal of
bringing knowledge to the peasants' children. However, today they all face the practical problem of how to survive while going on with teaching. Their monthly salaries vary from 120 to 360 thousand dong, depending on training level and teaching experience. Those teachers who were assigned to teach additional classes had a supplementary income of about one hundred thousand dong per month. With an average salary of 250 thousand dong monthly, they had to cover all expenses for their daily needs. Seventy per cent of them were married and had one or more children to feed. Incomes of this kind could only cover just one third of their daily necessities, although there was a recent rise in teachers' salaries.\textsuperscript{104} Worse yet, during the 1980s teachers' pay was often late.\textsuperscript{105} Since the end of the subsidy system, housing facilities for those coming from outside Luong Dien were no longer available. Thus a part of their meagre salary had to be set aside for housing and transportation costs.

In order to make ends meet, teachers of Luong Dien had to look for extra jobs. For instance, among the sixteen teachers at the local secondary school, two worked as wood carvers, three engaged in petty trading while others organized private tutorials at home. Almost all teachers were involved in farming and raising livestock to supplement their incomes. A few teachers had to quit their teaching career for other jobs. Those still engaged in teaching often mused about the popular notion about their "noble profession",\textsuperscript{106} as the deputy headmaster of Luong Dien school told me:

None of us teachers have ever entertained the idea that one could become wealthy by teaching. But teachers often expect to be held in high esteem by society for their knowledge, dedication and character. But this is no longer true in the present condition. I have worked in this school for 16 years but I may quit next year. The low salary is not a problem for me. I can survive with my family support to go on teaching. I love children and my job but I can't accept this insult to our teaching profession.

Teachers' salary has become a controversial topic for debate in recent years. However, the problem cannot be easily resolved by the government. With some 800 thousand teachers at all levels, their payroll takes up more than 60% of total government budget for the administrative and non-production sectors (Vice Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh 1994:4). There has been talk of slimming down the teaching staff to reduce the

\textsuperscript{104}The daily necessities consist of costs for health, education, clothing, fuel, light, water, transportation, communication, housing and food. Teachers however claimed that about 60 to 70 per cent of their incomes were spent for food. The teacher's salary is ranked the fourteenth among 18 occupations having the lowest salary in society (Hoang Tuy, 1996:3).

\textsuperscript{105}The average teacher's salary in the school years of 1985-1990 was 30 thousand dong per month. It was common for the state to owe the teacher's salaries from several months to years (Ban NNTW 1991, vol.2:224-25).

\textsuperscript{106}Between 1981 and 1990, in the whole country, about 20,000 teachers had left teaching occupation for other jobs. In 1995 the school system lacked 56,000 teachers (MOET & UNICEF, 1995:30). This estimation of shortage by MOET was based on a applying ratio of 1.15 teacher per existing classroom.
budget burden. While public statements call for an enhancement of education as "the primary national goal", what actually takes place at the grass roots shows the huge gap between reality and lofty rhetoric.

The school--'an adoptee of local government'

The head-master of Luong Dien school often used this metaphor to talk about the lamentable financial state of his school. It is true that for many years the central government could afford to pay teachers' salary. But the huge education network had become such a burden for the state and was now passed on to the local government.

According to the present authority, the commune is now responsible for covering the basic facilities of the school system (creche, kindergarten, primary and secondary school), such things as building and repairing classrooms, supplying desks, benches, black-boards and tables, etc. During the period of the collective regime, material facilities were supported by the co-operative. Decollectivisation took away from the school this important material source. Instead, the central government today allows the local authority to set up an educational budget in which the main source is from the people's contribution. The government is only responsible for paying the teacher's salary.

The educational budget of Luong Dien commune has been set up on the basis of three main sources:

1) Contributions by local people: The contribution level is, however, not certain. It depends on the situation of the commune each year. In 1995, the rate of contribution to education budget was equivalent to 4 kg of paddy per person. With a total population of 8,962 persons who were obliged to pay, the total amount to be collected was 35,848 kg of paddy.

2) Financial support by the district or province. This source is supplied in drops in order to encourage school material improvement. For instance, communes will be supported by an amount equivalent to 15 per cent of total expenditures

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107 During the 1980s, to save the public budget, the National Assembly decided to cut off 20 per cent of the staff in the administrative and non-productive sectors. Under this decision, many provinces tended to pressure a 'cut' on education and training branch (Minister of Education Tran Hong Quan 1995:81).

108 For many years, the education expenditure as a percentage of total public expenditure was between 3.7 per cent and 4.3 per cent. This budget was raised up to 6.7 per cent during 1980s and 8 per cent in 1992, (Ban NNTW 1991:230; MOET & UNICEF 1995:39-40). The CPV Resolution No.2 (1997) decided to raise education budget up to 15% in the year 2000 (CPV, 1997:35). In reality, the fund supplied by the central government for education met only 50 per cent of the needs. The rest of the expenses were passed on the local government (Nguyen Canh Tuan 1995:3-8).

109 One can pay in paddy or in cash. The local price of paddy in 1995 was 1,800 dong per kilogram. Total amount to be collected for commune's educational budget in 1995 was equivalent to 64,526,400 dong. The use of this budget is however decided by the local authority, not by the board of the school.
for each new school/classroom to be built.\textsuperscript{110}

3) Thirty per cent of total collected tuition are to be transferred to the commune educational budget. This source of tuition fees provides an amount of four or five million \textit{dong} every year.

Although the contribution to education budget was a great effort of the local people, the use of this budget was not under the control of the school but depends on the 'kindness' of the local leadership. As reported by the school headmaster, between 1992 and 1996, the commune of Luong Dien had spent a total amount of 50 million \textit{dong} for building a teacher's meeting room and providing some wooden furniture. Despite of this, all expenditures for office equipment (blackboard chalks, note books, pens and so on), which were previously supplied by the district educational services now fell on the teachers themselves.

The only financial source the school could have was thirty per cent of total collected tuition, which it was allowed to keep for its own activities. As reported by the school headmaster, this amount, about four million \textit{dong} every year, was just enough to cover the teachers' refreshment. In such a financial condition, other activities of school cannot be undertaken without more additional contributions of the pupils.

\textit{Education no longer as 'social welfare'}

Officially, education in Vietnam was free of charge until 1988 although since the early 1980s, extra contributions were already required. In December 1988, the National Assembly decided that pupils were to pay a part of tuition. This decision was made official by the Directive No.44/HDBT (4.1989) of the Council of Ministers, according to which pupils of grades one, two and three at primary level were still allowed free schooling but those of higher grades had to pay a fee. The minimum fee is equivalent to one kilogram of rice per month for pupils of grades four and five (primary level), two kilograms for lower secondary level and three kilograms for higher secondary level. According to the Minister of Education, "the average tuition of one US dollar per month is considered the cheapest in the world" (Tran Hong Quan 1995:62). Cheap as it might seem, many parents had difficulty to pay. Besides, there were other contributions to worry about. My investigation among the pupils of Luong Dien reveals that tuition fees took only about 20 per cent of total educational costs, as shown below:

\textsuperscript{110}The Director of Educational Department of Cam Binh district told me that a fixed amount to support localities in building new school was 5 million \textit{dong} for one classroom while the total expenditures to build a standard classroom were between 40 and 50 million \textit{dong}. In a plan proposed by Luong Dien commune, from now to the year 2000, there will be two new classrooms for secondary school and four classrooms for primary school. According to the school headmaster, this plan would meet only one third of the school's need.
Table 8.5. Financial contribution by pupils (in VND)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Amount paid/year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A set of text-books</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Notebooks, pens, ink, etc.</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reference books</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Tuition fees*</td>
<td>45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Construction fees*</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Examination costs</td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. School insurance costs</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fund for 'Little Plan' (Ke Hoach Nho)</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fund for young gifted pupils</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Fund for supporting calamity victims</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Red-Cross fund</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pioneer's/Youth League fees</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Extra classes*</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Pupils card</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Miscellaneous (lotto, gifts, feasts)</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total amount:</strong></td>
<td><strong>213,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

1. At the time of survey, 1USD was equivalent of 11,500 VN dong. These items and figures were compiled from information received directly from the pupils themselves, and cross-checked with their parents (and in some cases, with their teachers). In reality, while primary pupils did not have to pay tuition fees, their share of contributions were the same as those of higher levels.

2. Those items with asterisk (*):
   - Fees did not apply to primary pupils.
   - Construction fees mentioned here were spread among all pupils, not to be confused with contributions to commune education budget borne by all commune members.
   - The payment for extra lessons mentioned here was for additional classes on Thursdays, not to be confused with payment for private tutorials.

Sources: Own survey, 1995.

Although the level of these contributions might not seem unreasonably high, for many households they did take up a considerable share of their meagre incomes. If the average annual income of a peasant household in the Red River delta, as reported by the *Vietnam Living Standard Survey 1992-1993*, is 4,588,900 dong (SPC-GSO 1994:220), the education expenditures for each pupil (as listed above) took up about 5 percent of total household incomes, 60 per cent of which was already to be spent for food.111 Because of this, most parents often regarded schooling expenses for their children rather low on their priority list, next to food, fuel, health care, transportation, life-cycle obligations, e.g., weddings, funerals, house-warming, etc.

While the costs for private tutorials in Luong Dien were not so heavy as those in urban areas, these were often subjects of bitter criticism among the pupils and their parents on public education.\footnote{Additiona l tutorials" in the school system were regarded a national disaster' (quoc nan). This issue has been discussed openly in public media. Since then, it had been banned by a Prime Minister's decree in 1996. For further discussion, see Khanh Huu 1992:4; Nguyen Thac Han 1995:8; Kim Thuy 1995:1-6; Nguyen Lan 1996:3.}

**Conclusion**

It was my purpose in this chapter to analyze the causes of depressed state of education in the conditions of socio-economic change in Vietnam. My own empirical observations on a village school supported by available statistics point to a rather high drop-out rate during the 1980s and 1990s. Most of these dropouts were between 12 and 16 years of age-- an age where children were able to take part in the work force. This might explain a decrease in the number of pupils attending school at the secondary level.

My findings seem to indicate that intrinsically it is not the people who turned their backs on education. The current sad state of education is mainly due to the contradiction between individual pursuits and the public demands for education. Under the centrally-planned economy, such appeals as 'schooling for socialism' and attractions of 'becoming state cadre' often played an important role in pursuing education. The shifting to a market oriented economy has opened new avenues for life strategies, while the old demands of education system remain stagnant, lagging behind individual ambitions and labour market demands. This suggests that the problem of education must be seen in the context of a dialectical relationship with socio-economic factors and political system. In this relationship, "education is both agent of change and in turn is changed by society" (Fagerlind & Saha 1989:225). As the educational system (goals, contents and methods) does not adapt to socio-economic changes, there is always the risk of crisis.

Like many other theoretical and empirical studies on education in the Third World (Brown 1991; Weiner 1991; Gould 1993; etc.), my observations on education in Vietnam tend to strengthen the notion that one can only understand the uncertainty of education in relation to the role of the state.

Additionally, the empirical data presented in this chapter suggests that child labour studies which neglect the larger context of society and education might not yield valuable insights for practical actions (Standing 1982:611-613).

"Children's weakness and their ignorance might undermine the nation's stamina" (de Swaan, 1992:6). More than anywhere else, the prevalent rhetoric in Vietnam is in
full agreement with this logic, that "regardless the difficulties, education must be open (to all)", (Party General Secretary Do Muoi), and that "in a short time, in the field of education (we) are determined to catch up with other countries in the region" (Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet). The truth remains, however, that lofty ambitions from the leadership are far removed from present-day realities, pointing to the highly depressed state of education at all levels, as expressed by none other than the highest official in charge of national education:

How can we expect to enter the modern age when just 50 per cent of our total students are at the level of grade 5 (primary) and lower, and about six to seven per cent of our students just finish secondary school? (Minister of Education Tran Hong Quan 1995:82).

The story of children’s education today reminds us to remember a popular saying of the old times criticizing the dream of a peasant to strive to become a member of the intelligentsia, the highest of the four social classes in traditional Vietnamese society (intellectual, peasant, craftsman and trader) but the realities of life often brings him back to where he starts from:

*Nhat sy
Nhi nong
Het gao
Chay rong
Nhat nong
Nhi sy
(First rank the scholars
Next the peasants
When rice runs out
You turn around
First rank the peasants
Next the scholars).

The saying dates from a bygone age but it still seems to be valid today.
Annex to chapter 8

Table 8.6. School dropout rate in Vietnam by levels and school years (in percentage).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School years</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Higher secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981 - 82</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 - 83</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 - 84</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 - 85</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 86</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 - 87</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987 - 88</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 - 89</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 - 90</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 - 91</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8.7. Differences in dropout rate by areas in Vietnam in the school year of 1989-1990 (in percentage).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Higher secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole country</td>
<td>12.78</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>19.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanoi</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>12.96</td>
<td>8.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Chi Minh city</td>
<td>6.65</td>
<td>23.88</td>
<td>18.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nghe Tinh</td>
<td>12.15</td>
<td>24.09</td>
<td>16.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tay Ninh</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>38.73</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8.8. Enrollment rate by income quintile in Vietnam (percentage).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>(1) Poorest</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>(5) Richest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from 6 to 10</td>
<td>66.90</td>
<td>77.57</td>
<td>81.49</td>
<td>84.96</td>
<td>84.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 11 - 14</td>
<td>18.58</td>
<td>27.82</td>
<td>34.90</td>
<td>44.60</td>
<td>54.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 15 - 17</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>14.52</td>
<td>25.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 18 - 24</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: According to Vietnamese standard, age group between six and ten is expected to attend the primary school, ages between 11 and 14 are in low secondary school, ages between 15 and 18 are in upper secondary school and ages between 18 to 24 are in vocational training or university.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>% of sec. pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>44198</td>
<td>28138</td>
<td>16060</td>
<td>57.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>39673</td>
<td>26281</td>
<td>13392</td>
<td>50.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>37927</td>
<td>25544</td>
<td>12383</td>
<td>48.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>38743</td>
<td>28477</td>
<td>10266</td>
<td>36.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Changed as compared to 1977-78**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>36.0 %</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Annual Reports by the Department of Education, Cam Binh district archives.

**Note:** Population of the age group between 5 and 14 in Cam Binh in 1979 and 1989 was as follows: In 1979: 45,250 (1979 Census, Cam Binh archives). In 1989: 51,246 (TCTK 1989:16)
Chapter 9

CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON CHILDREN’S WORK IN A TRANSITIONAL ECONOMY

Going beyond the conventionally defined notion of child labour, this study has examined various types of children’s work in an environment of rapid socio-economic change, in this case the village of Gia o located in the heart of the Red River delta in northern Vietnam. The study has pointed out that while one cannot deny the intrinsic value of the work performed by children, serious contradictions exist between the day-to-day practice of work and education. It also attempts to analyze the changes which occur in the patterns of children’s work and the social changes that accompany them. The three major areas in which children’s work takes place have been scrutinized, namely domestic work, farm work, and non-farm work, in particular wood work. Considerable attention has been devoted to the impacts of cultural constraints, social institutions and formal education on the processes of childhood, socialization and work. In this concluding chapter, I shall first review some major findings presented in various chapters before a theoretical summing up can be made.

The concentration of the analysis on the three main types of work involving children, viewed from a comparative perspective between the periods before and after the economic reforms, should help illustrate the changing patterns of children’s work in rural areas in the context of structural transformation. The research has pointed out three important changes in the patterns of children’s work: 1) Children’s involvement in market employment shows an upward trend; 2) Work away from home and for wage are desired and children’s work is becoming more commercialised, diversified and mobile; 3) Perception of childhood is changing as traditional values are eroded as children enter into the labour market at an early age.

As far as the types of work are concerned, a close examination of children’s work reveals that during the period prior to the economic reforms, children were mainly involved in domestic tasks which enabled adults to take part in production work organized by the agricultural co-operative. Because of the policy of controlling and limiting the private economy of the co-operative, work performed by children chiefly took place in the non-productive sector and household chores. In the field of farming, data collected indicates that children’s involvement in the co-op’s work was only haphazard, temporary or under the guise of retainers of their family "contract tasks". Children’s activities in the non-farm sector was insignificant. Apart from a small number of village children engaged in petty trading, there was no available information indicating that children were involved in non-farm work at a large scale during that period.

Agricultural decollectivization implemented in the mid 1980s and the advent of wood carving industry changed all that. It brought about a labour market on a scale
never seen before in Giao village, involving a large number of boys and also girls. Research findings indicate that while age and gender were essential factors in the division of labour, there seemed to be a gender dichotomy in children's work: most girls were deeply involved in housework and farming under the supervision of their mothers, while boys moved into the wood work at an early age, sometimes as young as six or seven, in the hope of improving household incomes and their own. Learning the wood trade and becoming wood workers were desirable for both children and their parents. Earlier on I have indicated that children under 16 made up about 40 per cent of total labour force in the wood trade of Giao village, most of them working as apprentices. Traditional wood carving had almost disappeared in Giao village during the collective regime, but it has been revitalized and consolidated in recent years, offering an opportunity for village families to get away from rice monoculture. Although wood carving is basically a traditional craft, the production organization in this trade today has undergone drastic changes. The emergence of national and international markets for wooden furniture together with a new force known as cai thau (entrepreneurs) with their sub-contract system made this long traditional craft more commercialized and heavily dependent on capital-related factors.

While non-farm work appears as both the means and the end for most peasant households, children were flocking into this sector with the obvious intention of earning money. The nature of children's work in this type has also changed accordingly. As pointed out previously, it is essential for this study to consider not only the types and extent of work performed by children but more importantly, the nature of labour relations and the significance of children's economic activities. As I see it, under the centrally-planned economy, most children worked in the domestic context, on the family farm, under the supervision of parents or relatives and were basically unpaid. Nowadays, many children express their strong desire to engage in waged work and to become relatively independent by entering into the labour market. In the past, children's wish to earn money was not encouraged since the prevailing attitude presumed that money would demean human values and spoil the child. Involving children in exchange labour among kin families and neighbours was regarded as "normal", a major tenet of peasant morality, in contrast with the current attitude measuring work in terms of money. At the societal level, it is now generally accepted that to maintain personal and family well-being, one needs money, which should be earned from one's labour (Hong Phuc 1989, Mac Van Trang 1991, Hanh Nhu 1992). The widely accepted popular perception: "since you are poor, you are clean" has changed into something like: "since you are lazy, you are poor". The peasants, after the ups and downs of social change, suddenly found out that they had to work harder in order to survive. When rice land was redistributed to individual households after Doi Moi, all sources of production were mobilized to reach one target: raising family incomes. Under the collective system, those bent on making money for self improvement were condemned as pursuers of materialistic gains. Today they are praised as pioneers contributing to the construction of socialism. The reversal of both official and popular perceptions of ethics regarding the role of money in society has had a great impact on children's thinking. It is no surprise to see that most children express their desire to find paid jobs, motivated by a strong desire to have money of their own. This is certainly nothing wrong with such a desire but it is a turning point which has a far-reaching effect on the behaviour of chil-
children and young people nowadays. This "materialistic pursuit" is a direct result of the changes of the socio-economic system accompanied by an increasing demand for higher living standards for most people and particularly at a time when prosperity is a social objective popularly accepted and officially recognized. In a sense, children's preference for wage employment can be partly attributed to the capitalist development, and at the same time, a reflection of the rapid technological evolution and of the strong impact made by the mass media (Hear 1982; White & Tjandraningsih 1992; White 1996).

Previously, I have explored the process of socio-economic transformation in Vietnam at the macro level. More than a decade of structural adjustment has led to substantial changes in which economic activities in rural areas are becoming more diversified, the income gap between the rich and poor is widening while the structure of labour market also becomes fragmented. It is precisely in such a situation that my study examines the position of children with regard to the division of labour inside the household as well as in the labour market.

In the domestic context, I have analyzed the multifold nature of children's housework. Unlike a number of researchers who contend that children's housework is "interesting, educational and socially useful" (Shah 1996:5), my study reveals that house tasks performance is not only a process of children's socialisation but also an expression of the labour division within peasant households in which children are expected to make their contribution in maintaining the household economy. Parents usually encourage and often order their children to take part in various house tasks so that adult household members could take part in productive work and wage earning activities. However, while adults regard housework as "socially useful", children in general dismiss the idea, considering house chores as monotonous, boring and time-consuming. Most children, both boys and girls, express their wish to work in "well-defined tasks" with direct earnings rather than "hanging around the house". Furthermore, I would argue that it is the intensification of seasonal migration of male labourers in search of work elsewhere, the orientation of boys towards non-farm work and the feminization of agriculture that give girls an extra burden with house tasks where lie, if I may use the expression, the deep roots of domestication of girls. Particularly, available information from Giao village also indicates a new development in children's domestic work: the revitalisation of hiring children as house servants-- a practice which was virtually abolished in northern Vietnam several decades ago. Most cases of child house servants are found to be girls from poor families or in specially difficult personal circumstances. The demand for child domestic workers not only reflects a deepening social polarization but also reveals the sad fact that a number of poor girls now have no alternatives but hiring out their labour to sustain their families' well-being.

Regarding the types of farm work, I have pointed out the major trends of children's employment in agriculture. Children's work on the farm becomes more intensive after agricultural decollectivisation. Their labour is now considered a kind of commodity while work on the farm today is no longer attractive and this type of work is largely carried out by women and girls. During the period of collectivization, child work on the farm was regarded as a "supplemental source". Since the individual peasant household has become a unit of production, children are regarded as a real component of the household labour force and are put to work at an age earlier than ever before.
Some older children, particularly girls, also look for opportunities to market their labour outside the parental home. But work for wages in the agricultural sector is not so attractive because of its low remuneration. In the eyes of children and young people, farming is regarded as a lowly occupation. As men and boys go out searching for waged work elsewhere, girls become their mother's subordinates and are kept behind on the farm. Generally speaking, girls regard this kind of task as something of an "unwelcome obligation" while most of them wish to escape from rural life.

As we have seen, the development of commercialized wood craft has increasingly drawn children into wage employment on a large scale. My research has described some of the forms of woodwork involving children, their motivation of entering into woodwork as well as different attitudes toward child woodworkers, viewed from both parents' and employers' perspectives. While the wood trade in the eyes of villagers was a source of envy, and work in this sector became desirable, a majority of child woodworkers were found to work as unpaid apprentices or with little pay. Traditionally, the wood trade was a male-dominated occupation. Recently, a small number of girls started to learn woodwork, wishing to earn money from this trade. My observation shows that sometimes the age-based division of labour in woodwork is well-defined for certain tasks, but the main trend division at the work place is still gendered. Most girls taking part in woodwork did simple tasks such as polishing and refining carved wooden objects, for which they received lower wages compared to other paid-tasks done by their male workmates. Although some tasks were carried out by adult men only, wage rates were, in principle, not based on workers' age but rather on their skills. I have indicated that in a number of household-based workshops, parents carried out tasks as assistants while the main carvers were their children and youth workers. In small enterprises owned by entrepreneurs, apart from assistant trainees working without pay, adults and child waged workers were found doing similar tasks. It is interesting to note that in some cases, adult workers doing simple tasks received lower wages as compared to child workers and youth working with their skills. Like the findings reported by White and Tjandraningsih (1992), I found it was quite common that wages were paid on the basis of work skills rather than determined by age and therefore, there was no evidence of a children's wage rate. It is however important to remember that there was a clear differentiation between children working for wage and those working as assistant trainees. While apprenticeship was widespread in the wood trade, there was evidence that both craft masters and employers often took advantage of the training period during which trainees worked for them for a duration of about two years or longer without pay. The position of apprentices was actually vulnerable to exploitation by their masters/employers. Because the trainees' monthly financial contribution added considerably to the earnings of their masters/employers, these often took advantage of their positions as relatives, acquaintances or sponsors to prolong the training period, which also helps save production costs. For children who worked as skilled workers, their wages were often held back by their masters/employers who used them as a financing source in running their workshop.

As pointed out in chapter 6, child labour in the wood trade is relatively mobile. Children from elsewhere come to the village of Giao for apprenticeship while others move from the village to work in other localities, mostly in wood workshops in urban areas where they could earn high wages, making furniture for export, for example. In
workplaces far away from home, child woodworkers were often in a vulnerable position as they had to depend heavily on their masters' employers. Employers' abuse of child workers occurred often at the workplace, ranging from scolding, beating to cutting off wages, but children rarely reported these incidents to their parents.

Effects of woodwork on the mental and physical development of child workers were worth a close examination empirically. While research on child workers elsewhere reported that "children still working in garment factories had better nutrition and better health care than those who had been dismissed" (Boyden and Myers 1994, quoted from White 1996:6), my own study reveals that most working children in the wood trade had problems with their health. As reported by child woodworkers themselves and confirmed by the local medical staff, such illnesses as backache, curvature of the spine, astigmatic eye condition, skin diseases and respiratory disorders were common-place.

In brief, work for wage of child workers, in the home or in the labour market, on the farm or in the wood workshops, is fraught with uncertainties and the child's position is vulnerable. Child workers are often more liable to be exploited than adult workers because of their age, their work and daily life being controlled by others whose main concern was profit-making.

An important question this study wishes to explore is the relationship between work and education of working children. Based on official sources of education statistics, I have pointed out that school dropout occurred at a high rate immediately after the so-called "output contract system" was applied in the agricultural sector of northern Vietnam in the early 1980s. I found that the dropout rate was particularly high at the lower secondary level, among pupils between 12 and 16 years of age. My analysis reveals that while the poorest families could manage to send their children to the primary school, only a few children were able to make it to the secondary level and remarkably, none of them reached the tertiary level. Statistics also indicate a relative decrease of girls in school attendance as compared to boys.

High rates of dropout seem to be closely related to the increasing involvement of children in work. For a duration of 5 years, official sources of data indicate that the proportion of children at the 13-15 age group involved in economic activities increased from 30 per cent in 1989 to 73 per cent in 1994. At the grass-roots level, my investigation among the working children in Giao village shows that 70 per cent of those children who took part in the wood trade were no longer at school. There is little doubt about the fact that children left school before completing the required level to participate in the labour force. My study also reveals that most children were well aware of the fact that they might not expect a bright future when leaving school at an early age. In my opinion, the fact that only a small percentage of pupils did go on to higher levels of education is partly due to the depressing state of public education. I found that most dropouts did so reluctantly and felt regret afterwards, while alternative forms of education were virtually non-existent to provide them a chance for further education. Many parents and children themselves strongly felt that leaving school was a right thing to do, otherwise the children might miss opportunities to earn money. This was reinforced by the fact that after finishing the required level of education there was no guarantee of proper employment. Furthermore, as the rapid socio-economic changes force peasants to re-adjust their life strategies, the school system, in the eyes of the children themselves, is "dry and rigid", which means that it could not provide them with
practical skills to cope with the real world outside.

The shifting from the subsidized system to a more market-orientated one has deleterious effects on education in various ways. Firstly, it turns the school system, which is in principle under the care of the state, more and more into private hands, and the education costs previously borne by the state have now been passed on to the children and their parents. Though one may argue that tuition fees are cheap (Tran Hong Quan 1995), the fact shows that many parents have difficulty paying them. Moreover, the conservative pedagogical approach stressing children's obedience and passiveness and the constraints of "rites" within the school system, inherited from a patriarchal culture, have much to do with the current depressing state of formal education. My analysis of school dropout in relation to children at work suggests that it is necessary to provide these children an alternative form of education, enabling them to be better prepared for the highly competitive labour market.

In classical anthropological terms, it has been assumed that one way to understand human behaviour is to put it in a proper context. The argument expounded so far in this study is actually centred upon a "common-sense assumption that the various behaviors of a human population are interrelated, rather than separate and random, and that some degree of understanding may be reached by seeking linkages between behaviors" (Dyson-Hudson et al. 1998:42). The issue of working children has attracted a lot of attention from social researchers and is becoming a topical theme in global debates. However, despite numerous recent child labour studies, an essential aspect of child work has been virtually overlooked: the social context within which work occurs. Avoiding the shortcomings of previous works elsewhere, this study explores an integrated approach to the issues of child labour by emphasizing the dialectical relationship between social reality and social cognition in order to interpret changing patterns of children's work in the rapidly changing socio-economic environment of present-day Vietnam. Considering child labour as a social construction, this study looks at the practices of children's work as individual strategies which are directly related to the socio-economic system and the cultural environment in which the child is born and brought up. It is apparent that the rapid development of capitalist relations in economic activities is an important factor affecting people's way of thinking and changing their behavioural patterns. Without a doubt, the emergence of rural industries offers wage employment to children, but it is not the capitalist development alone that drives children into market employment. A clear-cut gender-based division of labour, differentiation in work performance between boys and girls, between older and younger children are reminders that cultural constraints play an important role in children's working lives. It is from this perspective that one may be able to perceive the meanings and values of children's work in relation to family, kinship as well as obligations and moral norms that are deeply attached to every specific task performed by them. I submit that the patterns of children's work as observed in their daily life, the interaction between parents and children, the interplay between employers and child workers are all symptomatic of the social realities, and the behavioural determinants at the decision-making level of the household are in fact adaptive responses to such a social reality. In this dialectical relationship, structural changes at the macro-level are translated into economic behaviours at the micro-level, and the patterns of child activities
are only reflections of certain choices among available alternatives. Individual choices are influenced by structural changes which, in turn, function as agents of change.

Such a theoretical assumption carries important implications when one looks at the changing concept of childhood in relation to children's work and education, which lies at the heart of the debates on child labour in the world today.

During the past decades, childhood has universally been considered as a realm of innocence, and the children's place is in the school, not at the workplace. The recent campaign against child labour leads to a rethinking of the concept of childhood, which tends to treat childhood as the interplay between work and school, particularly among poor children. In a sense, I concur with the view that regards childhood as a social construction and therefore, any approach to childhood without taking into account the cultural-social environment and the prevailing economic system is bound to be inadequate in understanding the issues involved.

An examination of the relationship between the child and the state in Vietnam may be helpful to understand the question of child labour in the light of recent social upheaval. For decades, the socialist revolution placed emphasis on the role of children, who were supposed to be trained to become the vanguard of socialism. Children's education was seen as a vehicle to achieve that goal. In this respect one recalls public utterances made by the country's leadership such as: "It is necessary to understand that children and teenagers are not to be put to work but on the contrary, they have to be prepared for future roles" (To Huu 1970:149, see also TVTUHH 1973). The task of "cultivating the people" aimed at creating new generations to serve socialism was given high priority, and children's education was regarded as a natural public commitment taken on by the state and the Party (Pham Van Dong 1995:2). However, since the centrally-planned economy collapsed, and children began to leave school in great numbers, such socialist ideals are no longer convincing. The state tries to cope with the vagaries of the market mechanism by promulgating a series of laws and regulations reiterating compulsory education and protection of children. Nevertheless, these bureaucratic measures do not seem to bring a halt to the ever-increasing flow of children into the labour market at the expense of further education.

In idealizing the roles of children, one tends to forget that "the issue and problem of child labour may change, but will not disappear; and indeed it has not disappeared, even in countries where access to education up to age 15 or so is obviously universal and where virtually no children can be described as 'absolutely' poor" (White 1996:3). Meanwhile, the mass media in Vietnam has begun to call on the public authorities to embark on a practical programme to solve the problem of child labour because "a total abolition of child labour without taking into account the individual circumstances of the children and the nature of their work may make it worse for them and their families" (Le Kim Dung 1998:9). As a consequence, the contradictions arising from the problems of combating child labour would require a fresh, more pragmatic approach. And as long as there still exists a gap between the ideal solution and the actual reality, the issue of child labour remains a formidable challenge for all concerned.
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Ho Chi Minh  


Hoai Huang  

Hoang Chi Bao (ed.)  

Hoang Giang  

Hoang Huy Tien  

Hoang Tuy  

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Weissbach, L.S.

Werner, J.


Werner, J. & Luu Doan Huynh

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White, B.

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**GLOSSARY**

This glossary includes specific words, slang phrases, proverbs and sayings that have appeared in this text. Most of them are widely used in Northern Vietnam but some should be understood in the context of Giao village.

**Words and phrases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/Phrase</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ac tat</td>
<td>Malignity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am</td>
<td>Yin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anh chi em ruot</td>
<td>Full siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anh chi em ho</td>
<td>Patrilineal/matrilateral same-generation cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anh/chí cung cha khác me</td>
<td>Senior half-brothers/sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba khoan</td>
<td>Three points contract system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac</td>
<td>Father's older brothers/sisters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Bao Ve Di Tich Lich Su Van Hoa</td>
<td>Committee for Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban Khanh Tiet</td>
<td>Village Committee for Rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat kinh vo bo me</td>
<td>Disrespect to the parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh cong</td>
<td>Public evaluation of workpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai thau</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam</td>
<td>Bran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam lon</td>
<td>The mixture of vegetable and bran for pigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can bo trung uong</td>
<td>Central cadre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cau tu</td>
<td>Praying for having a male heir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chau dich ton</td>
<td>The eldest son who will inherit and continue the lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi bo dang</td>
<td>The village cell of the CPV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi ho</td>
<td>Extended family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi tieu</td>
<td>Work norm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cho nguoi</td>
<td>People market (where labourers are hanging around to hire out their labour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chong</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu quoc ngu</td>
<td>The national script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chua Huong</td>
<td>Perfume Pagoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con gai</td>
<td>Daughter/girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con trai</td>
<td>Son/boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con sen</td>
<td>Maid-servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong diem</td>
<td>Payment points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong khoan</td>
<td>Payment based on piece-work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cong nhat</td>
<td>Fixed daily payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuc</td>
<td>Marigold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuoi lai</td>
<td>Re-marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuong hao</td>
<td>Local tyrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam dang viec nha</td>
<td>Responsible for housework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam dat</td>
<td>Lewdness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan ba</td>
<td>Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan ong</td>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan ngu cu</td>
<td>Adopted residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dao Hieu</td>
<td>Filial Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day cu</td>
<td>Full-day old (referred to newly born child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day nam</td>
<td>One full-year old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day thang</td>
<td>One full-month old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Den</td>
<td>Temple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Di hoan
Dia chu
Dieu cong
Doi cac cu
Doi cay
Doi cay
Doi cong
Doi Moi
Doi san xuat
Doi thu cong
Doi trong cay
Doi truong tuan
Doi tuong chinh sach
Dong
Dong ho
Dua o
Duc Ong
Duong

E chong
Ghen tuong
Ghen ty
Gia danh
Gia danh tuyet tu
Gia pha
Giao vien chu nhiem
Giap

Gio to
(Go) lim
(Go) mun
(Go) po-mu
(Go) trac
Gui (ban) con vao cua thanh

Hang xao
Hiep tho
Ho dang cha/ho noi
Ho dang me/ho ngoai
Ho gan
Ho xa
Hoc cach lam nguoi
Hoi Bao Tho
Hoi Cac Gia
Hoi Dong Nien
Hoi ho
Hoi tho moc
Hoi Tu van
Hop tac xa mang non
Hop tac xa nong nghiệp
Hu
Huan Dich Thap Dieu
Huong uoc

To get castrated (a slang referring to people who receive sterilisation)
Landlord
Work distribution
Elderly people team
The planting team (mostly female workers)
The plowing team (mostly male workers)
The guarding team
Subjects covered by a social policy
The dong (or: the piaster, Vietnam currency)
Lineage
House servant
Guardian Deity
Yang

Those women who have difficulty in finding a husband

Jealousy
Envy
The family
Heirless family
The family record
Teacher in charge
An organisation of village male members aged from 18 and older
The ancestor's death anniversary
Erithrophreu fordii o (wood)
Ebony wood
Filkeniahodginisisi (wood)
Delbergia cochinchineminis (wood)
Commending the child to deity

Rice miller
The guild of worker.
Father's patrilineage
Mother's patrilineage
Close relatives
Distant relatives
To learn the way of living
Association for Protection of Elderly People
Buddhist Association of Elderly Women
Association of people of the same age group
Credit association
Association of carpenters
Association of Confucian scholars
Co-operative of young persons
Agricultural co-operative
Naughty
Ten Commandments to the Children
Village convention

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khoan</td>
<td>Contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoan ho</td>
<td>Household contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoan san pham</td>
<td>Output contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoan viec</td>
<td>Contracted tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoan 100</td>
<td>Contract 100 (comes from the directive numbered 100 (issued by the CPV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khong con</td>
<td>Childlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinh Le</td>
<td>The Book of Rites (Confucian text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam giup</td>
<td>To help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lanh</td>
<td>Cool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao dong chinh</td>
<td>Main labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao dong phu</td>
<td>Assistant labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao dong gian tiep</td>
<td>Indirect labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lap tu</td>
<td>Nomination of a male heir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam dieu</td>
<td>Garrulosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lam thue</td>
<td>Hired labour for wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay cong lam lai</td>
<td>Using labour to make a profit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Dragon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lop day them</td>
<td>Additional tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lop mau giao</td>
<td>Kindergarten/nursery school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luong thuc dieu hoa</td>
<td>Harmonizing food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ly</td>
<td>Unicorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ly truong</td>
<td>The village head (old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>Apricot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat net</td>
<td>Undisciplined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mau</td>
<td>Land measurement unit, an area of 3,600 square meter (about 1/3 hectare).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minh Dao Gia Huan</td>
<td>Family Instruction (Confucian text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minh Tam Bao Giam</td>
<td>Collection of Chinese wisdom sayings (used as text book to teach children).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam Dieu Bac Ho Day</td>
<td>Uncle Ho’s Five Commandments to Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam nu thu thu bat than</td>
<td>Boy and girls are not allowed to be close (Confucian ethics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoan</td>
<td>Good behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nganh phu</td>
<td>Supplementary production branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngu Kinh</td>
<td>The Five Classics (Confucian Text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguo ich ky</td>
<td>Selfish people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguo lon</td>
<td>Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nguo thien ha</td>
<td>Strangers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngu Thuong</td>
<td>Five Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nha tre</td>
<td>Crèche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nha van hoa</td>
<td>Cultural House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhan con nuoi</td>
<td>Adopting a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhi Thap Tu Hieu</td>
<td>Twenty four filial duties of the children (Confucian ethics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nhuong nhin</td>
<td>Self-denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nong</td>
<td>Hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O do</td>
<td>Bonded labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O doi</td>
<td>Servant for life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O mua/o vu</td>
<td>Seasonal servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O nam</td>
<td>Servant on annual basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ong gia khot-ta-bit</td>
<td>A conservative man (slang),</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Buddhism
Deputy head of village
Rich peasant
Phoenix
Craft and trade guilds
Little worker/apprentices
Retribution based on karma
Transition
Tortoise
Land fund
Land owned by (Buddhist) Pagodas
Communal land
Land owned by the village communal house
Land owned by specific patrilineage
Ancestral cult portion land
A land measurement unit, an area of 360 sq.m2.
Chief
Workpoints records
Unfortunate fate
Nun
The cause of cultivating the people
Broken rice
Three Principles (Confucian ethics)
Three Thousand Words (Chinese characters)
Three Follows and Four Virtues (Confucian ethics regarding women’s morality)
Trimetrical Classics
Premature marriage
"Leaving the wife at large" (a village custom)
Village Tutelary Deities
Houseboy
Goddess
Priest
Village teacher of classical Chinese
Teacher
Christianity
Craftsman
Foreman
Carvers
Carpenter
Confucian Book of Family Rites
Balanced paddy
Custodian
Good practices and customs
Poll-tax
Founder of patrilineage
Withering [slow] money (slang word)
Fresh [quick] money (slang word)
Grave-visiting festival
Sentiment
Clinic station
Rice husk
Proverbs and sayings

Be nguoi con nha bac, ion xac con nha chu
(Though young as she/he is, she/he is the child from the higher patrilineal offshoot, though old as [you are], you are only a child from a lower branch)

Ca ao ai vao ao ta ta duoc
(If a fish comes to my pond, it is mine no matter where it comes from).

Cha me dat dau con ngoi day
(Children have to sit at the place arranged for them by their parents).

Co tien mua tien cong duoc
(With money, you can even buy angles).

Cong Dung Ngon Hanh
(The Four Woman Virtues: Housewifery, Tolerance, Nice Words, Good Character).

Con hu tai me, chau hu tai ba
(Children are spoiled by their mothers, and grandchildren are spoiled by their grandmothers).

Con gai la con nguoi ta, Con dau moi that me cha mua ve
(A daughter is someone else’s child, a daughter in law is a real child bought by the parents)

Con dai cai mang
(Parents have to bear responsibility for their children’s foolishness).

Dat vua chua lang
(The land belong to the King, the pagodas belong to the village)

Day con tu thuo con tho
(A child needs to be taught at an early age).

Dep trai di bo khong bang mat ro di Honda
(An ugly boy riding a Honda motorbike is more respectable than a handsome boy going about by foot).
Dong tien la Tien, la Phat, la suc bat cuoc doi
(With money, you can be regarded as Angles and Buddha,
and money make you stronger in life)

Gai thap tam, nam thap luc
(A girl is mature at 13, a boy at 16)

Giu cua nhu giu ma to
(Keeping the valuables as careful as keeping the ancestral tombs).

Gia don non nhe
(To enforce discipline (on children), just use a big stick).

Giau con ut, kho con ut
(For better or worse, parents prefer to stay with the last-born son).

Giot mau dao hon ao nuoc la
(A drop of kinship blood is much more precious than a pond of water).

Khi doi, dau goi phai bo
(When you’re hungry, you’ll have to crawl).

Khong thay do may lam nen
(Without a teacher, you will be nobody).

Mot me gia bang ba con o
(An elderly mother can work as hard as three house servants).

Mua khong den mat, nang khong den dau
(One’s face and head are safe from rain and sun-- meaning the preference of light
jobs).

Nam ton nu ty
(Veneration for men and disregard for women).

Nham mat lam ngo
(Turn a blind eye).

Nhan cu vi bat thien
(Idleness is the root of all evils).

Nu nhi ngoai toc
(Females are outsiders of the patrilineage)

Phep vua thua Ie lang
(The King’s Law surrenders to the village custom)

Ra duong hoi nguoi gia, ve nha hoi tre nho
(If you want to know your way around, ask the elderly;
If you want to know what really goes on in the home, ask the children).

Ruong be be khong bang nghe trong tay
(Having a lot of rice land is no better than possessing a skill)

Ruong sau trau nai khong bang con gai dau long
(A first-born daughter is worth more than a piece of fertile rice land or a good
buffalo).

Sinh nghe, tu nghiep
(To be born into the trade and to die for the trade).

Tam nam bat phu, tu nu bat ban
(Three sons do not make you rich, four daughter do not make you poor).

Thang gu lung lam cho thang ngay lung an
(The hard worker do more but in the end, lazy-bones eat)

Thuong con cho roi cho vot, Ghet con cho ngot cho bui
(If you love your children, give them the rod and the stick;
If you loathe your children, give them sweets and tidbits;
or: Spare the rod and spoil the child).

Tien hoc le, hau hoc van
(Learn the rites first, then acquire the knowledge).

Ton su trong dao
(Veneration for educational ethics).

Trai o re nhu cho chui gam chan
(Son-in-law living at his in-laws is just like a dog living under the pantry).
Van hay chu tot khong bang thang dot lam tien
(A well-educated man is worth less than an illiterate boy making a lot of money).

Vang nhu chua ba Danh
(As quiet as a pagoda).
Samenvatting

Werk dat geen naam mag hebben.
Veranderende patronen van kinderarbeid in een Noord-Vietnamees dorp.

Deze studie hanteert een niet-alledaagse definitie van kinderarbeid bij de bestudering van verschillende vormen van kinderarbeid binnen een snel veranderende samenleving als de Vietnamese, met name in dorpen van de Rode Rivierdelta.

De studie verwijst naar contradicties binnen de discussie over het terugdringen van kinderarbeid op grond van alledaagse ervaringen van kinderen die zowel werken als naar school gaan.

Drie belangrijke vormen van kinderarbeid worden aan een nadere studie onderworpen: werk dat thuis plaats vindt, arbeid op het platteland en in kleine werkplaatsen die zich toelopen op houtbewerking van allerlei aard.

Om bovenstaande redenen wijdt ik aandacht aan de invloed van culturele factoren, van sociale instellingen en van onderwijs in het algemeen op opgroeiende kinderen die (loon)arbeid verrichten.

Drie belangrijke veranderingen hebben zich op het terrein van de kinderarbeid voorgedaan: (1) kinderen nemen in toenemende mate deel aan het arbeidsproces; (2) loonarbeid, met name buitenshuis, wordt als wenselijk beschouwd waardoor kinderarbeid vercommercialiseerd, gevarieerd en mobiel van karakter wordt; (3) opvattingen over kind-zijn zijn aan sterke veranderingen onderhevig naarmate meer kinderen op steeds vroegere leeftijd de arbeidsmarkt opgaan.

De studie concentreert zich niet alleen op verschillende soorten en maten van kinderarbeid, maar ook, en met name, op de aard van de arbeidsrelaties en de economische betekenis van kinderarbeid.

Onder de centraal geleide economie werkten kinderen meestal, onbetaald, in familie of gezinsverband onder leiding van ouders of familieleden in de landbouw-coöperatie en binnen hetgeen aan privé-activiteiten van het huishouden was toegestaan. Tegenwoordig willen kinderen heel graag loonarbeid verrichten en willen ze betrekkelijk onafhankelijk de arbeidsmarkt op. In het verleden werden kinderen ontmoedigd om geld te verdienen, aangezien geld hun menselijke waardigheid zou aantasten en het kind zou verwennen. Door kinderen in familie- of nabuurschapsverband te laten werken werd dit werk als maatschappelijk aanvaardbaar beschouwd, hetgeen in schril contrast staat met de opvatting dat werk in monetaire termen dient te worden opgevat. Sociaal
gesproken gold de uitdrukking “je bent van smetten vrij, omdat je arm bent”, maar tegenwoordig geldt “wie arm is, is lui”. Deze omkering van officiële retoriek en volks ethiek over de waarde van geldelijk gewin heeft een grote invloed gehad op de percepties die kinderen zelf hebben bij hun verlangen betaald werk te vinden en eigen geld te verdienen. Er niets mis met dit verlangen, maar het illustreert een omslag met verreikende gevolgen op het gedrag van kinderen en jonge mensen. Deze “jacht op materie” kan als direct gevolg worden gezien van de veranderingen die zich op sociaal en economisch gebied hebben voorgedaan en die vergezeld zijn gegaan van een toenemende vraag naar een hoger levenspeil, en met name op een moment dat welvaart algemeen als een sociaal doel wordt aanvaard en officieel wordt erkend.

Een belangrijke vraag die in deze studie aan de orde komt is die van de relatie tussen werk en school van werkende kinderen. Officiële onderwijsstatistieken laten zien dat schooluitval in de landbouwsector significant toename met de invoering van het “produktie contract systeem” in het begin van de jaren tachtig. De uitval was het hoogst op het niveau van de eerste klassen van de middelbare school, bij leerlingen tussen de 12 en 16 jaar oud. Mijn analyse laat zien dat de armste families nog wel in staat waren hun kinderen naar de lagere school te sturen, maar dat de doorstroming naar de middelbare school stagneerde en dat geen enkele leerling was aan het vervolgonderwijs kon deel nemen. Een relatieve daling in participatie van meisjes was vergeleken met jongens eveneens te constateren. Vroegtijdige schoolverlaters zochten vrijwel zonder uitzondering hun heil op de arbeidsmarkt. De studie laat zien dat de meeste kinderen zich er van bewust waren dat hun toekomst weinig rooskleurig zou zijn wanneer zij op zeer jonge leeftijd hun school vaarwel zouden zeggen. De overgang van een op overheids subsidies gebaseerde economie naar een die meer op de markt is gericht heeft zeer nadelige gevolgen gehad voor het onderwijs op velerlei gebied. De schoolkosten zijn afgewend op ouders en kinderen terwijl het schoolsysteem volgens de leerlingen gekenmerkt wordt door droge kosten en rigiditeit.

De argumenten die in deze studie worden aangedragen, concentreren zich op een voor de hand liggende aanname dat het gedrag van mensen onderling met elkaar is verbonden, in plaats van gescheiden en toevallig, en dat er een zekere mate van begrijpen kan worden bereikt als er naar verbanden tussen gedrag wordt gezocht (Hudson 1998: 42). Door de tekortkomingen van eerdere studies te vermijden, streeft deze studie naar een integrale benadering van kinderarbeid als een verschijnsel dat een wederkerige relatie uitdrukt tussen wens en werkelijkheid. Alleen zó kan een snel veranderende situatie als die in Vietnam volledig worden begrepen. Door kinderarbeid als een sociale constructie te beschouwen, kan er naar de alledaagse praktijk gekeken worden als individuele strategieën binnen sociaal-economische en culturele contexten waarin het kind wordt geboren en
opgroeit. Het lijdt geen twijfel dat de opkomst van de plattelandsindustrie loonarbeid voor kinderen heeft mogelijk gemaakt, maar het is niet de kapitalistische ontwikkeling per sé die kinderen naar de markt drijft. Een scherp gemankeerd arbeidsdeling naar gender-rollen, differentiatie in arbeidsprestaties tussen jongens en meisjes, en tussen jongere en oudere kinderen herinneren ons eraan dat culturele beperkingen een dwingende rol spelen in het leven van kinderarbeiders. Vanuit dit perspectief kan men de betekenis en de waarde van kinderarbeid naar waarde schatten in relatie tot gezin, familie of huishouden, kortom in termen van verwantschap, maar ook zien als verplichtingen en morele normen die diep zijn verankerd in de specifieke taken die door kinderen worden uitgevoerd. De patronen van kinderarbeid op het niveau van het leven van alledag, de interactie tussen ouders en kinderen, het samenspel tussen werkgevers en hun jeugdige werknemers zijn alle symptomatisch voor de sociale werkelijkheid, en vormen gedragsdeterminanten op het beslissingsniveau van het huishouden. Ze zijn tevens aanpassingsstrategieën aan een realiteit waarin kinderarbeid alledaags is.