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

Van Chinh, Nguyen

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
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, Giao is an administrative unit under the commune of Luong Dien, Cam Binh district, Hai Hung province.  

Giao 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, Giao 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 (Ngô Vi Lien 1931:80).

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, Giao village had 396 households. However, the 1994 tax registration book of Giao 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 Giao village compared to an average of 4.1 persons for the Red River delta (TCTK 1995:151). My own household survey in 1994 indicated that 69.2% of village households were nuclear families with two generations, including parents and

---

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. Giao 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 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 1), 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 sao/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:

---

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 Gial 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 Giao 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/capita (kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>189.7</td>
<td>168.1</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>163.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>159.1</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>116.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>113.0</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>370</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).25 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

---

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 cooperative 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 (person)</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 nguoi (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.

---

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 soy 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 (Kleine n 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 Gia o 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 *Than Thanh Hoang* (Village Tutelary Deities). Gia o 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 di
rich lich su va van hoa) consisting of seven members was set up by the Elderly Associ-
ation 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 halls were also rebuilt and are protected with great care.\textsuperscript{30} 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 patrilineage 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

\textsuperscript{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 towards 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.