UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Ties that Mobilize: Migration, Native Place, and the Politics of Belonging in Urban Vietnam

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Timothy Karis

Committee in Charge

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Chair
Professor Richard Madsen
Professor Edmund Malesky
Professor David Pedersen
Professor Nancy Postero

2013

The dissertation of Timothy Karis is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, San Diego

2013

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPV:	Communist Party of Vietnam
NEZ:	New Economic Zone
KDTM:	*Khu Do Thi Moi* (New Urban Areas)
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
GONGO:	Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization

NOTE ON NAMES

I have employed pseudonyms throughout this dissertation to protect the identities of my study participants. The presentation of names follows Vietnamese conventions whereby surnames precede given names, and titles usually accompany the given name only. For example, the family name of Dang Quan is "Dang," yet he would be referred to as "Mr. Quan."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the many people and organizations who provided guidance and support to me as I completed the research and writing for this dissertation. This project was completed through the generous funding of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, San Diego, the Institute for International, Comparative, and Area studies, and the Foreign Language and Area Studies program of the United States Department of Education.

During my fieldwork in Hanoi, I benefitted from an affiliation with the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), allowing me access to archives, unpublished reports, and the helpful opinions of local social scientists that greatly enhanced my investigations. I would like to extend particular thanks to Dr. Dang Nguyen Anh for his insight, candor, and personal warmth during my stay. Countless people in Hanoi and the villages of the Red River Delta provided invaluable information that helped me better understand practices of mobility and relationships to native places, but my main interlocutors Bien and Dai deserve special mention for their eager willingness to entertain even the strangest of questions. Finally, it would be difficult to underestimate the value of Dang Viet Anh's astute observations, as well as his friendship, in making my time in Hanoi ever enjoyable and thought-provoking. His subsequent help in providing feedback on my written analyses has also been much appreciated.

Stateside, this work has been supported by a wide range of helpful professors, colleagues, and friends at UCSD and elsewhere. First and foremost, the members of my

doctoral dissertation committee have helped steer me in productive directions throughout my time in the doctoral program. My advisor, Dr. Suzanne Brenner, provided endless positive support and feedback, both in the construction of my arguments and—drawing upon her gifts in written expression—the way those arguments can be most effectively presented. Dr. Nancy Postero embodies everything that a professor and mentor should be, making herself constantly available to graduate students and offering advice to address any analytical dilemma. Dr. Edmund Malesky's well-informed feedback throughout my career has helped me elucidate the often opaque interactions of politics and society in Vietnam. Dr. David Pedersen has productively lent his critical eye to my conceptualization of migration within wider frameworks of global exchange. And Dr. Richard Madsen's far-ranging knowledge of Asian cultures has also proven extremely helpful in advancing correct interpretations and tracking down useful resources. Among my colleagues inside and outside of UCSD Anthropology, Eli Elinoff, Allen Tran, Alicia Snyder-Frey, Anna Pagano, Ana Paula Pimentel-Walker, Will Dawley, Ed Kennedy, Erik Harms, Clarissa Reese, and Alex Leonard deserve particular thanks for their feedback and many stimulating conversations about anthropology, research, and wider matters.

This dissertation and doctoral degree would have been impossible to complete without the love and ongoing support of my parents, Arthur and Virginia Karis; my stepmother, Polly Karis; my brother and new sister Ben and Olivia Karis-Nix; my "aunties" in Massachusetts, Elaine Karis and Miriam Cronin; and all of the rest of my family members and friends who are still with us and who have passed. Finally, my deepest gratitude is reserved for my wife, Nirada, whose unfailing love and positive energy during even the busiest of times I will always remember and appreciate.

VITA

2013 Doctor of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego

2006 Master of Arts, University of California, San Diego

2001 Bachelor of Arts, Summa Cum Laude, Skidmore College

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Ties that Mobilize: Migration, Native Place, and the Politics of Belonging in Urban Vietnam

by

Timothy Karis

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Professor Suzanne Brenner, Chair

Based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Vietnam, this dissertation explores how the material and symbolic relationships maintained by full- and part-time residents of Hanoi to native places in the Red River Delta support urban migration and life in the reform-era city. Independent migration from delta provinces to Hanoi has surged dramatically over two decades of deepening market reforms, blurring the distinctions between urban and rural lives once maintained so carefully by the Communist Party of Vietnam. Yet many urban migrants face ongoing legal and social discrimination in Hanoi, tied to an outmoded system of household registration and widespread anxieties about the "floating population" threatening to overwhelm the city.

My dissertation shows how Hanoi's many "unofficial" residents navigate a system of differentiated urban citizenship by forging communities around common provincial origins, and by mobilizing native-place relationships to find employment, housing, services, and social support in the city. It also pinpoints the changing relationships to native places among more established urbanites, as strong material interdependence transforms into more symbolic expressions of "returning" through ancestor rites, periodic trips to natal villages, or membership in one of Hanoi's increasingly popular native-place associations. Rather than fading from relevance, therefore, I argue that the structures and identities of village life can assume new roles amidst rapid urbanization, as the foundations for emerging forms of urban organizing and mutual assistance, and as valuable repositories of personal and collective identity. This perspective also reveals the dialogue inherent in Vietnamese citizenship even in the absence of participatory politics, as individuals and families "vote with their feet" and influence policymaking through independent decisions to migrate and pursue new livelihoods, and as they sustain alternative conceptions of belonging to those promoted by the state.

Chapter One:

Situating the City and Country in Post-Socialist Vietnam

Welcome to the achievement of the millennium in Hanoi! At this sacred moment, our fellow citizens…from urban to rural, from mountain forests to the islands, are heading to the capital…we appreciate all of your contributions; that's the true spirit of 'the country for the capital and the capital for the country.' We are grateful to President Ho Chi Minh, the revolutionaries, our patriotic ancestors, heroic martyrs, the generations of workers, farmers, intellectuals, and the soldiers who have built and defended the capital, protecting every inch of the land of our ancestral roots...

Hanoi is beautiful today: travel through the streets and you will find achievements in processes of innovation, integration, and development... The capital city lights up with a new position, a new look, and a new vitality. To honor our ancestors and the glorious history of the nation, all of the people of Vietnam must vow to unite as one concerted force, bringing together our spirit and energy, wisdom and talents; strive to make Hanoi more civilized, modern, and prosperous, alongside other capitals of the world.

—President Nguyen Minh Triet, Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi, October 10, 2010

October 10th , 2010 (10/10/10), marked the official "Millennial Anniversary of Hanoi" (*Dai le 1000 Nam Thang Long-Ha Noi*), commemorating the city's founding 1000 years earlier as Thang Long ("Rising Dragon"), capital of the nascent Dai Viet state. Like others living in Hanoi, I had been closely following the 50-foot "countdown clock" perched atop Ba Kieu Temple, one of downtown Hanoi's most prominent landmarks, preparing for the festivities and for the city's virtual shutdown as the date approached. The Vietnamese government spared no expense for the occasion—the final bill reached $60 million (Masis 2010)—and the activities included parades through decorated streets, visits from foreign dignitaries, and performances of patriotic plays and songs. Images capturing the city's triumphant anti-colonial history projected onto massive outdoor screens, while banners hung throughout the streets declaring that "the

greatness of Ho Chi Minh will forever live on in our cause!" (see Fig. 1.1). Vietnamese national heroes and leaders, including President Nguyen Minh Triet (quoted above), delivered rousing speeches to citizens and soldiers celebrating the cultural, political, and military achievements of Hanoi, where the nation's "ancestral roots" reside.



Figure 1.1: Decorated streets ahead of the anniversary celebration (left) and a parade passing through Ba Dinh Square during the festivities (right)

Despite these invocations of the Hanoi's past, over two decades of deepening market reforms (called *Doi Moi*, or "renewal"), the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has fixed its gaze squarely on the future of its capital city, and the anniversary celebration reflected this orientation as well. Efforts to raise Hanoi's stature in the years leading up to 10/10/10 included ambitious attempts to reshape the city, tame its more disorderly spaces through an initiative called "urban civilization" (*van minh do thi*) (Labbe and Bordreau 2011), and keep up with industrial demands and a burgeoning population by expanding its boundaries into the surrounding countryside. A common sight on the news during my time in Hanoi was officials in suits and hardhats unveiling plans to update Hanoi's infrastructure, or announcing agreements with foreign contractors to expand the

"new urban zones" (*khu do thi moi*) appearing along the city's suburbs. President Triet's speech also oscillated strategically between Hanoi's historical foundations and modern "development" (*phat trien*), praising past achievements while promoting the ongoing construction of a "new city" that is "modern, civilized, and prosperous." The mingling of nationalist imagery and socialist political institutions with urban development models characterized by scholars as "neoliberal" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2102) has come to define life in reform era Vietnam, providing a complex—and often contradictory—set of governing logics and expectations of citizens living in Hanoi, as this dissertation reveals.

On the world stage, the millennial celebration would be a coming out party for the "New Hanoi" (*Ha Noi Moi*) (Labbe and Boudreaux 2011), a chance to display the long strides the city has made over two decades of deepening economic reforms, and its emerging status as a modern, global metropolis comparable to others in Southeast Asia. For the domestic audience, organizers sought to emphasize Hanoi as a shared cultural and economic resource of the people under the watchful direction of the Communist Party. To this end, leaders invited artistic troupes from across Vietnam to showcase their local cultural identities, and buried a time capsule containing items representing each of the nation's provinces. The recurring message was that modern Hanoi emerged from contributions of an entire nation—the "workers, farmers, and intellectuals" from "urban to rural, from mountain forests to the islands"—and thus its cultural and economic resources *belong* to the Vietnamese people: "the country for the capital and the capital for the country," in President Triet's words.

But to whom does Hanoi really belong? And just who belongs in the city's reordered, "modernized" spaces? Only two decades ago, Hanoi remained relatively homogenous and circumscribed—not to mention economically stagnant (Koh 2006)—primarily home to government bureaucrats and families of "good class background" (Li 1996) resettled there after the American War. Since market reforms took hold through the 1990s and 2000s, however, Hanoi has undergone dramatic and often contentious demographic and spatial transformations, prompting pressing questions over social difference, citizenship, and experiences of belonging in the city. Scanning the crowds at the anniversary celebration—middle-class families buying sweets for their children; couples stealing private moments on the back of a motorbike; young men drinking beer and chatting in provincial dialects; police in variously-colored uniforms keeping the parade routes clear; national leaders addressing onlookers from red podia; sunburned tourists (and anthropologists) snapping photos—reveals a cosmopolitan picture of a complex and dynamic city on the move. But even as Hanoi "lights up" with a "new vitality," lingering governing institutions and ideologies from the socialist era, as well as the exclusionary urban development patterns in the reform era, have created conditions where legal and social belonging can remain elusive for some citizens living in the city.

Among the 10/10/10 attendees are countless migrants from the Red River Delta countryside, working full- and part-time in Hanoi's informal sector as construction workers, taxi and delivery drivers, domestic workers, independent recyclers, or general laborers. I myself came with Van, a 28-year-old motorbike taxi driver originally from Nam Dinh who is enjoying a rare day off with his wife and young daughter. These are

the Vietnamese citizens whose labor has literally built post-socialist Hanoi, their sweat and blood absorbed into the fabric of the changing city. Yet because of Vietnam's restrictive system of household registration (*ho khau*), many "peasants" (*nong dan*) from the countryside—once situated at vanguard of the socialist movement (Pelley 2002)—lack residential rights and labor protections upon moving to the city, and after the celebrations will, like Van, return to small, crowded boarding houses located along Hanoi's urban fringes.

And while the festivities delighted many visitors, some middle-class Hanoians betray a more conflicted view toward the anniversary, calling such lavish spending for an ephemeral cause "wasteful," a "distraction" from Hanoi's real urban growing pains. One friend of mine avoided the events altogether, complaining that the streets are "too crowded" and questioning the wisdom of spending the "people's money on a dozen musical stages" rather than "arranging for the unemployed." That day and throughout my time in Hanoi, locals pointed to increased traffic and pollution woes, rising costs of living, and the powerlessness they feel against heavy-handed urban development efforts which have taken over public spaces and forced people from their homes and properties (Wells-Dang 2010; Labbe and Boudreaux 2011; Harms 2013). An older shopkeeper living near my apartment dismissed the anniversary celebrations as designed "for *them,*" tourists, migrants, visiting officials, people from *elsewhere* who might be wooed by the showy displays; the groomed spaces and repainted facades framing the performances and parades, he insisted, reflect the vanity and propaganda of the Communist Party and not the "real Hanoi."

Beyond the legal and social dimensions of "urban citizenship" (Holston 1999) in Hanoi—policy discriminations, exclusionary development patterns, and political input over the future of the city—the affective and symbolic dimensions of belonging among urban residents have also taken on new significance in the reform era. Hanoi in many ways still represents a "city of migrants" (Li 1996) where few have roots more than few generations deep. Newcomers and long-resident Hanoians alike report strong "feelings" (*tinh cam*) of attachment to their ancestral homelands (*que huong*) in the countryside—where their ancestors are buried and extended family members remain—that often rival or surpass feelings of attachment to the city. Especially in the context of rapid urbanization and marketization, and the alleged proliferation of "social evils" (such as gambling, prostitution, and slum development), native places serve as valuable sources of cultural values and personal and social identity, bulwarks against the immorality and anonymity of urban life. Practices of "returning home" (*ve que*) to native villages for death anniversaries (*ngay gio*), holidays, and "revitalized" pre-revolutionary rituals (Taylor 2007) allow Hanoians to escape the market-related anxieties of the city and achieve a sense of belonging through regular acts of reconvening with living and deceased relatives, while also demonstrating fidelity to the homeland. President Triet certainly recognized of the symbolic and ideological power of "native place" in his speech during the anniversary celebration, extending the idiom of origins to claim Hanoi as the "land of our ancestral roots"—a not-so-subtle reminder to those who might view Ho Chi Minh City as the real cultural and economic heart of the nation.

While the millennial anniversary of Hanoi provided the occasion for reflection and planning interventions among Vietnamese leaders pushing for Hanoi's expansion and modernization, it also provides an opportunity for scholarly reflection the lived experiences of belonging underlying the city's recent demographic, economic, and spatial transformations. To do so requires moving between the structural forces influencing the governance and development of Hanoi—in this case the institutions and policies of the state along with the demands of foreign contractors and international advising bodies—and the everyday practices of citizens navigating the opportunities, exclusions, and subjectivities associated with urban life under the conditions of late socialism.

This dissertation explores the politics of belonging in urban Vietnam by examining relationships between the management and production of space, practices of mobility, and native place relationships among residents of Hanoi. This perspective reveals the dialogue inherent in Vietnamese citizenship even in the absence of participatory politics, as individuals and families "vote with their feet" and influence policymaking through independent decisions to migrate and pursue new livelihoods, and as they sustain alternative conceptions of belonging to those promoted by the state. We will see how relationships to ancestral homelands figure in prominently in these practices: how citizens from villages in the Red River Delta *mobilize* native-place ties to overcome obstacles to belonging in the city; and how native-place ties *mobilize* urban residents to create new civic alliances in Hanoi and increase their participation in, and contributions to, activities in ancestral homelands.

Drawing on recent ethnographic fieldwork in Hanoi and villages of the Red River

Delta, the chapters that follow will show how the material and symbolic relationships maintained by full- and part- time residents of Hanoi to native places in the Red River Delta are in fact crucial to sustaining urban migration and life in the post-socialist city. For example, we will see how migrants from the Red River Delta countryside navigate the city's system of differentiated urban citizenship by forging communities around common provincial origins, and by mobilizing native-place relationships to find employment, housing, services, and social support in the city. We will also see the changing relationships to native places among more established urbanites, as strong material interdependence transforms into more symbolic practices of "returning" through ancestor rites, periodic trips to natal villages, or membership in one of Hanoi's increasingly popular "native-place associations" (*hoi dong huong*). Rather than fading from relevance, therefore, this dissertation shows how the structures and identities of village life can assume new roles amidst rapid urbanization, as the foundations for emerging forms of migrant community building and mutual assistance, and as crucial repositories of personal and collective identity in the post-socialist city.

Beyond documenting the material and symbolic roles of native-place ties in Hanoi, this dissertation also explores the political relevance of new mobility patterns, native-place networks and associations, and "unofficial" urban residence. Anthropologists have an important role in detailing the alternative cultural logics and practices of contestation that run up against coercive projects of "improvement" (Li 2008) or slow down the steamroller of urban modernization in post-socialist settings like Vietnam and China (Nonini 2008). In the current study, I show how the actions of

citizens take on direct and indirect political significance in Hanoi: how independent urban migration and community building can be a force for official recognition and policy change; how the resurgence of once-discredited cultural practices can reshape official ideologies; and how new forms of citizen resistance destabilize exclusionary planning interventions. One of the main recurring arguments made throughout the dissertation involves the actions of Vietnam's "peasantry" in destabilizing and reshaping state policy, from contributing to the downfall of socialist-era agricultural collectives and frontier resettlement projects, to current practices of mobility and ritual revitalization that pressure state authorities to expand citizen rights.

By addressing the economic, political, and symbolic aspects of belonging among residents of Hanoi, this dissertation puts into conversation a number of recent streams of anthropological scholarship. First, building on work exploring experiences of citizenship and the superimposition of market logics in states with legacies of authoritarianism (Ong 2006; Ong & Zhang 2008; Kipinis 2008), we will see how socialist technologies of control over people's lives in Vietnam yield to new governing technologies where citizens are to assume increasing responsibility for their own welfare, as the uneven retreat of mobility restrictions both necessitates and enables the emergence of private networks among Hanoi's unofficial residents. Also, in targeting the more symbolic and affective dimensions of belonging and urban-rural connections in the Red River Delta, this dissertation also extends research scholarship pinpointing nostalgia for "traditional culture" and the revitalization of local identities and rituals during periods of political-economic turbulence (Chau 2010; Schein 2000; Ivy 1995). This primarily theoretical

opening chapter introduces these themes and their applications to the current project, building a conceptual framework for the more historical and ethnographic chapters to come. It also provides an overview of the organization of the work, and introduces my field site and the methodologies employed to guide the research.

Ethnographic Context

This dissertation draws upon eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Hanoi and in villages of the Red River Delta between the years of 2009-2010. Hanoi's changes were palpable even in this time period, as it spanned the lingering effects of a mid-2000s economic "boom" (Bradsher 2006), and also a relative slowdown with the global recession. My ethnographic vantage point also changed with my spaces of residence in the city, as I moved from the downtown region to the rapidly-transforming "New City" in Hanoi's south about halfway through my time in Vietnam. Given Hanoi's size and complexity, below I introduce the physical and cultural geography of the Hanoi and the Red River Delta and describe how and where I focused my investigations.

Research Setting

Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam and represents one of two "special class municipalities" in Vietnam, along with Ho Chi Minh City in the south, reflecting the two primary poles of population and political-economic influence in the country. Following a major administrative reordering in 2008, Hanoi now comprises ten "urban districts"

(*quan*) within about 20 kilometers of the city center and eighteen "rural districts" (*huyen*) annexed over time from the surrounding countryside (see Fig. 1.1).

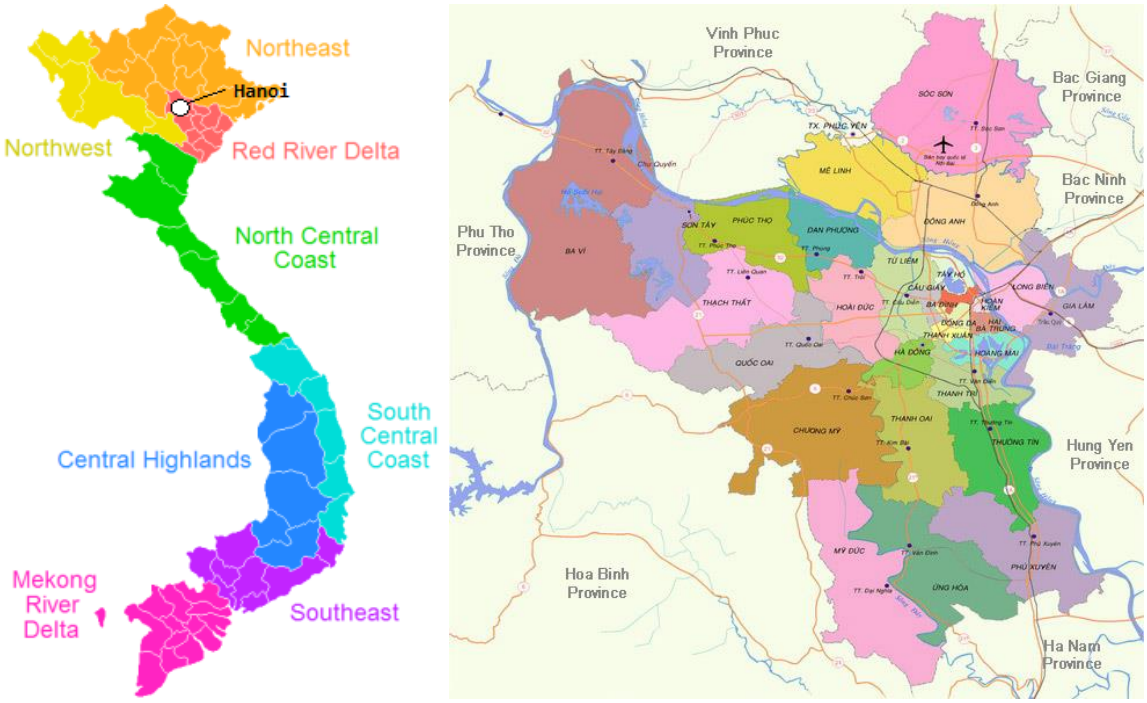


Figure 1.2: Hanoi and the regions of Vietnam (left), and the 28 districts of Hanoi (right)

Hanoi's urban districts are further divided into 145 wards (*phuong*), some of which have retained a distinctive urban identity for centuries, while others map onto the boundaries of once-independent villages absorbed into the urban sprawl (see Koh 2006). As a result of expanding borders and ongoing in-migration, Hanoi's population grew from just over one million inhabitants in 1992 to 6.5 million in 2010 (GSO 2010). The biggest leap occurred in 2008 after the ratification of an ambitious growth initiative that annexed the whole of Ha Tay Province and further incorporated districts from six other surrounding provinces, increasing Hanoi's population by 3 million overnight.

Hanoi's most central areas are located in the "Old Quarter" (*Pho Co*) of Hoan Kiem District—a preserved[1] area of narrow lanes and early 20th century shophouses—and among the Franco-Vietnamese government buildings and socialist-inspired "square" in Ba Dinh District. In the older parts of the city, networks of narrow lanes (*ngo*) extend from main thoroughfares and house most of Hanoi's population, bustling with informal economic activity (sidewalk cafes, street vendors, improvised barber shops). Living options remain somewhat limited for foreigners in Hanoi[2], and an anthropologist cannot simply take up residence anywhere for research purposes. To ensure a balanced picture of life in Hanoi and sufficient exposure to diverse residents, I lived for eight months in a residential area of Ba Dinh District and for ten months within the "New City" in the southwest of Hanoi, near the border of Dong Da and Cau Giay districts. Since around the year 2000, districts in this area—particularly Hoang Mai, Thanh Kuan, Cau Giay, and Tu Liem Districts—have attracted a number of high-rise construction projects (Labbe and Boudreau 2011), and today its skyline towers over Hanoi's comparatively low-rise city center. Yet these marginal reaches of the city also remain works in progress, home not only to middle-class families escaping the headaches of downtown, but also thousands of migrants from the countryside, who are drawn to the availability of cheap boarding houses, labor networks, and a market of services directed toward residents excluded from "full rights to the city" (Lefebvre 1991).

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[1] Legislation introduced in the early 1990s placed limits on building renovations in the Old Quarter and created a "management board" charged with enforcing preservation (see Moffat 2011).

[2] Guesthouses and apartments must meet quality requirements set by the city government to be approved for rental to foreigners, and landlords must pay higher "commercial" rates for utilities in these buildings.

To understand the experiences of these labor migrants in Hanoi, I conducted the majority of my urban-based research within Thinh Liet ward, located in eastern Hoang Mai district (see Fig. 1.3).

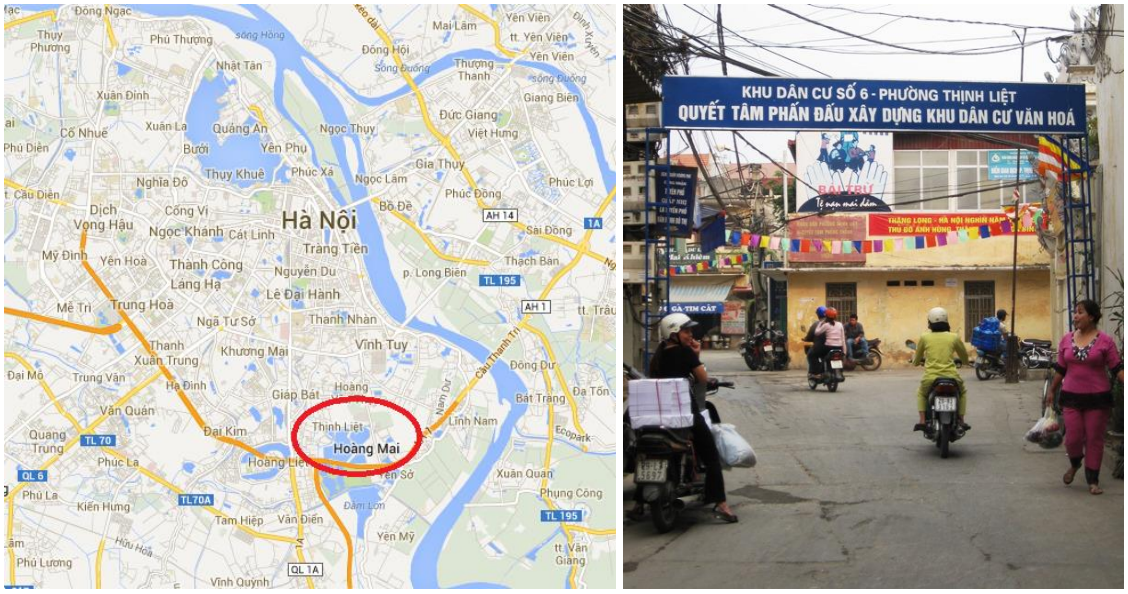


Figure 1.3: The location of Thinh Liet Ward, Hoang Mai District (left), and a gate to the ward, with a sign reading, "Vow to build a cultured neighborhood" (right)

In Thinh Liet, I became friendly with a cohesive community of migrants from two neighboring districts in rural Nam Dinh Province (Hai Hau and Giao Thuy). As I describe in chapter three, citizens from these districts have a long history of both seasonal and long-term migration to Hanoi to fill jobs in the city's informal sector (DiGregorio 1994). In particular, my research focused on Hanoi's ubiquitous motorbike taxi drivers, since this was the most common profession among male migrants from Nam Dinh living

in Thinh Liet[3], an example of the "occupational clustering" (Skinner 1973) that supports networking in the city.

Of course, not all migrants in Thinh Liet are from Nam Dinh, and one of my primary interlocutors in both Hanoi and the Red River Delta countryside was a 36 year-old delivery driver named Dang Bao originally from Dong Do village, Thai Binh Province. Bao's kin became my surrogate family in Vietnam, and his invitations "home" to the village I gratefully accepted as a researcher and a friend. Interested in the relationships maintained by residents of Hanoi to native places, I regularly traveled to the Nam Dinh and Thai Binh countryside to attend events such as death-day anniversaries (*ngay gio*), lunar calendar holidays, and other occasions prompting residents of Hanoi to "*ve que*" or "return to the homeland."

My research did not only address mobility, belonging, and native-place relationships among recent migrants from the countryside, however. Hanoi's former state workers and rising middle-class also figure prominently in the spatial reorganization of the city, the former at times facing evictions from state housing (Schwenkel 2012), and the latter performing new social distinctions through new property investments and mobility practices (as described in chapter five) in Hanoi's surrounding area. Furthermore, since very few Hanoians of would claim the city as their "native place," I also sought to understand issues how relationships to ancestral villages change over time of residence in the city, particularly in the context of the "return to origins" (*ve nguon*)

[3] Female migrants in Hanoi from Nam Dinh most commonly work as recyclers or domestic workers (see Resurreccion & Ha 2008).

movement that has "transfixed… an entire nation and its leaders" (Jellema 2007: 58) in the midst of forward-looking economic and social "renovation" (*Doi Moi*). I therefore spent time in the urban homes (*nha*) and rural homelands (*que huong*) of Hanoians from across the social spectrum.

Methods and Data

My research methodology for the current project consisted primarily of participant observation, formal and informal interviewing[4], attending events, meetings, and rituals (both in Hanoi and in delta villages), and conducting investigations into Vietnamese print media, advertising, and literature. Interviewees included migrants from the countryside, long-resident Hanoians, landlords, employers, Communist Party members, entrepreneurs, participants in native place associations, and villagers from Nam Dinh and Thai Binh. Most people were surprisingly open to a wide range of questions, including those regarding domestic politics, but I nevertheless used common sense to avoid putting people in uncomfortable or dangerous situations in a setting where open criticism against the government remains illegal. I also changed personal and place names in this text where appropriate, while maintaining fidelity to my actual observations and interactions.

Another methodological tool developed for this research project involved documenting and interpreting the "personal geographies" of people I met in Hanoi and

[4] In total, I audio recorded and transcribed 26 extended formal interviews, and conducted around 50 additional informal interviews recorded by notebook.

throughout the delta: their movements over time and the historical circumstances surrounding those movements. Noticing from the beginning of my research the extensive experiences of state-sponsored and independent migrations reported by my interlocutors, I sought to examine how people's experiences of mobility map onto—or even cause—shifts in state developmental visions, as well as the spatially-dispersed identities resulting from repeated experiences of movement (spanning, for example, the native place, the city, and other destinations encountered as the result of forced or free migration). Offering a map to interviewees and asking them to narrate their personal geographies proved quite revealing in addressing the give-and-take of Vietnamese citizenship, providing analytical linkages between past and present practices of mobility.

City, Country, and Native Place

"On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre of learning, communication, light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times."

- Raymond Williams (1975: 1)

"Listening to informants talk discuss the difference between 'the village' and 'the town'… I often had the unsettling sense that I was listening to an out-of-date sociology textbook."

- James Ferguson (1999: 84)

The history of Hanoi has been tied closely to the history of the surrounding countryside in the Red River delta since the city's founding in 1010. Material

connections persisted through traditions of seasonal migration (Hardy 2003) and through the formation of urban neighborhoods based on common occupations and communities of origin (Li 1996). The ideological links between countryside (*nong thon)* and city (*thanh thi)* also preoccupied colonial, national, and revolutionary leaders seeking to strategically pose the relationship between the governing metropolis and the agrarian villages thought to constitute Vietnam's cultural heartland. In more recent history, the countryside and its inhabitants have been alternately positioned as the lifeblood of socialist revolution and wellspring of moral virtue and cultural values, or as a nagging impediment to modernization and personal and collective "improvement" (Li 2007). This section reviews social scientific and ethnographic treatments of the city/countryside opposition as it relates to social relations and definitions of "the modern." It shows how scholars, state leaders and planners, and urban and rural citizens alike employ a value-laden (sometimes positively valued, sometime negatively) temporal framework that constructs the country as firmly rooted in the past and the city as the site of capitalist futures, and how rural/urban ideologies constitute flexible cultural materials to be shaped and directed toward particular interests. It also examines how visions of rural "native places" become implicated in this process, representing the virtue, cultural purity, and sense of belonging offered by life in the Red River Delta countryside.

The symbolic oppositions between city and country, urban and rural, are thoroughly implicated in definitions of progress and modernity, whether these definitions come from state authorities promoting particular visions of economic development, social theorists grappling with the rationalization of industrial society, or an ethnographer's

interlocutors reflecting on the "fundamental difference between 'town ways' and 'village ways' (Ferguson 1999: 83). Each pole of this opposition, as Raymond Williams (1975) makes clear in his work, relies on the other for meaning and valence, and each can feed the escapist desires associated with modernity's advance—the city an antidote for the economic limitations and stifling obligations of rural communities, and the country a vision of belonging and authenticity to combat the noise and moral bankruptcy of life in the city. While Williams addressed city/country dualism from a literary perspective in the context of capitalist development in the British Isles, he acknowledges its influence across time and space as "a central part of our experience and of the crises of society" (1975: 289), and anthropologists have done well to document its ideological and developmental effects in settings as diverse as his own English countryside (McCrone 2002), postcolonial Zambia (Ferguson 1999), and late socialist China and Vietnam (Schein 2001; Harms 2011).

Indeed, even as advances in communications and transportation blur the distinctions between urban and rural lives in much of the world; even as the analytical categories of "urban" and "rural" have come under attack as empty, ideological, or "sociologically irrelevant" (Bonner 1997: 166); and even as ethnographers steel themselves against "the clichéd dualist stereotypes of modernization theory" (Ferguson 1999: 40), the urban/rural split retains strong symbolic resonance for people and governments around the world, and its manifestations in different cultural settings call for ongoing anthropological study. In Vietnam, "the distinction between the country and the city is *invoked* as if it constitutes a universal organizing feature of social life" Harms

(2005: 40) and thus cannot be ignored as a force in people's lives. Though perhaps belonging to the realm of ideas, state and popular visions of city and country are not *merely* ideas when they form the basis for lived legal and social discrimination.

While reflections on the distinctions between city and country date to antiquity (Williams 1975), it is "the rise of modernity in general and the of the industrial revolution in particular" (Bonner 1997: 167) in northern Europe that provoked a wave of original scholarship among social theorists dealing with the positive and negative consequences of urbanization and the emerging capitalist division of labor. Confronting a society increasingly "mediated through economic relations rather than personal ties" (Goldschmidt 1995: viii), sociologists developed conceptual tools and dualisms for assessing the social, economic, and "mental" (Simmel 1903) changes wrought by capitalist modernity and urban-based lives and relationships. Compared with prior conceptions of "the country" akin to Rousseau's (1754) "state of nature" free from the vices of political society, for these early sociologists, the urban-rural contrast no longer solely "referenced the difference between corruptness of society and the purity of nature, but rather presented social theorists with two different kinds of social organization" guiding life and relationships (Bonner 1997: 168).

Frequently cited in social scientific comparisons of social life in urban and rural contexts is the classic text of Ferdinand Tonnies (1957 [1912]) on the opposing social systems he termed *Geimenschaft* (Community) and *Gesellschaft* (Society/Association). *Geimenschaft* refers to a social order rooted in the "givenness" of family institutions and shared interests, one which, "being based on a consensus of wills, rests on harmony and

is developed and enabled by pathways, mores, and religion" (Tonnies 1957 [1912]: 223). Gesellschaft, on the other hand, "derives from the conventional order of trade" (*Ibid.*) and involves social relationships emphasizing competition and individual advantage. The work of Tonnies helped instantiate a number of understandings of city and countryside to be taken up by subsequent thinkers. First and foremost, the social structures tied to rural life begin to assume the character of an "other" whose relationship to emergent capitalist modernity is fundamental and oppositional. Furthermore, in his elaboration—and largely glowing assessment—of the familiar relationships and shared fortunes of Geimenschaft's orientation, Tonnies also supported a tendency to associate rurality with ideas of belonging and community in contrast to capitalist modernity's "dark side," where competition rather than cooperation is the dominant ethos.

Among early social scientists, Emile Durkheim's influential contrast between organic and mechanical solidarity (2012 [1893]) also deserves mention another important framework for addressing the city/countryside dichotomy. In a society exhibiting mechanical solidarity, social integration and cohesion comes from a strong sense of commonality (or "collective consciousness") and homogeneity among individuals—people feel connected through similar work, educational and religious training, and lifestyle. This form of social solidarity normally operates in "traditional," "pre-industrial, small scale settings where relationships are based on kinship ties of familial networks (*Ibid.*). Organic solidarity, on the other hand, accompanies the interdependence that arises from the capitalist division of labor and the complementarities between people—a development which occurs in "modern," "urban" and "industrial" settings. Durkheim,

like Tonnies, draws a broad contrast between the character of social relations exhibited by traditional and modern communities, but he also takes on his colleague's Geimenschaft and Gesellschaft framework to task for implying that the calculative individualism engendered by capitalist markets was necessarily socially disintegrative or destructive, showing instead how organic solidarity constitutes an equally natural and "authentic" system well-adapted to the conditions of modern society (Bonner 1997). In fact, Durkheim praises this evolutionary development for entailing "a process of liberation of the individual from tradition and the emergence of a new kind of consciousness affirming the primacy of individual identity" (Palumbo & Scott 2003: 54).

Max Weber was also centrally concerned with the relationships between modernity, capitalism, and urbanization. Through analyses of the rationalization (1958) and bureaucratization (1968) of advanced societies, he paints a picture of development from "traditional society" based on to "modern societies" based on scientific reason and market-based calculations. In his view, "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the disenchantment of the world" (2011 [1919]: 155). Weber was sensitive to the anonymous and alienating features of urban-based social structures. In fact, he projected considerable disdain for modernity and the calculative city in his writings, even as he recognized the impending disappearance of any alternative through the ongoing bureaucratic rationalization of society. The significance of rural society, for Weber, comes from its "ability to sustain an alternative culture to capitalism, which found a home in the city" (Bonner 1997: 32). It should be noted that religious practice drove much of the analysis of Weber and

Durkheim on the disenchantment of society under the conditions of modernity, and I will revisit this aspect of their writings in chapter four when addressing ritual revitalization in Red River Delta villages.

The greener pastures of the countryside tempting urbanites in late modernity can be made clearer by a recent stream of anthropological work targeting "nostalgic" cultural practices and the revitalization of local identities and rituals against a backdrop of political-economic transformation. In these contexts, the rural countryside, the ethnic village, or the "ancestral homeland" can serve as key symbols of cultural purity and authenticity, their existence a boon in times of modernization and global homogenization. In many ways, Japan's experience with rapid post-war modernization—the original "East Asian economic miracle"—would foreshadow the social tribulations and symbolic therapies accompanying Vietnam's (and China's) economic reforms. In a work pinpointing the relationships between Japan's longing for the "premodern" and the cultural anxieties resulting from perceived westernization and cultural dilution, Marilyn Ivy (1995: 10) finds that in order for Japanese modernity to meaningfully take shape and persist, "modernist nostalgia must preserve…the sense of absence that motivated its desires." Focusing on images of "the vanishing," those "margins and remainders of modernity" lingering in Japanese society, she describes how "the desire to encounter the unexpected, the peripheral unknown" becomes important for grounding modernity, and how images and artistic forms representing "traditional culture" become resurrected and reconfigured in the "consumption" of nostalgic forms (*Ibid.*: 26). Similarly, as Vietnamese citizens try to nudge closer to global conceptions of "the good life" while

negotiating changing value systems, they have undertaken certain practices or performances vis-à-vis the "native remote" (Ivy 1995) that index and contextualize successful participation with urban modernity.

In China, commentators have described the exploration of identity and ancestral heritage alongside economic development as a "culture fever" (*wenhua re*) that trickled down from Chinese intellectual class to the rest of society during the 1980s (Chen et al. 2001). During this period, citizens sought out new meanings of social difference within the Chinese nation-state, bringing growing numbers into contact with rural- and minority-themed media and tourism. In this capacity, the belief systems and traditional arts of villages and ethnic groups supply a reflective counterpoint to Communist China's religious void and "drab ideologies" of development (Gladney 2004). Feeding escapist desires, folk cultures from the countryside can serve as "malleable substances that can lend vitality and continuity in a swiftly changing, often disorienting, reform process" (Schein 2001: 226).

Akin to "culture fever" in China that sent people in search of their national and personal roots, Vietnam has witnessed its own "*ve nguon*" or "return to origins" movement in recent years that has been embraced by both citizens and leaders, although often with different motivations (Jellema 2007). The temples, tombs, and traditions of the countryside have all been rehabilitated as religious freedoms expand and people leave the city to "remember their roots" (*nho nguon*). For example, officials celebrate the death anniversaries of not just socialist martyrs, but also heroes from the imperial pantheon, worshipping alongside citizens in a bid to create "political legitimacy from the ritual

engagement" with these revered figures (DiGregorio and Selemink 2007: 440). Popular religious practices celebrating national and family ancestors, once seen as feudal, superstitious (*me tin*), or otherwise inimical to socialist revolution, have become reframed as crucial markers of the Vietnamese cultural identity[5]. In post-socialist contexts like Vietnam and China, the revival of pre-revolutionary beliefs goes beyond simply providing an antidote for the anxieties of life in the capitalist city. In fact, the "reenchantment" (Taylor 2007) of Vietnamese society has also operated "as a vehicle for alternative subjectivities and counternarratives" (Jellema 2007: 60), creating a space relatively autonomous from the state where citizens "long forced to suppress their inner experiences and personal beliefs can finally express themselves" (*Ibid*).

In Vietnam, all of these related phenomena—the persistence of urban/rural dualisms, nostalgia for threatened cultural practices, the revitalization of ancestor ceremonies, and new forms of citizen expression—converge in the one unquestioned and universally valued site of rootedness, authenticity, and belonging: the native place (*que huong*). In fact, so close is the association of nativity with rurality that the term *que* can be used to denote either "native place" or "the countryside" in general. Nearly all Hanoians regard their ancestral homelands in the countryside with extreme reverence, stay involved with village affairs, and feel that they "share the same blood" with native fellows, called *dong huong*. Kate Jellema (2007: 73) nicely sums up the multiple but thematically linked meanings of the *que huong*:

[5] Not all practices revitalized in rural villages find state support, of course, and religious activity remains another important window onto state-citizen relations in Vietnam (see chapter four).

> The *que huong* is closely associated with birth, childhood, mother love, ancestral lands, family history, village community, and simple rural life; in short, *que huong* represents a feeling of being fundamentally at home. The *que huong* is understood to shape its inhabitants, molding their identity…their character, such that it might be understood as a second womb, the womb of the community, from which young people must be born a second time when they reach maturity and venture out into the world.

The allusions to birth and the "second womb" here are apt; when reflecting on their intimate relationships to native places, my interlocutors repeatedly mentioned that the soil of the native place is where their umbilical cords and placentas are buried, and also the eventual site of their remains.

Since Vietnamese mandarins from the Red River Delta studying in Hanoi first articulated the ideologies of *que huong* (Hardy 2003), native places have exhibited a strong centripetal pull on those living away from home, celebrated as an ideal of belonging in literature, music, and in the many Facebook pages devoted to shared ancestral homelands (see Fig. 1.3).



Figure 1.4: Cultural performance (left), Facebook group (center), and literature (right) drawing upon the *que huong* theme

Beyond the main association of native places with places of birth, the images in Figure 1.4 also illustrate the flexibility of *que huong* ideologies: while nearly all Vietnamese people claim a specific ancestral village, visions of collective identity can refract to the level of shared provinces (as with the Facebook group open to all natives of Nam Dinh Province living in Hanoi), or even to the level of the nation-state among overseas Vietnamese, who in spite of fraught political and personal relationships still consider Vietnam to be their ancestral "homeland" (as in the pictured book's title, "Vietnam, My Native Place"). Although not the focus of this dissertation, increasingly common acts of "returning" among Vietnamese refugees also point to power of *que huong* visions to manifest homeward longings and feelings of ancestral obligation among émigrés (see Long 2004).

In the reform era, the desires and the abilities of Hanoians to connect meaningfully with native places have converged alongside transportation advances, rising incomes, and ritual revitalization in Vietnamese society. Keen to "remember their roots" (*nho nguon*) and demonstrate loyalty to the lineage, urban residents in the reform era "ardently pursue homecomings and reunions" (Jellema 2007: 58) in the *que huong*, and often "lavish" their ancestral homelands with contributions toward family and village projects (Schlecker 2005). Such events have been described as "rites of return" (Taylor 2007) where spatially remote migrants and temporally remote ancestors periodically return to the place of origins. As such, we can already begin see how *que huong* ideologies, rather than attaching people to native places in the countryside, can actually

support and justify migration away from "home" in the pursuit of work in the city, since Vietnamese rites of return are, in fact, premised on the "normative separation" (Taylor 2007: 20) of family members.

Government, Migration, and the Politics of Belonging

While in many contexts where anthropologists ply their trade, the *transnational* movements of people (i.e. foreign immigration) dominate considerations of migration and belonging, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has witnessed in the last two decades a momentous *domestic* surge in independent or "spontaneous" migration, challenging enduring colonial and socialist conventions of population management and reshaping the relationships of Vietnamese citizens to their government. The politics of belonging as a conceptual framework enriches studies of migration by targeting both legal structures of membership along with the discourses and ideologies through which people construct and police the social boundaries of political collectivities (see Yuval Davis 2011; Castles and Davidson 2000). This framework also proposes that such structures and discourses of belonging are subject to negotiation and contestation, as people can challenge unjust institutions and work to denaturalize dominant views of the social and spatial order. If recent trends toward economic liberalization and the global movement of capital have created fertile environments for migrants to stake out in search of better lives, they have also placed unprecedented pressures on national and city governments to themselves adapt and respond to new demographic arrangements, simultaneously cultivating the conditions necessary for sustained economic growth—which often require a mobile labor

force—while maintaining political control and protecting the integrity of citizenship. In this section, I apply a number of influential perspectives from the anthropology of government and the nation-state to the study of mobility and the politics of belonging in Vietnam.

Crossing regional, national, and global space in the pursuit of livelihoods, humans demonstrate remarkable responsiveness and adaptability when faced with socioeconomic strife or opportunity. Since the dawn of the nation-state, governments have tried to control this human penchant in order to productively dispose a territory and its inhabitants (Inda 2005), prompting a variety of direct (e.g., resettlement plans) and indirect (e.g., household registration systems) mechanisms to control the movements of citizens. The centralized management of citizen movements and settlement patterns within a sovereign territory can be linked to the emergence of the modern nation-state in 17th century Europe and the subsequent elaboration of government's primary goal to support the "welfare of the population" through administrative and technical interventions (Foucault 1991: 216). The partial erosion of population controls in late-socialist environments like Vietnam can be linked to the emergence of neoliberal rationalities of rule where citizens are charged with increasing responsibility for their own welfare. To understand both of these developments and what they mean for mobile citizens in Vietnam and elsewhere—how national populations and migrant bodies come to enter the crosshairs of political authorities—the work of Michel Foucault (1991) on the genealogies of modern government offers a useful starting point.

According to Foucault (1991: 131), written reflections on "government as a

general problem" exploded between the 16th and 18th centuries, owing to the breakdown of feudal institutions and the dispersion of social difference through newly centralized states. New questions regarding "how to be governed, how to govern others…how to become the best possible governor" (*Ibid.*) rushed to the fore as leaders addressed novel demographic arrangements and devised ways to skillfully dispose state subjects and their relations with "things" (tangible and intangible) such as wealth and property, customs and habits, famines and epidemics. Foucault directly opposes this emerging art of government, or "governmentality," to prior notions of sovereign rule in the Middle Ages, exemplified in Machiavelli's "the Prince," where "the objective of the exercise of power is to reinforce, strengthen, and protect the principality" (*Ibid.*: 133) above all else, the lives of subjects themselves assuming secondary importance. Governmentality's emergence is also marked by the increased use of "soft" techniques of governance that rely on "cooperation and voluntary compliance" rather than overt mechanisms of coercion (Nagl 2008: 2).

Central to this shift in political rationalities, and to the ability of political authorities to put new visions into practice, was the 18th century emergence of the concept of population as the "terrain *par excellence"* of government (Inda 2005: 5). Through increasing administrative reliance on statistics, populations came to display tendencies and problems irreducible to individuals or families, and thus became the primary objects of state intervention.

> In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its

> condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, and health…it is the population itself on which the government will act either directly through large-scale campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities (Foucault 1991: 140).

We can see clearly here how the control of citizen movements—the "flow of population into certain regions"—figures in this updated governing mandate, as the productive administration of people and things requires their efficient arrangement in space. As aggregation rendered populations increasingly "knowable" and amenable to political programming (Inda 2005; Legg 2005), political authorities could address perceived problems of demographic imbalances, overpopulation, or promote agricultural expansion in national frontiers (Dery 2000). In his work on forms of "high modernist" statecraft, James Scott (1998: 3) similarly describes how early modern leaders devoted considerable resources to "rationalizing and standardizing what was a social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format" using techniques that rendered society increasingly subject to official intervention. For example, the development of state censuses and identity documents allowed authorities to "control the internal migration of their population through residency permits and internal passports" (Kertzer & Arel 2002: 3) and contributed to the ability to govern "from a distance" (Legg 2005).

Another important attribute of Foucault's view of modern political power germane to discussions of state control and citizen agency is that it often proceeds "without the full awareness of people" (Foucault 1991: 140) by producing docile bodies whose comportment supports the dominant political-economic agenda. This process

occurs not only through the institutions of the state, but also through the countless other "actors, organizations, and agencies concerned with exercising authority over the conduct of human beings" (Inda 2005: 7), including schools, service providers, and the media, shaping citizens who can essentially "govern themselves." This view of the self-regulating subject has been commonly linked to—both by Foucault himself and by many subsequent interpretations—the market-driven technologies of neoliberalism: the set of political-economic practices championing the deregulation of business, free markets and trade, private property, and entrepreneurism (Harvey 2005) that have had a profound effect in Vietnam (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012), as I explore in chapter five. The concept of "neoliberal governmentality," then, refers to a mode of "governing through freedom" that involves a retreat of the state from public welfare and "relies on market knowledge and calculations" (Ong 2006: 13) among a "responsibilized" citizenry. While this set of doctrines and policies has long been dominant in Great Britain, the United States, and other advanced liberal democracies, recently it has become difficult for any nation to remain competitive globally without some degree of marketization and economic globalization, and the ability of such political-economic transformations to shape new practices and subjectivities in non-western contexts has become a critical and debated question for anthropologists working in East and Southeast Asia (see Nonini 2004; Ong 2006).

Concerned with pushing Foucault's theories of government into the service of anthropological inquiry, Jonathan Inda (2005) has outlined a number of analytical streams that can guide ethnographic inquiry into governance, population management,

and migration, and which find utility in the study of Vietnam. First, researchers have explored the elaboration and justification of specific "political rationalities, the intellectual machinery for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political programming" (Rose 1996: 147). Within the disciplines of public policy, planning, education, or medicine, particular social groups can become constituted as objects of inquiry or intervention, such as ethnic groups, workers, peasants, or, in the present case, migrants. For example, describing the post-reform influx of migrants into Chinese cities, Zhang (2001) shows how this group became constituted in official and media discourses as a "floating population," a derogatory characterization born of socialist ideologies of residential fixity to support a centrally-planned division of labor that displays strong similarities with official Vietnamese views on migration. Inda (2005: 8) also points the "problem-oriented nature" of political rationalities—how the responsibilities of governing authorities tend to be framed in terms of diagnosed problems such as "poverty," "overpopulation," or "urbanization." Ethnographers can examine "the sites where these problems are given form and the various authorities [state and non-state] accountable for vocalizing them" (*Ibid.*). A final useful analytical frame of governmentality involves the "technical" dimensions of political authority, the "devices that make objects 'visible' and render things into calculable and programmable form" (Inda 2005: 9). Here, anthropologists have looked to a number of bureaucratic practices laying the groundwork for political programming, including ethnic classification schemes (Pelley 2002; Schein 2000), census enumeration (Kertzer & Arel 2002), and modernist urban plans (Holston 1989). In places like Vietnam and China, the

development, adaptation, and erosion of specific technologies for managing and directing population flows—such as resettlement plans and household registration systems—reveal a great deal about shifting state priorities concerning economic and social development.

The work of Foucault and others on the development of the art (and science) of modern government offers anthropologists a historical context to understand how those who would shape the conduct of humans render society legible and engage political programming to maximize the well-being and prosperity of populations. Particularly in his later work, Foucault made very clear that his vision of political power is not confined to the institutions of the state, and that advanced market liberalism employs a diffuse set of non-state technologies to keep modern citizens in line with capitalist ideologies. However, this top-down view of structural forces and market energies can also obscure the practices and subjectivities of people themselves that may or not conform to the expectations of governments or markets. To understand migration and population management in late-socialist contexts where authoritarian conventions coexist with emergent neoliberal trends, considerable attention must also be focused on the ways state authorities construct and enact visions of political membership, as well as the ways citizens remake policies through their own economic and political agency.

As indicated by the language used in the dissertation thus far, I believe the concept of *citizenship* provides a valuable perspective on the politics of belonging and the relationships between state and citizen power in Vietnam. Traditionally anchored to a territorial nation-state, expanding flows of people, capital, and political-economic ideologies have forced analysts to reconsider contemporary articulations of "the elements

that we think of as coming together to create citizenship—rights, entitlements, territoriality, a nation" (Ong 2006: 6), generating one of the "livelier discourses" in the human sciences (Friedmann 2005: 71). According to one recent assessment (Bloemraad et al. 2008: 153), the language of citizenship has been utilized in a number of distinct but related ways among anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists interested in migration, referring to official legal statuses, rights, forms of political participation, and a "sense of belonging" among individuals in society.

Citizenship as the basis for social inclusion/exclusion has its origins in the city-states or *polis* of ancient Greece, where the status afforded certain male property owners the ability to participate in politics and the public sphere. The concept took on new meanings with Roman imperial expansion and the need to rule from a distance, when "the need to incorporate disparate peoples within the empire resulted in citizenship as a juridical concept of legal status, in which the citizen is the subject of a state" (Bloemraad 2008: 155). Only after the Enlightenment and the elaboration of liberalism's concern with individual rights did citizenship emerge as both a formal legal status and mechanism for social equality and political participation. This liberal model of citizenship flowed out of the work of 17th century political thinkers such as John Locke, whose ideas of consent and contract focused on the rights accorded to individuals and the obligations they owe to society and the state (Kofman 2005).

Contemporary social scientific thinking about citizenship has been heavily influenced T.H. Marshall's (1950) pioneering model of modern citizenship and the evolution of rights. Marshall's writing addressed a specific problem in liberal political

theory—the reconciliation of democracy with the social consequences of capitalism—and posited the ability of the welfare state to offset inevitable market-driven inequalities, serving to limit "the negative impact of class differences on individual life-chances, thereby enhancing the individual's commitment to the system" (Turner 1994: 227). Grounded in the history of Britain over three centuries of capitalist industrial expansion, Marshall (1950) identified a developmental sequence in which citizens came to acquire civil rights (e.g., freedom of speech, property rights) in the 18th century, political rights (e.g., voting, rights to run for office, association) into the 19th century, and finally what he calls "social rights" (unobstructed paths to security and prosperity) in the 20th century as the government tried to incorporate diverse sectors of the population and reduce social inequality. Only with this complete trio of citizen rights could political subjects be considered "full members of a society" (Marshall 1950: 8). Although this linear model of the development of rights breaks down when applied to Vietnam and China, where the "evolutionary scenario was essentially reversed" and a "commitment to social citizenship predated political and civil citizenship by many centuries" (Goldman & Perry 2002: 5), the ability of economic reform to breed new political and civil rights in these contexts remains an important question guiding my research. As for the social rights long championed by paternalistic socialist states, the forces of neoliberalism in Vietnam have significantly undermined the role of state institutions to provide welfare in favor of private provision (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012), redrawing "the boundaries between the state and civil society in favor of the active citizen who would take more responsibility for their life" (Kofman 2003: 396).

A number of specific observations and themes emerging out of scholarship on modern citizenship can be applied to issues of internal migration and population management in late-socialist states like Vietnam and China. First of all, conceptions of citizenship must address who is, and who is not, entitled and obligated by the status of full nation-state membership. A crucial distinction commonly discussed in analyses of migration and citizenship regards the manner in which national governments reckon nativity, following either the principle of *jus soli* (the right of birth) or that of *jus sanguinis* (the right of blood). When states invoke the former, as in the United States, the full rights of citizenship are conferred upon anyone born within that nation-state's territory. When the latter logic takes precedence, only "native blood" or descent entitles one to citizenship.

It is easy to see how these differing logics of membership can condition the experiences of transnational migrants trying to get a footing in their adopted homes, but these logics can also apply to experiences of internal migration. The Vietnamese system of household registration (*ho khau*), for example, marks people at birth as either "urban citizens" or "rural citizens," in many cases preventing migrants from the countryside from accessing housing, jobs, or services in the city: a denial of "urban citizenship" (Holston 1999). Indeed, as social scientists pay increasing attention to the different scales and experiences of legal and social belonging, the idea of urban citizenship can focus attention on cities as sites of contestation over rights, and of new notions of membership and solidarity among people making claims on the state (*Ibid.*). For researchers attempting to link broad political-economic structures to the "heterogeneous

initiatives" of the world's increasingly mobile families (King & Wilder 2003: 293), urban citizenship provides a useful idiom for examining legal and social belonging in the places where "the business of modern society gets done" (Holston 1999: 3).

Another recent construal of citizenship that moves beyond formal membership in a territorial state is Aihwa Ong's (2005) work on forms of "variegated" citizenship" in East and Southeast Asia, where selectively deployed neoliberal technologies of governing are disarticulating the components of citizenship—rights, entitlements, territory, nation—and reorganizing subjects according to their value in a world economic order. Against the backdrop of "robust and centralized" state institutions that remain operative for the majority of citizens, Ong (2005: 16) describes the "neoliberal exceptions" embraced by leaders to better compete in global markets:

> In some milieus, the neoliberal exception gives value to calculative practices and to self-governing subjects as preferred citizens. Meanwhile, other segments of the population are excepted from neoliberal criteria and thus rendered excludable as citizens and subjects.

These neoliberal exceptions to typical ways of governing in China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and elsewhere manifest visibly in new zoning technologies that mark certain Special Economic Zones (SEZs) exempt from standard government regulation, and less visibly through the creation of "neoliberal subjectivities" among a citizenry charged with looking increasingly to private sources for its own welfare.

Migration and policies of population management figure centrally in the neoliberal exception and forms of variegated citizenship. If the work of citizenship

involves the management of social differences (Holston 2005), then high levels of internal and transnational mobility in East and Southeast Asia have forced market-minded governments to assign values to the diverse bodies and communities appearing within their spatial domains. Ong (2005: 79) shows how foreign domestic maids migrating to Southeast Asian cities are assigned little market value and excluded from the rights of citizenship, while "elite workers and members of dominant ethnic groups" receive nurturing, pastoral care from governments shaping a vision of the national future." *Internal* migration also generates variegated forms of citizenship, particularly in late-socialist contexts with conventions of strict population management. In Vietnam, college students, skilled professionals, and high-tech manufacturing recruits wishing to establish permanent residence in a new community meet with much more success than those arriving from the countryside without marketable skills (Dang et al. 2003). The migrants from the Red River Delta countryside with whom I worked remain at the bottom of the hierarchy—seen not as self-regulating subjects with skills to offer, but as a social problem—and enjoy few state accommodations, forced to maneuver within outmoded institutions of control.

Despite generating new categories of membership that can exclude certain groups of people, the mobilizing forces of neoliberal reforms must also be acknowledged as a key source of agency in contexts where the possibility of relocating independently is relatively new. Regarding experiences of citizenship, in the absence of a more participatory tradition of state-society relations, internal migration in Vietnam and other late-socialist contexts can be seen as an ongoing dialogue between the structuring policies

of the Communist Party and the economic agency exhibited by increasingly mobile citizens. In fact, assessing emergent migration flows—along with their supports and obstacles—has become a popular strategy to assess political-economic change in Vietnam (see Hardy 2003, Scott & Truong 2003) and China (Mobrand 2006), where the loosening of authoritarian controls has invited new forms of citizen movement and association at odds with official preferences. This is not new: experiences of migration have been intimately tied to Vietnam's modern political development, as "the pattern of the nation's population mobility has both been influenced by and reshaped the dominant ideology and institution of the time as they have evolved" over time (Zhang et al. 2002: 7). Indeed, as chapter two covers in more detail, in spite of recurring characterizations of Vietnamese villagers being "immobile" by nature and suffering from "a pathological attachment to their native country" (Kherian 2000, in Hardy 2003: 71), seasonal and long-term migrations have been a way of life for Vietnamese families for centuries and remain so today, boosted in fact by advances in transportation and new opportunities for informal work in the city.

While the concept of citizenship offers important insight into two-way street of national membership[6], the analytical fit with contemporary independent mobility practices in Vietnam is not perfect. As noted, direct citizen influence remains difficult through current political channels in Vietnam, and the package of rights associated with national membership do not always match the expectations of liberal theory. Moreover,

[6] Chapter three explores urban citizenship in more depth and the efforts of people living along the physical and social margins of urban society to build communities and expand the distribution of rights.

the actions of most of my migrant interlocutors to move to Hanoi and find informal employment operate *outside* of the existing structures of citizenship. That is, even as the laws that create differentiated citizenship in Hanoi slowly liberalize (at the usual sluggish pace of Vietnamese bureaucracy), people nevertheless choose to circumvent the household registration system completely, drawing on native-place networks and the urban marketplace to build largely self-sufficient communities without waiting for possible legal concessions. With this in mind, I introduce one final theoretical framework to help shed light on migration, government, and the politics of belonging in Vietnam, bringing together elements of a "mobility turn" (Urry 2008) in the social sciences with the work of Jacque Ranciere on politics and political philosophy.

For Ranciere (2005), structures of citizenship purported to uphold equality hold very little hope for the true exercise of politics, being little more than elements of the existing *unequal* social order. In his view, "equality in society" constitutes a contradiction in terms, since bringing people into any organized social grouping involves the manifestly impossible task of distributing shares of the common good in a just manner. At some point, an inevitable "miscount" occurs and turns equality on its head, constituting a fundamental "wrong" that challenges the legitimacy of any political philosophy aiming to efficiently arrange people and things. In fact, the main purpose of politics-as-usual is not to chase an elusive ideal of equality, but rather to uphold and naturalize the dominant social order, so Ranciere offers an alternative vocabulary:

> Politics is generally seen as the set of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems of legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this

> system of distribution and legitimation another name. I propose to call it *the police* (*Ibid.*: 28).

Opposed to these forces, Ranciere understands "politics" as "determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration of society" or "shifts a body from the place assigned to it" (2005: 28). By making unseen bodies seen and unheard voices heard, politics represents a kind of productive "encounter" between once incommensurable domains, exposing the "wrong" and forcing a given social order to transform. Political actors accomplish this through a radical assumption of equality that subverts naturalized ideologies and "undoes" the durable arrangements of the police order by "demonstrating the sheer contingency of any order" (*Ibid.*: 17).

This definition of politics versus policing proves useful in the context of officially unauthorized migration in Vietnam, where long-dominant institutions of population management, state discourses of preserving the urban/rural divide, and popular ideologies of social distinction in the city have been confronted by a "mob anonymous speaking beings" (*Ibid.*: 22) working and building communities in the city. In fact, recent work on the "politics of mobility" has taken cues from Ranciere's work to highlight how migration can "produce irregularity" (Mezzadra 2010: 185) and become a creative force for social change. Tim Cresswell (2010: 21), reflecting on the increased interest of social scientists in issues of human movement in space and its constituent elements (including motives, routes, experiences, and frictions), has called for investigations into the "ways in which mobilities are both productive of social relations and produced by them." One way to do this is to focus on everyday practices of "escape," whereby people simply "exit

from a given organization of social life…without naming their practices" (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: xiii), and influence social and legal mores at their destinations. By showing how acts of escape can predate or overwhelm official controls and force authorities to "recapture" the spillage—as in the case of Communist Party policies being forced to *react* to independent urban migration on a massive scale—this dissertation demonstrates how even practices of mobility conceived by actors as non-political fit into Ranciere's definition of transformative political activity. Hanoi has changed dramatically as a result of the migration of peasants from the Red River Delta countryside, and attention to the maintenance and potential breakdown of a once-dominant social order is vital to understanding the politics of belonging in urban Vietnam.

Organization of the Work

I divide the dissertation into six chapters. Having introduced here the main themes and theoretical frameworks of the dissertation, chapter two delves more deeply into Vietnamese history to investigate how people experienced colonial and socialist experiments in population management, covering half-legendary narratives of territorial expansion, French colonial administrative interventions, and highland resettlement projects from the socialist era. Chapter three turns to population management in the era of economic reform, and specifically the efforts of independent migrants to Hanoi from Nam Dinh Province to overcome a system of differentiated system of urban citizenship by mobilizing native-place relationships to find work, housing, and services in the city. Following up on practices of "going" (*di*) to Hanoi for work, chapter four examines acts

of "returning" (*ve*) to the homeland for holidays and ancestral ceremonies, showing how *que huong* ideologies premised on reunion can actually support migration away from native villages. Chapter five moves back to Hanoi and focuses on how the production of urban space, along with the ways people move through it, become implicated in ideas of social class and patterns of exclusion in the city. Finally, in a concluding chapter I examine native-place networks in the context of Vietnam's strengthening "civil society," postulating on the social, spatial, and political future of Hanoi.

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Chapter Two:

Spatial Visions, Migrant Decisions: Colonial and Socialist Experiments in Population Management

Just before his eighth birthday, Dang Bao and his family moved from a makeshift settlement in Vietnam's northwest mountains to a centuries-old village in Thai Binh Province, the country's cultural and historical heartland. Despite the strangeness of his new physical surroundings—flat, green fields to the horizon—the social environment facing Bao was more familiar; his welcoming neighbors spoke the family dialect and many shared the same surname: it felt like home. Indeed, for the Dang family, this migration experience was less an uprooting than a "re-rooting," a return to their ancestral "native place" (*que huong*) after a decade of participation in one of the government's ill-fated frontier development programs. Thousands of Vietnamese citizens with roots in Thai Binh and neighboring provinces experienced similar homecomings during the 1980s, abandoning unsustainable agriculture and forestry projects in highland "New Economic Zones" and descending back to their native villages in the Red River Delta[1]. In so doing, families like Bao's collectively forced the Vietnamese government to modify its highland development strategy, influencing policymaking through independent decisions to relocate and pursue new livelihoods, much as Vietnamese peasants decades before contributed to the downfall of mismanaged agricultural cooperatives through their "foot dragging, moonlighting" (Luong 2003) and other forms of non-compliance.

[1] Others sought opportunities for independent entrepreneurship in nearby provincial capitals, or followed their countrymen to the new coffee frontiers of the Central Highlands (see Dery 2000; Hardy 2003).

Following the winds of changing state developmental visions and migration possibilities, Bao's early homecoming to Thai Binh would not be his last migration, and by the time I met him in Hanoi, he had accumulated an impressive list of destinations and occupations throughout Vietnam, from coal mining in Quang Ninh Province, to coffee farming in the Central Highlands, to selling crab noodle soup from a food cart in Saigon, before finally settling in Hanoi. Coming of age as the oldest of four brothers during Vietnam's subsidy period, a time of widespread poverty and economic mismanagement, Bao was forced to forgo high school and seek outside work starting at age sixteen to supplement the family's meager farming income. In many cases, he lacked official permission to leave the commune, instead making informal arrangements through social networks tied to common provincial or village origins.

When Vietnam's market reforms began to refocus developmental attention on urban areas in the 1990s, Bao began carving out a place in Hanoi—brimming with labor opportunities and close enough to Thai Binh to maintain family and ancestral obligations—working as a driver and sometime insurance agent. Yet even after living in the city for seven years and raising his own young family there, he remains a "temporary" resident with limited rights to housing or public services. Nevertheless, like his parents before him, and like so many other Vietnamese citizens forced to weather the political-economic storms of the late 20th century, Bao has continually placed the concrete economic needs of his family above the spatial preferences of the government, mobilizing private relationships and resources to overcome durable technologies of population control.

Listening to Bao narrate his complex personal geography over tea in a makeshift café—itself an informal and quasi-legal migrant enterprise—helped make clear to me how the migration practices of Vietnamese citizens, both state-sponsored and independent, have occurred in negotiation with governing authorities, at once conditioned by state development visions and policies of population control, and capable of destabilizing and transforming these same visions and policies. Province-hopping narratives like Bao's also reinforced the idea that, contrary to official discourses proffered since the colonial era of "peasants attached to villages" (Hardy 2003), and in spite of institutional legacies from the socialist era inhibiting free movement, the personal histories, identities, and contemporary livelihoods of most Vietnamese citizens are spatially dispersed, encompassing a range of sites with personal and economic significance, with "native places" representing essential and emotionally-charged nodes in these circuits.

For centuries, authorities including Vietnamese emperors, French colonial bureaucrats, and Communist Party leaders have tried—with mixed levels of commitment and success—to shuffle and manipulate the Vietnamese population to suit their own particular strategies for economic development and political self-preservation in an oft-contested territory. Governing visions took aim at different scales of space, from the wider territorial concerns animating frontier projects, to experiments in colonial urban planning (Rabinow 1995), to locally-enforced efforts to control the household arrangements of peasant families (Kirkvliet 1995). These efforts have often involved "problematizing" the population—and especially the vast and malleable peasantry—as an

object for scientific intervention, following a belief that "experts' rational planning paves the way for human progress" (Luong 2006: 381). For example, perceiving the Red River Delta lowlands as critically overcrowded (Hardy 2003), early 20th century French administrators proposed large-scale population transfers to comparatively "empty" reaches of the Indochinese peninsula. Though this grand vision never materialized, the revolutionaries-turned-bureaucrats leading independent Vietnam similarly sought to manage citizens' movements in ways that would maximize production and security. Specifically, the architects of Vietnamese state socialism promoted large-scale population transfers to national frontiers, forcibly depopulated urban areas, and installed of a system of household registration called *ho khau* (modeled after the Chinese *hukou*; see Solinger 1999; Zhang 2001) that for decades tethered citizens to their communities of origin to receive rations and government services. Ideological campaigns supported these spatial interventions, including attempts to (re)shape the meanings of "native-place" in the service of population movement or fixity, as I describe later in this chapter. Today, as neoliberal reforms have taken hold in Vietnam, changing governing logics have given rise to new freedoms of movement, but the CPV remains wary of unchecked mobility—particularly the massive flows of rural residents like Bao into cities—and many legal obstacles remain for would-be internal migrants.

Drawing from historical sources and ethnographic investigations into the personal geographies[1] of people like Bao with ancestral roots and/or family ties in Thai Binh

[1] The term "personal geographies" here refers to the desires, plans, and experiences of migration over one's lifetime, as well as the resultant spatially-dispersed identities and social orientations.

Province, this chapter weighs the spatial visions of governing authorities against the migration decisions of Vietnamese subjects and citizens, focusing primarily on the two main spatial theatres preoccupying leaders and administrators since the dynastic era: the frontier and the city. It details the official policies and ideological campaigns related to migration under colonial and socialist logics of rule alongside the "cultures of mobility" (Hardy 2003) of those involved, treating migration in Vietnam not simply as a reaction to changing social, economic, or political structures, but rather as a "social movement in the literal sense of the word," understood as a "creative force" beneath these structures (Papadopoulos et al. 2008: 202). Particularly in national contexts such as Vietnam lacking a liberal-democratic tradition, ethnographic attention to the experiences of mobile citizens like Bao reveals the dialogical nature of political membership, as people—regardless of the ability to organize or participate in elections—can support state initiatives or push back on spatial restrictions and heavy-handed policies through their movements, "voting with their feet" to pursue new opportunities or escape hardships.

Of course, Bao's parents did not have social or political transformation on their minds when they returned "home" from the frontier in the 1980s, and neither does Bao himself give much thought to the liberalization of urban migration policies, having fended for himself in Hanoi for so long. But through their collective rejection of mobility restrictions, Vietnamese citizens have nevertheless forced policymakers to readdress how the population should be controlled (or not) within its latest project of full-scale marketization, a trend consistent with other periods in Vietnamese history when the "politics of control is compelled to come to terms with a politics of migration that

structurally exceeds its (re)bordering practices" (Mezzadra 2011: 121) resulting in new and contingent relationships between leaders, citizens, and space.

Peasants, Settlers, and Vagabonds: Vietnam's "March to the South"

The idea of the "peasantry" (*nong dan*) in Vietnam carries the baggage of centuries of redefinition and revaluation, and the scars of repeated involvement in tumultuous political-economic experiments. Indeed, the wet-rice agriculturalists scattered in villages throughout the Red River delta heartland (where Thai Binh and Nam Dinh Provinces are located) have always loomed large in historical imaginings of the nation: as the farmer-soldiers defending early Vietnamese polities against the "barbarians" from the north; as the proletariat stand-in placed at the vanguard of socialist revolution; and more recently as the embodiment of cultural values and authenticity in an increasingly urbanized society rife with "social evils" (Harms 20011). Beyond the realm of ideas, peasants have also been treated by governing authorities as a shapeable mass to be manipulated in the service of territorial expansion and consolidation, and the migrations—both forced and independent—of peasants have quite literally given shape to the "long and sinuous" (Pelley 1999) territory today known as Vietnam.

Herein we find one of the central paradoxes in studies of mobility in Vietnam: the coexistence and frequent deployment of two contradictory discourses on the peasant's propensity for movement. While population movement has clearly represented "one of the most significant features of Vietnamese history" (Dang et al. 1997: 315), with peasants repeatedly serving as the mobile "territorial spearheads" (De Koninck 1996) of

the state, administrators and scholars have also long characterized peasants as "attached" to villages, loathe to stray beyond the "bamboo hedge" traditionally surrounding their communities (Hardy 2003). Are Vietnamese peasants "movers," ready to establish new fields and communities in remote lands at the government's behest? Or are they "stayers," attached irrevocably to their inherited fields and insistent family and ancestral obligations? Officials in faraway capitals were left to ponder these (plainly reductionist) questions and draw expedient conclusions in the service of particular visions of development, seeing the pull of native-places as either something negative to overcome in the service of territorial expansion and frontier development, or as something appropriate for rural farmers who should remain "fixed" in villages and therefore manageable, countable, and taxable.

Insight into the ideological foundations and socioeconomic realities behind these two governing imperatives—the "will to move" and the "will to attach" (Hardy 2003)—along with peasants' own experiences of involvement in such efforts, can be gleaned by examining the formative, half-legendary master narrative of Vietnamese history: *Nam Tien*, the imperial "march to the south" from the Red River delta motherland, an eight-century long process of military conquest and agricultural expansion that displaced Cham and Khmer groups to the south and extended Vietnamese influence to Saigon and the Mekong Delta. Before delving into the historical progression of *Nam Tien*, however, it is important to note that, while appearing in history texts as something of an organized and steady sequence of conquest and colonization, the process of Vietnamese southward expansion is better understood as a series of sporadic, often unrelated events. These

included the simple practice of clearing vacant lands, early treasure-hunting raids that destabilized border communities, full-scale military operations aimed specifically at land dispossession, as well as the purposeful movements of entrepreneurs, peasants, and beggars alike settling new lands and forming viable villages in the military's wake. As Li (1998: 19) points out,

> …this *Nam Tien* was no simple linear progression, as it is so often presented, no essentialized preordained sequence by which the 'Vietnam' of the 10th century became the 'Vietnam' of today. There was no historical teleology at work here, but rather a series of different episodes responding to particular events or opportunities.

Nevertheless, many Vietnamese historians view the southward march as "constituting the central thread of the history of the Viet people" (Le 1981, in De Koninck 2000: 14), and looking into spatial visions and individual decisions spurring *Nam Tien* gives a clear picture of early relationships between the state and its subjects. It also illuminates the cultural meanings and shared historical experiences of nativity, displacement, and mobilization among the Vietnamese peasantry, many of which are still invoked today in debates over migration[2].

After nearly a millennium of subjection to various Chinese dynasties, the independent Dai Viet state emerged in the year 1043 under the leadership of Ly Thanh Tong, who established the capital in present-day Hanoi (then called Thang Long, meaning "ascending dragon") and set about the long-overdue process of nation-building. During this time, the Vietnamese sphere of influence extended only to approximately the

[2] Particularly discourses on "vagabonds" characterizing the "floating population" of free migrants flooding into cities looking for work during the reform era.

18th parallel near Ha Tinh Province (De Koninck 1996), with most of the population crowded into villages scattered across the Red River Delta (see map in Appendix 1). Small-scale farming on communally allocated lands represented the norm, and villages valued and maintained a large degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency. In spite of highly localized village identities[3], leaders worked to cultivate a unified peasantry throughout the delta, seen as critical to Vietnamese resistance against Chinese and (later) Mongol intrusions during a time of fragile independence. Nationalist poets such as Nguyen Dinh Chu reflecting on this period, for example, have praised the "heroism and patriotism of the peasants, who had only bamboo pikes when fighting against foreign invaders" from the north (Rato 2004: 328).

However, in another pattern that would repeat in Vietnamese history, discourses celebrating peasants as the lifeblood of the nation—resurgent especially in socialist tracts of the 20th century—did little to erase actually existing social differentiation and popular resentment toward political systems holding influence out of the reach of most, in this case all but a few delta villages with traditions of educating the governing mandarins. Evidence of tensions between Thang Long and the delta hinterland can be found in sayings such as "the power of the emperor stops at the bamboo hedge (*luy tre*)" and in the lyrics of traditional folk songs communicated across generations and recorded by cultural preservationists in the 18th century (from Taylor 2004: 327):

> The first is a scholar and the second is a peasant
> When the rice is running out the scholar wanders around

[3] Thai Binh Province owes the development of its unique cultural identity and ritual life to its status as a virtual "island" in the Red River delta, hemmed in by three wide rivers.

> Now the first is the peasant and the second is the scholar
> .

The language of "wandering" (*lang thang*) here is significant, turning a term usually deployed against out-of-work peasants around on the mandarins, suggesting their dependence and precarious hold on power. Beyond maxims and songs, Vietnamese history is also full of occasions when peasant resentment bubbled over into full-scale revolts—usually in response to burdensome tax codes and land seizures—effecting political change in many cases but also leaving many peasants landless, marginalized, and keen to start a new life elsewhere (Woodside 1989).

For their part, during times of relative peace, the newly independent leaders of Dai Viet began to pair military preparations with civilian-oriented forms of nation-building, establishing universities, mobilizing rural subjects to construct communal dike systems, and, significantly for the current discussion of territorial management, creating population and tax records at the village level. Administrators sought to "fix people in villages" (Hardy 2003: 7) in order to more authoritatively manage territory, augment the war chest, achieve social order and cohesion, and avoid the creation of "unstable" subjects roaming the countryside. They introduced a tiered system of village membership that emphasized the rights of individual adult males with firm ancestral claims to the locale, called "insiders" (*noi tich*). Outsiders (*ngoai tich*) consisted of recent migrants (*khach ho* or "guest sojourners") and even their children and grandchildren (promoted to *thuoc ho* or "long term sojourners") who lacked "access to communal land and other services" (Hardy 2001: 188). Confucian ideologies, including the promotion of moral doctrines of filial piety, supported such efforts to attach people to

their families, ancestors, and native villages. Unlike later periods of history when urban migration strengthened connections between Hanoi and its hinterland, peasant settlement in the capital remained practically nonexistent[4], although mandarins with roots in the countryside provided an important exception: not only was this form of migration to Hanoi (or Thang Long) considered unequivocally positive, it also contributed to the elaboration of native-place ideologies through the mandarins' own nostalgic writings—they could "wax lyrical on the morality and propriety of staying at home" (Hardy 2003: 70) while liberated from its often oppressive structures.

With the Chinese threat fading and domestic governing structures solidified, rulers of the Ly (1009-1225) and later Tran (1225-1400) dynasties began to revise visions of a static peasantry and cast a colonial gaze southward, toward the territory of the Cham people living beyond of the Hai Van Pass, which until this point represented a prohibitive physical and cultural frontier (See map in Appendix 1). At first, expansionary operations were "driven more by strategic considerations than economic ones" (Li 1998: 20), such as the establishment of the first land routes between Vietnam and Champa. While this served the civilian interests of generations of later migrants, the primary aim of the "feudal lords" at the time was simply to "attack Champa more easily" (*Ibid.*). And this they did, pushing the ever-threatened Cham capital south from its toppled site at Indrapura, and annexing large swaths of land in the area of present-day Dong Noi. However, Cham resistance remained fierce through the 13th and 14th centuries, and the

[4] Across the river from Thang Long, however, the market town of Ben Tre thrived, drawing peasants from all over the countryside to trade and meet. Still, these were short-term trips and nonlocals could not simply settle there without the usual onerous steps involved in changing residence (see Logan 2003).

settler mentality had yet to replace a military footing. Historian John Whitmore (1985) suggests that, despite the historical view of manifest destiny in *Nam Tien*, Vietnamese territorial control only truly solidified when the Cham threat disappeared with the final sacking of the new capital at Vijaya in 1471. Until this point, the future stability of annexed lands could not be taken for granted and civilian migration programs remained limited.

The large-scale settlement of newly acquired frontier territories began in earnest during the 15th century under the leadership of Emperor Ho Quy Ly, prompted by a combination of territorial visions emanating from Thang Long and social and economic circumstances within Red River Delta villages. From the perspective of leadership, Emperor Ho was "unimpressed by the old system of maintaining contested dominion over the border territories" (Li 1998: 21) and demanded firmer control over the south, establishing a district-level administration system in new territories and "pressing" peasants to migrate there. Successive feudal leaders followed this precedent and encouraged migration by "issuing incentives, such as exemptions from duty services and taxes, and by granting ownership of newly-opened lands for migrants" (Dang et al. 1997: 315). From the perspective of peasants trying to eke out a living in the delta, political and economic problems further encouraged migration. Specifically, members of the nobility had begun to "seize communal lands to increase the size of their own domains…impoverishing the small peasants who joined the ranks of the [landless] tenants and serfs" (De Koninck 1996: 243)—groups with little to lose by leaving the village. Population increases in the delta region, widespread landlessness, and the

continued objectives of territorial expansion and defense—supported through government incentives for resettlement—would set the stage for more significant migration-driven demographic transformations to come.

But who exactly were these individuals responsible for opening up the southern frontier? While this chapter interrogates the idea of "peasants attached to villages" as a discourse propagated and reworked by governing authorities as an instrument of population control, there nevertheless existed real cultural and economic incentives for Vietnamese peasants to remain in their native-places. Who would risk their share of communal lands, or subject themselves to the "laughs and insults" (*cuoi che*) of their neighbors by failing to perform village-based ancestral rites, considered the "gravest" form of impiety in Vietnamese society (Hardy 2003)? Certainly, in the early years of *Nam Tien*, soldiers and their families (recruited from the peasantry) constituted the vast majority of settlers, as "villages of veterans were established under military rule on newly acquired borderlands" (Thion 1977: 328). Although detailed accounts of relocation experiences from before the 17th century are scarce, Li (1998: 23) unearths one family history from the year 1498 that records this process:

> In the Hong Duc period (1470-1497) our ancestor was recruited from Thanh Hoa to fight in the land of the Cham, together with his family. Because he performed well in battle, he was allowed to stay in the Quang Nam area. Discovering a big river close to the sea…he gathered people to come and set up the village here.

This passage reveals not only how the emperors in Thang Long incentivized the establishment of "military colonies" (*quan dien*) by granting land to deserving defenders of the nation, but also how such communities cleared the way for civilian resettlement in

the soldiers' wake as other classes of peasants were "gathered" up to join the mobilization.

The first peasant groups to be specifically targeted for resettlement in the southern colonies were those lacking a firm social or economic footing in their communities of origin, as their relocation at once populated the frontier and reinscribed order on bodies rendered inherently threatening by their placelessness. These were not always impoverished, desperate people looking to sell their labor; in fact, amidst recurrent palace intrigue and regime changes, the far southern colonies were "originally defined as a place of banishment…for political dissidents and malcontents…a place of exile" (Li 1998: 22). Over the years and by logical extension, other "undesirable" segments of the population would be similarly targeted for migration, at times with comparable undercurrents of coercion. For example, De Koninck (1996: 243) notes how one emperor "even authorized the landlords to recruit landless workers and vagabonds as slaves who were then used to clear new lands." Many victims of land seizures and debtors joined the mobilization willingly as well, as economic desperation outweighed the censure of neighbors. According to Thion's (1977: 328) colorful assessment, "tramps, outlaws, and beggars could be integrated into new villages, on a somewhat inferior footing, and were given land to till." The incorporation of these wanderers and vagabonds into stable villages commanded "substantial energy and resources" (Hardy 2003: 235), and remained a major governing imperative through the French colonial and socialist eras, informing and presaging discourses on the threat of a "floating population" which continue today (see chapter 3).

Despite the attention of authorities on the resettlement of soldiers, exiles, and landless peasants, the trails blazed by these groups allowed other Vietnamese people of more varied backgrounds to "pull up stakes and move south," hoping to "find a brighter future in the new land…and improve their families' fortunes" (Li 1998: 22-23). Hardy (2003: 25) notes that, rather than stifling mobility among peasants, village structures and kin relationships within the village "often helped people leave it," particularly in the south where traditions of migration were becoming well-established. Indeed, even as Vietnamese territory was divided by civil war between the Trinh lords of the north and the Nguyen lords of the south, the drive to settle the Mekong delta continued, this time at the expense of the long-resident Khmer people. Often entire families or clans already living in the Nguyen lands banded together when opportunities to relocate again beckoned, pushing ever-further south in a stepwise manner and reworking ideas of family origins. Li Tana (1996: 24-25) provides a "typical example" of this process through the family history of the famous 19th century southern rebel Doan Huu Trung, one that reveals the sustained interest of peasants in conceptions of "native-place" even while on the move:

> …his ancestors originally shifted south from either Thanh Hoa or Nghe An during the Le dynasty, that is, sometime before about 1600. They first went to Quang Binh and set up a village named Chuon, where they stayed for a 'long time.' Then they traveled further south to Thua Thien. The village they set up here was called Chuon Ngon (meaning the branch of Chuon), and the Chuon village in Quang Binh was renamed Chuon Goc (the root of chuon).

Linguistically linking the villages through an idiom of relatedness (roots and branches) reflects the continued obligations felt by mobile peasants to honor their ancestors'

memories, but also shows flexibility of the home place discourse, especially among southern families who sometimes stayed in one place for only one or two generations before moving on.

While much of the Mekong delta was settled independently by similarly mobile peasants "who were simply infiltrating a sparsely settled area" (De Koninck 1996), the Nguyen leadership also undertook large-scale relocation programs aimed at concentrating political allies and continuing agricultural expansion. In the area of present-day Saigon, royal planners carved four districts (*huyen*) out of marginal lands, endowed each with its "full complement of military and civilian officials," and commenced "opening widely this land for one thousand miles, on which more than forty thousand households were gathered, then recruited wandering people…and let them go and live there so it could be populous" (Li 1996: 25). Families from the Trinh-controlled Red River Delta also found their way to the new deep southern settlements minus the stepwise path, their hand often forced by war, famine, and the crushing weight of taxes (De Koninck 1996). Given the longer histories and durable social structures of villages in northern provinces, Li (1996: 25) has commented on the roles of traditionally-organized lineages and clans providing the necessary "leadership, mutual assistance, and support" for such a risky migration proposition, demonstrating early native-place networks in action. After Vietnamese territory was unified again under Gia-long in 1802, the final frontier programs commenced, particularly as part of peacetime efforts to ramp up agricultural production in the Mekong Delta, the geographic terminus of *Nam Tien*. To this end, even convicts were granted freedom and allowed to participate in land pioneering own the parcels they

had cleared (De Koninck 1996). Unfortunately, in events that foreshadowed the French colonial experience, the plantation economy in this region was slowly taking over from conventions of small landholding (Dery 2000), and opportunities for peasants to stake a fresh claim on productive land would soon dry up rather abruptly.

Vietnam was a colonizing nation long before it was colonized by the French, and the long southward march of the Viet people into new lands illuminates many concepts revisited throughout this study. Most importantly, the territorial strategies of Vietnam's early dynasties shaping *Nam Tien*'s progression represent the first in a long series of officially-sponsored migration policies targeting the movements of peasants, a pattern continuing through French colonialism, socialist institutionalization, and neoliberal experimentation. And each governing body, regardless of its background or aims, took cues in the art of population management from projects and leaders past, as we will see in the next two sections. Peasants in Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, and other Red River Delta provinces have been caught up in these projects and migrations from the beginning, hailing from regions long depicted by discursive authorities as "overcrowded" (Dery 2000) and potentially unstable. In fact, many of the derogatory characterizations of people from these provinces as "beggars and wanderers" have their origins in popular understandings of Vietnam's feudal history. More than once, when discussing my research site in Thai Binh with friends in Hanoi, people used the phrase "*nguoi cai bang*" a term for "beggar" that references the the province's reputation for repeatedly enduring times of hardship that sent young men wandering as vagabonds throughout the

countryside, "with a cane in one hand and a bag in the other" (*Tay gay, tay bị khap nơi tung hoanh*).

Furthermore, the constitutive actions of Vietnamese southward expansion demonstrate both the importance and flexibility of native-place ideologies in the context of migration. While representing seemingly contradictory threads of Vietnamese history, we can see how "will to move" and the "will to attach" become easily reconciled as two sides of the same coin in *Nam Tien*: only with the possibility of movement do ideologies of attachment become articulated and deliberated. The social and economic belonging found within the "bamboo hedge" of home villages indeed exerted a powerful force, but leaving one's neighbors behind was not a cultural endgame. As we have seen, governing authorities and migrants alike were eager to build new "native-places" on the frontier, as "settlement" implies not just departure, but also eventual fixity. Local governors in the south mandated the immediate construction of village "communal houses" (*dinh*) in new frontier communities and set about "measuring and registering" (Li 1996: 25) the population to further inscribe new place-based identities on migrant bodies. Newcomers, many of whom were once considered wanderers or misfits elsewhere, could achieve formal belonging in as few as two or three generations (Hardy 2001), and soon new conceptions of native-place identity emerged, with roots and branches of family trees crisscrossing Vietnamese territory.

Finally, the foregoing analysis of *Nam Tiến* also suggests that beneath the spatial visions and obscuring "master narrative" of expansion were thousands of individual decisions by migrants and their families pursuing new economic opportunities or fleeing

strife in the northern provinces—recall the soldier-turned-pioneer whose "entrepreneurial efforts" built a "whole new village" (Li 1996: 23) in Quang Nam, or the families living in the Trinh-controlled north who, "crushed under the weight of taxes and other extractions" (De Koninck 1996: 243) mobilized their own robust kin networks to defect and start over in the southern Nguyen lands. From these stories, we can see how migration is an inherently agentive and political act, capable of supporting or undermining the spatial visions of faraway regimes. Governing authorities backed by armies may have opened the door to the frontier, but it was the Vietnamese people who decided to step through it—and as we will see later in this chapter, migrants including Bao's family have also been responsible for heading back the way they came.

Colonial Designs: managing the population in Indochina

When French forces captured Saigon and surrounding provinces in 1859 in retaliation for the alleged mistreatment of Catholic missionaries, a series of events was set in motion which resulted in rapid and fundamental changes to the ways Vietnamese territory and its population would be conceptualized and managed, including expanded roles for cities and highland frontiers. By 1887, a new political entity named French Indochina appeared on maps encompassing the entirety of modern-day Vietnam, a colonial construct comprising Tonkin (northern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), Cochinchina (southern Vietnam), as well as the Kingdom of Cambodia to the west. Around the same time in metropolitan France, developments in the "sciences of society" (Rabinow 1989) and the widely influential modernist movement changed perceptions of

governance, with academics, planners, and architects finding a ready laboratory for spatial and social experimentation in the colonies. As Gwendolyn Wright has argued, places like Morocco, Madagascar, and Indochina represented blank canvases (or at least, old and worn canvasses) appropriate "for transforming the concerns of intellectuals and architects into policies, for putting theory into practice" (Wright 1991: 325-326). This section explores how French leaders and planners trying to achieve an "administrative ordering of nature and society" (Scott 1998) in colonial Indochina rearranged both urban and rural spaces according to evolving discourses on modern governance, as well as the consequences of these intellectual movements on the physical and political movements of colonial subjects living within these managed spaces.

Underpinning all French colonial interventions in Indochina were the twin goals—shared by past and future regimes—of minimizing social unrest and stimulating a productive economy, but the methods employed to achieve these goals varied widely over time. A number of historians and social scientists have noted a distinction between the militaristic, "assimilationist" policies of the early years of French colonial administration and the softer "associationist" governing style deployed later (see Wright 1991, Thomas 2005). Assimilationist strategies emerged as a product of the still tenuous hold France held over much of (especially northern) Vietnamese territory in 19th century, and entailed cultural dominance in language, laws, and architectural styles, as well as demonstrations of power through "the destruction of indigenous cities and towns and…a continued, visible, military presence" (Wright 1991: 327). During this time, while the turbulent highlands north of Hanoi were still uncontrolled and facing full-scale military

attacks, 19th century colonial leaders found the villages of the Red River Delta comparatively stable and were initially encouraged to complete the assimilationist project there through the normalization of French language and dress, and "a well-designed educational system [that] would produce, in one generation, a pacified and devoted population, one thoroughly open to French ideas" (Rabinow 1989: 150).

By the turn of the century, however, authorities in France began to regard assimilationist strategies as a failure both on practical and moral grounds, and the colonial administration sought new strategies to support the stability and modernization of Indochina. Drawing upon intellectual currents rising in France—including a selective embrace of cultural relativism (Wright 1991)—a new generation of colonial authorities began implementing "associationist" policies in Indochina and other colonies aimed at pairing modernist principles of planning with "the preservation of distinctive local cultures" (*Ibid.*: 327). They hoped that respect for native culture and leadership combined with the expansion of social services such as schools and hospitals—consistent with metropolitan discourses on managing the "welfare of the population" (Rabinow 1989: 10)—would win hearts and minds and build the colony into an important asset for France. Thus formed a particular style of "colonial modernism" which merged more avant-garde or universalist visions of social and spatial transformation—evident in the wide boulevards and ordered housing blocks of colonial quarters of cities and in "simplified" plantation economies—with seemingly incongruous nods to vernacular styles and receptivity to cultural traditions in policymaking. Of course, these changes were not indicative of an about-face in matters of domination, and "one should certainly

not confuse these efforts of aesthetic reform, with their interplay of modernist and contextual themes, or the semblance of decentralization that accompanied them with a critique of colonialism and its inequalities" (Wright 1991: 335). Rather, such strategies simply represented "modernized" forms of domination and socio-spatial control, designed to "make colonialism more popular among Europeans and more tolerable to the colonized people" (*Ibid.*: 322).

The ideas animating new approaches to colonial space emerged in the context of deteriorating social conditions in France, prompting a search among young Parisian scholars for positivist solutions to the national malaise. "The social" as a terrain of action had come to the fore alongside the industrial revolution, and future luminaries of colonial planning such as Henri Prost and Ernest Hebrard grappled with the problems of poor industrial productivity, class antagonisms, an inadequate housing stock, and the perceived "moral degeneracy and physical debilitation" endemic to cities (Wright 1991: 327). While France itself would not embrace their spatial prescriptions until much later, suffering from a political apathy at the time resulting from successive economic and geopolitical setbacks (Rabinow 1989), these young urbanists and reformers saw unique opportunities for social experimentation in the colonies; in fact, such places were considered unique "*champs d'experience*, or experimental terrains" and helped to invigorate the intellectual life of Paris:

> Here one could appraise firsthand the actual conditions of quite diverse settings, and simultaneously, distill general principles, whether about the nature of cities or the influence of religion; moreover, it was possible to consider or even act on the political ramifications of various ideas (Wright 1991: 327).

The visions of early 20th century French urbanists found a highly-interested interested audience among those directing the course of colonization, and soon their ideas about how to arrange bodies and build prosperity, as well as the "experts" themselves in many cases, were being deployed throughout Indochina's cities and frontiers.

Cities undoubtedly represented the choicest such "experimental terrains:" contained environments where "spatial, social, and scientific elements were finally combined in a comprehensive manner" (Rabinow 1989: 211). Modernism also found its clearest expression in cities, though in its purist forms a few decades later in settings outside of the colonies. Most French colonial cities bear the marks of early- to mid-20th century modernist interventions, and the historical and contemporary relationships between built space and power have inspired a wave of recent scholarship on colonial Casablanca (Maghraoui 2013), Damascus (Verdeil 2012), and Algiers (Zarobell 2010). In Indochina, cities also underwent drastic transformations under the direction of colonial planners, growing rapidly with the superimposition of "French districts" and the expansion of industrial zones, as well as assuming bureaucratic roles well beyond their capacities under Vietnamese dynastic rule. In these settings, alongside the careful strategic integration of local histories and cultures, urban spaces also

> …exemplified many of the principles espoused by avant-garde modernists: more standardized construction, more rationalized organization of public services and industry, efficient circulation routes, and greater attention to the hygienic aspects of design, such as the need for fresh air and sunlight (Wright 1991: 323)

These social and spatial reforms tapped into desires to create "islands of modern civilization" (Rabinow 1989) that would both "aggrandize the colonial government and make it more efficient" (Wright 1991: 334) as it expanded its reach.

The spatial environment of Hanoi that frames the experiences of both permanent residents and migrants today has its origins in the actions of French planners who tapped Hanoi to be the capital and administrative and aesthetic centerpiece of the Indochinese Federation. Leaders in Paris invited professional urbanist Ernest Hebrand to Indochina as a government advisor, charged with building a new government quarter and designing several "exemplary" administrative buildings" (Wright 1991) in Hanoi, including the finance ministry, museums, and universities, among other projects. Taking cues from the associationist approach outlined earlier, and from ideas percolating within the "small but determined" *Societe Francais des Urbanistes*, Hebrard sought to "strike a balance between industrial growth and cultural respect, between modernism and tradition" (Wright 1991.: 332) in his designs. For example, Hebrard's museum of the Ecole Francais d'Extreme-Orient "grafted Southeast Asian decorative motifs[5] and climatic accommodations" onto an imposing institution of colonial knowledge— which was otherwise designed to express "the supposed universality of Western concepts of order and beauty." Rather than substantive political involvement in their own lives, Vietnamese subjects instead received "only architectural concessions…the substitution of

[5] Hebrard spent time researching, photographing, and sketching indigenous art, from Buddhist pagodas to local village crafts for his projects (Wright 1991).

what we could call 'visual decentralization' for meaningful reform" (*Ibid.*), demonstrating how space and aesthetics articulate with power in strategies of governance.

Hebrard also took on more practical planning concerns intended to make Hanoi more "organized, sanitized, and rationalized" (Wright 1991: 334), invoking the modernist vocabulary to address the city's perceived shortcomings. To this end, he created a plan to accommodate automobile growth, separated industrial and residential spaces, and widened boulevards. Significantly, he also established an exclusive zone for "European-type" houses, a de facto means of segregating the races through a "sanitary corridor," deemed necessary from a "functional" and "medical" point of view (*Ibid.*), but in reality another clear example of the manipulation of space to exert power over people's movements. What resulted was a worthy visual testimony to France's dominance, as well as a functional urban center relying not just on surveillance and coercion, but on "modern industry and financial development, on education, art, and supposed cultural tolerance," all "unified and celebrated in new administrative surroundings" (Wright 1991: 238). Reformist colonial administrators of Hebrand's time also called for more educated Vietnamese residents to assume posts in the urban bureaucracy, though these were mostly redundant with existing French-staffed positions, and thus a largely meaningless gesture. The aim was to use native forms and bodies in ornamental ways that appeared as concessions, but would actually reinforce the superimposed colonial order and increase social stability.

Urban migration in the Hanoi region became a significant force for the first time in Vietnamese territory under French colonial rule. Besides those students lucky enough

to be accepted into urban universities, most arrivals in Hanoi from the countryside found employment in the industrial zones springing up throughout the city. These relocations and the new (segregated) neighborhoods and "urban villages" created to support them contributed to the rapid growth of Hanoi during this period. Much of the urban migration under French rule can be regarded as "permanent" moves to the Hanoi region, though native villages retained material and symbolic importance (Li 1996). Some hinterland provinces (such as Nam Dinh and Hung Yen) also witnessed light industrialization and urbanization under the French, begetting greater involvement in the colonial economy and creating new networks of relatives spanning city and country, while other provinces like Thai Binh wallowed in relative isolation from urban centers until much later, delaying the development of intimate urban-rural relationships.

Outside of cities, colonial interventions in the modernist mold also found applications in the vast countryside and highland regions of Vietnamese territory. While scientific diagnoses and prescriptions for the management of rural spaces in Indochina would intensify later, projects pursuing transformative knowledge and control of it began almost immediately during the late-19th century, part of "a methodical plan for the progressive occupation and pacification of the country" (Rabinow 1989: 146). Mapping and census projects targeted the farthest reaches of territorial frontiers, followed by networks of roads, bridges, and administrative complexes connected new provincial capitals, durably built "to demonstrate that the French intended to remain permanently" (*Ibid.*). In Tonkin, villages of the Red River Delta were made more legible and governable in 1897 through the registration of individual men for tax purposes, with tax

receipts serving as a de-facto identification card and method of "external control" over peasants, since those who failed to produce valid tax cards upon request risked "fines and imprisonment if they ventured beyond the village" (Hardy 2003: 122). Later, a state identification service was created to more formally "fix the identity, filiation, and birthplace" of the Tonkinese, employing "state of the art" methods including fingerprinting and photography for administrative and judicial purposes (*Ibid.*). And in a clear and potent symbol of the biopolitical control exercised by officials, invasive anthropometric techniques were also employed on colonial subjects; according to French accounts, an "individual's height, chest, head, ears, and elbows were measured with meticulous precision with the aid of special instruments distributed to provincial authorities" (*Ibid.*). Fall (1966: 128-129) estimated that by 1945, close to a million villagers living in the Red River Delta held colonial identification cards that aimed to prevent travel by "suspect" individuals, but which also limited the possibilities for independent migration among all peasants.

State-sponsored migration campaigns, however, remained a different story entirely, as "policies on migration during the colonial period generated a great energy of thought and debate" (Hardy 2003: 85), seen as crucial to fix the "demographic disequilibrium" of Indochina. Indeed, even as the above practices of bureaucratic simplification limited the mobility of villagers in Thai Binh, Nam Dinh and other northern delta provinces, French officials became concerned with what were viewed as critical levels of "overpopulation" in the region. The issue received almost "obsessive attention…studied by officials, business people, and academics in books and articles

published in the late 1930s" (*Ibid.*), due in part to political forces in France calling for a reassessment of the colonial adventure and its administrative difficulties (Wright 1991). Censuses of the time revealed that the Red River Delta contained 33 percent of the total population of Indochina but less than two percent of the total land area (Kelly et al., 2001: 3), with birthrates outpacing the perceived carrying capacity of the heavily-cultivated land. One professor from the Faculty of Law in Hanoi found such figures "horrifying" and made his feelings known in a manuscript entitled "The Demographic Problem in Indochina" (Kherian 1937, in Hardy 2003: 78) which outlined the potential for overpopulation to engender deepening poverty in a region already plagued by food and land shortages. The threat of population pressure on social and political stability "also gave the debate a strong sense of crisis" as officials feared a "tidal wave" of drifters and other "starving multitudes" would surely foment rebellion (Hardy 2003: 79). Organized population movements became widely recommended as a remedy to these population problems and as an economic development strategy for the colony as well.

Like their predecessors in the Vietnamese dynasties, French colonial administrators were captivated by the possibilities of Indochina's territorial frontiers to relieve overpopulation in the Red River Delta. In the deep south of the Mekong Delta, French engineers made their own "notable contribution to *Nam Tiến*" (De Koninck 1996: 246) by improving drainage and reclaiming fields from the floodplain, transforming the delta region into an "export-oriented rice bowl" (*Ibid.*), staffed by recruiting "peasants from the densely populated north…to settle as either tenants or landless laborers" (Kelly et al. 2001: 8). The colonial administration also enlisted seasonal workers from Thai

Binh and Nam Dinh to work in plantations or coal mines in marginal regions, with cyclical migrations following the harvesting calendar (Dang et al. 1997). Some of these workers, however, faced severe exploitation and mistreatment, returning home with stories of forced labor and even "wholesale slaughter" on the plantations, creating an "unhappy reputation for French migration initiatives" (Hardy 2003: 75). Others encountered more favorable circumstances and were grateful for the opportunity to migrate from the northern delta, either seasonally or permanently; one successful settler in the Mekong delta from Thai Binh even related his experiences in a poem,[6] revealing optimism for the future of his homeland and confidence in his native-place identity:

> To help the country's poor people
> The government organized a migration
> Moving people there to make a living
> Especially folks from Nam Dinh and Thai Binh could go
> We won't lose our traditions

Already, we can see that the economically-stressed provinces of Nam Dinh and Thai Binh stood out in the eyes of colonial authorities and native residents alike as likely sources of out-migration, perceptions that persist today. French officials were apparently impressed with the quality of migrant labor from this region, with workers demonstrating an "aptitude to adapt quickly to the new disciplines and work techniques of the plantations and mines" (Brocheaux & Hemery 2009: 122), oblique praise to be sure, but also evidence of the economic flexibility that remains a source of pride in those provinces.

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[6] From "*Bai ca di dan,"* or "Songs of Migration" in Hardy (2003: 74)

French colonial officials also had grand plans for the domestication of highland regions of Indochina, the first time the minority-occupied frontiers of central and northwest Vietnam entered the crosshairs of governing authorities for spatial rearrangement and economic development, a phenomenon that would repeat with more robust results under the succeeding Communist regime. The relatively thin populations of highland frontiers constituted further evidence of demographic disequilibrium in Indochina, and ever since their conquest of northern Vietnam, French administrators had "tried to settle the hinterland with Viet people from the plains" (Hardy 2003: 70). They regarded the lowlanders' agricultural technologies and knowledge—not to mention long experience under French administrative structures—as essential for the "taming" of highland minority regions, pursuing a modernist visage of "shaped and settled order, an order to replace the chaos of unbridled bush, with its threat to health and good taste" (*Ibid.*). Governors in such regions initially offered simple land grants to migrants, but facing a widespread lack of interest among potential settlers, later organized large-scale subsidized projects, such as one in pursued in Thai Nguyen Province in 1919 (later described by a French analyst): "138 families were given vast areas of land to transform into irrigated rice fields…besides the land, the settlers also received free tools, seeds, draft animals, and a sum of 6 piasters…" (Gourou 1936, in Hardy 2003: 90).

Unfortunately for the ambitious French administrators, some of whom received promotions for designing highland migration schemes, the settlement and "improvement" of Vietnam's highlands did not take hold, and "the failure of project after project" (Hardy 2003: 71) began to engender widespread skepticism about the possibilities of frontier

migration as a panacea for overpopulation. In the example from Thai Nguyen above, for example, many of the disappointed settlers soon packed up, sold their granted land to the minority *Nung* people already living in the region, and returned to the delta[7]. By 1932, only a handful of families remained, leading to the view that the investment of 40,000 piasters in the project was "totally excessive for the low number of settlers established" (Hardy 2003: 90). Assessing the situation in hindsight, one Vietnamese journalist commented that "the job of forcing people to clear lands in the mountains…has forced those holding power in our country to scratch their heads and tire out their brains for ages" (Nghiem 1944, in Hardy 2003: 85).

French academic and policy studies attributed such failures to the pathological "attachment" to villages exhibited by the Tonkinese. Such ideas reflected the emergent Western European interest in studying the influences of "native culture" outlined earlier as well its associated orientalist gaze. For example, in the assessment of noted geographer Charles Robequain (1944: 62):

> It is the very structure and basic meaning of Viet society which keeps the native home and stifles the spirit of adventure. This is true of all the peoples of the Far East; the age-old influence of Chinese civilization which has [supported] the native's attachment to the village of his birth. Ancestor worship…is very strong in the Viet heart. Only the faithful observance of its rites can assure the happiness of both the dead and the living. To abandon one's birthplace without hope of return seems like a sacrilege which will harm not only the individual and his family but the entire community.

According to this logic, psychological and religious factors, inculcated over centuries of

[7] Such actions can be seen as examples of the "weapons of the weak" used by peasant groups across time and space to resist exploitation (Scott 2008), and certainly reflect the power of unplanned migration to influence policymaking.

exposure to Confucian culture, stood as an irremediable obstacle to large-scale resettlement, instead condemning many immobile peasants to lives of poverty in overcrowded villages. Such beliefs were not limited to the French colonial administration, of course. Feudal leaders, as we have seen, acknowledged the pull of native-places, and promoted their own version of "transportable" attachment supporting the southward march. Vietnamese scholars during the French colonial era also reproduced reductionist discourses on peasant attachment, particularly with reference to the age-old villages of the Red River Delta, where migration was seen as a last resort undertaken only "when the belly's hungry and the feet have to move" (Vu 1942, in Hardy 2003: 120). However, among these sources, such commitment to native-places constituted a point of pride as much as an indictment of native culture. Fidelity to one's roots was virtuous, and last-resort migration represented "strong indication of the practical-minded spirit of the Vietnamese people" (*Ibid.*). We will revisit these alternately positive and negative assessments of peasant attachment to villages in the next section, as socialist leaders similarly manipulated the meanings of native-places to their own ends.

To summarize, even as French officials cited the immobility of the rural Tonkinese for the failure of certain migration programs, they often created economic and political conditions inimical to movement by supporting an administrative attachment to native places that limited the ability of villagers to pursue a better life elsewhere. Nevertheless, with an institutional power beyond that of any previous governing regime, the French colonial period (1859-1954) witnessed new forms of migration throughout

Vietnamese territory, shaped by, but also reshaping, the spatial visions of Paris- and Hanoi-based academics and planners. In rural areas, most migration involved either the largely independent cyclical movements of peasants areas "during transplanting and harvesting seasons in search of temporary employment (Dang et al. 1997: 315), or the longer-term migration of groups of settlers brought to work on far-flung plantations and mines. And despite their failures in promoting migration there, frontier regions also grew in population and importance under the French, and by the end of the colonial era, settlements "created in the…highlands by the authorities for their own auxiliary needs began to constitute an outlet for adjacent overcrowded plains" (Dery 2000: 39), and further "opened up" Vietnam's frontiers to subsequent strategies of development and migration.

According to Hardy, these varied migration practices demonstrate two distinctive "cultures of mobility" operating during the French colonial period. First, and traceable to the dynastic period covered in the last section, was the long-established practice among rural villagers of leaning on networks of friends, relatives, and *dong huong* (or native fellows) to find seasonal agricultural employment, or to relocate completely when "relatives offered a base for settlement in exchange for work" (2003: 111) in often faraway locales. Indeed, even as outside forces conspired to limit peasant mobility, indigenous village social structures also made migration possible, since village-based networks providing resources for people working far from home had long been the norm in the Red River Delta. And in contrast with pessimistic discourses by French authorities of attachment to native-places and the dire social consequences for leaving home, among

migrants circulated alternative discourses exemplified in the common saying, "one destination, two homes," suggesting ongoing connection to one's original native-place, even if this connection draws more upon nostalgia than actual social and economic behavior.

The second culture of mobility in colonial Indochina reflects the superimposed economy of plantations, mines, factories, and diversified cities, whereby even those "who wished to avoid using networks based on family or kin relations" could find employment and new social surroundings (Hardy 2003: 112), even adopt an urban lifestyle with all of the European trappings. As I have pointed out, for all of their structures of social support, villages can also represent highly antagonistic settings for people with personal or political disputes, and with even a minimum of education people had the chance to escape the countryside and find work outside of the village with colonial employers.

The primary pillars of French colonial spatial visions and migration policies were modernization, economic development, and supporting social stability through perceptions of legitimate rule. While we might assume a significant rupture from French colonial goals in light of the drastically different version of economy and society espoused by the Communist Party of Vietnam in the postcolonial period, what we find instead are some surprising continuities: modernist planning strategies, large-scale population transfers, and strict control over the movements of the Vietnamese peasantry.

Mobilize! Socialist transitions and migration in Vietnam, 1954-1986

When French Indochina formally decolonized and the new territorial boundaries

of Vietnam became fixed according to the stipulations of the 1954 Geneva Convention, another process of decolonization in the sphere of thought had already commenced among Communist leaders and intellectuals. At the helm of a newly minted nation-state, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) undertook number of crucial tasks to "make the revolution stick" (Pelley 2002) and build a new society according to nationalist and Communist principles: consolidating control of Vietnamese territory, institutionalizing the socialist system, and constructing a national consciousness capable of supporting state ideology and the party's legitimacy. All three of these tasks implicated the thoughts and movements of Vietnam's peasantry, whom leaders positioned at the vanguard of revolution through the careful selection and manipulation of Marxist and Leninist ideologies, and later targeted for mass mobilizations. This section considers the inherited and constructed ideologies motivating spatial projects among the CPV, weighing the intentions and execution of these projects against the personal geographies of "peasants" from the Red River Delta, including Dang Bao's far-flung family.

Though his ideas would carry enormous consequences for the people of East and Southeast Asia, Karl Marx himself did not see much potential for Communist revolution in this part of the world in his materialist conception of history. He regarded the "Asiatic mode of production" as an unsuitably backward stage of human economics, many steps removed from the capitalist version that will usher in a proletarian revolution. Moreover, the urban proletariat was virtually absent in 20th century Vietnam, so Ho Chi Minh and other leaders would need to look elsewhere to staff the revolution. While these figures drew early inspiration from Lenin's call for peasants to unite with workers against

imperial forces (see chapter five), it was really Mao Zedong who was able to successfully reshape Marxist principles to accommodate a peasant spearhead, through his thesis of an armed struggle launched from the countryside" (Deane 2001: 25), ideas soon disseminated throughout northern provinces. The absorption of this particular configuration Marxism-Leninism by now-President Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants had "provided them not only with a doctrine on the seizure of power, but also with ideas on what to do with it afterward" (Post 1989: 4). Accordingly, although green in matters of governance, the revolutionaries now saw as their primary objective moving into the second phase of revolution, the "transition to socialism," which involved radical new economic frameworks and spatial visions for the distribution of citizens. For instance, addressing the twin aims of industrial cities and productive collective farmlands to support them, leaders saw the preservation of an urban/rural dichotomy as essential to socialist nation-building, and it has remained a studied governing imperative ever since, only abating in the last two decades or so, as we will see in the next chapter.

Unfortunately for the young independent country, leaders would have to wait to put many of these social and economic ideologies into practice throughout Vietnamese territory, as two decades of continuous military efforts to unify the country (1954-1975) put many grand spatial visions on hold. Migrant decisions, on the other hand, became life-or-death propositions in many cases, as wartime brought new forms of movement to Vietnamese territory, based more on survival than anything else. In the communist-controlled north, citizens fled to the countryside to avoid American bombing, considerably reducing the population of Hanoi, Hai Phong and other strategic cities.

South Vietnam, however, "witnessed substantial urban growth" (Kelly et al. 2000: 9) owing to three main factors: refugee movements among rural villagers fleeing escalating conflict in the countryside; the "strategic hamlet" program which separated people from their native villages and fields; and the boom in Saigon's economy materializing alongside the American presence which created new business opportunities for urban migrants.

Following the reunification of Vietnamese territory with the fall of Saigon in 1975, the CPV intensified control over the movements of citizens in order to maintain political power and preserve an idealized division of labor and collectivization, enacting large-scale population transfers and refining a system of household registration called *ho khau*[8] that for decades effectively tethered people to their communities of origin or work units. While the next chapter considers contemporary experiences and debates surrounding the *ho khau* system in Hanoi, its origins deserve attention here as a key piece in revolutionary visions of production and reproduction. Of course, the registration and control of households was not new to Vietnam, and I have described the tax and identification cards issued by the French colonial regime to monitor individuals and restrict spontaneous mobility, a system itself based on earlier feudal models of registration for purposes of taxation and military conscription (Brocheaux & Hemery 2009). In this particular incarnation, the CPV drew inspiration from a similar system developed during the 1950s in communist China (called "*hukou*"), used to classify and

[8] *Ho*" means "household" in Vietnamese, while "*khau"* refers members of households. Usually the term is combined with the noun *so* for "ledger/register," as in *So Ho Khau* or "household registration."

control the labor of urban versus rural workers (see Zhang 2001, Solinger 1999). The Vietnamese implementation of *ho khau* provided officials with "a far superior administrative tool than had previously existed…to know the entire population, men, women, and children, and would use this knowledge to great effect over subsequent decades" (Hardy 2001: 189). Officials recorded people's names, place/date of birth, ethnicity, religion, profession, and membership in a household, using such information to keep track of births and deaths, control the movements of people between urban and rural areas, and also to police potential threats to the regime. Citizens leaving their native-place without permission—or work unit "households" among urban workers in factories or state institutions—would lose their rights to grain rations, education, health care, and other state-provided services. They might also fall under suspicion of counterrevolutionary activity, joining the long list of people whose personal details rendered them "problematic" for the regime, including religious minorities or those whose family members had studied in France (Hardy 2001).

The intense surveillance associated with *ho khau* virtually eliminated the possibility of independent migration, particularly to cities, for nearly a half-century. Accordingly, from the 1960s until the mid-1980s, most labor migration in Vietnam remained government-sponsored, primarily involved with opening and securing national frontiers. Like their colonial predecessors, Vietnamese leaders in the 1970s were deeply concerned with reducing population pressure in Red River Delta provinces (Dang et al. 1997) and saw opportunities to pair economic development with national security by settling the highlands with reliable citizens. Frontier migration was also closely linked to

the consolidation of socialism throughout Vietnamese territory, which necessarily precluded any strong existing ideologies or "traditional systems" (Dery 2000), here among the many ethnic minority groups indigenous to marginal mountainous regions. State planners carved New Economic Zones (NEZs) out of the highlands and enjoined migrants to clear land, plant crops, and contribute to the national project—to "go and build a new village!" ("*Di xay du que huong moi!*") in the rhetoric of mobilization (Hardy 2003: 150). Later, state-financed forestry, mining, and manufacturing (particularly steel) projects in the highlands would call for even more migrants in the northern highlands. Characteristic of the sometimes "massive population transfers" (De Koninck 2000) prescribed during this period was the 5-year economic development plan announced at the 4th Party Congress in 1976 (see Fig. 2.1).

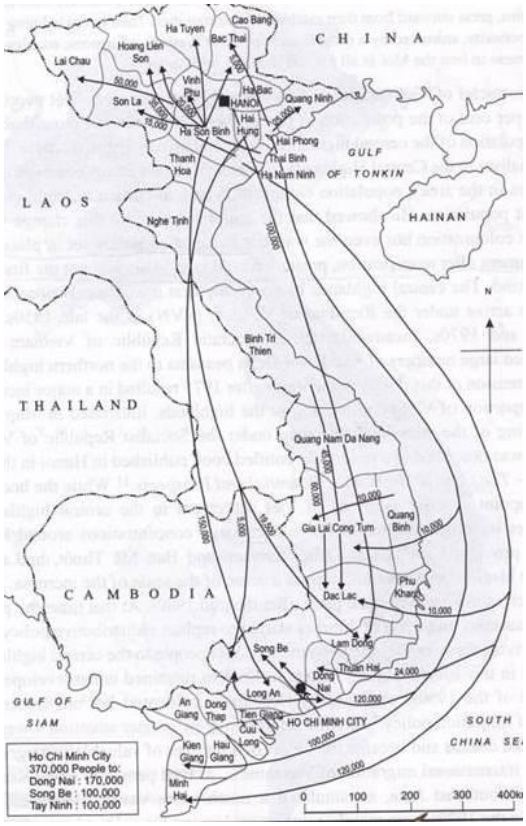


Figure 2.1: Population transfer plan from 4th Party Congress in 1979 (in Hardy 2003: 12)

The map used to define intended transfers reveals the lofty ambitions of early leaders trying to scientifically control the population and maximize the productivity of its territorial reaches. The Vietnamese state largely financed these homesteaders, especially during the early stages of the NEZs, providing incentives for migrants such as shelters, supplies, and a plot of land. Ultimately, in a recurring theme of Vietnamese spatial politics, governing ambitions fell short of institutional capacity, and predictable difficulties managing such complicated schemes soon emerged.

Whereas French authorities observed only pathology and obstinacy in the Vietnamese peasant's relationship to native-place, Communist Party governing

authorities saw more practical flexibility and ideological malleability, a complex cultural heritage waiting to be harnessed in the service of demographic reorganization, particularly in the highlands where the French failed in their transformative visions. According to future Minister of Education Nguyen Van Huyen (1995 [1944]: 70), the idea of *que huong*

> is formed not just by those who live there but also by all those who originated there and may return only one or twice in a lifetime, but have the tombs of their ancestors in the commune and their familiar temple is maintained by a member of their clan…With the facilities of movement , people can settle down elsewhere but will always claim to be a native of their original village; they pay their personal tax to the village, they contribute to the communal charges, even when they do not enjoy material advantages…

In other words, officials viewed migration as a routine event for many peasants, recognizing that the *que huong* discourses invoked to argue for "attachment" are in many ways formed through absence, motivating pious migrants to continue to honor their ancestors and maintain an economic presence in native-places, thus preserving their social standing and potential for return. Moreover, many of the people holding power in the CPV during the 1960s, like Nguyen Van Huyen, were born in countryside and well-versed in the hardships there that might feed a mobilization to highland frontiers (Hardy 2003).

In this context, discursive authorities set out to rework the *que huong* idea to "persuade peasants to volunteer for migration" (Hardy 2003: 26), labeling birthplaces "old homes" and villages carved out of the hills "new homes," thus reinscribing native-place identities in a manner similar to dynastic leaders promoting the settlement of earlier territorial frontiers. They also co-opted the popular saying "one destination, two homes"

and turned it into a propaganda slogan, suggesting the permanence of the destination while conceding the inability to sever ties with the "old home" completely. Further, appealing to the nationalist sentiment that heavily influenced communism's articulations in Vietnam, leaders promoted the view that the highlands were the new "home" of revolution (*que huong cach mang*), or that "the whole country is your native place" (*dau cung la que huong*) (Hardy 2003: 26), this latter discursive trick aimed at shifting the scale of nativity and belonging—from local/fixed to national/mobile—among Vietnamese citizens. They hoped to pair "the idealistic energies of patriotism with the problem-solving energies of peasant need" (*Ibid.*) and looked to the impoverished villages of the Red River Delta to start recruitment efforts.

While this chapter has so far detoured from the experiences of Dang Bao and his family in order to describe spatial politics and migration experiences in centuries past, this point in history (the 1960s and 1970s through the present) marks the beginning of many stories I gathered of state-sponsored and independent movements among citizens from Thai Binh and Nam Dinh. During this period my interlocutors dispersed to agricultural and industrial frontiers in the northwest highlands, but also to Hanoi and other locales throughout Vietnamese territory as soldiers, teachers, and laborers. In the remainder of this section, I will integrate these experiences into a discussion of spatial controls and the personal geographies of citizens from these and surrounding provinces, where state agents zealously tried to mobilize villagers to settle and develop the "New Economic Zones."

Dang Bao's father, Dang Quan (Mr. Quan hereafter), recalls clearly when the

government recruiter arrived in the villages of Dong Da district, Thai Binh, in the summer of 1975 with the charge of signing up volunteers to "colonize the wilds and cultivate the forests" of Yen Bai Province. He describes how "throughout the countryside at that time there were schemes to bring people to the new economic zones," and how his interest in such opportunities had been piqued a year before when an acquaintance returned home with reports of free land and fortunes to be made. Bao's parents hailed from neighboring villages and married young into the grinding poverty of postwar Vietnam, when "life was strenuous" in the midst of agricultural collapse due to sustained war efforts and the failure of state collectives. Seeking an escape, they joined an estimated 50% of able bodied villagers from Dong Do and left for the hills of Yen Bai Province sight unseen in 1976, originally planting corn until finding more lucrative—though backbreaking—work in road construction, supporting the many infrastructure projects in the frontier region. Migration decisions represented almost purely economic calculations; Mr. Quan and other participants cited neither an insurmountable "attachment to home" nor a strong notion of patriotism as major considerations.

At first, government assistance kept the resettlement community afloat (in the Vietnamese penchant for speaking in percentages, Mr. Quan estimates that about 80% of their overall expenses were subsidized by the government), but after about ten years, labor opportunities and ongoing investment—indispensable in such marginal conditions—dried up as more people deserted and the enthusiasm of cadres waned. Feeling "uncomfortable" and "disconnected" in the highlands with little motivation to stay, Mr. Quan consulted with his parents in Dong Do Village and decided to "*ve que*" or

"return to the native-place" in summer 1984. Awaiting him in the village was a large share of the family's farming responsibilities, but also a new house plot adjacent to his parents' and a chance to rejoin the usual village social and religious activities. Hundreds of other families from Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, and neighboring delta provinces left frontier settlements around the same time (see Hardy 2003), heading "home" to native-places they hadn't seen in years, or independently relocating to the new "coffee frontiers" of the Central Highlands (Dery 2000). A few relatives stayed in the area, opening businesses in the provincial capital, and today Bao's far-flung patrilineal relatives can be found living in all these locales.

Outside of Yen Bai Province, other Dong Do natives—mostly retired soldiers—sought and found "stable" (*on dinh*) work in the equally rustic midlands north of Hanoi during the early 1970s, working in factories such as the Thai Ngyuen Iron and Steel Plant, a bombing target during the American War and key economic asset for the CPV in the postwar years. When tracing his personal geography during this period, one of Bao's paternal "grandfathers" (whose blood relationship to Bao was hard to discern[9]), a 71-year old veteran named Tuan, described accepting a position at the steel plant after a nearly a lifetime of serving the revolution as a propagandist and soldier[10]. He already had some experience in the highlands when serving in a "mobile unit" responsible for "suppressing traitors to the revolution" hiding out in the hills—a mission he dismisses now as driven "more by propaganda" than substance—and he initially felt rewarded by the chance to

[9] He (and I) used the term *ong noi*, which indicates an older paternal relative.

[10] During his youth, Tuan had travelled around the delta "climbing trees and reading newspapers" as a propagandist in rural areas.

relocate to Thai Nguyen and earn a reasonable wage. However, citing failing health, Tuan lasted only three years there, returning mostly penniless to Dong Do in 1974 since he failed to work long enough to secure retirement pay (*tien luong huu*). While many former soldiers his age battle ongoing health issues, Tuan also asserts that "unhygienic" and "dangerous" residential communities in the highlands, along with a lack of adequate medical facilities, contributed to his poor health and decision to *ve que*. This sentiment echoes in other ethnographic accounts of migration to highland frontiers, which "were indeed unhealthy – their mosquitos highly malarial" and climates disagreeable to delta natives (Hardy 2003: 71). Tuan still expresses some bitterness about the conditions and lack of care received in Thai Nguyen, not to mention envy at the pensions distributed to younger revolutionaries. Despite this "disadvantage," Tuan remains positive overall about his life trajectory and satisfied raising his family in the "warm earth" of the village, watching his children (now all migrants) achieve prosperity, and providing a "good example of Vietnamese culture to his grandchildren," including Bao and his brothers.

Not all migration from the Red River Delta countryside to the northern highlands in the years before the *Doi Moi* reforms stemmed from state programs, however. As mentioned, economic conditions in Dong Do and neighboring areas during the 1970s and 1980s remained extremely precarious, and some villagers headed to the hills without a clear plan, hoping to find temporary work in the wake of agricultural and industrial expansion. Young, unattached men in particular saw few prospects in the village and set about "roaming" (*di lang bat*[11]*)* in search of wages and adventure without a firm

[11] In Vietnamese, the two terms for "roaming" or "wandering" carry different valences: *di lang thang*

commitment to stay, hoping to draw upon networks of kin and friends to secure permission to work temporarily. In the words of one Dong Do resident, "for a while I was roaming around up there…I went out to the hills of Mong Cai to plant tea. They ordered us around; whatever they told us to do, we just did it." A small business owner I met in Hanoi named Dai, originally from Hai Hau district in neighboring Nam Dinh Province, related similar experiences of roaming during the subsidy period without joining a formal program:

> Yes, I remember that: "go to the new economic zones" [we were told]. At that time I was still young and unmarried…there were programs to bring people, but I did not go that way; I only went to earn some money to bring home with me. For example I did forestry, some gold mining. I surely did not go and stay put.

Economic exigencies forced Dai's hand—as they did for Bao's parents and other Dong Do villagers—and the existence of state enterprises in the highlands influenced his decision to migrate there, but he left and returned to the village on his own terms.

In his extensive treatment of frontier settlement during in the pre-reform period, Hardy (2003: 27) notes parallel experiences of self-determination in the settlement and eventual abandonment of New Economic Zones. In his view, people from delta provinces decided to "head for the hills…less in the spirit of patriotic socialism than to seek prosperity." Escaping economic dysfunction on the collectives, they hoped "to develop a new and vibrant society in the highlands" (Hardy 2003: 230). But awaiting

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carries the meaning of drifting and vagabondry, while *di lang bat* carries a more positive meaning in roaming for the sake of adventure and coming-of-age.

these mobilized citizens in the hills was still more dysfunction: spotty infrastructure, inadequate health care, and cadres who "only knew how to say 'no'" (*Ibid.*) to requests for necessary support. People's expectations diverged significantly from state visions of settlement, the latter amounting essentially to "staying, surviving, and subsisting." Hardy's interviewees found at first that "in the first five years, the state gave aid…and there were not many difficulties," but eventually most settlers similarly gave up on frontier programs in the northwest highlands (2003: 230).

Like their French colonial counterparts decades before, Communist Party authorities during the 1960s and 1970s came to realize that the highly-touted highland New Economic Zones were not developing according to plan. In the evaluation of a Thai Binh cadre at witnessing 491 recruits (from 107 families) abandoning the highlands on their own initiative during one a six-month period, "we have not yet got our migrating compatriots to settle down contentedly to making a living and building their new home village (*que huong*)" (in Hardy 2003: 195). This piece of self-criticism represents perhaps a more nuanced view than the French assessment of "pathological attachment" to villages, but psychological attributions also emerged under the CPV, with particular limitations attached to each category of citizens involved in the programs: women and older people "have strong feelings for home and the land of their ancestors [and] prefer to stay at home and die in company;" young people "like to fly high…rather than just clearing the wilderness;" cadres themselves "have strong family feelings [and] are shy of hardship" (Hardy 2003: 158-159). Where officials had once convinced themselves that native-place ideologies were flexible and citizen mobilization intrinsic to Vietnamese

citizenship, reality forced the acknowledgement that the peasantry is not merely a "shapeable mass" in the service of economic transformation, but rather comprised of individuals in diverse subject positions who will look after their individual and family needs before those of the national community.

Clearly, initial migrations to the hills were largely determined by the mobilization of a state project, but they also depended on the decisions of individual participants seeking out a better life, and the eventual downfall of frontier projects in the Northwest resulted from the momentum of similar economic agency. Zhang et al. (2001: 3) agree in their analysis of migration in the socialist era, concluding that despite the CPV's continued attempts "to reshape the country's population configuration and distribution, policy outcomes…have been swayed as much by individuals and families in pursuit of their own aspirations and livelihoods as by the state plans." During the mid-1980s, the government reconsidered its frontier development strategy and, consistent with the steps toward marketization to come, began to encourage migration to a new frontier in the Central Highlands, again to relieve population pressure, but also because leaders saw the coffee grown there as a key export crop. During this transitional period, migrants acted "largely outside of state control…but moved along networks and used resources made available by state policy" (Hardy 2003: 30), foreshadowing the extension of such networks into urban areas in the reform era when cities became the main target of development.

While resettlement projects in the northwest highlands accomplished neither substantive population redistribution nor the economic transformation of the mountains in

the image of the orderly delta lowlands, they did give shape to the personal geographies of villagers from Dong Do and elsewhere. In fact, a glimpse at the bus schedule in Thai Binh city reveals the long-term impact of state visions and migrant decisions—both coming and going—in this region. Among the usual routes to Hanoi and Hai Phong are daily departures to Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Lai Chau, and other seemingly unlikely highland locales, mapping onto the movements of families like Dang Bao's over the past three decades. While many people left for home villages or ended up in Vietnam's growing cities, relatives and social networks still inhabit the highlands—which since the 1990s have enjoyed a boom of industry and tourism—constituting yet another resource for migrants following economic opportunities throughout Vietnamese territory.

Conclusions

This chapter examined the spatial controls of governing authorities alongside the migration experiences of Vietnamese people—particularly those native to the Red River Delta—across a large swath of history, demonstrating continuities and ruptures between colonial (both imperial Vietnamese and French) and socialist strategies of spatial control and population management. This understanding of history sets the stage for understanding contemporary experiences of mobility and migrant community building in contemporary Vietnam, where once again migrant practices chip away at the authority of state population controls. While the likely destinations of migrants in the reform-era—major cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City—indicate rupture with past forms of movement to frontiers and other rural areas, there exist many more continuities that will

be interrogated in the chapters to come: state practices of citizen identification and management; efforts to channel population flows into particular areas; the manipulation of official ideologies to support new spatial interventions; and the mutually-constitutive relationships between migration policy and practice.

Entering the era of economic reforms in Vietnam (which began in 1986), our next stop is along the margins of Hanoi to examine the legal and social environments facing urban migrants in contemporary Vietnam. We will begin by taking a drive from downtown Hanoi to a neighborhood of Thinh Liet along Hanoi's southern outskirts, where Bao and thousands of other migrants lacking "urban citizenship" mobilize native-place relationships to forge livelihoods and communities in a transforming city.

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Chapter Three

Unofficial Hanoians: Urban Citizenship, Migration, and Native-Place Networks in Thinh Liet Ward

Driving south from downtown Hanoi along Giai Phong Street—the city's main north-south thoroughfare—it is remarkably easy to miss the turn to Thinh Liet ward and melt into the traffic of Highway 1A, as I discovered the first few times I attempted the trip alone. While the first half of the twelve kilometer route passes Hanoi's colonial-era train station and other familiar landmarks, after crossing a motorbike bypass into Hoang Mai district, the urban landscape transforms abruptly into an undifferentiated sequence of freshly constructed shophouses—tall and skinny—obscuring the numbered lanes below (*ngo*) that serve the area's "residential neighborhoods" (*khu dân cư*). Only after exiting the main road and navigating the obstacles of these onetime village footpaths—dusty construction sites, honking motorbikes, trapped taxis, street vendors—does the lively pace and sometimes gritty improvisation of life in one of Hanoi's emerging growth corridors reveal itself (see Fig. 3.1).



Figure 3.1: Giai Phong Street (left) and the narrow lane to Thinh Liet Ward (right)

Once composed of villages and farmlands, Hoang Mai today represents the city's southernmost "urban district" (*quan*), as well as one of its newest, only minted as such in 2003. Along with other marginal districts of Hanoi, it also reflects contrasting images of Vietnam's urban future, experiencing substantial state investment and real estate speculation (called "land fever" or *sot dat*) alongside the arrival and informal accommodation of thousands of migrants from the countryside, many of whom lack the necessary paperwork to secure formal employment or legal housing. Tucked into the folds of urban spaces yet to be pressed into their final forms, neighborhoods like Thinh Liet—located along Hoang Mai's eastern reaches via Ngo 1043 (see appendix 1 for map)—allow Hanoi's "unofficial" residents to sustain viable, largely self-supporting communities without offending the city's established legal and social mores.

My usual destination in Thinh Liet is a *bia hoi*[1] restaurant near the old village center frequented by one community of urban migrants from Nam Dinh Province, working in Hanoi's informal sector as day laborers, independent street vendors, and, most commonly, as motorbike taxi (*xe om*) drivers in the surrounding area. In fact, migrants from two neighboring communes in Nam Dinh enjoy a near monopoly over the area's motorbike taxi business, scattering to high-traffic corners by day and returning at night to shared public spaces and boarding houses in Thinh Liet. In addition to cheap libations, the *bia hoi* restaurant offers the Nam Dinh migrant community a place to forge and sustain relationships with native-place fellows (*dong huong*), cultivate a sense of belonging through common dialects and life experiences, and mobilize social networks in

[1] An open-air restaurant serving inexpensive draft beer and noodle and rice dishes

the service of particular goals. For me, the restaurant provides a valuable site of ethnographic access to mobile citizens whose practices of independent labor migration, mutual assistance, and community development are contributing to Hanoi's growth and, at the same time, blurring the lines between urban and rural lives once maintained so carefully by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV).

As with Van, Bao, and other urban migrants profiled in previous chapters, the status of most members of the Nam Dinh migrant community in Thinh Liet remains "temporary" according to the *ho khau* system of household registration. Unable to secure labor contracts, buy property, or freely enroll their children in public schools in many cases (Dang 2010), Nam Dinh migrants largely fend for themselves, drawing upon personal relationships and an expanding private marketplace of services catering to migrants to acquire the necessities of life. Even as migration to major cities in Vietnam surges alongside deepening market reforms and the pursuit of informal work in Hanoi becomes a near-universal livelihood strategy among rural delta families, officials remain reluctant to jettison the *ho khau* system, adhering to a normative view that "rural people" should remain in the countryside and "stick to farming activities" (Rigg 2006: 187). Media outlets and long-resident Hanoians also worry aloud about the "uncivilized" habits of newcomers who are threatening to overwhelm the city. Embedded in these laws and ideologies of belonging are the entitlements of who does and who does not have legitimate claims to urban space—often described as "rights to the city" (Lefebvre 1990; Holston 2009)—resulting in the development and normalization of a form of differentiated urban citizenship that carries ongoing significance for those seeking

alternatives to the economic limitations of the countryside.

Focusing on the community of Nam Dinh-born motorbike taxi drivers and informal laborers living full- and part-time in Thinh Liet Ward, Hoang Mai District, this chapter describes the legal and social environment facing urban migrants in Hanoi alongside the strategies employed by these "unofficial Hanoians" to build communities and achieve their economic goals without substantive rights to the city. Like the previous generation of state-sponsored migrants from Thai Binh and Nam Dinh (discussed in chapter two) who abandoned untenable frontier settlements and shaped rural development policies in the 1970s, the current generation of unofficial Hanoians have similarly refused to stay in their assigned places, escaping the spatial restrictions of official categories of citizenship and pursuing a livelihood strategy spanning city and country. Following the writings of Papadopoulos et al. (2008) on the consequences of unsanctioned relocations and other "breaks with the tangible configuration" (Ranciere 1999: 30) of society, here I consider everyday practices of labor migration in Hanoi to be manifestly political, with the potential to challenge and transform existing forms of rights. That is, as long as permanent legal residence remains "only a dream" ("*chi la mo uoc*") for temporary migrants in Hanoi under current administrative structures, citizens are compelled to opt out of official channels entirely and forge alternative pathways to belonging. In the process, without formally organizing or intending to create a namable object of policy such as "urban migration," independently mobile citizens have become a considerable social and political force in Hanoi, generating popular debate and appearing on legislative agendas as leaders belatedly recognize and attempt to manage their growing numbers.

As agricultural incomes fail to meet the needs of Vietnam's rural residents, labor migration to major cities promises to continue apace, and this chapter shows just how Vietnamese citizens negotiate the collisions of socialist traces and market energies to find work and privately advance their interests in Hanoi, with or without substantive rights to the city. The chapter has two related goals. First, exploring the mutually-constitutive relationships between nativist ideologies and urban migration in Vietnam, I demonstrate the roles of social networks based on shared "native places" (*que huong*) as crucial resources for Nam Dinh migrants seeking employment, housing, and social support via unofficial channels in Hanoi, showing how the uneven retreat of socialist-era mobility controls both necessitates and enables the emergence of alternative structures of belonging in the reform-era city. While many analyses of the relationships between urban migration and rural communities usefully describe the benefits gleaned by the latter through remittances and investments, this chapter shifts perspective to show how the cultural resources of the Red River Delta countryside—such as village social structures and local identities—can themselves support ongoing urban migration and life in the city, as the foundations for shared livelihood strategies and mutual assistance networks among migrants with common ancestral origins, real or imagined.

Second, by tracing these informal pathways to belonging in Hanoi, this chapter further reveals how marginal urban spaces such as Thinh Liet—home to entrenched migrant communities of ambiguous legality—emerge as key arenas in the negotiation of Vietnamese citizenship, forcing leaders, landlords, and long-time residents to grapple with questions of free movement and the rights of "rural citizens" to transgress urban

space. Putting practices of independent urban migration in the context of other peasant-driven social transformations in Vietnamese history, as well as more visible forms of collective action in Hanoi, I speculate on the different channels available—and actors involved—in the expansion and exercise of citizen power in contemporary Vietnam.

Urban citizenship in Hanoi

When I ask Dai if he could show me his *ho khau* paperwork, he promptly climbs the staircase of his small café and karaoke room, rummages around a file box in the loft, and descends with a small red booklet in hand. The information within document Dai's place of birth (Hai Hau, Nam Dinh), current residence (Hanoi), and stated occupation (Driver), along with other biographical details. But perhaps the most important entry in the booklet is newer and written in a different ink, noting "10 May 2008," the day when Dai changed his *ho khau* status to become an official, rights-bearing resident of Hanoi (see Fig. 3.2).



Figure 3.2: *Ho Khau* booklet (left) and Dai's change of status (right, identifying information concealed)

He acquired this status through a late-in-life second marriage a year earlier to an established urbanite from Hoan Kiem District, much as citizenship in a nation-state can be conferred through marriage. Having worked and thrived in the city since the mid-1990s as an unofficial Hanoian—starting as a pedicab (*xich lo*) and motorbike driver and before eventually buying his own taxi—Dai expresses pride that his livelihood did not *depend* on becoming an official resident, though he recognizes that it afforded him opportunities beyond the reach to many of his associates, including the chance to pursue his entrepreneurial vision in the comfortable confines of his café, rather than "suffering the crowded streets" as a driver. Partly due to his relative success, Dai is a local icon in Thinh Liet ward, with an outgoing personality and an unfailing willingness to help fellow *dong huong* from Nam Dinh. Yet, when he drives deeper into the heart of Hanoi, Dai may be viewed as just another "*nha que*" ("peasant" or "hillbilly") living on the margins of urban society, his dialect an easy giveaway of rural origins. Dai's life in Hanoi and recent change of status call attention to number of themes explored in the sections below and in later chapters, including the perseverance of informal urban migrants in the face of structural limitations, the distinctions between formal and substantive belonging in Hanoi (even among those migrants lucky enough to change their *ho khau* status), as well as the relationships between the production of urban space and the production of class, as large-scale urban migration adds new layers of social complexity to Vietnamese cities.

Any experience of internal or transnational movement invariably involves issues of exclusion and inclusion, as mobile individuals find themselves in changing social and political surroundings that may be hostile or welcoming to their presence.

Anthropological interest in the elaboration, bestowal, and contestation of social membership has intensified alongside increasing mobility, and *citizenship* has become a conceptual centerpiece, that badge of rights-bearing belonging in a territorial nation-state[2]. While Communist Party notions of citizenship in Vietnam are typically less concerned with "empowering the individual" than "obligating citizens to participate in social programs linked to nation-building" (Keane 2002: 2), the partial adoption of neoliberal political-economic frameworks invites questions regarding the related development of new notions of individual rights and freedoms, as well as new checks on government control through independent movements pursued with little reference to official directives and little reliance on state institutions. Citizenship also provides a language to examine the expectations and entanglements of national membership from a dialogical perspective, as people within any system of governance can exert political pressure and influence policy through collective action. In Vietnam, as demonstrated in chapter two, the spontaneous mobility of citizens[3] constituted an important check on heavy-handed strategies of population management (Zhang et al. 2006; Taylor 2007a), a pattern that continues today through the unspoken negotiation between governing authorities and independent migrants living along the fringes of Hanoi.

To understand the experiences of urban migrants in Hanoi, I draw upon Holston's

[2] The concept of citizenship frames this chapter, but when applied to Vietnam, it remains more an analytical tool for understanding urban membership than a call for popular action. In fact, interviewees in Thinh Liet only once mentioned the term 'citizen' (*cong dan*) spontaneously, when the son of a makeshift beverage stop owner assured me that his family remained 'good citizens' in spite of their technically illegal occupation of street space.

[3] See chapter two for more details on how Vietnamese citizens from the Red River Delta forced policy changes by abandoning state-sponsored resettlement sites, or by independently seeking seasonal work away from work collectives during the 1970s and early 1980s.

(2009; 2010) work on systems of national and urban membership which are based on formal equality but can contain massive inequalities in the distribution of rights and legalization of social differences. In this case, even as the Vietnamese constitution guarantees that "all citizens are equal before the law" with "the right to access socio-economic services in an equal manner" (Constitution of Vietnam 1992), authorities have long differentiated between urban versus rural origins in the determination of citizen rights. Accordingly, the concept of "urban citizenship" conveys a quite literal status in Vietnam: children born into established Hanoi families—or those like Dai who change status through marriage—will thereafter become "urban citizens," enjoying the concrete "package of rights and entitlements associated with legal residency in the city," as Zhang (2002: 313) has noted in Chinese cities. By emphasizing bloodlines over birthright, the *ho khau* system exhibits many similarities to national systems of *jus sanguinis* citizenship, whereby first- or even second-generation residents of many countries (such as Japan or Germany, see Solinger 1999)—or in this case the city of Hanoi—may denied the rights of full membership if their ancestors were born elsewhere.

Beyond its legal definitions, however, the idea of "urban citizenship" can be also be invoked to understand the unique role of cities in the construction and exclusion of Vietnamese social groups, and the efforts of urban migrants to build communities without the benefits of official residence. Urban peripheries and other marginal living spaces (train tracks, riversides) have recently commanded the attention of researchers interested in the politics of housing legality and emergent formations of social solidarity among the urban poor, documenting the actions of "squatter movements" (Boonyabancha and Mitlin

2012; Elinoff 2012) and other citizen groups making claims for the legalization of title, extension of public services, and generally "the right to have a daily life in the city worthy of a citizen's dignity" (Holston 2009: 246). While the lack of a participatory voice in politics among Vietnamese citizens limits the ability to make formal claims on the government, I argue here that the sheer inertia of migration and informal residence on Hanoi's margins itself constitutes a politically-relevant force, one that has resulted in both national policy changes and ad-hoc compromises with local city officials on issues of housing and access to public services. Moreover, in spite of common associations—in Vietnam and elsewhere—of urban margins as sites of poverty and criminality ("slums"), we will see how neighborhoods like Thinh Liet also represent "emergent spaces of invention and agency" (Holston 2009: 249) among networking and enterprising migrants. Before detailing this economic agency and political influence among Hanoi's unofficial residents, I will first outline the historical and contemporary relevance of *ho khau* registration and other residential laws for urban migrants, since these issues are at the heart of recent policy debates (Dang 2010).

While systems of household registration operated within Vietnamese territory under a succession of emperors and French colonial leaders for the purposes of military conscription, labor assignments, and most importantly tax records, the *ho khau* system developed in support of the socialist institutionalization was a uniquely all-encompassing governing technology, "put to all sorts of uses" (Hardy 2002: 191) by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) during the 1960s and 1970s. The Vietnamese system of *ho khau* was modeled on the Chinese system of *hukou* devised in the 1950s in support of that

country's own visions of communist revolution. As a prop to the command economies of both countries, household registration systems supplied standardized social and economic knowledge about the population, which authorities then used shape communities and distribute rights (Hardy 2002). Such knowledge also formed the basis for population redistribution strategies based both on security goals (the "reeducation" of potential counterrevolutionaries) and economic goals (the development of national frontiers). Most importantly, under policies of rural agricultural collectivization and the establishment of urban work units, *ho khau* status determined people's access to the most basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and social welfare. During this "subsidy period" (1975-1986), citizens relied on an earned coupon system to receive food supplies and other provisions. Because rights to coupons were only granted at the site of registered residence, unauthorized relocations became extremely rare. For those unfortunates who lacked a birth certificate or who fled economic or political strife in their homeland without a clear plan, the lack of proper *ho khau* documentation represented a critical situation. According to Le (1998: 192), "the civil rights of an individual [could] be guaranteed only with the presence of *ho khau*… rations for food and almost all other necessary consumer items, ranging from cooking oil to the 'rights' to be on the waiting list for purchasing a bicycle or government house assignments" depended on registration status, effectively attaching people to their home communities.

Changing one's *ho khau* status was possible during Vietnam's pre-reform period, but it required the burdensome steps of obtaining a "moving certificate" (*giay chung nhan chuyen di*) and letters of introduction from the place of origin, as well as an

uncertain trip to police headquarters in the destination for final processing (Hardy 2002: 193). Moreover, not all destinations were available to would-be migrants: while the Communist Party supported and actively sponsored large-scale legal relocations to New Economic Zones and state forestry enterprises in the highlands, they had inverse goals in mind for large cities like Hanoi where populations were targeted for significant *reductions*. According to Hardy (2002: 197), "migrants' dependence on official ratification of their move to the city" provided an "effective brake to unregistered growth in the urban population." Even so, during the 1970s and early 1980s, some citizens abandoning the New Economic Zones some did try their luck moving, or returning, to Hanoi without permission. Unlike families like Bao's (described in chapter two), who were able to reestablish their social and legal standing in their villages of origin after an absence, those moving to large cities faced extreme hardships without access to subsidies, living in slums or the exposed Red River Delta riverbank—where "illegal" communities can still be found—collecting garbage or selling low-value items such as cigarettes or chewing gum on the black market. Thus, for more than three decades (1955-1986), living without proper *ho khau* documentation amounted to living "without the rights granted to Vietnamese citizens under the law" (Hardy 2002: 192). With inter-provincial migration heavily restricted, Hanoi's population until the mid-1980s consisted mostly of those families who remained during the war years and state cadres transferred north following the cessation of major conflicts in 1975 (Luong 2006: 378).

As Vietnam's planned economy slumped critically in the 1980s, a number of political-economic factors converged to change the possibilities for independent

migration in the Red River Delta. Beginning in 1986, the Communist Party launched its *Doi Moi* reforms aimed at liberalizing the economy and courting foreign capital, resulting in the rapid growth of urban economies, particularly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Associated decollectivization policies created private real estate markets, allowing people to buy and sell formerly state-controlled lands, and the abolition of the subsidy system finally broke the "long-enshrined link" between economic benefits and residence status (Hardy and Turner 2000: 27). State investment in infrastructure and the rise of private transportation companies gave rural Vietnamese citizens the practical means to pursue economic activities in other provinces, and today dozens of buses daily ply the improved routes from Hanoi to Nam Dinh and other delta provinces.

While the *ho khau* system remained intact following the *Doi Moi* reforms, its dominating influence over the movements of citizens to cities diminished somewhat, since the market could now provide what was once the exclusive province of state institutions: food, housing, transportation, even informal labor opportunities. Once a "necessary condition for access to most essential goods and services," legal *ho khau* status in Hanoi came to be just "one form of capital asset among many" (Hardy 2002: 199) that could be mobilized in the city. According to Li Tana's (1996: 4) assessment of urban migration after the first decade of reform:

> The abolition of the state subsidy system in the late 1980s has made individual movements possible, because even though registration is still mandatory, being unregistered no longer affects a person's livelihood that critically. To ordinary Vietnamese it can almost be seen as a kind of liberation, because it means that the power to control people's movement by the Party and the state has been greatly reduced.

Released in this way from institutions linking citizens' livelihoods to particular places, independent migration to large cities—where most new economic opportunities linked to market reforms were focused—soon replaced rural-to-rural movements as the most common forms of migration in Vietnam. In Hanoi, migrants such as Dai who arrived during the 1990s took on informal work as cyclo drivers or junk collectors and stayed for months at a time in private "lodging houses" (*nha tro*), with "people of a particular occupation and from certain native-places" (Li 1996: 42) concentrated in particular areas of the city

Despite the liberating qualities of the *Doi Moi* reforms for would-be urban migrants in Vietnam, important differences exist between being free to go to the city and being free to remain there. While private markets for housing and labor have allowed informal migrants to build communities and make a living in the city, durable legal conventions and the *ho khau* system still maintain direct and indirect control over access to many urban services. For example, permanent registration status is still necessary to register a car or motorbike, obtain loans from the bank, buy land or build a house, enroll children in public schools, gain legal access to water and electricity, or to participate in national programs for poverty reduction (Dang 2010: 5). In Hanoi, citizens are subject to an elaborate classification scheme—called the KT System (short for "*kiem tra*" or "verification")—which ranks the population according to different *hộ khẩu* residence categories from the most stable (KT1, KT2) to the most unstable (KT3, KT4)[4]. The

[4] Residents fall into four categories: KT1 status applies to established Hanoi families; KT2 status applies to people registered in the same province, but currently living in a different district; KT3 status applies to

overwhelming majority of registered urban migrants in Hanoi remain on the bottom two rungs (Niimi et al. 2009), while countless temporary and informal migrants arrive officially "unregistered," forgoing the *ho khau* categories entirely. Instead, they obtain and constantly renew a "temporary stay certificate" (*tam tru*) through their landlords, the same certificate one would need if simply visiting relatives in the city for more than a few days.

Most of the members of the Nam Dinh migrant community I meet in Thinh Liet fall into the "unregistered" category, typically unaware or uninterested in the possibilities of changing their *ho khau* status , or even the steps taken by their landlords to secure a *tam tru* temporary stay permit. Maintaining their rural *ho khau* with one foot in the city and one in the village (Dang 2010), most are content to keep a tolerable and profitable situation intact. Nevertheless, when prompted, they did not hesitate to mention the hazards of working in Hanoi's informal sector, including low wages, long working hours, and lack of job security. While motorbike taxi drivers from Nam Dinh retain considerable independence in their work, other temporary workers (delivery drivers, construction workers, domestic workers) lack proper labor contracts as defenses against abuses by employers, who often serve as landlords as well, creating the potential for dependency and exploitation. One 38-year-old father working in Hanoi assembling furniture mentions that employers are only too happy to house workers informally on site: "In general, with a job like ours, the owner always keeps some rooms for us so we are always ready to work…. sometimes we even have to go to work at 9 or 10 PM!

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people living long-term in a different province with official permission; KT4 status applies to contracted seasonal workers and students living temporarily outside of their registered home (from Dang 2010: 5).

Anyway, we cannot complain about this since it is the nature of the job. Wherever, whenever he needs us… they can have our service more quickly." It is also on the basis of labor contracts that workers in Vietnam access social, health, and employment insurance, further marginalizing migrants from the social safety net that exists for legal Vietnamese workers. Regarding housing, citywide shortages in affordable apartments and restrictive *ho khau* requirements force migrants in Thinh Liet into overpriced and substandard boarding houses, often with six or more residents sharing "cramped" (*chat hep*) living spaces (see Fig. 3.3). Other housing complaints included price gauging by landlords for electricity and water access, and unsanitary conditions.



Figure 3.3: Exterior (left) and interior (right) of a Thinh Liet boarding house (*nha tro*)

Urban migrants also face discrimination from educational and medical providers, who can selectively use residential status as a prerequisite to deny access to schools or health care, according to levels of supply and demand—or simply on a whim—without any consequences (Dang 2010). Though these practices have been deemed illegal, there are "significant gaps between law and practice…many public service providers and

decision-makers are often unaware of, or do not understand, the enacted laws and new policies" (*Ibid.*). Further, as argued throughout this section, officials in Hanoi "are *used to* imposing barriers on people, including migrants" (Dang 2010: 5, emphasis mine), limiting the practical effectiveness of these legal concessions.

The most commonly cited challenge among informal workers in Hanoi involves the mismatch between wages and the cost of living in Hanoi, a primary factor motivating migrants to maintain strong ties and an economic presence—usually through ongoing agricultural production—in home villages, where spouses may stay behind, and where children may be schooled to save money. As one Nam Dinh migrant—a 38-year-old delivery driver named Anh—summarizes the situation, "in general, there is more work in Hanoi, yes, but there are also difficulties: number one is stable employment; number two is housing; and number three is food…in Hanoi, everything is expensive compared to the countryside." When it comes to considering a more permanent family relocation to Hanoi, Anh again focuses on economic realities and the hardships of life in the city:

> TK: What do you plan to do in the future?
> A: I'll continue working here for a few years, and then I'll go back to my hometown to open a restaurant and be with my wife.
> TK: Did you ever consider moving your family to Hanoi with you?
> A: I have thought about that a lot. I've made up my mind and I decided to take the difficult way myself. I cannot let my wife suffer like I'm doing here. That's why I decided to leave my wife back in my hometown. There she can earn some money [farming rice] while raising the kids, and I can stay here to make even more money for the family.

Unmarried migrant workers looking to the future voice similar concerns about raising a family in Hanoi: "the real difficulties come when you get married and then have children.

If you take your wife and kids up to the city, the level of income does not meet the cost of daily activities, or for your children's education." Indeed, many members of the Nam Dinh migrant community recognize the potential benefits—such as better educational opportunities—of building a life and seeking legal permanent residence in the city,[5] but balk when weighing incomes against expenses like city school fees. When I ask a *xe om* driver named Hoang living in Thinh Liet with his wife and 3 year old daughter about the possibility of the latter studying in Hanoi, his vagueness betrays pessimism: "if conditions allow for it, she will go to school up here, but if conditions are impossible, then she will study in my hometown." Hoang would like to change his status but feels "this is only dreaming… since securing *ho khau* is still extremely difficult" for those without a job in the formal sector or property in the city—a conundrum when such assets are themselves often out of reach for migrants. Nevertheless, some informal workers do hold out hope for an eventual change of status, especially younger migrants socialized into a more accommodating Hanoi: "if I find a good, stable job with a secure life for my family, if given this chance, I *must* stay. Give me the chance to make good money and give my children a good education and I will always stay here."

Despite the hardships, most members of the Nam Dinh community get by without changing *ho khau* status, renewing their *tam tru* paperwork every six months, and returning to home villages periodically. In fact, older migrants, such as the patriarch of a migrant family running a drink stall in Thinh Liet, optimistically report that official

[5] This change would not necessarily mean giving up status, property, or rights in the village as many relatives would remain in the countryside to protect and utilize such assets.

insistence on legal channels to urban citizenship has faded over the years: "ten years ago we could still move but it was harder…everything depended on getting a new Hanoi registration. Now people from all provinces don't need to do so…there are now policies that allow for temporary residence and temporary absence." Most importantly, Nam Dinh migrants report significant increases in their incomes, even after expenses, compared to earnings from farming alone. It is important to note, therefore, that despite an abundance of scholarly and policy-driven analyses of migration in Vietnam demonstrating ongoing obstacles to free movement (Hardy 2002; Nguyen 2012) and the need for an overhaul of the *ho khau* system (Dang 2010; UNDP 2010), Nam Dinh migrants themselves do note dramatic improvements in their livelihoods and prospects. Later in this chapter, we will see how independently mobile citizens themselves, rejecting the limitations of differentiated citizenship and finding alternative pathways to the city, in fact helped expand migrants' rights and generate the comparably favorable conditions for urban migration today.

Migrant Energies/Socialist Legacies: Policy, Practice, and Perceptions

The Communist Party of Vietnam's long history of controlling population movements through the *ho khau* system in the pre-*Doi Moi* era carried a number of enduring consequences that shaped Hanoi's experiences with urban migration over three decades of deepening reform. First, while Vietnamese citizens had not exactly remained static during socialist institutionalization—in fact, the government resettled large numbers of people during this period—the rise of market forces and breakdown of *ho*

khau's hold over people's life trajectories resulted in an "explosion of private activity" (Vasavakul 2003: 25) as pent-up economic agency found realization. Like the opening of a "release valve" (Gu 1992), Vietnamese citizens in the late 1980s and early 1990s immediately began relocating independently across the nation, trying their luck in the coffee fields of the Central Highlands (Dery 2000) or in major urban centers like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The release was not entirely economically-driven, however: many families who were dislocated after successive conflicts in Vietnamese territory also seized upon new freedoms of movement to reunite with relatives or finally leave untenable resettlement sites.

Second, with little experience managing spontaneous urban migration after decades of restrictions and *de*urbanization measures, state and city governments were left unprepared to manage the massive influx of people from the countryside. In fact, to speak of "migration policy" at all in the Vietnamese context is a misnomer, as no one government ministry takes responsibility for addressing their growing numbers and needs. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs deals with state-sponsored labor movements, and the Ministry of Public Security handles *ho khau* enforcement, but Dang (2010: 9) points out that the absence of "a specialized agency responsible for migration further adds to the difficulties caused by the lack of coherent policies on migration as a whole." As market reforms took hold in the Red River Delta region, a lack of attention to the possibilities of migration to Hanoi resulted in a succession of reactive and incomplete policies from the 1990s through the 2000s that put considerable power in the hands of migrants themselves as they pushed into the city uninvited.

A third effect of socialist legacies of population control in Vietnam concerns the creation of a contradictory set of legal codes and expectations of citizenship. The awkward superimposition of two antagonistic political-economic principles—tight government control over citizen movements and livelihoods versus market-driven strategies requiring a more mobile labor force—carries consequences into the present, including the emergence of two alternative paths to belonging in Hanoi: via the official *ho khau* system and through unofficial channels carved out through private relationships, social capital, and access to markets. A number of anthropologists have recently addressed the operation of multiple governing logics in states with socialist or authoritarian legacies like Vietnam and China (e.g., Ong 2005; Zhang 2010). For example, Aihwa Ong (2005) has shown how the partial adoption of neoliberal logics of rule represent "exceptions" to governing-as-usual and can result in the coexistence of different regimes of rights among different categories of citizens, according to their market value in a deterritorialized world economy.

Throughout the course of my research I found that certain categories of citizens who relocated from other provinces—such as employees in the financial sector and university students securing jobs after graduating—predictably reported far smoother experiences establishing legal residency in the city than informal migrants. This phenomenon was the focus of a rare direct criticism of the Vietnamese government among informal migrants in Hanoi: when asked what leaders can do to make his life in Hanoi easier, one long-time unofficial resident with a diverse employment history in the informal sector (pedicab driver, construction worker, and now delivery driver for a

cosmetics marketing company) declared that "the state doesn't care about workers…the Vietnamese state is only interested in qualified people…it would be good if they cared about my brothers and sisters here, the laborers, the porters, the *xe om* drivers." Such distinctions between Vietnam's nurtured "qualified" workers and the unprotected informal sector suggest the operation of market-driven processes of social differentiation alongside existing urban/rural citizenship distinctions.

While the coexistence of contradictory governing logics in Hanoi creates challenges for many urban stakeholders—including local officials, landlords and migrants themselves—the resulting confusing legal environment in Hanoi can actually serve people's interests as well. As mentioned above, pressured bureaucrats can selectively enforce the *ho khau* status requirements governing access to health care, welfare programs, or public schools according to changing levels of demand (Dang 2010). And landlords whose tenants can legally stay, but not legally access electricity or water, can take advantage of this contradiction and charge double or triple the official rate to migrants who have little leverage to complain. But among informal migrants themselves with some social and financial capital in place, contradictory legal codes also allow room for maneuver and multiple pathways to building a life in Hanoi. As Dang (2010: 5) puts it, in the reform era, "the *Ho Khau* system could not prevent migration…it just made it more expensive." With enough money, *ho khau* status can be overcome or even bought[6], and indeed some migrants from Nam Dinh with humble beginnings have

[6] Emerging alongside Hanoi's condominium building boom are "Red Book Agencies" that will assist new homeowners in the city with the paperwork to establish legal residency though the *ho khau* system.

become quite wealthy in Hanoi. In fact, such entrepreneurs, along with enterprising street vendors and other informal workers, seem to conform closely to newly embraced neoliberal rationalities of governance where citizens are to assume increasing responsibility for their own welfare, becoming self-managing as the "social state" gives way "enabling state" (Rofel 2007) (see also chapter five). Of course, those "primordial" (Dang 2010) voices within the CPV who are reluctant to relinquish control over citizens' movements might disagree that such independence, or the expansion of market logics in general, represents progress.

Further consequences of Vietnam's conventions of population control relate to the enduring negative perceptions of migration and the "floating population" (Leaf 2002)—among leaders, media, and Hanoi's more established citizens—that can create a social environment characterised by exclusion, xenophobia, and a rising class consciousness linked to particular backgrounds and spaces of residence in the city. Judgments of migrants surface in subtle ways, such as when I use the term for "urbanization" (*do thi hoa*) in discussing my research with a wealthy medical practitioner in Hanoi. Rolling her eyes and waving her hand toward the street—which indeed reflects a showcase of urban migration: construction workers climbing scaffolding above; motorbike taxi drivers waiting on the corner; and a group of underpaid restaurant touts accosting passing motorists—she dismisses the idea that Hanoi is becoming any more "urban;" rather, she feels the city is being besieged by "*ruralization"* ("*nong thon hoa"*), crowded with people and practices from the countryside, an observation noted by Harms (2011) in fast-growing Ho Chi Minh city as well (see also Taylor 2007: 14). Another commonly-

whispered term passing judgment on urban migrants in Hanoi is "*nha que*," a derogatory term meaning "bumpkin" or "hillbilly" and invoked when observing behaviors or sartorial choices thought to be out-of-place in modern Hanoi.

Government discourses on reform-era migration and Hanoi's changing demographics have done little to change popular perceptions, displaying strong continuities with Communist Party perspectives of independent citizen movements during the years of central planning. From the early years of reform, the CPV's conservative branch has influenced official attitudes toward those citizens who have chosen to bypass state population controls. A report drafted in 1988 by then Party General Secretary Do Muoi set a clear precedent for how unsanctioned urban migration should be treated, suggesting the need to "block the flow of rural to urban migration. [It] has created difficulties to economy and society…we should avoid the problem, and we absolutely have the ability to do so" (in Li 1996: 59). The "ability to do so" may have been overstated, however. As migration surged in spite of *ho khau*, Hanoi's local government drew the ire of state leaders for letting a "social problem" run out of control, prompting one outspoken official to call city leaders "right-wing and impotent" for "not chasing the migrants out" (*Ibid.*: 60).

Even as governing structures over the intervening years adapted to accommodate independent relocations, and as "urban migration" as an issue began appearing in long-term policy tracts, official views still maintained that such movements constituted a problem to be solved, rather than a potential asset to household incomes and national economic development. For example, the 2001-2010 Viet Nam Population Strategy

declared that "spontaneous and seasonal migration of workers has been decreasing the capabilities to meet basic social services, contributing to the pollution of the environment, destroying natural resources, and increasing social evils" (in Dang 2010: 7). Similarly, in one recent policy document from the People's Police Committee, the author attributes to unauthorized migration a laundry list of "social evils" challenging the "rules and conventions" of society in Hanoi, including "security disorder, conflicts between immigrants and locals, gambling, drug addiction, prostitution …traffic congestion and traffic accidents" (Dinh 2008: 1). The association of "social evils" with uncontrolled mobility reflects representations of potentially dangerous "wandering migrants" operating outside of village or state surveillance. Though city authorities usually handle issues of migration, on the occasions when state-level government agencies "actually address [migration] as an important issue, it is often described as having mainly a negative impact and seen as an impediment to development" (Dang 2010: 7).

While such reports and policy statements don't much excite Hanoi's usually fatalistic migrants, the *enforcement* of such policies can have a much more immediate impact on their lives. Outside of Hanoi's government buildings and on its streets, the police and other urban bureaucrats deserve mention here as another arm of officialdom with similar perceptions of urban migration. As long as the CPV has been in power, the role of city police has been a "custodial one to keep in check anything that was vaguely not in keeping with the rules and conventions of society" (Li 1996: 54), and the "floating population" of migrants certainly represents a threat to existing modes of control. While random police shakedowns of migrants rarely occur, "unofficial" residents do report

discrimination when dealing with city police who are likely to side with established urban citizens in financial disagreements or minor traffic accidents. Recent policies forbidding street vendors from operating in certain Hanoi neighborhoods also target the "disorderly" practices of migrants (Harms 2011) and periodically zealous enforcements remain a constant worry among the city's petty traders.

Official and popular views of migration in Hanoi involve spatial relationships as well, tied to the position and perceived condition of migrant-heavy neighborhoods along the fringes of the city. Working in the marginal neighborhood of Hoc Mon in Ho Chi Minh City, Erik Harms (2011) describes how the categories of inside the city (*noi thanh*) and outside the city (*ngoai thanh*) inform spatial ideologies of class and urban belonging, and how such areas can be viewed with suspicion for uncomfortably straddling the divide between known urban and rural worlds. Tinged with such judgments of the unknown/uncontrollable urban margins, the Hanoi police missive introduced above also warns of the effects of migration on the "urban environment and architecture:"

> Due to a housing shortage in Hanoi, finding a shelter for city immigrants is very difficult. These residences are usually in the bordering areas, near the suburbs, where there is limited infrastructure… it is also less controlled area which is an attraction for the urban poor and migrants… these factors has caused many difficulties for the management of neighborhoods… encroachment through illegal, irregular or slum housing is a fairly common phenomenon… moreover the majority discharge a wide variety of garbage into rivers causing pollution and contagious disease (Dinh 2008: 2).

Thinh Liet is located in one such "border area, near the suburbs" and contains large areas of irregular housing—mostly extralegal add-ons to existing structures—and its occasionally befouled air does lend credence to environmental problems. Nevertheless,

the idea that working class migrant neighborhoods exhibit more "social evils" than any other sections of Hanoi, such the seedy nightlife districts where the city's middle- and upper-classes spend their time and money, is questionable. Holston (2009: 249) has pointed out that such perceptions can derive from stereotypes of poverty and desperation in urban "slums," a stigma that "leaves little space for…dignity and vitality" among migrant communities.

Hoang Mai District in Hanoi is not only a destination for migrants from the countryside, however, and this fact further complicates the spatial order of Hanoi. With relatively abundant land to develop, Hoang Mai is also the scene of the rapid construction of middle- and upper-class condominium complexes—similar to what Caldeira (2000) has termed "fortified enclaves"—providing refuge from the pace and traffic of inner-city districts (see chapter five). Again, the situation is similar to Hoc Mon in Ho Chi Minh as described by Harms (2011), where migration from the countryside, outmigration from the city center to the periphery, and the intentions of contractors and planners have created a highly contingent space with conflicting interests. In Hanoi, local officials want control and development along city margins; landowners there want a piece of the economic pie and to avoid land annexations; and migrants simply want to maintain their secure presence. Urban margins are also moving targets, of course, since "the economics of the edge are only temporary as the edge itself urbanizes" (Harms 2011: 49). As Nam Dinh migrants continue to build a community around common village origins in Thinh Liet, it remains to be seen whether government planners and construction crews will eventually enforce new levels of exclusionary "order" (*trat tu*) in the area—part of recent efforts to

"engineer a new city through the physical and social restructuring of space" in outer Hanoi (Labbe & Bordreaux 2011: 280)—and whether the Nam Dinh community will stay or move on to greener pastures along the city's shifting margins.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) suggests that the expansion of cities both undermines and congeals the rural as oppositional, a situation that bears scrutiny within Vietnam's urban spaces. In many respects, the demands of capitalist production, the relaxation of restrictions on mobility, and the ongoing expansion of metropolitan areas into the countryside have blurred the experiential line between urban and rural Vietnamese citizens during the past two decades. Yet persistent legal, ideological, and spatial processes of social differentiation can contribute to a climate in Vietnamese cities where true belonging in the city, even with the correct paperwork, can remain elusive for urban migrants—Hanoi's 'least-protected' group (Dang 2010)—whose disorderly communities and under-the-radar arrangements may not conform to "late-socialist urban aesthetics" (Zhang 2001: 4). Therefore, questions remain: In the absence of state protections and full rights to the city, how do Hanoi's legions of informal urban migrants access employment, housing, and urban services, and carve viable communities out of Hanoi's urban spaces? Moreover, what are the political implications of these rural citizens turning up uninvited in Vietnamese cities, attracting the attention of authorities, and undermining the categories of citizenship that long defined people's lives and movements? In the next section, I examine more closely the economic roles played by social networks based on shared native-places among Nam Dinh migrants, before turning to the political impacts of this type of organizing in the context of other past and present citizen "movements" in

Vietnam.

Native-Place Networks and Migrant Community Building in Thinh Liet

While meeting friends and conducting interviews in the Viet Ha Bia Hoi restaurant in Thinh Liet, I often chat about local history with the establishment's owner, a 57-year-old grandfather named Sang, who was born about a kilometer away in the heart of what was once Giap Nhi village. Sang has witnessed Thinh Liet's (and Hanoi's) ups and downs over his lifetime. He recalls the spectacle of American flyer-dropping campaigns that brought him and his friends out into the local streets. And he remembers the bombs that sent his family fleeing to the countryside for refuge. After decades of peace, however, and especially since the *Doi Moi* reforms that triggered urban redevelopment in his backyard on a massive scale, what we usually discuss is the state of his neighborhood: how Hanoi's fringes crept southward and absorbed the communities that would become Hoang Mai District; how Thinh Liet and surrounding village landscapes transformed into urban wards targeted for redevelopment; how many property owners, realizing the increasing value of their holdings, renovated, sold and moved on, "planting houses" ("*trong nha*") instead of crops; how those who stayed, like himself, expanded existing properties into boarding houses rented to students and workers, or opened small shops and businesses catering to these groups.

Most Nam Dinh migrants in Thinh Liet trace their origins to two neighboring rural districts located along the South China Sea: Giao Thuy and Hai Hau. These districts lie outside of the delta's most stable rice producing zones, typically yielding two harvests

per year compared to three in areas further inland. The agricultural calendar beckons the return of some relocated family members, but during most of the year, villagers feel compelled to fill idle time with gainful employment in the city. Nguyen et al. (2012: 18) found similar attitudes among Thanh Hoa migrants in Hanoi, who felt that "the homeland is in my heart…[but] the young and the capable should choose cities." While Nam Dinh Province's eponymous provincial capital was at one time itself a bustling industrial center, that city has "been left to decay" (Li 1996:30), and nobody gives much thought to relocating to other urban areas in northern Vietnam[7]. Home to established Nam Dinh enclaves and robust social networks sustained over decades of seasonal and long-term migration (DiGregorio 1994), Hanoi is the favored destination.

From the early years of reform when migrants like Dai (the café owner) reported "sleeping in [their] pedicabs for nights at a time," the Nam Dinh community has steadily become a dominant urban demographic in Hanoi, with men still concentrated in the transportation sector as *xe om* and taxi drivers, and women primarily engaged in recycling, domestic work, or as small-scale street selling (Ressureccion & Ha 2006). Urban wards like Thinh Liet in eastern Hoang Mai District became attractive destinations due to their marginal locations and lax enforcement climates, the availability of extralegal housing, and an expanding marketplace of urban services catering to migrants. Growing still, Thinh Liet remains a "migrant place" and buzzes with activity from the pre-dawn hours, when workers set off, to the late evening when they gather for 2,000D glasses of

[7] There is, however, a sizable Nam Dinh migrant community in Ho Chi Minh City and the surrounding industrial area, organized enough to support a number of native-place associations (*hoi dong huong*).

draft beer and easy conversation with friends. Sang's *bia hoi* restaurant sits in a prime location along a busy intersection, with locals and migrants alike watching football or the news on a massive television on the back wall. Outside, about a dozen *xe om* drivers take turns whisking passengers throughout the city and back (see Fig. 3.4).



Figure 3.4: Nam Dinh *xe om* drivers wait for passengers outside of a popular *bia hoi* restaurant

If Hoang Mai reveals a thriving image of Vietnam's urban future, Giao Thuy rural district in Nam Dinh reveals the other side of the same coin: depopulated agricultural villages occupied overwhelmingly by children and retirees. Indeed, outside of harvest and the holidays, a significant percentage of Giao Thuy's working-age men and women are in Hanoi accumulating earnings as part of a spatially dispersed livelihood strategy. But this situation does not portend the imminent ruin of the Vietnamese countryside, nor render the structures and identities of village life obsolete amidst the homogenizing

influences of "global cities." To the contrary, rural communities remain critical sites in these dispersed households, especially those lacking an urban *ho khau*. In fact, during the late-2000s economic crisis, maintaining property and an economic presence in native-places has proven essential for out-of-work labor migrants. Furthermore, the native-place relationships so critical to overcoming obstacles in Hanoi draw their power from ideas of relatedness and mutual support derived from highly valued, if idealised, visions of village-based Vietnamese culture, suggesting further complementarity between the resources of city and country.

Underpinning the native-place relationships mobilized by migrants in Hanoi are two cultural logics of human relatedness attaching people to one another: 1) those involving known blood ties; and 2) the feelings of commonality associated with shared "native places" (*que huong*) in the countryside (Schlecker 2006; Choi 2008; Nguyen 2012: 55). According to Markus Schlecker (2006: 516), the latter relationships—like those of blood ties—also have a timeless and "'given' quality, in that what is shared…such as a local dialect [or] sight… has existed long before one and has become a part of one." Like many words in modern usage, especially those describing abstract concepts, the Vietnamese terms for blood ties (*dong huyet thong*) and native-place ties (*dong huong*) derive from Chinese, and map onto a similar distinction in traditional Chinese thought between relationships of consanguinity (*xueyuan*) and those of shared attachments to ancestral places of origin (*diyuan*) (Zhang 2001). As in Vietnam, these two terms describe different logics of relation but are also inseparable, since "*diyuan* [native-place bonds] is no more than the extension of *xueyuan* [blood bonds]" (Fei 1985,

in Zhang 2001: 72), owing to the patrilineal structure of traditional villages. That is, tracing back through enough generations, the odds are high that your neighbors share a blood bond. Among people living away from ancestral lands, relationships based on shared native-places draw on the "spatial projection of blood connection," which can provide a "subjective negation of the actual spatial separation" (Zhang 2001: 55) and support ideas of "fellow-feeling" remotely. New urban migrants and third-generation Hanoians alike regard their ancestral homelands in the countryside with extreme reverence, stay involved with village affairs, and express that they "share the same blood" (*cung dong mau*) with native fellows.

Clearly, the idea of a rural "native-place" only makes sense as a social reference point and instrumental identity with distance, after leaving the village—otherwise it's just "home"—which prompts questions about how unprecedented levels of spatial mobility in Vietnam and China have interacted with this concept and given it new material significance within the scope of capitalist production. While few historical studies mention native-place networks or organizations in Vietnam, Goodman's (1995) work in China pinpoints Shanghai from the mid-19th to mid-20th century as another context where rapid urban migration created roles for native-place identities in the city:

> Sojourners established *huiguan* [native-place organizations] to create a supportive home environment in an alien city as well as to symbolically assert the importance of their sojourning community. Formal association began with the construction of a temple for local gods and burial-grounds or coffin repositories for sojourners. Through their connection with religious life and critical ritual moments in the lives of sojourners, associations maintained native- place ties and sentiment over long periods in foreign environments, contributing to the organization of trade and safeguarding native-place business or trade interests.

The roles of such groups spanned the symbolic (maintaining rituals, building temples for local deities) and the economic (organizing trade, protecting businesses), demonstrating similarities to contemporary incarnations. However, I am not making the argument here that native-place networks and organizations operating in contemporary Hanoi relate in a continuous way to these traditional forms of association. While the fellow-feeling of common village origins may be timeless, as an emergent basis for citizen organizing among urban migrants, I understand *dong huong* relationships among Nam Dinh migrants in Hanoi as situated in firmly the present, within the context of modern communication and transportation technologies that bridge the city/village divide and allow for the symbolic world of ancestral relationships to interface with the practical demands of life in the city's burgeoning informal sector.

Giao Thuy migrants in Thinh Liet identified both practical concerns and deep "feelings" (*tinh cam*) when describing their motivations to cluster together and assist fellow *dong huong* in Hanoi, citing cultural responsibilities to help "cousins and neighborhood friends" from the village, shared fortunes, along with as simple expedience as a way to make employment and housing connections: "We always prop each other up, we live together, help each other, and our relationships toward each other are egalitarian." In one instance, over drinks one night, a delivery driver named Hoang gushes to me about the *tinh cam* he feels for fellow Giao Thuy natives, using the "average Tuan" to make his point: "all the men from the same village are like brothers to me. When Tuan gets a job in the city, Tuan will bring his men from the same province, friends he knew from his

hometown, to work with him to help everybody make a living." Here we can see an example of the conflation of blood and native-place ties, as *dong huong* are commonly claimed as "brothers and sisters." Many migrants feel that the social networks that emerge out of *dong huong* relationships have become indispensable in Hanoi's current legal and economic environment, saying that finding work would be "very difficult" without such relationships in place, or, more emphatically, that "I am who I am now is because of those people who came here from my hometown that pulled me up; there are many things I could not have done myself, on my own."

When examining the instrumentality of native-place networks, it is useful to distinguish between relationships that serve as a bridge between the city and countryside, and those that provide mutual assistance within the city itself. Regarding the former, many scholars have documented the practices of native-place fellows—immediate relatives, cousins, fictive kin, friends—following well-beaten paths of migration into existing destination communities and professions, such that "cooperation along kinship and hometown ties appears to be important in migrant communities around the world" (Mobrand 2006: 267). Skinner (1976) has called the economic specialisation and occupational clustering among Chinese urban migrants from particular villages or provinces a "mobility strategy" that offers established sources of belonging in an urban community. Working in the Philippines, Trager (1988:79) shows how labor migration to cities "does not dissolve but rather sustains family and kinship ties and reciprocal obligations within personal networks." Those looking to escape the limited prospects of life in the countryside can call on friends and relatives in the city to support a move, just

as successful migrants in the city can invite family members or "recruit" friends into the chosen line of work, reducing the risk inherent in all migration decisions. For example, in her study of the Wenzhou migrant community in Beijing, Zhang (2001: 55) shows how strong native-place networks and a foothold in the clothing trade "played a significant role in channeling migration flows and sustaining their informal economy at the destination." As more migrants made the trek from Wenzhou, the community gained considerable economic and political power that eventually proved too threatening to city leaders at the time (who razed the enclave), but the association of Wenzhou migrants with the clothing trade persists, as does the ability of this economic niche to sustain ongoing relocations to Beijing.

Among Nam Dinh migrants in Hanoi, the formation of an economic niche in the transportation business offers villagers in Giao Thuy, Hai Hau, and other impoverished rural districts an alternative life trajectory and an established network to introduce newcomers to the trade and to the city. According to a *xe* om driver named Cuong in his mid-twenties:

> There were not any jobs available in my hometown at all! When my friend told me about driving a *xe om* in this place, I went here with them. I watched what they were doing and then followed them to do their job. Countrymen are known to always try every possible way to bring their families and friends to wherever it is believed that they can find good jobs.

Cuong's colleague and friend Bien, only nineteen years old, came to Hanoi for work at the insistence of his parents, and as part of a family livelihood strategy made possible through social networks linking Nam Dinh and Thinh Liet:

> First my parents came up here. They explored what they could do here through *dong huong* who had come before…My father works in construction and my mother as a porter…My parents were here [in Hanoi] when I was still in school and I wasn't old enough to work. When I didn't take the state exam, my parents said I should follow them to Hanoi. At first, I was just doing odd jobs for people. Later, as I became familiar with the streets, I became a xe om driver.

Unlike Cuong, Bien came to the city without a clear job in mind, simply following his parents' own carefully considered relocation to Hanoi and working as a "free laborer." However, once in the city, he quickly tried to improve his lot by connecting with Cuong and other *dong huong*. This agentive act implicates the value of the second type of native-place networks supporting mobile citizens in Hanoi: those operating within the Thinh Liet migrant community itself.

Within migrant neighborhoods, native-place relationships allow unofficial Hanoians to generate crucial stores of social capital, understood here as "social obligations ('connections'), which are convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital" (Bourdieu 1986: 243). The private formation of mutual assistance networks based on native-place among migrants living along urban margins has been well-documented in Chinese urban environments such as Beijing (Zhang 2002; Mobrand 2006) and Harbin (Wang et al. 2000), but little has been written about this form of citizen organization in modern Vietnamese cities. Among the limited ethnography exploring the economic roles of native-place relationships in Vietnamese urban migrant communities, Thien (2004) finds that rural citizens in Ho Chi Minh City mobilize provincial identities in the pursuit of jobs, bank loans, and educational enrollment by borrowing the *hộ khẩu* paperwork of a friend or relative to enroll children in school. Similarly, Nam Dinh

migrants seek assistance from longer-resident family and friends to speed up bureaucratic processes or to access credit to make capital investments in vehicles, food carts, or goods to sell. Dai, for example, the upwardly mobile taxi driver-turned-café-owner from Hai Hau, relied upon the higher-ups from his taxi company—run and staffed almost exclusively by Nam Dinh migrants—to secure a bank loan to buy his own taxi, rather than leasing and sacrificing more earnings. And in a move telling of the still-uncertain social environment facing urban migrants in Hanoi, one of the first actions undertaken by *xe om* drivers arriving from Nam Dinh with their own motorbike is to locate a trusted *dong huong* capable of registering vehicles in the city on their behalf, a move which conceals their origins and prevents unnecessary hassles with the police (who can use province-specific license plate numbers a kind of index of belonging in the city).

Nam Dinh migrants forge these relationships by setting up meetings, making calls, or perhaps by joining one of Hanoi's increasingly popular "native place associations" (*hoi dong huong*)[8]. But they also build and sustain "connections" (*quan he*) more informally, simply by visiting places like Sang's *bia hoi* restaurant and Dai's café to chat, gossip about hometown affairs, and catch up with neighbors. The density of Nam Dinh migrants in Thinh Liet creates regular opportunities to interact with *dong huong*, and what seems at first glance as groups of men simply killing time may involve something more productive. Drawing on Malinowski's (1936) concept of "phatic

[8] Native-place associations (*hoi dong huong*) have 'proliferated' in Hanoi over the past decade (Schlecker 2005). Usually most popular with students and retirees, I found a number of associations operating among labor migrants as well. Such groups organize social gatherings in the city and sponsor projects in the 'homeland' such as temple reconstructions, death anniversary (*ngay gio*) events and education funds (see chapter five).

communion"—referring to how informal communication can involve more than just conveying information, providing a means of forging ties for their own sake—Elyachar (2010: 454) has developed the concept of "phatic labor" to pinpoint the economic value and real outcomes of such everyday sociality. Cafes and other meeting places (including domestic contexts) in her fieldsite of Cairo are "where deals are made, information exchanged, workers located, and opportunities pursued." Through these spontaneous exchanges, men and women acquire and cultivate networks of *watsa*, intermediaries who can "get things done" for them.

The concept of *watsa* relates to similar concepts in Vietnam (*quan he*) and China (*guangxi*) of the instrumental "connections" deemed necessary to thrive economically in the city (Zhang 2001). These terms can carry connotations of patronage or corruption, but in Thinh Liet they also refer to the horizontal connections forged between *dong huong* with avowedly egalitarian relationships. Among Nam Dinh migrants in Thinh Liet, the importance of establishing actionable *quan he* with a wide variety of people comes up repeatedly in conversation, from complaints about being stymied by a lack of connections in a particular trade, to boasts about going into business with a well-to-do cousin. As a foreigner and unlikely presence in Thinh Liet, I too gain first-hand experience with the operations of phatic labor when approached by enterprising eavesdroppers, as polite chatting occasionally preceded moneymaking proposals such as a tax-evading car importation scheme. Whether construed as building "social capital," engaging in "phatic labor," or simply making connections, the everyday interactions of Nam Dinh migrants in Thinh Liet can carry concrete outcomes, for instance helping a

construction crew replace a member, or helping a newcomer staying with friends identify an upcoming housing vacancy. And while these interactions proceed between diverse groups of people—migrants, landlords, patrons, ethnographers—we have seen how *dong huong* relationships rise to the top of the hierarchy of trust and expected support, and it is no surprise that these connections are judged most essential.

The Politics of Presence: Understanding Collective Action in Hanoi

As the strategies of independent migrants to make a living in Hanoi's informal sector—including the mobilization of native-place networks—are becoming better understood in the social science literature (see Agergaard and Vu 2011; Nguyen et al. 2012), the political implications of thousands of rural citizens rejecting the spatial proscriptions of *ho khau* categories and forming independent communities along Hanoi's margins have received considerably less attention. Questions of citizen power in Vietnam cannot always be addressed directly through participatory politics or robust social movements, the usual hallmarks of collective action. However, new work on state-society relations has done well to displace the notion of authoritarian Vietnam having completely "closed" structures for political influence among citizens (Wells-Dang 2010), showing instead how processes of "negotiation and tolerance through action and reaction" (Koh 2001: 280) better characterize the two-way street of Vietnamese citizenship. A recent example of citizen power exercised effectively in Hanoi involved the forced shelving of a government-endorsed project to turn public Hanoi's Reunification Park (*Cong Vien Thong Nhat*) into a "private, Disneyland-style, theme

park" (Wells-Dang 2010). A coalition of architects, retired officials, journalists, and ordinary citizens staged small-scale protests, applied political pressure through government "connections," and succeeding in preventing the park's privatization. This outcome has been described by Wells-Dang (2010: 98) as a "clear example of a civil society network…influenc[ing] power around a shared conception of the common good," albeit one that depended greatly the participation of state actors.

While the type of citizen action described by Wells-Dang represents an exciting and instructive template for formal citizen organizing and the development of civil society in the future, it relies on the contributions of elites with some control over national discourse, and reflects only one of many ways Vietnamese citizens can influence policy through collective action. Most notably, Vietnam's vast "peasantry" has repeatedly provoked drastic policy shifts in the Communist Party era, mobilizing their own independent strategies, logics, and resources to shape rural development outcomes in ways unanticipated by state planners (Taylor 2007). For example, villagers undermined Vietnam's failed agricultural collectives through their foot dragging, moonlighting and other forms of non-compliance (Luong 2003; Kerkvliet 2005), and contributed to the downfall of mismanaged frontier development schemes in the 1960s-70s by collectively abandoning highland resettlement sites for greener pastures (Hardy 2003). In fact, according to Zhang et al. (2001: 1066), despite an official preoccupation with shaping the movements and livelihoods of Vietnamese peasants, "the policy outcomes with respect to population mobility have been swayed as much by individuals and families in pursuit of their own aspirations…as by the state plans." Also targeting the implicit spatial dialogue

between citizens and state, Mandy Thomas (2002) has pointed to novel uses and occupations of urban space in Hanoi by migrant street vendors, roadside café owners, and even skateboarders as a "rebuttal" of Communist Party norms, with such everyday practices having a potentially "destabilizing" effect on state control. My research among independent migrants in Hanoi similarly reveals how everyday practices of mobility and spatial occupation can serve as an effective "rebuttal" to established norms.

Though many anthropologists deal with more visible acts of contestation, politically relevant human agency can also be found in simple "persistence" and "inertia" —here among migrants arriving along Hanoi's margins en masse and staying put—even when not perceived as resistance "in the consciousness of individual agents" (Holston 2010: 13). It is a politics of presence that forces accommodation, as leaders are forced to reassess and modify manifestly ineffective policies. For example, considering the ideological and demographic implications of releasing the peasantry from their fields, Li Tana (1996: 41) calls the early development and official tolerance of private "boarding house" (*nha tro*) accommodations for migrants in Hanoi nothing short of "revolutionary" for the time, foreshadowing the give-and-take of migration policy and practice that continues into the present. More recent developments in the expansion of rights for urban migrants include the 2007 Residential Law, which provides new paths to official residence for KT3 residents, as well as ongoing debates in Vietnamese research and legislative bodies about dismantling the *ho khau* system entirely (see Dang 2010).

Residential rights are intimately linked to issues of urban membership and often form the basis for collective action among migrants and other urban poor living along the

margins of cities. In Latin America, this phenomenon is well documented among the informal settlements ringing the primate cities of Lima, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and elsewhere as residents mobilize around common interests such as land titles and legal access to public services (Holston 2010; Soto 1989). Native-place ties often constitute essential "building blocks" for neighborhood cooperation in many of these contexts (Mobrand 2006; Mangin 1973). In Vietnam, the dependence of migrants on rental housing limits potential for direct migrant organizing around common goods, but in many ways the margins of Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and other growing cities have become equally important sites for political challenge and innovation in Vietnam. Following a pattern that Koh (2001; 2006) has detailed extensively, neighborhoods along Hanoi's outskirts cater to those wishing to "evade" or "negotiate around" official policies, driven by arrangements between ward-level officials and local citizens such as Thinh Liet's enterprising landlords, who build and rent out extralegal migrant housing with the complicity of local police. As in Chinese cities (Mobrand 2006: 265), landlords often serve as a "buffer between migrants and local government bureaus." Networking with *dong huong*, cultivating relationships with landlords, and seizing upon ongoing political concessions to residential rights, multitudes of unofficial Hanoians have turned the once quiet fringes of the city into dynamic, full-service "migrant places" that will continue to break down the legalized boundaries between urban and rural citizens.

Beyond the language of citizenship, Ranciere (1999: 30) offers another useful perspective on the political power housed in everyday collective action that can be applied to non-participatory contexts. In his definition of politics, Ranciere emphasizes

not the operations of the "state apparatus" or the legislative pursuit of equality—that belongs to the realm of "policing" responsible maintaining a naturalized social order—but rather what people do to challenge hierarchical power arrangements and shift their bodies from their "assigned places," often outside of existing structures of citizenship. This view of political activity supports the idea of independent migration as a potentially transformative force that "undoes the perceptible divisions" (*Ibid.*) of the social order, such as the differentiated distribution of rights among Hanoi's migrants and natives. Applying these ideas specifically to experiences of unauthorized migration, Papadopoulos et al. (2008: xii) have argued that self-interested "escapes" from existing modes of rights often "predate the formation of control," triggering "shifts which would have appeared impossible if described from the existing situation." Social transformations develop, in this view, not just through revolutionary events or organized social movements, but through subversive everyday practices that force authorities to reassess and modify existing structures of control. In the case of Vietnam, the wholesale rejection of past limitations on movement represents not just agency within existing structures of population management, but rather the transcendence of such structures and the evacuation of their practical relevance.

Conclusions

Amidst rapid independent migration to cities, top-down technologies of control over citizen mobility and livelihoods in contemporary Vietnam can be seen yielding—haltingly—to neoliberal logics of governance where citizens are to assume increasing

responsibility for their own welfare. Yet even as lawmakers selectively embrace market reforms, and tacitly acknowledge the value of an independently workforce to meet shifting labor demands, traces of outmoded socialist institutions still conspire to limit the possibilities of rural citizens. This chapter has demonstrated how social networks and urban communities built around shared native-places can provide flexible, alternative structures of belonging for unofficial Hanoians, supporting the mobile livelihood strategies of independent urban migrants, and chipping away at the authority of the Vietnam's system of differentiated citizenship.

Nam Dinh migrants have never accepted state ideologies that there are places they do or do not "belong." This pre-supposition of equal dignity is critical, prompting migrants to "break the rules" (Hardy 2002) and gain access to the economic opportunities housed in the city without much thought for outdated expectations of citizenship. In the process, such assumptions of equality have destabilized the well-policed ideologies and social arrangements once represented by authorities as upholding equality in society, particularly the urban/rural division of labor constructed in support of socialism. Urban migration outside of the *ho khau* system, supported by extensive native-place networks, can therefore be seen as a creative political force in reform-era Vietnam, ushering in a rapid restructuring of urban society that continues to the present.

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Chapter Four:

Ve Que: Returning Home

Bus tickets. Taken for granted any other time of year, in the weeks leading up to the Vietnamese New Year (*Tet*), securing bus tickets becomes an exercise in persistence, patience, and sometimes detached resignation. Planning transportation to "*ve que"* or "return home" preoccupies much of Hanoi from December to February, with people buying bus, train, and airplane tickets months in advance in many cases; procrastinators suffer the consequences of last-choice seats, circuitous routes on undesirable "private" buses, or delaying their trip altogether. I had been invited to join Dang Bao's family in Thai Binh Province for the *Tet* holiday beginning February 14th, 2010. But with only three left days before the New Year, Bao had yet to make travel arrangements, unsure when his employer in Hanoi would shut down. Other friends in Hanoi looked at me with disbelief when I described the situation: "It's too late! You'll have to go by motorbike now." Of course, making the trip by motorbike was not an option, since Bao and I would be burdened by the plentiful gifts expected of returnees to the village. And while Hanoi's "emerging middle class" (Belanger et al. 2012: 3) increasingly makes the trip by private car or first-class train (To 2012), personal finances and the geography of Thai Binh—surrounded by rivers and lacking rail lines—preclude those choices for Bao and many other labor migrants from the Red River Delta.

"There will be many buses, not just the scheduled ones," Bao assured me. Even so, I was beginning to worry that my study of native-place relationships in Vietnam would omit the quintessential cultural experience of "returning" for *Tet*. But I put my

faith in Bao, packed a light bag, and met him in Thinh Liet in the early morning for the trip on February 13th: only a day to spare. From there, we took a taxi to Gia Lam Bus Station, where the concrete floor was barely visible through the throngs of people and their possessions also intending to *ve que* (See Fig. 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Passengers waiting for (left) and boarding (right) buses on their way to "return home" (*ve que*)

Thankful to be assigned only the duty of watching over our own bags, I handed Bao three VND100,000 notes (about seventeen dollars) and watched him disappear into the crowds toward the ticket counter, resigned to whatever might come next. Bao emerged about ten minutes later, grinning anxiously and running with two tickets in hand (but no change, given the last-minute markups), insisting that we "*di luon,*" or "go immediately" as he had found miraculously found two spots on the next bus leaving for Thai Binh. Surprised, I jumped to join him and we were soon on our way to our seats. Or so I thought. Bao had bought tickets for an already-full bus—knowingly in fact. He had done this before—it was "the only way to get home today"—and set about hoisting boxes

and bags to the rooftop bus attendant and making his way aboard. I followed, wedged myself between other last-minute arrivals, and began the two-hour standing journey over bumpy roads toward Bao's *que huong* in the Thai Binh countryside.

Not all urban residents *ve que* for the *Tet* holiday (see chapter five), but the vast majority of Hanoi's population will spend the surrounding days of the lunar New Year visiting relatives and tending to ancestral obligations in native places across Vietnam, often to the villages of the Red River Delta where the majority of Hanoians have roots (Li 1996: 19). The activities surrounding *Tet* serve to "reconvene scattered communities, bringing them back in sentimental expressions of home, unity, and togetherness…the living and the dead together at the same place at the same time" (Jellema 2007a: 62). Like other occasions bringing urbanites back to their *que huong*—such as death-day anniversaries (*ngay gio*), local festivals, or other holidays in the lunar calendar—*Tet* represents a "rite of return" (Taylor 2007: 19) that cannot be properly performed outside of native places, mythologized as the "womb" from which people emerged and the eventual site of their remains (Jellema 2007a: 73). As such, native places and the act of "returning" (*ve*) serve important roles in the overall revitalization of spiritual life in Vietnam and a renewed interest in the "cult of the ancestors" among leaders and citizens of all social classes in reform-era Vietnam (see Taylor 2007).

In Thai Binh, Bao and I returned for *Tet* to find two of his younger brothers already there. They work in Hanoi as well; in fact, the population of Dong Do village swells dramatically over the holidays when dozens of other migrants *ve que* from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and elsewhere. Bao's youngest brother, Hoa, has a part-time job as a

commercial driver in Hanoi and regularly makes the trip home. The middle brother, Lien, was tapped from an early age—due to his academic promise and eventual university education—to succeed his uncle in a lucrative labor contracting business, and has become quite wealthy in Hanoi. Lien arrived the day before with his wife and baby son in a new Toyota SUV, its white paint gleaming against the village's drab palette of greys and browns. He also contributed the most money to the family's holiday preparations: VND5,000,000 ($300) by his report. Market-related social distinctions such as these interact with acts of returning in complex ways. On the one hand, better-off Hanoians can simultaneously demonstrate their social status and moral character to people whose judgments matter (including the watchful ancestors), often lavishing native places with donations for events or temple upgrades. On the other hand, acts of returning also involve social leveling mechanisms—such as when Lien's Hanoi-born wife dutifully donned a conical "peasant" hat (*non*) to perform her expected chores—or even social *reversals* considering the power held by rural female religious practitioners who act as esteemed gatekeepers to the spirit world. Bao himself, as the eldest brother, will one day inherit from his father the role of *truong ho* (lineage head) of the extended Dang family, and this fact alone (along with the foreign anthropologist in tow) also afforded Bao a certain amount of respect and prestige upon his return, new SUV or not.

This chapter considers the dual impulses in contemporary Vietnam to "go" (*di*) to the city to make a living, but also to "return" (*ve*) to the homeland to attend to relatives and ancestors, examining the practices, symbols, and ideologies tying together practices of migration and conceptions of nativity and piety. While the last chapter described how

native-place ties serve the material goals of residents of Hanoi, here I shift focus to understand how the spiritual needs of Hanoians and the affective dimensions of "belonging" are sustained by relationships to homelands, and how ritual practices interact with market forces in contemporary Vietnam. From this perspective, we will again see how high levels of reform-era citizen mobility and urbanization in Vietnam do not erode the significance and roles of rural native-places, but rather increasingly position the *que huong* as a highly valued "object of reflection" (Schlecker 2005)—and site of emotional and monetary investment—in the lives of city dwellers. Through ethnographic analyses of returning experiences, I show how the epiphenomena of the *Doi Moi* reforms in Vietnam—including new religious freedoms, increases in disposable income, transportation and communications advances, market-related anxieties, and the perception that relationships in the cold, calculating city lack "feeling" (*tinh cam*)—have ushered in new ways of relating to the countryside and performing fidelity to native places among Hanoians. Rather than being a discourse of attachment and fixity, we will see how the idea of *que huong* actually supports and gives rise to mobility, containing an implicit endorsement of migration so long as people "remember their roots" (*nho nguon*) and *ve que* periodically. Finally, I also explore how relationships to native-places change over time of residence in the city, from strong material interdependence among recent migrants, to more "symbolic" encounters with ancestral homelands among Hanoi's established urban citizens.

The material in this chapter draws upon research conducted in Dong Do village in Thai Binh, where I returned with Bao for many occasions, including the Lunar Calendar

holidays of *Tet Nguyen Dan* and *Tet Thanh Minh*, death-day anniversaries (*ngay gio*), a gravesite dedication, and a spirit possession ceremony requested by a group of Hanoians and conducted by Bao's mother (a medium) in the village. I divide the analysis into four sections: first, I introduce ancestor veneration practices and their role in the "ritual revitalization" proceeding in Vietnam among both citizens and leaders. Next, I describe the mutually supportive relationships between going (*di*) and returning (*ve*) in Vietnam in the context of urban migration and life in the reform-era city, along with the structures of patrilineal kinship that give shape to *que huong* ideologies. Finally, I analyze the symbolic and material dimensions of *ve que* experiences among different groups of Hanoians, from recent migrants to long-resident urban citizens.

Ancestor Veneration and Ritual Revitalization

One day in Hanoi, while visiting the home of close friend with a proudly "modern" and global cultural orientation (he now studies in the United States), I noticed him placing offerings on a small ancestral altar (*ban tho*) against the wall and silently praying for about ten seconds. Later, curious about his response, I asked him what religion he practices. And in a refrain I heard before among oft-worshipping Hanoians, he smiled and replied, "I don't have a religion," attributing his actions to Vietnamese "culture" (*van hoa*) and personal feelings rather than the dictates of any organized faith. In fact, a 2004 poll conducted in Vietnam found that 81% of respondents indicated "nonbeliever" (Martin 2006: 57) when asked to choose their religion from a list. This is likely due to lingering socialist discourses of official atheism, but also because the shared

spiritual beliefs and practices among the great majority of Vietnamese people involve elements of three distinct but complementary strains of thought—Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism—with no definitive text or agreed-upon structures of membership and leadership. And while "much scholarly and bureaucratic effort has been expended" (Jellema 2007b: 468) trying to determine if Vietnamese spiritual practices should be classified as a religion, superstition, cultural tradition, or code of ethics, such "taxonomic dilemmas" (*Ibid.*) do not much bother people like my friend mentioned above, nor the ethnographer interested in understanding spiritual engagement from the perspective of Vietnamese people themselves.

These three social and spiritual belief systems (Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism) entered the Red River Delta through successive migrations and acts of colonization—most consequentially from China—and together comprise the "triple religion" (*tam giao*) that guides personal morality, family relationships, and social conduct in Vietnam. The concept of *tam giao* in some ways sidesteps the "taxonomic dilemma" of Vietnamese religion, as an indigenous concept that is satisfying both at an emic level as "a story people tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 448), and also at an etic level as a suitable analysis of actually-existing syncretic religious practice in Vietnam. The idea of *tam giao* held interest historically in Vietnam among leaders trying to properly dispose their subjects toward morality and well-defined hierarchies of family and national rule, but also among poets and philosophers reflecting on the artful complementarity—"three vehicles on the same path" (Hue 2010: 54)—of Vietnamese spiritual life:

Renowned doctrines and religions are of three:
Confucianism aims at helping nations,
ruling people, rectifying families.
Daoism focuses on nurturing vital force
and spirit serenity,
On medicine to heal evil diseases…
Buddhism liberates sentient beings
from three-path suffering,
So their ancestors can attain deliverance too.
Confucianism uses Three Bonds
and Five Constant Virtues.
Daoism preserves Five Vital Forces
and Three Origins.
Buddhism teaches Threefold Refuge
and Five Precepts.
They are like three vehicles on the same path.

—Zen Master Hương Hải (1631-1718) (in Hue 2010: 54-55)

Today, the beliefs and practices emerging out of *tam giao*—most importantly ancestor veneration—constitute a central, shared thread of Vietnamese culture that transcends region, class, party status, or alternate religious identifications. Nearly all Catholic families, for example, maintain an ancestral altar in their homes in a similar fashion to Vietnam's majority "nonbelievers" (Taylor 2007).

Indeed, while other elements of the "triple religion" continue to hold sway over the conduct of Vietnamese citizens—such as the organization of family life around Confucian structures—its most salient and recognizable features are those related to the veneration of ancestors—including family, village, local, and national ancestors (Pelzer 1992: 775). The veneration of the dead, of course, manifests in many different religious traditions, such as in Catholic practices of appealing to saints as Godly intercessors (Woodward 1996), and in Mesoamerican "ancestor cults" (Mautner 2012). Such practices in Vietnam—known as "*tho cung to tien*" (worshipping the ancestors) or more

informally as "*nho on ong ba*" (remembering the moral debt to one's grandparents) (Jellema 2007b: 468)—share much in common with other Asian cultures derived from the Chinese Great Tradition. As in South Korea and China, in Vietnam the "spirits" (*than thanh*) of ancestors are thought to carry on into the afterlife, requiring ongoing attention and nurturance from living descendants. According to Philip Taylor (2007: 15), a leading scholar of Vietnamese popular religion:

> Among the most pervasive beliefs in Vietnam is the view that spirits…co-inhabit alongside the living. Willful, sometimes retributive beings, they have the power to influence the course of life. The wealth and security of the living depend on maintaining with them relations of mutual care and assistance.

Tending to one's ancestors is woven into the fabric of everyday Vietnamese life. In Dong Do village, Bao's mother, like millions of others in villages and cities across Vietnam and the diaspora, begins each day with offerings of fruit, snacks, and cigarettes to altars dedicated to her own and to her husband's patrilineal ancestors, and the smell of incense greeted my every morning there. Throughout the day, invitations are "whispered to ancestors to partake of family meals" (Taylor 2007: 15) and join other gatherings. On any given day in Hanoi, urban residents can be found burning votive paper by the side of the road, to commemorate family or national ancestors, or "to appease the restless souls of those who have died unjustly or away from home" (*Ibid*.). People commonly seek out temples devoted to noteworthy historical figures, making offerings and praying for the health of loved ones, for success in business, or simply when facing a difficult life decision. Experiences of returning to the countryside—whether to native places to honor

the dead, or to ancient temples and altars thought to be spiritually efficacious—figure prominently in Vietnamese ancestor veneration, practices at once "expected and demanded, forced and desired" (Jellema 2007a: 58) among city dwellers.

Although ancestor veneration in Vietnam has an ancient history, popular religious practice in Vietnam over the past century has been defined more by rupture than continuity, most obviously through the secularizing efforts of the Community Party in from the 1950s through the 1970s. Confident that rational governance and not religious orthodoxies held the solution to society's problems, communist leaders felt that "moral concerns were actually social concerns which could be objectively studied and remedied in new ways" (Woodside 1976: 200), and set about dismantling the "superstitious" (*me tim*) elements of the "feudal" past. Beyond simply operating as "an opiate of the masses," ritual expenditures in Vietnam were seen as contributing to the impoverishment of peasants and capable of supporting forms of inequality that worked against social transformation. At the behest of state authorities, local cadres tried to eliminate "unscientific" practices such as fortune telling and mediumship, and placed limits on expenditures for life cycle ceremonies and ritual occasions "in which the elite competed to outdo each other in the extravagance of their offerings" (Taylor 2007: 31). Instead, citizens were asked to show their allegiance to the socialist cause by embracing "thrift" through rationing and other austerity measures, including the substitution of so-called "salty banquets (*tiec man*, lavish feasts with fish, meats and alcohol) for "sweet" (*tiec ngot*) ones, "which were limited to plain tea and simple sweets" (Schlecker 2005: 513). Leaders also requisitioned temples and pagodas to be used as warehouses or schools,

redistributing the surrounding land to collectives (Malarley 2002; Luong 1992). And most importantly, citizens were asked to adhere to new conceptions of belonging and relatedness, subordinating their devotion to living and dead relatives to that of the new "society" (*xa hoi*) being constructed (Schlecker 2005: 511).

While these state interventions did successfully suppress popular religious practices for decades, the years of reform (1986-present) have seen a dramatic resurgence of ritual activities—a "reenchantment" (Taylor 2007) of society embraced by citizens and leaders alike. As one of the most visible features of contemporary Vietnamese culture in an avowedly secular society, ritual revitalization has attracted the interests of many anthropologists studying post-socialist transformations in Vietnam (see Taylor 2004, 2007; Jellema 2007a, 2007b; Choi 2007). In his "state of the field" report on contemporary anthropological research in Vietnam, Luong (2006: 389) summarizes some of the changes:

> The strong revitalization of rituals in Vietnam…has encompassed the intensification of rites of passage (e.g., weddings, funerals) and rites of solidarity (e.g., ancestor death anniversaries, village deity worship, and festivals), as well as the reconstruction or renovation of ritual space (e.g., ancestral tombs, lineage halls, pagodas, temples).

Tied to the intensification of ritual life in Vietnam is another trend in the symbolic and cultural dimensions of Vietnamese life, what Jellema (2007: 105) identifies as the "return to roots" (*ve nguon*) movement. This refers to the "preoccupation with origins (*nguon goc*) and cultural identity (*ban sac van hoa*)" in the context of "forward-looking renovation and liberalization policies" (*Ibid.*). Urban intellectuals concerned about

Vietnam's eroding distinctiveness have written about "traditional" religious activities as basic to the country's indigenous culture (Taylor 2007). The everyday actions of citizens also contribute to the *ve nguon* movement though increased interest in Vietnam's pre-revolutionary holy sites, and by exploring their own "roots" by joining native place associations (*hoi dong huong*), or participating in revived pre-revolutionary rituals.

Many analyses have been proffered to explain this ritual revitalization and obsession with national, regional, and personal "roots," but all agree that a combination of factors is at play. Starting with the top-down backdrop of loosening governmental control over citizens' since the *Doi Moi* economic reforms, "state cultural policies have devoted noticeably less attention to the modernization and secularization" (Choi 2007: 103), with leaders themselves embracing certain folk beliefs and rituals. However, as DiGregorio and Selemink (2007: 440) note, even as authorities allow citizens "to openly ritually engage a much wider group of charismatic dead" from outside of the socialist canon, they have also "attempted to control and appropriate such festivals, thus…creating political legitimacy from the ritual engagement" with these figures. With these interests in mind and to demonstrate attunement to the cultural values of the Vietnamese people, the Communist Party has indeed participated in ritual practices unthinkable during the era of high-socialism. These include an annual (televised) visit by "comrade-leaders" to Ho Chi Minh's tomb during *Tet* to "offer incense and solemnly remember Uncle, loved and respected leader of the nation" (from a television address, in Jellema 2007: 65). And even beyond revolutionary figures, leaders also fund and attend a multi-day festival commemorating the death anniversary of Vietnam's legendary national ancestors, the

Hung Kings, making a claim to legitimacy based on ritual links the pre-revolutionary past" (DeGregorio and Selemink 2007: 440).

However, it would be erroneous to attribute Vietnam's robust and ongoing ritual revitalization solely as a product of loosening state control over the cultural sphere. Popular religion, by definition, arises from the bottom up, and in Vietnam its resurgence has been driven by the creativity of meaning-seeking people themselves. A better approach, and one that addresses questions of citizenship and belonging, foregrounds religion—its official allowances and its independent flourishing—as an ongoing dialogue between state and citizens. State actors will continue to try to channel, manage, and serve their own ends with the expression of belief, just as people will push the limits of religious freedoms and ritually embrace counter-narratives and local histories.

But why have Vietnamese people increasingly turned to local religious traditions and expanded their practices of ancestor worship in a society undergoing rapid economic development and the proliferation of "neoliberal subjectivities" (Belanger et al. 2012)? In views widely accepted for decades, both Max Weber (1946) and Emile Durkheim (1912) predicted that modernity's advance would progressively secularize society through the dominance of modern bureaucratic rationalities and the diffusion social bonds through increasingly differentiated and atomized relationships. The writings of Karl Marx also suggested the erosion of religion alongside modern forms of production: by employing technology to boost output and distributing resources more fairly, the conditions of deprivation and inequality that gave rise to religious belief would be "ameliorated" (Taylor 2007: 30), leading to secularization. However, considering the

ascendancy of new and old religious forms across the Global South—from the worldwide evangelical movement to Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East—it appears the historical luminaries of the social theory may have gotten this one wrong.

In the case of Vietnam, two related sets of explanations for ritual revitalization guide the arguments in this dissertation. Rather than explaining the phenomena as residual survivals from Vietnam's folk cultures—an argument for continuity with "traditional" practices—these perspectives regard the resurgence of ritual life in Vietnam as "part of the fabric of modern existence" (Taylor 2007 4), tied to people's new relationships to markets, governments, and their fellow citizens. Within the first set of explanations, many have argued that religion provides relief from the insecurities and anxieties arising from capitalist markets, offering people "an appealing way of dealing with the integration of local worlds with global capitalism" (Jellema 2007a). In his work on pilgrimage, for example, Taylor (2004) shows how South Vietnam's goddess cults offer a sympathetic ear for successful but socially marginalized businesswomen. I myself witnessed on many occasions my Vietnamese interlocutors seeking out spiritual guidance and assistance in matters of business or investments at rural temples. As we will see later in this chapter, market reforms indeed interact in novel ways with religious practice in Do Do village, lending credence to the view that capitalist restructuring finds new roles for spirituality.

Beyond these rather literal examples of market/spirit interfaces, the segmentation of urban space and feelings of alienation from one's neighbors and have also accompanied neoliberal forms of urban development, encouraging urban residents to seek

out alternative sources of belonging and commonality "where the past offers certainty for relationships in the present." Many of the same Hanoians who reported increased contributions to with their ancestral homeland, or who joined one of the city's native place associations (*hoi dong huong*), explained their actions, in part, by citing the increasing anonymity, spiritual emptiness, and general apathy of Hanoi, where people "care more about work and income than emotions and relationships." To many Vietnamese citizens, urban society "denotes a nebulous sphere in which one engages in relationships that were neither kin (*ho*) nor considered close (*gan*)" (Schlecker 2005: 512), for example those with "colleagues" (*dong nghiep*).

The second, related set of explanations for Vietnam's reform-era ritual revitalization comes from literature on the unique social transformations of post-socialist states. Here, taking cues from the experiences of Eastern Europe and China, religious practice

> operates as a vehicle for alternative subjectivities and counter-narratives creating a space relatively autonomous from the state in which people long forced to suppress their inner experiences and personal beliefs can finally express themselves (Jellema 2007a: 60)

As the project of building a socialist state in thought and action subsided, new spaces of expression opened up to Vietnamese citizens, who could finally bring back village rites once deemed heretical and direct their devotion not toward the fulfillment of the state's revolutionary vision, but toward personal expression and family/ancestral obligations. In Vietnam, experiences of reconnection with ancestral homelands draw upon local identities and celebration styles contrary to those of Communist "society" (*xa hoi*). The

physical spaces and sub-national cultural identities associated with *que huong*, therefore, are intimately involved with the "re-emergence of pre-revolutionary practices of feasts and rituals against the backdrop of a crumbling socialist state, perceived by its citizens as having failed" (Schlecker 2005: 510).

Going, to Return: The Complementarity of Piety and Mobility

At one level of analysis, the ideologies surrounding filial piety and the ongoing mutual support between the living and dead contain a strong disciplining orientation tying people to native places, where one holds irrevocable obligations to the ancestors and where people report a sense of belonging unattainable when adrift. However, as demonstrated in chapter two, Vietnamese history is full of examples when discourses of *que huong* have been mobilized or manipulated in the service of state or citizens' goals, demonstrating flexibility in the face of new opportunities that take people away from their homelands. I have shown already how practices of ancestor veneration and the phenomena of ritual revitalization and the *ve nguon* movement in Vietnam have foregrounded native places in the spiritual practices of urban residents. This section adds the variable of *mobility* to show how the symbols and rituals surrounding native place articulate with increasing urbanization and new patterns of citizen movement in the reform era.

One idiom through which to explore the symbolic oppositions between city and country in Vietnamese thought involves the paired concepts of "going" (*di*) and "returning" (*ve*). While the Vietnamese language employs another word for simple acts

of "coming back" (*tro lai*) to the same place, the verb "*ve*" specifically carries the meaning of "coming back home" (Jellema 2007a: 74). People can "*tro lai*" when returning multiple times to a restaurant or friend's house, but when visiting the *que huong* they always "*ve*." For example, while conducting fieldwork in Vietnam, conservations usually led to the question of when I planned to "*ve My*," or "return to America," the site of my own native place. On the other hand, since returning to the United States, friends in Vietnam ask when I will "return" (*tro lai*) for a visit. Regarding the second half of the opposition, the "going" (*di*), unlike English, where we may "go home" after being away, in Vietnamese the word "*di*" (go) only implies movement away from home, paired for example with "work" (*di lam*), "study" (*di hoc*), or another locale (*di Ha Noi*). Within this relationship of *di-ve* movement, we can locate a key cultural foundation for the practices of migration that have long defined the lives of families in the Red River Delta.

The idea of *que huong* developed in tandem with mobility, as people venturing beyond the hedge of the village almost "compulsively" (Jellema 2007a: 72) kept their ancestral obligations and native village in mind. As described in chapter two, some of the romanticization of *que huong* can be traced to the cityward movements of mandarins in Hanoi from the 12th century. These intellectuals and poets gave voice to the feelings of connection and inevitable return that still inform understandings of nativity. Today, urbanites give a more modern voice to these same feelings though the numerous karaoke folk songs celebrating the "*que huong*" (see Fig. 4.2)



Figure 4.2: Video still from a popular karaoke song praising the *que huong*

Members of the Vietnamese diaspora in France, the United States, and elsewhere also contribute to the discourse of returning to native places, navigating fraught terrains of geopolitics and personal sentiments of belonging in their homecoming decisions (Long 2004). Elaborated in this way—from a distance—we can see how *que huong* as a field of discourse and action relies on movement away from home for its power and relevance. In fact, an exception to the usual *que huong* relationships among Hanoians helps to prove the rule: as I found out in the course of interviewing, among very recent migrants in Hanoi—those for whom the village has not yet become an "object of reflection"—the idea of *que huong* makes little sense, and I began substituting the term *nha*, or simply "home" when discussing their villages of origin. Only with sustained living away the place of birth does a home become a native place.

Understood in this way, the *di-ve* opposition and ideologies surrounding *que huong* can actually support the migration of Vietnamese citizens. When people from Hanoi *ve que* (return to the homeland) to villages in the Red River Delta, they experience

"moments of togetherness premised on normative separation" (Taylor 2007: 20). That is, the act of reconvening is built into understandings to native places. For example, the activities undertaken during *Tet* involve not only the return of the ancestors, but also the return of far-flung family and friends who must be visited and pay visits in a rather formalized manner. As Jellema (2007a: 58, my italics) suggests, celebrating returning (*ve*) in these circumscribed and "occasional" encounters is to endorse on some level the act of going (*di*).

> …the unmarked corollary to the coming back must certainly be the going away…buried within the trope of return…we discover, unexpectedly, hidden sanction for mobility. In other words, the emphasis on return accidentally configures ancestral rituals, and by extension the familial…communities they generate, as *occasional* gatherings or *temporary* reunions.

My interviewees from Hanoi also emphasized the idea that acts of return are premised on a normative dispersal of ritual actors. Describing the pull on migrants to *ve que* for death-day anniversaries, one young man from Thai Binh recognizes the reality that working in the city is a necessity, but it is not a place to lay down new roots:

> When it comes to the anniversaries, you have to go home. Home, wherever you and your older generations were born, where the umbilical cord and placenta are buried, you've got to be there. Here in the city, it could be a better place to live, to do business, but it never is a place to do those [ritual] things. Back home, you have a lot of relatives, my ancestors come from there and my grandparents live there. Here, it's just a sub-branch of the family and it could not replace the original branch

The language of "branches of the family" here derives from Vietnamese understandings of patrilineal descent groups, called *dong ho* where the verb *dong* indicates "flow." The flow signifies "the movement of substance from the founding ancestor down the

generations, forking into ever more branches" (Schlecker 2005: 517). Never severed from the main branch, mobile "sub-branches" of the *dong ho* may extend to Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, or Orange County, California, but this organization leaves little ambiguity as to the definitive place of origins. Ancestor veneration centered on native places thus can be seen as "faith that is consistent with mobility, migration, and the widening of cultural horizons" (Taylor 2007: 20), sustainable even when circumstances force people to leave their *que.* As people follow their own individual ambitions to other provinces and countries, the disciplining nature of *que huong* relationships and the need to *ve que* are matched by a "liberating" (Jellema 2007a) cultural expectation of geographic distance. So long as people demonstrate piety to relatives and ancestors by periodically returning (*ve*) to native-places and contributing to the ancestors' care, they can freely go (*di*) to work or study in the city to make a better life for themselves and their families.

The complementarity of *que huong* ideologies and mobility can be seen not just through the intermittent presence of migrants returning to the village, but also in the nature of their involvement. Scholars of migration correctly focus on remittances sent to native-places as a significant prop to local economies, allowing villagers to pay school fees, build new homes, or deal with rising everyday expenses. But I found that the ritual involvement of Hanoians—some of whom are third-generation urbanites with only tenuous ties to living relatives in the *que huong*—returning for death anniversaries and holidays represents another important source of assistance for villagers. While their revolutionary attempts at "cultural reform" were heavy-handed, Communist Party leaders did correctly perceive that ritual life in the countryside can be significant drain on local

incomes. Today, the "sweet banquets" once favored by state authorities would be considered grossly inadequate to honor the ancestors and satisfy guests; such truncated celebrations "lack feeling" (*khong tinh cam*) (Schelcker 2005) and could cause a family to "lose face" (*mat mat*). Instead, ritual events in the *que huong*—particularly death anniversaries and tomb dedications—become an opportunity to publicly display the status of the family and the ancestors. Expenditures for food and drink, hired musicians and other ritual specialists, costumes, and ornate paper offerings can run into the hundreds of dollars, and organizers in the village have come to rely on the contributions of comparatively wealthy returnees like Lien, Bao's older brother from Dong Do village, and other *VIP* (pronounced "veep" in Vietnamese) guests we will meet later in this chapter.

In this mutually-beneficial arrangement, many actors gain prestige: ritual practitioners in the village such as Mrs. Thi, Bao's mother, by directing the course of quite beautiful and elaborate ceremonies; the returnees by demonstrating wealth and ongoing commitment to the *que huong* (while earning merit in the eyes of the ancestors); and the lineage as a whole for hosting memorable celebrations, building the most impressive tombs, and even for producing the successful "local-boy-made-good" who dutifully returns, another implicit endorsement of migration. Besides the contributions of family and lineage members, friends, acquaintances, and perfect strangers from the city can also request village-based rituals to be performed at their behalf, typically employing the use of a sought-after medium. This provides another source of financial support for villagers that might be missed in analyses limited to gifted remittances. Life in the city

relies on the countryside as a symbolic source of belonging and site of spiritual involvement with the ancestors, just as life in the countryside relies on the contributions of returnees (and other visitors) to sustain these same highly-valued ritual practices.

Ethnographies of Return: The Ritual Significance of *Que Huong*

It should be clear by this point that acts of returning to native places represent a constituting part of urban life in reform-era Vietnam, where renewed interest in finding one's "roots" and satisfying ancestral obligations through revitalized rituals have met rises in incomes and advances in transportation. Communing with relatives and ancestors in the *que huong* offers an alternative to the subjectivities promoted through past (socialist) and present (neoliberal) efforts to rationalize and modernize society. I now turn to practices of returning themselves to illustrate these points, and further, to demonstrate how relationships to native places change over time of residence in the city. Using ethnographic data and images from Thai Binh Province, the sections and subsections that follow cover death anniversaries (*ngay gio*), a mediumship ritual tied to Vietnam's Goddess Religion[1], and activities surrounding the *Tet* (New Year) holiday.

<u>Wealth and Virtue: The Death Anniversary and Tomb Renewal of a Great Ancestor</u>

[1] The "Goddess Religion" or *Dao Mau* refers to a belief system originating in the Red River Delta involving the worship of "mother goddesses," including the spirits of mythical beings such as Princess Lieu Hanh, and of legendary historical figures such as the Trung Sisters (Hai Ba Trung) (See Taylor 2004; Endres 2007).

My first experience of returning to Dong Do village in Thai Binh was occasioned by the death anniversary (*ngay gio*) of Dang Bao's *cu nam doi*, his great-great-great-great-great (that's five) grandfather, one of the founders of Dong Do village and its first lineage head (*truong ho*). This would be a grand event, I was told, because members of the family had just completed a new tomb complex to be dedicated at the same time. Bao's father (Mr. Quan) is the direct patrilineal descendant of this Great Ancestor, and as the oldest brother in his generation, serves as the current lineage head (*truong ho*), a role Bao himself will one day inherit. Bao's mother (Mrs. Thi) knew her devotion would need to turn sharply toward Mr. Quan's ancestors when she married into the family and she embraced this responsibility wholeheartedly even while maintaining ties to her own patrilineal kin in a neighboring district. While official responsibility for the *buoi gio* (death anniversary event/meal) falls to Mr. Quan, his wife remains the undisputed family authority in ritual matters.

Beyond her ritual obligations to the lineage, Mrs. Thi also serves the village and surrounding area as a well-respected medium (*ba dong*) in the tradition of the "Goddess Religion," capable of giving her body over to ancestral spirits and performing specific "spirit possession ceremonies" (*len dong*) upon request. These practices in Vietnam lie somewhere on the continuum between "incarnation" (where the medium's body becomes possessed by spirits) and "performance" (where the focus lies on a presentation that pleases and draws out the ancestors) (Fjelstead and Nguyen 2006: 10). In a view that is "close to the emic perspectives of mediums" themselves (*Ibid.*), most scholars agree that Vietnamese spirit possession involves elements both incarnation and performance: when

the "mediums are possessed, they are giving the sprit a bodily form, and, at the same time, they are pleasing the spirits by wearing attractive clothing or dancing in a beautiful way" (*Ibid.*). Mrs. Thi casts her abilities more as duties, attributing her role to "being burdened with an unpeaceful life." In her words, she "owed a debt from a previous life, resulting in abnormal things happening to our family…in order to give my family some peace, I must do these ceremonies with the hope of serving and pleasing the Buddha and the Saints/Goddesses." Like shamans in other cultures, she "uses the magical ability given to [her]" to "help the community" through ritual interventions. Immediately upon my arrival at the Dang family homestead, Mrs. Thi's ritual zeal was on full display, as she busily directed her assistants setting up for a ceremony (see Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3: The Dang homestead with Mrs. Thi (in white) directing the ceremonial preparations for an important ancestor's death anniversary (*ngay gio*)

Besides maintaining the tombs and main lineage altar (*ban gio*), one of the responsibilities of the lineage head in Vietnam involves maintaining a book of records containing the day that each previous *truong ho* (and some other patrilineal relatives) was

"lost" (*mat*). Bao retrieved this impressive book for me to document, and I noticed that nowhere were the *birth*dates of the ancestors recorded, reflecting the Vietnamese ontological emphasis on a different passage: the beginning of the afterlife. Death anniversaries have long been celebrated by Vietnamese people, but these has been a significant increase in the pomp and ceremony surrounding these events alongside ritual revitalization in the reform-era. As mentioned, state actors have also become involved, recognizing and organizing events around the death anniversaries of a wide range of revered figures—including the nation's founding ancestors, national heroes, and of course Ho Chi Minh himself (Taylor 2007). In Thai Binh, as across Vietnam, death anniversaries are rather festive occasions, where even the serious spiritual elements proceed with good-natured informality. Along with the many lineage members returning to the *que huong*, the spirit of the deceased is also thought to return on this date to visit and watch over the family, calling for a sumptuous feast, the lighting of incense, and, in this case, a ritual of spirit possession where the Great Ancestor himself bestows gifts upon his descendants.

On the morning of the *ngay gio* in Dong Do village, before the dancing and feasting, two dozen or so close relatives made an initial trip to the family graves located amidst the rice fields, lighting incense, saying personal prayers, and inviting the Great Ancestor to join them (most attendees would light incense among the tombs after eating). By noon, enough people had gathered to begin the events. The symbolic transformation of Mrs. Thi into the Great Ancestor began with fan dance performed by her pink-clad associates (called "*nguoi hau dong*," or "those who serve the *co dong"*) and the driving

rhythms of a hired band of ritual musicians known as *cung van*. Together, the "graceful" (*duyen dong*) movements of the dancers and the storytelling "songscapes" of the musicians served to please the ancestor (see Norton 2009: 94). A paper boat in front of the altar symbolizes the journey of the ancestor to the medium's body and, along with stylized rowing and net-casting, recreates everyday activities "appropriate to each spirit" (Fjelstad and Nguyen 2006: 28), in this case the fisherman ancestor. After dancing to the front of the group in front, Mrs. Thi made offerings of fruit and other items before being covered by her assistants by an ornate red veil (*khan phu dien*). The veil signals the arrival of the spirit, and as soon as the spirit has "taken seat" (Chauvet 2012: 87), Mrs. Thi tossed it aside, emerging as the Great Ancestor incarnate (see Fig. 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Mrs. Thi's transformation into the benevolent Great Ancestor who distributes blessed currency as gifts (*loc*) to the assembled family members

To dramatize the transformation, Mrs. Thi's body movements became more masculine as she took a shot of whiskey and smoked a cigarette intermittently. At this point, all of the people observing—related villagers and dozens of returnees—had the chance to interact

with the returned ancestor and receive blessings and gifts (called "*loc*," in this case, small denominations of cash) suffused with the energy of the spirit. The dancing and music continued for another forty-five minutes of so until the application and removal of the red veil once again signaled Mrs. Thi's transformation back into humanly form.

Between the music, dancing, and distribution of *loc*, the festive, shared experience reinforced bonds with both the living and dead, constituting a powerful rite of solidarity. After the performance and a small break, the feasting commenced, with plates of chicken, fish, rice cakes, and dozens of bottles of rice whiskey. Participants at death anniversary events and other events in the *que huong* place "overwhelming importance" (Avieli 2007: 122) on the shared consumption of specially-prepared foods, as family members are encouraged to "*an dam gio*" or "eat the ancestor worship ceremony" (*Ibid.*). Toward the end of the meal, people started peeling off in groups of two or three and making their way to the site of the Dang ancestral tombs, which were being unveiled to visiting lineage members—many of whose contributions helped realize the project—for the first time. My own upbringing sent me signals to be quiet and solemn when it was my turn to stand within the tomb and say my own prayers, but the informality—and intoxication—of the surrounding crowd quickly made clear the celebratory intent of such occasions, even encouraging me to take their photo for posterity (I made sure to frame and return a copy). The tomb was indeed impressive, towering over others nearby in the Dong Do rice fields, a concrete badge of ancestral honor for the Dang lineage that provoked other families in the village to follow suit (see Fig 4.5).



Figure 4.5: The newly renovated tombs of the Dang lineage (left, center), and other village tombs currently under construction (right)

In total, about 200 people with ties to the lineage came to the Dang homestead to celebrate the *ngay gio* of the founding ancestor and offer incense at the renovated tombs (compared with fifty or so visitors most years), some from as far away as Ho Chi Minh City or Dak Lak Province in the Central Highlands. Most, however, came from Hanoi and Hai Phong, the two cities where Thai Binh migrants have the strongest social networks. Throughout the day, I had noticed many relatives, especially those from the village, fawning on and congregating around one well-dressed visitor in particular. Mrs. Thi also made sure to interact extensively and share blessings with this individual. When I inquired about his identity, Bao told me that he was a high-ranking army officer named Mr. Anh stationed in Hai Phong who had contributed the bulk of the money for the tomb upgrade and festival meal. This was confirmed the next day when Mr. Quan's younger brother read aloud the carefully recorded contributions made by different members of the lineage, not all of whom could attend personally (see Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: Counting (left) and announcing (right) each person's monetary contributions to the death anniversary and tomb renovation event in Dong Do village

It was at this point that I realized that my friend Bao was truly looking out for me, since he had earlier convinced me (against by better judgement) to part with VND500,000 (around $30) of my own for reasons I could not grasp at the time. Not expecting the painstaking ritualized accounting, I felt relieved when my name was called to the approving, betel-red grins of the elders.

Mr. Anh, the army officer, had donated in fact donated VND100 million ($5000) for the temple restoration, the food, and the many tables and chairs that would be reused for future events. This amount is more than some white-collar workers make in a year in Hanoi, and represents a veritable bounty in the village, allaying financial pressures related to the family's many ritual responsibilities. While not a regular visitor to *que* (Mrs. Thi even forgot his name during an interview), the army officer nonetheless enjoyed uniform admiration for his generosity, shaking hands and giving a speech about his grandparents' connection to Dong Do, and his desire to sustain that connection into the future. He was even invited into the Dang home in front of the family's ancestral

altar to take his meal, places usually reserved only for lineage elders and indicative of a *"VIP"* visitor, according to Bao (see Fig. 4.7).



Figure 4.7: "*VIP*" returnee sitting with lineage elders indoors in front of the family altar (left) while other returnees catch up with seldom seen family members outdoors (right)

Through these contributions toward the lineage and *que huong*, we can again see the complementarity of migration and ideologies of ancestral and filial piety. Place-based religious practices like those exercised in the Red River Delta at first glance seem to be based on bounded "social forms and co-presence" (Taylor 2007: 21), but in reality events such as death anniversaries represent rites of return, depending symbolically on the "reconvening" of lineage members living and dead, and practically on the financial contributions of the wealthier branches of the family tree living elsewhere. Rather than being endangered by expanded mobility and the urban pursuit of wealth, these processes in fact help sustain place-based local religion in reform-era Vietnam.

Vietnamese citizens fortunate enough to get ahead in the city often direct "conspicuous benefaction" (Luong 2006) toward their communities of origin, donating

huge sums of money not only to upgrade family homes and fund lineage events, but also for wider local causes such as temple reconstructions and school renovations. For example, Schlecker (2005: 510) documents the experiences of one Hanoian with family ties to Bac Ninh who returned to his *que huong* to find a local pagoda seriously damaged by flooding. Following a "commemorative ritual…Vinh began to pull out bundles of 50,000 dong notes…for the construction of the new pagoda," rationalizing the donation similarly to the army officer in Thai Binh by saying, "our grandmother had been a very respected person in this village." For Mr. Anh, Bao's brother Lien, and other financially successful products of the Dang lineage group in Dong Do, death anniversaries and other events in the *que huong* provide opportunities to publicly index their wealth and moral virtue, while at the same time reinforcing their belonging and identity though active involvement with the definitive place of origins.

The "Four Palaces" Ritual, Upon Request

In summer 2010, Bao informed me of an event taking place in his home village that I might be interested in attending. I thought I must have overlooked one of the many lunar calendar holidays, but in fact this event did not coincide with any particular fortuitous day; rather, a group of women from Hanoi with ties to Dong Do had requested Mrs. Thi's services as a medium to perform the "Four Palaces" Ritual, a component of the feminized "Mother Religion" or "Goddess Religion" (*Dao Mau*) associated with the "*yin* spirit world" ("*coi am*").[2] The "four palaces"—Sky, Earth, Water, and

[2] The Vietnamese terms for the concepts of "yin" and "yang" are am and duong, respectively.

Mountains/Forests—are where a pantheon of spirits with specific personalities and abilities (healing, bringing prosperity) reside (Chauvet 2012). Despite significant temporal and regional variations in the pantheon's contents, all conceptions share "a common core consisting of a hierarchy of…spirits in the following order: mother spirits (*mau*), mandarins (*quan*), ladies (*chau*), princes (*ong hoang*), princesses (*co*), and young princes (*cau*)" (Norton 2009: 28).

The Mother Religion and goddess worship represent a set of ritual practices "rapidly growing in visibility and popularity" (Chauvet 2012: 88) in Vietnam. This is especially true in the Hanoi region, which is geographically close to temples associated with the most famous female deities, such as the Mother of Heaven herself, Princess Lieu Hanh, to whom a temple in Nam Dinh is dedicated (*Ibid*.). Vietnamese and foreign scholars have interpreted the Mother Religion as a "syncretic popular religion that blends indigenous beliefs with imported…elements from the institutional religions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism" (Norton 2009: 57), but are quick to point out that its dynamism and resuscitation relate closely to the social changes of Vietnam's reform era. For example, urban businesswomen and men frequently appeal through mediums to the "prosperity spirits" that can confer financial success, with specific characters offering blessings for retailers, wholesalers, the protection of businesses from misfortune, or even luck in gambling (Chauvet 2012: 95). The Mother Religion movement can also be seen through the gendered prism of the *ve nguon* (return to roots) movement introduced earlier. Female deities have been promoted by urban intellectuals as symbols of the nation and indigenous cultural identity "at a time when the rapid change and

globalization in the *doi moi* era have been perceived as a threat to cultural sovereignty and social cohesion" (Norton 2009: 62). Taylor has called this association of femininity with indigenous identity the "mothering of the nation" (2004: 387). Further, the multiplicity of Goddesses has "allowed them to become loci of diffused meanings and disparate usages and speak to a geographically extensive following" (*Ibid.*: 287).

While popular today, the Four Palaces rituals performed by Mrs. Thi and other religious practitioners were once frowned upon or banned completely. French colonists dismissed such practices as "toned down survivals of primitive shamanism" (Chauvet 2012: 89) and socialist leaders fought against all forms belief contrary to patriotic nation building and rationalized social planning. A leading state intellectual in the 1960s labeled goddess worship "a bastardization of Taoism that gives birth to scenes of witchcraft" (Nghiem Tam 1965, in Chauvet 2012: 89). Communist officials banned such practices in 1975, forcing mediums to perform their ceremonies in secret. Since reform, authorities still warn against the dangers of spirit possession and fortune telling, but from the 1990s have slowly eased official prohibitions (Pham 2007: 50).

The desires of Hanoians to escape the city to commune with the sprits and ask for blessings have provided new opportunities for rural religious practitioners like Mrs. Thi to supplement their farming incomes and acquire social status. Bao remains a bit shy about his mother's gifts, but he is clearly proud of the notoriety she has achieved in the region as an efficacious medium, and was excited for me to witness the Four Palaces ceremony, even if he (who has seen it many times) preferred to smoke cigarettes and talk on the phone outside periodically during the event. The two women from Hanoi who are

who initially consulted with Mrs. Thi about performing the ceremony were hoping for success in their work. According to Mrs. Thi, the participants specifically sought "health and safety, and fortune and promotions in their careers." It was actually difficult to initially discern who requested and funded the ceremony, but once underway the main (worldly) protagonists became clear.

The Four Palaces ceremony in Thai Binh took place over the course of about four long, intense hours, requiring considerable stamina from medium and audience alike. In the morning, Mrs. Thi and her assistants prepared the altar and "asked permission from the Buddha to carry out the ritual." When ready, she sounded a bell to announce to the participants—and the spirits—the beginning of the ceremony. About twenty people crowded into the Dong Do communal house (*dinh*) along with Mrs. Thi and her assistants, and the *cung van* musicians. As before, the music induced a trance-like state within the medium and "invoke[d] the spirits to descend (*giang*) into the temple and to take possession of the medium's body, then sing the legend of the spirit" (Chauvet 2012: 85). About fifteen spirits successively possessed Mrs. Thi during the ceremony, each change requiring her to sit before the altars, make offerings, and complete the transition with the removal of the red veil. At one point, the ritual actors went outside to burn votive paper offerings of items needed in the afterlife and appropriate to each spirit: houses, horses, boats, and stacks of paper currency. Mrs. Thi performed dances—some graceful, some funny or bawdy—in the attire and style of the incarnated spirits, hand mirrors and fans for female spirits, and cigarettes and whiskey for male spirits. Iin addition to throwing holy *loc* (gifts) of candies, fruits, and small amounts of money, Mrs.

Thi specifically called about five people, including me, to the altar individually for a "special" blessing, cloaking us with a veil and placing offerings on our covered heads (see Fig. 4.8). According to Fjelsted and Nguyen (2006: 27), this allows the spirit to "hover over" participants and transmit blessings.



Figure 4.8: Medium (Mrs. Thi) blessing participants while dressing and behaving in the manner of different spirits in the Four Palaces Ceremony

As the ritual finally wore down, some members of the audience approached Mrs. Thi individually with offerings while whispering personal requests or prayers. Mrs. Thi accepted the offerings, gave token gifts back, and offered a few more words of blessing and encouragement. By this time, my legs had lost feeling but my heart was still beating quickly from the musical crescendo that peaked with Mrs. Thi's final dance.

Later that evening, after everyone had time to rest, I spoke with Mrs. Thi about the ceremony and its participants. She told me that while everyone contributed some

money, the women (along and their husbands and daughters) who requested the ceremony also primarily funded it, contributing VND3,000,000 total ($160) on top of all of the other donations received, including mine. Although she performs these rituals out of feelings of obligation, Mrs. Thi also earns a small amount of money from each performance, since her own reported investment totaled about VND2,000,000 ($110) in ritual accoutrements (plus her time). Of course, some money was given away as small gifts from the spirits, but "contracted" rituals such as these work from the understanding that effective *ba dang* deserve the balance of compensation for their physical and psychological labors.

As with the *ngay gio* ceremony, people returning from cities to the countryside—this time for a formal ritual intervention rather than a family holiday—donated considerable sums of money in support of local religious practices. But they got something in return for their money, and I doubt they regret their investments. The main contributors received special treatment and customized interventions intended to bring good luck and financial success in the uncertain and anxiety-provoking context of urban capitalism. Their participation also provided a chance to visit with old friends and bolster feelings (*tinh cam*) of belonging and spiritual grounding unattainable in the city. Those who returned (*ve*) to the countryside—one of whom was a student living most of the year in Saigon—will once again "go" (*di*) to the city to resume their work and studies, buoyed by the experience.

<u>Exodus Hanoi: The Lunar New Year</u>

The crowded bus ride back to Thai Binh for *Tet*, despite its discomforts, ended up providing valuable opportunities to inquire about *ve que* experiences among a particularly captive audience. We discussed the foods they were looking forward to eating, and the importance of honoring the ancestors and providing gifts to the children of the village. Others gossiped about who was not "returning" this year, absences reflective of a "bad family" (*kem gia dinh*). And we all shared laughs over the comedy of our collective situation, which produced exchanges like the following between the ticket collector and a passenger trying to poach former's usual space on the stairs:

A: *Vao di!* (Go further inside!)
B: There's no room; I'm too tall!
A: How tall are you?
B: 1.8 meters.
A: Not so tall. *Vao di!*

The bus eventually dropped us off on the main road in Hung Ha district, Thai Binh, and three motorbike taxis (two for us, one for our packages) took us the remaining fifteen kilometers through brown rice fields to Dong Do village, where I spent the next six days celebrating the New Year with Bao and family.

With the exception of particularly important death anniversaries, the *Tet* holiday—shortened from *Tet Nguyen Dan* (meaning the "first morning of the first day")—exerts the greatest homeward pull on residents of Hanoi. While most of the independent labor migrants I spoke with in Thinh Liet Ward try to *ve que* at least three times per year, among longer-resident "urban citizens," *Tet* usually occasions their only annual visit, and this being the case, the experience of exodus from the city—the

preparations and the movement—has become a kind of collective ritual itself in Hanoi. In the final week before the new year (a period called *Tet Nien*, or "extinguish the year"), Hanoians spend their time busily buying new clothes for their children and goods to bring home (ours included blankets, jackets, tins of cookies, and a new rice cooker, among other items), zipping around the city to deliver gifts to bosses and in-laws, clearing up debts, and coordinating arrangements with relatives back in the *que*. This sense of activity and excitement contrasts markedly with Hanoi in the immediate wake of the New Year, as the city becomes a ghost town of mostly tourists and the businesses—and longing-for-home staff—that serve them. In the village, people must add extensive holiday preparations to their usual daily chores, cleaning homes, altars, and gravesites; buying decorations including the Peach Blossom Tree (*Dao Nhat Tan*), thought to symbolize strength, vitality, and longevity (see Fig. 4.7); and most importantly, cooking the traditional foods of *Tet*, since preparing food—along with all other housework—is forbidden during the first three days of the new year.

Falling on sometime during late January or early February each year according to the lunar calendar (*am lich*), the *Tet* holiday represents Hanoians' longest annual break from work and has become a unifying and widely recognized marker of Vietnamese identity in the Vietnam and in cities around the world with large immigrant communities. Reflecting the a symbolic understanding of rootedness in the agricultural countryside (recall that the general term for native place, "*que*," is also the word for "the countryside), *Tet* celebrates the union of nature and culture, the living and the dead. While the two ancestral rites in Thai Binh outlined above involved mediumship and a sustained focus on

the spirit world, experiences of returning home for *Tet* also give over considerable time to the living: parents, children, grandparents, extended family members, and neighbors.

On the day before the New Year, families usually spend time at home, and in Bao's home in Thai Binh, the men were charged with little more than relaxing while Mrs. Thi ordered around her Hanoi-born daughter-in-law, Vu, the wife of Bao's brother Lien. The two had only married two years before, and already had a baby son in tow whose antics occupied everyone's attention. Born and raised in Hanoi and firmly middle-class, Vu was clearly eager to demonstrate her obedience to Mrs. Thi and her ability to make domestic contributions, even donning the traditional conical hat of Vietnamese peasants when it started to drizzle (Bao's wife was not with us as she had to attend to her ailing mother in Viet Tri Province). As evening approached, the family settled in for dinner and drinks, catching up on the past few months and watching the televised broadcast of the countdown (see Fig. 4.9).



Figure 4.9: Mrs. Thi cleans the house on the final day before *Tet* behind the Peach Blossom Tree (left), and watching televised fireworks at midnight (right)

As midnight struck, I heard the strange cacophony of televised fireworks, cheers from neighboring homes, and the sounding of temple bells and drums throughout the village. Soon afterward, Bao's family made a succession of offerings to the ancestors: first at the home altar (*ban tho*) to invite lost parents, grandparents, and siblings from both sides of the family to join in the *Tet* festivities, then to the lineage (*ban gio*) altar to honor more distant ancestors; and finally to the village temple (*den*) to praise local tutelary deities. We then quickly returned to the house, congratulated each other for turning a year older, and turned in early, knowing the next day would be a whirlwind.

The beginning of the New Year in Vietnam is a time for fresh beginnings, since all of the troubles of the past have been swept away with the pre-*Tet* cleaning. Families are extremely careful to remain in good spirits, avoid conflicts, and exhibit genuine hospitality during this time to set a positive precedent for the months to come. Visits to relatives and friends in the village are also coded into experiences of *Tet*. These visits traditionally followed a strict protocol based on one's age and status in the village, but Bao was too eager for protocol, and we bounced around the village for hours chatting with everyone from aged great-uncles with memories of the American War, to Bao's former school buddies who now work in the Quang Ninh coal mines. Returning family members constantly streamed into Mr. Quan's house this first day as well, since the home of the *truong ho* is an obligatory first or second stop among lineage members. For children, the first day of *Tet* is a joyous occasion, as they receive small red envelopes of cash (called *li xi*, or "gift money") from older relatives, exchanging traditional greetings and words of wisdom. As Bao told me, "to keep their face, rich people from the city

should give VND50,000 to village children, while for others, VND10,000 is enough" (I settled on VND20,000). The first day of *Tet* also brought a large commensal feast to the Dang homestead, making use of the tables and chairs donated previously by Mr. Anh, the Hai Phong Army officer, followed by drinking and chatting into the night.

The next few days in Dong Do brought more visits, more leftovers, and a family outing in brother Lien's new SUV. After carefully negotiating the village's narrow lanes toward the main road, our first destination was Dong Bang Temple in northern Thai Binh Province, a site linked to the Goddess Religion with an eventful history that demonstrates the creativity of Vietnamese peasants in the face of religious limitations. The temple dates to prehistoric times (Pham 2012: 50); according to legend, it was built by King Due Vong in the third century B.C.E. to honor his father King Hai Bat, who had successfully brought peace and prosperity to the precarious early state. Revered over many centuries, King Bat Hai over time entered the Mother Religion's pantheon as the "Father God" alongside the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh. Dong Bang temple itself became known for related spirit possession ceremonies until communist authorities attempted to rid Thai Binh of such "superstitious" (*me tin*) practices. In response, drawing upon the multiplicity of honored spirits there, locals set up a new altar and recast the temple's main purpose as honoring Tran Hung Dao, another admired king of the 13th century from the region (famous for repelling Mongol invaders) whose historical associations were more palatable to the revolutionary cause. In fact, throughout the era of high socialism, rural citizens commonly "refashion[ed] their legends in order to position their deities as state-approved national heroes" (Kendall 2007: 168). These actions guaranteed the temple's

survival and allowed worshippers to wait until the time was right to resurrect its past purposes. Today, a statue of King Bat Hai looms over the interior of the complex, and the altar once reserved for Tran Hung Dao has been reintegrated into the Goddess Cult where King Tran is just another "male spirit" (Pham 2007: 50). In fact, I started investigating this complex history as result of contradictory notes from my *Tet* trip: Bao told me Dong Bang Temple was dedicated to a Tran king, but this was nearly impossible to discern given its reform-era makeover.

The temple was predictably crowded and reflected great social diversity, from local villagers drinking and gambling on the streets, to well-heeled urbanites taking advantage of their time in the countryside to take in traditional sites and make their offerings. In a carnival-like atmosphere, people jockeyed for position in front of incense bowls and indulged in traditional cultural offerings like palm reading, fortune telling, and calligraphy arts (see Fig.4.10).

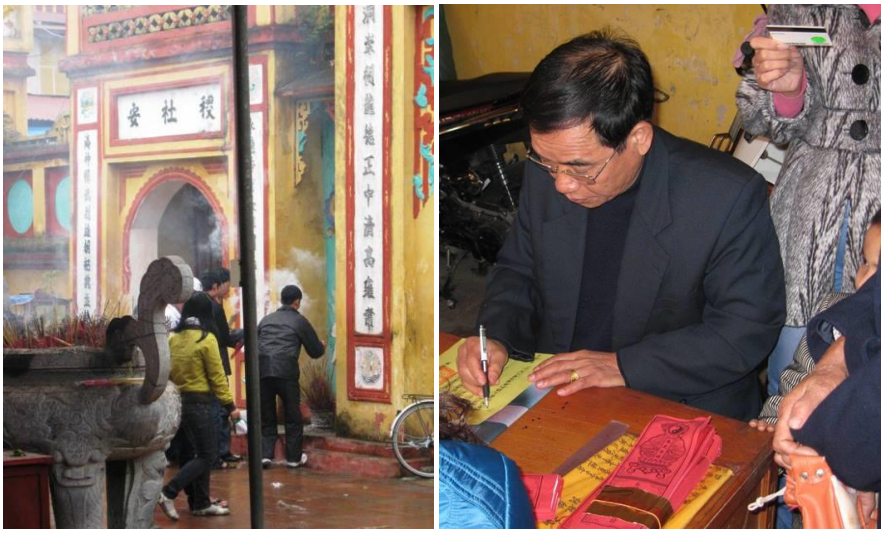


Figure 4.10: Dong Bang Temple in Thai Binh (left) and a fortune teller divining the future for visitors

Most of the paid activities at the rural temple were directed toward, and mostly patronized by, non-locals.

On our way back to Dong Do village, we took advantage of our covered transportation on a misty day to make one more stop, to a highly-regarded (by Mrs. Thi) female fortune teller in a neighboring village. There, each of us in turn received an analysis of our character and our physical health, along with advice for the future. She told Lien to be thankful for his beautiful family and not get carried away with making money. She told me to eat more (my appetite had soured on the now days-old *Tet* specialties). Finally, we returned "home" to Dong Do once again, where Mrs. Thi burned votive offerings of paper clothes and other consumer products to accompany the ancestors back into heaven.

Analysis and Conclusions

In the context of increasing migration, the geographic separation of families, and urbanization, events like death anniversaries and *Tet* celebrations can be seen as a "rites of return" (Taylor 2007), bringing together the ancestors, far-flung family members, and those who have remained in the native place. This view aligns well with the Confucian-Vietnamese concept of the lineage as a "synchronic" entity that has endured as a valuable source of personal and collective identity through repeated attempts to reform family structures (Avieli 2007: 124). According to Pham (1999: 19), "the communitarian character of the family found expression not only in relationships between the living members, but also in those between the dead, the living, and the unborn." While the

lineage stretches from the remote past to the infinite future, its structure is de-temporalized into a cohesive, synchronically-conceived community that reconvenes on regular occasions. More evidence of this synchronic orientation comes from the interplay between the living and dead that proceeds in everyday life through the existence of "parallel worlds," whereby "the dead depend on the living for their material needs [and] the living depend on the protection and good will of the ancestors for their own happiness, success, and prosperity" (Avieli 2007: 125).

To this analysis of family complementarity, I would add yet more actors: those who live far from native-places and *ve que* periodically. In contemporary Vietnamese understandings of family, it is not just temporality but also spatiality that becomes collapsed into a bounded unit of shared identity and mutual support. Just as between the living and dead, those living at the source and those farther afield enjoy a material and symbolic complementarity that bridges distance in addition to time. Though these bonds are taken-for-granted and immutable, returnees still feel compelled to perform their rightful place at the table. They demonstrate fidelity to family by giving gifts, supporting ritual expenses, and performing household chores, and demonstrate fidelity to ancestors by lighting incense, making ritual offerings, and "lavishing" their *que huong* with funds for temple upgrades and tomb renovations.

For all of its explanatory potential, however, this synchronic perspective of Vietnamese family life omits other motivations to *ve que* among Hanoians. In fact, insight into the desires of modern Hanoians can be gleaned from switching to a diachronic view more sensitive to the relationships between phenomena over time. In

addition to personal and social identity, urbanites in Vietnam also yearn for "cultural identity," reflected in the *ve nguon* (return to roots) rhetoric espoused by those concerned with retrieving the distinctive Vietnamese identity, and in the conversations I had about the moral and cultural bankruptcy of the modern city. Desires to resurrect an "authentic" Vietnamese culture have led to renewed interest in folk music, participation in pre-revolutionary rituals, and touristic practices among urbanites visiting local temples to consume "compartmentalized 'traditional culture'" (Schein 2001: 226).

As described in chapter one, a number of anthropologists have interrogated the interplay of urbanization and cultural identity in China, undergoing similar political-economic and cultural transformations. With increasing numbers of people living "urbanized lifestyles" (Guldin 1997) and trying desperately to access the spoils of modern global capitalism, Chinese citizens have been groping for new sources of identity amidst the tumult of rapidly social change:

> In post-Mao China, practices of nostalgia, revitalization, and reenchantment have taken up folk cultures from the countryside and worked them as malleable substances that can lend vitality and continuity in a swiftly changing, often disorienting, reform process (Schein 2001: 226).

Here, visions of temporality are not collapsed but rather celebrated as alternatives to official versions of socialist history and the country's current trajectory. In Vietnam, experiences of reconnection with ancestral homelands involve local rituals and celebration styles once steamrolled by "the rationalization" efforts of a zealous socialist project, and currently threatened by the forces of globalization and modernization. Unlike synchronically understood family identities in Vietnam, questions of "cultural

identity" most assuredly involve temporal considerations, as people adapt and (re)construct practices from the past to ground themselves in an uncertain present and future.

Another key point to take away from this chapter is that relationships to native places change significantly over time of residence in the city. As mentioned, Bao and other labor migrants in Hanoi tend to keep one foot in the village, returning frequently. While Bao does not enjoy the financial position of his younger brother Lien, he nevertheless contributes a large percentage of his earnings to support his mother and father in Dong Do. For him, the village is his "savings account," since he knows that relatives there would similarly come to his aid in a financial emergency. And when migrants have difficulty finding work in the city, native places serve as safety nets where people can return and contribute in other ways to the family economy. Native-place ties among Hanoi's third- and fourth-generation urban citizens, while highly valued, are much more intangible. Theirs is a more symbolic connection to *que huong*, sustained by occasional trips to *ve que*, practices of conspicuous benefaction to support the lineage or village, or sometimes membership in one of Hanoi's "native-place associations" (*hoi dong huong*). These groups arrange meetings of native-place fellows (*dong huong*), maintain lists of contacts, keep members informed of news from home provinces, and spearhead fundraising efforts for projects in ancestral villages.

The migrants I met from Nam Dinh and Thai Binh working in Hanoi's informal sector and living cheek-by-jowl in Thinh Liet's boarding houses do not keep an ancestral altar of any kind in these rented spaces. A simple prayer and offering of water or fruit

suffices for people whose ritual involvement in native places remains regular and ongoing. Long-resident Hanoians from Dong Do, on the other hand, almost uniformly maintain a small ancestral altar in their homes or businesses, where they make their daily offerings to those who have been "lost" (*mat*) over the years. Nevertheless, such altars in Hanoi remain mere capillaries in the networks of lineage members spanning time and space. *Que* is where the heart is.

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Chapter Five:

New City, New Citizens:
Urban Space, Mobility, and the Production of Class in Hanoi

"In the rapid and acute socio-economic transformations of the past 20 years, Vietnamese society has witnessed a gradual change in valued symbolic capital, from association with the revolutionary and peasant class to association with the modern, entrepreneurial, and urbane."

- Belanger, Drummond, and Van (2012: 5).

As the *Tet* (New Year) holiday approached in February 2010, most residents of Hanoi—new migrants and well-established families alike—made preparations to return to their native places (*que huong*) in the countryside, securing bus or train tickets and buying up the inexpensive clothes and other commodities surging in from China at this time of year to take along as gifts. As described in chapter four, such experiences of "returning" represent a constituting part of the *Tet* festivities for many families, allowing them to fulfil ancestral obligations while reconnecting with far-flung extended family members. This year, however, increasing numbers of Hanoians will not be heading "home" for new year, instead taking advantage of time off from work to take a family trip to Singapore, spend some time along Vietnam's southern beach resorts, or, like the Pham family, retreat to "vacation homes" in the rustic midlands northwest of Hanoi. The Pham family is part of what many academics have termed Vietnam's emergent middle class, a slippery social category referring more to shared cultural and consumptive practices than any defined metrics of income (Belanger et al. 2012; King et al. 2008). Like others with the means to do so, the Phams have actively participated in the real estate boom

reshaping Hanoi and its surrounding countryside in the past decade (Labbe and Boudreau 2011), purchasing condos for nuclear households along Hanoi's rapidly-developing margins and, most recently, building their rural sanctuary in the hills of Ba Vi district, about 50 km west of Hanoi. Moving by private automobiles between these private spaces, the Pham family's retreat from the noise and stresses of the city is nearly complete, becoming ever more insulated from everyday street life in Hanoi and the headaches of public transportation during the *Tet* season.

In targeting the formation and consumption practices of Asia's growing urban middle-classes and "new rich," social scientists have pointed to a number of phenomena tied to space and mobility than can produce and reify social differences in cities such as Bangkok, Beijing, and Jakarta, including the appearance of private condominiums and gated communities (Zhang 2010); the increasing use of private transportation and freeway "flyovers" that bypass the urban poor (Truitt 2008; Jenks 2003); the growth of suburban shopping malls and supermarkets which "both cater to and create the demand for the consumption of goods" (Drummond 2012: 80); and new forms of leisure travel and investing in conspicuous "holiday homes" (To 2012) outside of the city. In Hanoi, as these practices become normative in contemporary visions of "the good life," they have also become increasingly accessible for certain segments of society with "privileged configurations of social, cultural, or economic capital" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 396). The Phams are by no means members of Hanoi's political or economic elite, but nevertheless, through rising incomes, property investments, and some well-placed "connections" (*quan he*), they have come to enjoy all of the trappings of a "modern"

(*hien dai*), globally-oriented lifestyle. And rather than being vilified for perpetuating class distinctions in the socialist state, the Phams in fact conform to the expectations of particular form of neoliberal governance—promoted through state-driven market reforms and the efforts of international economic bodies—that "strives to aestheticize urban space and inculcate 'proper' urban practices that are shaped by new moral, economic, and aesthetic regimes" (Schwenkel 2012: 440). The Phams, along with other middle-class Hanoians, represent the consuming, self-regulating subjects seen as essential to market-driven modernization and the "civilizing" of urban spaces.

As state and popular visions of modern and moral lifestyles change, and as social status becomes more firmly linked to economic might and forms of conspicuous consumption, some segments of Hanoi's population once at the top of the social hierarchy under central planning have the cards stacked against them in the accumulation of symbolic capital under a new urban order. In particular, peasants-turned-urban migrants from the countryside and former state workers unplugged from the social safety net find themselves either legally excluded from free movement, priced out of sought-after "new urban zones" and private transportation, or even forcefully evicted from their aging homes to make room for more "rationalized" forms of urban development (Gough and Tran 2009). These two groups, constituting the bulk of Hanoi's urban poor, face new patterns of spatial segregation and social marginalization as state planners and private citizens attempt to clearly delineate zones of belonging and exclusion in the city (Zhang 2010). However, discourses promoting privatization and a new citizenry amenable to "improvement" (Li 2007) have not completely replaced existing cultural conceptions of a

"good life," and neither have efforts to reorganize and rebuild Hanoi in the name of "urban civilization" (*van minh do thi*) steamrolled non-conforming urban spaces out of existence. Rather, city residents facing displacement have resisted unfair policies of land compensation (Harms 2013), and new migrants have engaged in strategies of urban place-making and community building at odds with the intentions of city planners, suggesting that the uneven pace and application of neoliberal reform in Vietnam leaves room for alternative values and practices among a diverse urban population.

This chapter explores how the production of space contributes to the production of social class in Hanoi, and how different groups of citizens—from the urban poor, to the rising middle-class, to the economic and political elite—have experienced what Nguyen-Marshall et al. (2012) call the "reinvention of distinction" in Vietnamese cities. It demonstrates how changes to Hanoi's built environment and the ways in which people to move through space are tied to new conceptualizations and performances of modernity, and how these ideas emerge out of articulations between emergent neoliberal logics and Vietnam's unique history of social relations across the colonial, socialist, and reform eras. By tracing the transformation of class in Vietnamese cities, this chapter not only examines the changing meanings and values of social identities, but also how the mobilities and spatial practices associated with particular categories of citizens become differentially evaluated within neoliberal modes of urban governance. For instance, we will see how the same freedom of mobility enjoyed by Vietnam's rising middle class—relocating to the suburbs, moving between multiple homes in the city and countryside—can become a cause for concern when practiced by rural-to-urban migrants, whose

independent movements and informal urban communities constitute "social problems" in the view of state experts. I also show how national leaders and international advisors evaluate the diverse forms of place-making materializing in Hanoi, as the types of communal residence and street-level economic activity exercised by the urban poor also fall outside the bounds of successfully reformed "urban civilization."

I begin the chapter by defining the meanings of social class in the Vietnamese context and addressing the history of class formation and erasure across the colonial, socialist, and reform eras, showing how changing forms of valued symbolic capital have impacted the social mobility of Vietnamese people. Next, I turn to Hanoi's rapidly-transforming built environment and demonstrate how neoliberal modes of urban development—particularly the proliferation of gated communities known as "new urban areas" (*khu do thi moi*)—impact the politics of belonging in Hanoi by creating exclusionary zones of class privilege, and by sustaining moralized expectations of the private, civilized homeowner. This section also demonstrates how the actions of those with limited class mobility in Hanoi—including poor residents forced out of socialist housing and migrants from the countryside—can subvert the aims of many urban renewal projects, by contesting processes of displacement, or by constructing bustling "villages within the city" to the chagrin of city leaders and planners. In the third section, I examine the relationships between the production of space in Hanoi (and surrounds) and citizen mobility, situating the comings-and-goings of different groups of citizens within contemporary perceptions and performances of social class. In my conclusions, I

summarize my findings and reflect on the indeterminacy and anxiety-provoking nature of social change and class belonging in urban Vietnam.

Distinction and Erasure: Social Class in Vietnam

Like any other socially constructed category, contemporary ideas of class in Vietnam must be understood as the products of changing historical circumstances, governing ideologies, and popular perceptions and practices. Here, I approach social class as socially situated and performed, emphasizing the "lifestyling practices" (Belanger et al. 2012: 1) of different groups of citizens, as well as the wider economic policies and social discourses used to evaluate the "quality" of these groups. Marxist understandings of social class—defined by relations to the means of production—inform the following analysis to the extent that they became operative in governing strategies of status erasure, and also to help understand how the production of space can become an instrument of power wielded by economically and politically dominant classes (Lefebvre 1993).

The analysis also draws inspiration from the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1989), who approaches social class not only through factors of economic production, but also through practices of consumption and regimes of "taste" and "distinction." Bourdieu sees people's positions in "social space" ("*espace social"*) as derived in part from particular configurations and deployments of cultural, social, and economic capital; when these "various species of capital…are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (1989: 17), they become convertible into the "symbolic capital" that begets prestige, honor, and class

belonging. This perspective shows how "certain 'positions' come be associated with sets of 'dispositions,' or sets of tastes expressed through certain lifestyles" (Belanger et al. 212: 10), as possessions and practices carry meanings beyond their everyday use values. "Taste" functions as "a sort of social orientation…guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu 1984: 166). Of course, there is nothing neutral about these processes of assigning group belonging or elevating and denigrating different bodies and ways of life. Such distinctions and assessments of taste can constitute a "social weapon that defines and marks off the high from the low, the sacred from the profane, and the legitimate from the illegitimate," (Allen and Anderson 1994: 70), as we will see in Hanoi with respect to styles of housing and forms of geographic mobility. Bourdieu's associated idea of *habitus*—the unconscious set of dispositions expressed through particular lifestyles—is both instructive and potentially obfuscating here. While it draws attention to everyday practices in defining group belonging—as opposed to organized class-oriented political activities—*habitus* also emphasizes early socialization and behavioral inflexibility in ways that belie the "agency in class mobility" (Belanger et al. 2012: 10). Indeed, the Phams and other middle-class citizens have adapted to new social mobility strategies and presented changing representations of themselves to suit shifting values surrounding social identities (rich/poor), consumption (minimized/made conspicuous) and ways of living (communally/individually).

There are two terms for "class" in Vietnamese usage: the first, *giai cap*, derives

from Marxist understandings of revolutionary class struggle and its usage is typically limited to that context. The second, *tang lop*, has its roots in Confucian thought, and maps fairly easily onto Western concepts of high-, middle-, and lower-class status, though these concepts too find limited applicability to contemporary Vietnam (Cheshire 2010). Social class is not a topic that came up often in my conversations with Hanoians, remaining a delicate subject in a forward-looking country grappling with memories of a socially riven past. According to Belanger et al. (2012: 8), there is no widely accepted term for the post-*Doi Moi* middle class living in the suburbs of Vietnam's cities, although in official discourse there are "occasional references to a 'middle level' ('*tang lop trung lieu'*) of citizens used in a purely descriptive sense—that is, with no political connotation and most often in a way that somehow implies 'civil servants.'" Another term referring to the upper end of Vietnam's middle class and the "urban rich" is *dai gia*, literally means "big person" but carries the meaning of "those who are wealthy and possess multiple and large properties and abundant consumer goods (*nguoi lam tien nhieu cua*)" (To 2012: 143). In popular and media discourse, *dai gia* constitutes an admired and aspirational identity, as well as an arena of critique over corruption and the *sources* of wealth among businesspeople and their families. News stories also point to the lavish and hedonistic lifestyles of this group, particularly the youth thought to suffer a deficit of cultural values through lives defined by the pursuit of material wealth. Another widely used class-based concept involves the problematized "urban poor," for instance among city officials trying to aestheticize the city by alleviating the most visible forms of poverty. In sum, although the idea of social class does not constitute a pervasive sociolinguistic category, visions of

urban belonging and the values and practices associated with poverty and wealth clearly implicate social and economic distinction as an important field of discourse in Vietnam.

As explored in chapter two, feudal (pre-colonial) Vietnamese society was predicated on a fundamental division between villages in the countryside—which enjoyed considerable autonomy throughout most of this period—and the capital cities populated by an elite class of mandarins and governors. Under this "literati class" in the social hierarchy were Vietnam's peasants, artisans, and also a class of merchants who at times amassed great wealth through inter-regional trade (Woodside 1988). This arrangement is significant because it shows how "wealth alone did not equate to high social status" under the Confucian value system promoted by most pre-colonial dynasties (Belanger et al. 2012: 3). Nevertheless, even while scorned for their pursuit of riches, the merchant class was tolerated to the extent that it remained essential for the smooth functioning of society. Moreover, sufficient wealth allowed the children of merchants as well as peasants to devote their lives more fully to scholarship since the civil service exams that minted new mandarins remained the only clear avenue for class mobility and the acquisition of symbolic capital in imperial Vietnam.

The French colonial period (1867-1954) ushered in dramatic shifts to Vietnam's social structure and the emergence of a distinct middle class, although at first social mobility remained closely tied to participation with the governing administration rather than to patterns of accumulation and consumption (Nguyen-Marshall 2012). According to Tran (2008, in Belanger et al. 2012), beginning in the 1920s the native bourgeoisie congealed into what could be considered a cohesive group with its own class

consciousness and distinct interests. Under the "associationist" colonial governing strategy implemented during this time (see chapter two), new opportunities appeared for well-educated Vietnamese subjects to join Hanoi's middle- and upper-classes as white collar professionals working in law, medicine, civil service, and education, or as small business owners. Members of this new westernized class of businesspeople and professionals "dominated urban centers such as Hanoi and Saigon, shaping the socio-economic milieu to reflect their interests and tastes…organiz[ing] friendly associations and charities and taking advantage of the boom in print media to propagate their modern views" (Belanger et al. 2012: 3). It is difficult to estimate the influence of this group on contemporary class understandings, but certainly elite modes of "tasteful" consumption in the performing and culinary arts retain a French flavor in Hanoi.

The upheavals of socialist revolution and interaction with foreign entities beginning in the 1940s would yet again transform the meanings of social differences in Vietnam. The idea of class assumed a central role in the ideologies of communist leaders bent on purging Vietnamese society of the social structures and crass consumerism sustained under colonial rule. Early communists led by Ho Chi Minh gained exposure to Marxist and Leninist thought as foreign students in Europe, and brought back to their homeland a dramatic revolutionary prescription for liberation from socioeconomic inequalities. Among the most influential works among Vietnamese communists was Lenin's "Theses on the National and Colonial Questions," presented in 1920 to the Second Comintern Congress. In this strategic configuration of Marxism to suit revolution in colonial contexts, Lenin called for cooperation between Western

Communist parties and national liberation movements in Asia and Africa, considered natural allies against the "common enemy of world imperialism" (Duiker 2000: 65). In this view, colonial control over the resources and markets of far-flung territories and their resources not only helped to sustain social inequalities, but also inhibited the development of domestic progressive forces, and therefore would have to be systematically dismantled to defend against a predatory global capitalist system and support the advance of global Communism.

But Lenin was not the only Marx-inspired political luminary to influence the direction of the Vietnamese class-based struggle. Lenin's Asian call-to-arms outlined above encouraged peasants to unite with workers against imperial forces, but, as noted in chapter two, it was Mao Zedong who was most successful in reshaping Marxist principles to accommodate peasant movements. Therefore, in addition to Lenin's reconciliation of patriotism and socialist revolution, the second main principle in "Ho's acceptance of Communist ideology was Mao's thesis of an armed struggle launched from the countryside" (Deane 2001: 25), a revolutionary model based on and mobilizing and elevating the social position of Vietnam's often exploited agricultural workers.

Even in the midst of ongoing conflict with France and then the United States, President Ho Chi Minh and his lieutenants set about spreading their ideas and beginning the transition to socialist production. In terms retooling a society corrupted by social distinctions, this involved "promoting class equality in the name of the masses of people (*nhan dan*)" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 397). Institutionally, leaders set about "creating a new collectivized peasantry which would be willing to make the necessary

efforts to increase crops and to deliver a larger proportion of their products to the state" (Post 1989: 365). Constitutionally, to accomplish the tricky task of reconciling class equality with some form of vertical leadership, the CPV drew again on Leninist permutations of Marxist thought to create "a people's democratic state based on the alliance between workers and peasants…under the clear-sighted leadership of the Workers' party of Vietnam, the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and president Ho Chi Minh" (Constitution of the DRV, 1960).

The implications of these revolutionary ideologies for the organization of Vietnamese society were far reaching, particularly for those whose economic activities or rival religious identifications posed a threat to socialist levelling mechanisms. At first, the transformations occurring in Hanoi and northern Vietnam differed markedly from those in the South, where socialist institutionalization came later (after reunification in 1975), and where American foreign aid had long buttressed the market economy. In fact, one of the most immediate effects of the communist party control in the north was a mass exodus of professionals, intellectuals, and Catholics—groups who could see the political writing on the wall—to South Vietnam, where many "joined Saigon's middle class, already developed and active since the French colonial period" (Belanger et al. 2012: 4). Whether they left or remained, property owners soon saw their lands, homes, and businesses confiscated to support the creation of nationalized industries and agricultural collectives. Leaders attempted to "transform Hanoi from a colonial consumption city into a producing city" (Turley 1975: 377), and set about virtually eliminating the urban capitalist class. Associated with the French regime and symbolic of "connivance and

collaboration with the oppressing colonial power…people belonging to this group [the urban middle class] experienced dramatic downward social mobility" (Belanger et al. 21012: 11) under CPV leadership. And when Vietnam became reunified at the conclusion of the "American War" in 1975, the urban middle class was purged yet again, this time in Saigon where thousands of residents with questionable class backgrounds faced similar property confiscations, or worse, assignment to re-education camps in the countryside. Many former professionals and southern military leaders fled the country entirely during this transitional period, joining the "boat people" whose drastic actions testify to the tense atmosphere surrounding social differences (social class, ethnicity, and religion) in the early years of nationhood.

Despite the communist party's preoccupation with eliminating socioeconomic inequalities and exploitative capitalist practices through the institutionalization of high socialism, new forms of consumption and distinction soon emerged that created a *de facto* "regime elite" of state cadres and military leaders that at times undermined discourses of equivalency. Higher social positions depended on the symbolic capital gleaned "from good class background (i.e. peasant and/or revolutionary)" (Belanger et al. 2012: 4) and service to the nation. Cheshire (2012: 93), for example, describes the "perks of Party membership during the planning period, in which senior officials had access to top quality food products and consumer goods, even during times of severe shortage and famine." These individuals helped themselves to "larger monthly rations of rice, meat, oil, and sugar than peasants and workers" (*Ibid.*), resulting in social distinctions that contradicted and exposed official ideologies.

A number of novels and memoirs written either overseas or in the post-reform period have offered new details of the uneven hardships endured during Vietnam's period of collectivization (e.g., Duong 2002). For instance, diasporic author Tuong Nang Tien (1986: 237, in Cheshire 2012) reflects on the class politics surrounding the food containers—used "Guigoz" brand milk cans from the Netherlands—used to heat and transport rations on collectives:

> One day, the man in charge of heating the Guigoz cans of food for the board of overseers at the construction site tripped and fell, dropping dozens of cans. Rice and meats scattered all over the ground. Those top comrades, the director, the political commissar, the engineer, the manager … made wry faces, embarrassed by the flagrant display of their overabundant rations before the hungry eyes of the collective. Tell me what you hide in your Guigoz can and I'll tell you what class you belong to in the classless society.

Beyond increased rations, top-level cadres also enjoyed the privilege of traveling to eastern-bloc European countries, where they could acquire yet more consumer possessions (such as they were in these countries). In the "classless society," occupation and rank within the communist bureaucracy largely determined one's living standard, creating a "pattern of accumulation based on leveraging access to the state" (Cheshire 2012: 96) that would prove durable into the present.

The Doi Moi market reforms beginning in 1986 triggered the slow decline of socialist ideologies that had stifled markets and consumer culture, creating the conditions for the emergence of distinct social classes defined more by capitalist accumulation, consumer practices, and shared social perceptions than by party membership (although, as we will see, the latter remains a crucial asset for social mobility). In spite of these changes, the idea of "capitalism" (*chu nghia tu ban*) was and remains a dirty word in

Vietnam, associated with French colonial exploitation and American economic imperialism. Countering a pervasive fear in the party that commercialization would undermine socialist ideology, in the lead-up to reforms the architects of Doi Moi tried to reconcile revolution and reform, arguing that

> …the market predated capitalism, so that it could not be deemed a capitalist invention: it was rather an ingenious invention of mankind… Moving from the subsidy system to market mechanisms was never presented as the rejection of socialist principles, but rather as a tool for their implementation" (Rama 2008: 29).

The Communist Party would relinquish control of the economy only to the extent that it allows them to continue their charter of managing society toward prosperity while preserving the legitimacy of existing political structures. In post-socialist contexts like Vietnam and China, this logic has manifested in what Ong and Zhang (2008) refer to as "socialism from afar," where guarded economic liberalization does not necessarily deplete state power but rather diversifies the forms of "governmentality" used to control citizens. Nevertheless, in spite of their best efforts to channel and manage capitalist energies, we have seen in previous chapters how such energies often bubble over any artificial containers, for example as migrants from the countryside overcome durable residency restrictions to fill labor needs in the city. Further, as market frameworks become increasingly pervasive, the actions and discourses of the CPV actually betray a kind of support for the creation of new types of citizens whose comportment is amenable to capitalist development and consumption, in many cases turning a blind eye to rising social disparities.

Targeting both the market mechanisms transforming urban economies, and the "logics, knowledge practises, aesthetic values, and moral subjectivities" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 380) emergent alongside new political-economic influences, scholars of contemporary Vietnam have recently entered the dialogue on the effects of *neoliberal* forms of capitalist restructuring, which bear meaningfully on class understandings in contemporary Hanoi. To be clear on the meanings of this variously-defined term, here I understand neoliberalism in Vietnam as encompassing a number of related phenomena including the transfer of certain powers of governance from the state to private or transnational entities; official discourses of privatization, self-regulation, and the development of "quality" citizens; the conflation between market behaviors and appropriate forms of modern and moral personhood; and the proliferation of logics of efficiency and profitability as the metrics for assessing health, aesthetics and government performance (see Rose 1996; Zhang 2001; Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012). Drawing from the work of Foucault (1991) and others on modern government and the management of populations, socialist technologies of "biopolitical" control over citizens' lives in Vietnam can be seen yielding—haltingly and incompletely—to neoliberal governing logics where citizens are to assume increasing responsibility for their own welfare. While the CPV invited these changes and, to some extent, controls who reaps their rewards, outside forces have also played a role in defining new expectations of citizenship in Vietnam. International organizations including the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advocate strongly for continued neoliberal restructuring in Vietnam "as a means to "civilize,

modernize, and privatize" the socioeconomic and physical landscapes of cities through "minimization of state intrusion in the market and the expansion of foreign knowledge systems" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 388).

Market frameworks call for subjects to become free, self-managing, self-enterprising individuals in different spheres of everyday of everyday life—health, education…professions, and so on" (Ong 2006: 14). However, the self-regulating subject—an "entrepreneur of himself or herself" (Rose 1996: 56)—does not simply appear alongside structural economic change; rather, particular desires and beliefs matching market imperatives must become internalized through various state and non-state sources of moral and cultural influence:

> The previously unfree subjects of these societies cannot merely be "freed"—they have to be *made* free in a process that entails the transformation of educational practices to inculcate certain attitudes and values of enterprise, changes in television programs ranging from soap operas to game shows to implant the desire for wealth creation and personal enterprise…

In Vietnam, these desires manifest in a longing for a modern, middle-class lifestyle among those riding the wave of the current economic boom, and the freedoms afforded certain categories of citizens—"the entrepreneurial, the better off, and those of higher social status" (Gough and Tran 2009: 175)—enable agentive social mobility and the acquisition of symbolic capital through forms of consumption defined as "modern" (*hien dai*).

Of course, ambivalence toward showy wealth remains a conservatizing factor to some degree in late-socialist Vietnam, but the ideologies trickling down through domestic media, international organizations, and the Communist Party itself are unmistakably pro-

market and pro-accumulation, shaping many people's views of success and social class. For example, the Communist Party has promoted the rise of "a new entrepreneur class (*doanh nhan*)" though policies such as the 2000 New Enterprise Law and growing recognition of the contributions of private business leaders to national development (Ho 2003: 2). Regarding ideologies of urban development, conformity to officially promoted forms of "quality"—in living arrangements, commodities, even types of people (Pashigian 2012; Kipinis 2006)—has become an aspirational goal for many people, tied to new class hierarchies and performances that index participation with modern urban life. The proliferation of market-oriented discourses also contains a moral element, whereby people who do not measure up to the standards of modernity are faulted for their "failures." Evaluating citizens based on their conformity to new expectations of citizens "naturalizes middle classness as somehow reflecting desirable personal qualities, rather than a privileged position in an environment of increasing structural inequalities" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 397).

Before moving on to specifics of neoliberalism and performances of social class in Hanoi, it should be noted that the rise of these phenomena does not imply the wholesale replacement of prior forms of governance or cultural values in any national context, and in particular in states with authoritarian legacies like Vietnam where the CPV retains close control of politics and large segments of the economy. Neoliberal influences in Vietnam are neither totalizing nor clearly demarcated from the state agents charged with filtering them into society. Rather, market-based restructuring in Vietnam has been superimposed onto extant logics of rule developed in support of communism,

resulting in the appropriately contradictory term favored in official discourse on Vietnam's political-economic system: "market socialism." Neoliberalism remains an "exception" (Ong 2006) in Vietnam: certain groups are excluded from the rights and expectations of neoliberal visions for society based on their low "market value" or because they are judged to be incapable of "exercising the techniques of self-management and self-discipline that are the hallmarks of a morally appropriate, neoliberal personhood" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 380). Assessing the reform era in China, Michael Nonini (2008) cautions against overstating the power and reach of neoliberal restructuring and its inevitable role in dominating and transforming society, pointing to the experiences of those excluded from the project and alternative cultural logics that continue to endure. In his view, informed by fieldwork in China, anthropologists making dramatic claims regarding the spread of neoliberalism have too often focused on

> elite and highly educated informants instead of displaced workers, farmers or… migrants to urban areas…Instead, in considering whether and to what extent the Chinese population 'buys into' market logics of thinking and acting, one must take into account the sheer diversity of class backgrounds in China, the discursive formations that exist in China today (Maoist, Confucianist, Daoist, Buddhist, etc.) as alternatives to ruling market logics, and the presence of…protests exhibiting widely held moral economies (*Ibid*: 146).

Interrogating the effects of neoliberal logics in Vietnam helps elucidate the complex class relationships accompanying market reforms, but with Nonini's warning in mind, we must also addresses subjectivities that oppose the expectations of neoliberal citizenship, and

spatial practices among Hanoi's citizens derived from principles of communitarianism and the cultivation of personal and political networks, rather than from market logics.

Quality City, Quality Citizens

For much of my time in Hanoi, I lived in a neighbourhood called Lang Ha, in Dong Da District, in an area most people refer to as the "New City." Outside of the protected Old Quarter and well-built French Quarter, this part of Hanoi was one of the first regions to be targeted for large scale redevelopment along the lines of "urban civilization" (*van minh do thi*). Once a marginal space, it is now fully integrated into continuous urban sprawl as Hanoi's fringes creep ever outward, and today contains a mix of heavy commercial activity (auto dealerships, computer stores, chain restaurants, etc.), office buildings, and redeveloped housing, much of it in the form of high-rise apartments. The area is much less "raw" and dynamic than the migrant-dominated neighbourhood of Thinh Liet described in chapter two, but still houses a diverse population of elites, young professionals, migrants, and poorer homeowners who have kept their property intact through these changes. While much of my research focused on the experiences of informal migrants in Hanoi, Lang Ha's proximity to a number of gated condominium communities in Cau Giay and Hoang Mai districts—both completed and (noisily) under construction—also gave me a window onto the spatial transformations of the city as they unfolded. Furthermore, living away from downtown provided opportunities to meet middle-class and elite families who decided, like so many others around the world with increasing social mobility, to leave the center city for the peace and security of the suburbs. We ate out together, went shopping, and engaged in many of the more pricy

recreational activities appearing in Hanoi during the past decade: tennis, bowling, and the occasional evening cocktail on the rooftop bar of the Hanoi Sofitel.

Just as the transition to socialism and breakdown of class distinctions in Vietnam involved the reorganization and resignification of urban space, so too has the ongoing transition *from* socialism has entailed the destruction of old forms and the production of new kinds of urban spaces to support market-based logics of rule. And while the pace of urban redevelopment in Hanoi appears meteoric at times—a two year absence can result in a disorienting return to the same locale—such rapid changes to the organization of urban space are not unprecedented in post-socialist contexts. In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, for example, advisors and planners "promoted the destruction of socialist cityscapes—including architecture, public housing and communal centers — while endorsing…capitalist redevelopment as key to the construction of modern and prosperous global cities" (Schwenkel 2012: 438), ushering in new techniques of urban renewal across Eastern Europe. The "collapse of structures and bodies previously perceived as indestructible" (Pusca 2008: 371) helped bring about popular catharsis but also a degree of disorientation as the erasure of the built environment threatened to erase locally valued identities, ways of living, and place-based histories. In post-socialist Vietnam, an international consensus of neoliberal advisors has similarly swayed the direction of urban development by endorsing privatization and "rationalization" efforts in Hanoi and other major cities to help the country overcome the economic and social deficiencies sustained under central planning. The rapid pace of change in in Vietnam has promptly devalued and dismissed long dominant forms of knowledge, expertise, and

modes of planning in favor of market- and profit-driven strategies of urbanization (Schwenkel 2012; Labbe and Boudreaux 2011). This section shows how these changes to the post-socialist built environment in Hanoi proceed alongside new understandings of social class tied to how people live and comport themselves in urban space.

The idea that the production of space can support the creation, polarization, or concretization of social differences is now well understood in the social sciences, demonstrated through historical and contemporary studies of, for example, exclusionary land policies in indigenous Mexico (Hesketh 2012), modernist urban planning in Brazil (Holston 1989), or the racially segregated cities in the United States (Massey and Denton 1993). Henri Lefebvre pioneered many ideas regarding the social production of space and its relationship to power, showing in the first place how "any 'social existence' aspiring or claiming to be 'real'…must produce its own space," (1991: 53) or else it would remain a mere abstraction. And since "(social) space is a (social) product…the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action…[and] in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination" (*Ibid.*: 26). For Lefebvre, class relations thus have a "cardinal role" in the production of space, since "this production is performed solely by classes, fractions of classes and groups representative of classes" (1991: 55). Looking at the production and resignification of urban spaces reveals a number of phenomena in contemporary Hanoi: how class ideologies consistent with new developmental priorities manifest in Hanoi's physical environment; how relationships to sources of power relate to urban planning agendas; and how state experts and private citizens alike engage assessments of the

quality and "tastefulness" of different built forms and their occupants.

Nikolas Rose has argued that under neoliberal logics, the reorganization of urban space involves "shaping the conduct of free individuals in the direction of civility" (1999: 73), with planners taking aim at spatial forms such as street infrastructure, housing, parks, and buildings to instil new aesthetic sensibilities and counter regressive behaviors such as slum development and criminal activity. Judgments of the quality of particular ways of living accompany these changes to the city's spatial environment, such that urban development projects become intricately linked to "new discourses and categories of moral personhood" that fit with visions of modern urban living (Schwenkel 2012: 439). Hanoi, like other cities of the Global South bent on rapid modernization, have long been seen as havens of urban disorder, disease, and living arrangements in dire need of development. For example, recall the Hanoi police missive introduced in chapter three that pointed to the array of "social evils"—dangerous "irregular" housing, pollution, drugs and prostitution—resulting from free migration and informal settlement in the city. Consequently, points out Schwenkel (2012: 439), "strategies of urban governance have consistently focused on the domain of aesthetics as a means to 'civilize' resident conduct and create cleaner, safer, and more livable communities."

Beginning in late 1990s but intensifying in recent years, the Vietnamese government has promoted a set of ideologies and practices surrounding Hanoi's built environment and the conduct of its citizens meant accelerate the modernization of the country: "*van minh do thi*" or "urban civilization" (see Fig. 1).



Figure 5.1: Sign in Ho Chi Minh City declaring "2008: The Year of Implementing Urban Civilization"

Hanoi's authorities have enacted new traffic safety laws, shooed street vendors away from main thoroughfares, and contracted large-scale urban renewal projects called "new urban zones" (*khu do thi moi* or KDTM hereafter) along Hanoi's margins that have fundamentally shifted the city's landscape and center of gravity. Signals of the moral imperative to civilize the city—emanating from both state and private sources—can be found everywhere in modern Hanoi, from cartoons in newspapers lampooning "uncouth" urban behaviors (see Fig. 5.2), to periodic police crackdowns on unsafe motorbike practices (such as riding with more than two occupants, or without a helmet).



Figure 5.2: Cartoons from Vietnamese newspapers depicting behaviors out of touch with the goals of "urban civilization" (*van minh do thi)*

In the advertisements for KDTM housing splashed across popular Vietnamese newspapers and websites, the codes of modernity and civility are condensed into veritable how-to guides of contemporary living. One such KDTM development that I saw steadily grow in Hanoi, and which advertised extensively on "urban lifestyle" websites such as dothi.com and khudothimoi.com[1], was the "Mulberry Lane" luxury apartment complex in Ha Dong district. Spearheaded by Singaporean interests and typifying the "American Suburb" naming conventions of many gated communities in Asia (Pow and Kong 2007), Mulberry Lane promises residents "high quality, luxury apartments for modern lifestyles," proximity to supermarkets and big-box retail stores, abundant green spaces, and, as a slogan, "a place to enjoy a genuine (*dich thuc*) life." The association of the genuine or authentic with styles of living unavailable to Vietnamese citizens only twenty years ago is a potent reminder of the dynamism of

[1] These websites contain real estate listings, a directory of services for KDTM residents, and sections dispensing advice on interior design and décor.

cultural values and class orientations, reflecting here, as in China, a "dramatic move away from yearning for a social utopia…and toward building a private paradise in postsocialist times" (Zhang 2010: 1).

Still, we must proceed with caution when investigating neoliberal forms of urban governance in Vietnam. The wide angle lens that facilely attributes the introduction of large-scale suburban developments to the penetration of neoliberalism threatens to overlook the historical nuances and contemporary quirks of "market socialism" that have influenced urban planning in Vietnam. Prior to the land reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s, housing options in Hanoi and other cities remained scarce and barely habitable. Crowded subsidized housing blocks provided shelter for some, while others lived in improvised homes hafted onto existing buildings. A burgeoning urban population and acute shortage of subsidized apartments forced leaders to address land title and residential rights as part of their 1986 *Doi Moi* reforms, and soon "for the first time since independence, private stakeholders were formally invited to produce their own housing and, a few years later, were recognized as their legitimate owners" (Labbe and Boudreau 2011: 277). These changes significantly increased the diversity and quantity of housing in Hanoi, but also carried a number of unintended consequences.

First, land privatization created the conditions for the highly lucrative, but often corrupt, practices of land and housing speculation in Hanoi that continue today (Schwenkel 2012). The initial privatization of many lands under military or state control allowed high ranking cadres the initial opportunity to purchase multiple plots of land (or today, condominiums in newly-approved complexes) at deflated prices and then resell to

non-state employees (Labbe and Boudreau 2011: 278). From my conversations about the housing market in Hanoi, I learned that the sequence of resales and the price paid for properties in new urban developments are often determined by citizens' degrees of distance from state agencies overseeing the urban development process. For instance, "Evan" Pham, (the English name was self-styled), the middle child in the Pham family introduced at the outset of this chapter, lives in a gated condominium complex on Duy Tan Street in Cau Giay district, where we often played tennis together. Evan's father, a retired state auditor, bought the property in 2008, and while his status in the Communist Party and income remained opaque to me[2], he clearly had the inside track on acquiring these and other properties in the area, many of which he has already "flipped" for a profit. In any case, for a twenty-five year old recent college graduate without a job, Evan's home and the surrounding complex were impressively modern and well-appointed, with only a sandal-wearing ball boy and hard-working maintenance staff suggesting the existence of class differences lurking outside of the gates.

Second, in addition triggering a real estate boom, land reform in Hanoi also resulted in the development of mixed-use neighbourhoods and a fragmented cityscape "generally assessed as chaotic" by a new generation of architects and state planners (Labbe and Boudreau 2011: 278). These expert assessments—combined with advice and proposals from international organizations and contractors—prescribed new approaches

[2] I found, as Zhang (2010) did, that better-off families involved in the post-socialist bureaucracy were often cagy or vague about their sources of wealth.

to fundamentally restructure areas of Vietnamese cities still amenable to improvement[3] through planning interventions in line with the ideals of "urban civilization." Studying the spatial reordering of Vinh City, a city in central Vietnam with about 200,000 residents, Schwenkel (2012: 438) describes the dramatic change in fortunes experienced by the once-celebrated Quang Trung public housing project and its residents over the course of two decades. Built with assistance from East Germany in 1985 during the long post-war reconstruction period, experts initially hailed Quang Trung for its "advanced architectural design" and the "high technical and industrial standards" that distinguished it from other socialist urban housing developments. Being chosen as a resident during this period constituted a perk for service to the country and carried enormous symbolic capital. However, by the early 2000s, UN experts and government officials representing market-driven interests began declaring Quang Trung and similar projects unsuitable for the city's "sustainable urban development" (*Ibid.*), claiming the dilapidated public areas, run-down facilities, and even the lifestyles of the residents within required urgent "planning intervention" and "rehabilitation." The structures were torn down in 2005 and the land converted in more "rational" residential developments. Writes Schwenkel (2012: 438):

> In a short span of time, Quang Trung had changed from "modern" to "unmodern" housing, and its residents from privileged citizens in priority dwellings with lavish amenities to disadvantaged urban poor with inadequate facilities and destructive urban practices….It is a "success" story rewritten as a "failure," with new roles assigned to the main actors: new urban socialist citizens, who once contributed to the independence and industrial

[3] Certain areas of Hanoi, including the protected Old Quarter, remain off limits for large-scale urban development.

> development of the city, have now…hastened its demise, turning a model socialist community into a dystopic urban "slum."

In Vinh and other Vietnamese cities facing developmental evaluations, government-run housing is often the primary target for renewal, as "international agencies and actors map notions of 'low quality and 'inferior standards' onto socialist design," (Schwenkel 2012: 390). And with the notable exceptions of the displaced residents of socialist housing themselves, most Vietnamese citizens generally view these plans "with approval, because they have come to view the state goal of promoting "civilization" (*van minh*) as best achieved through an urban spatial order based on middle-class respectability and private property ownership" (*Ibid.*: 438), most clearly manifest in the KDTM model of high-rise apartment towers with department stores and supermarkets, tidy avenues lined with villas, and a high security presence.

Returning to Hanoi, where the replacement of socialist housing with new urban forms has proceeded at breakneck speed, the first major foreign-funded KDTM built in Hanoi was the Ciputra West Lake, an Indonesian-led housing project in Hanoi's most sought-after neighborhood, completed with fanfare in 2005. While the level of luxury at Ciputra is not representative of the diverse forms that KDTM take in Hanoi (Labbe and Boudreau 2011), the project was a harbinger of things to come and remains potent symbol of modernization, privatization, and consumerism in the socialist capital; it was the first complex in Hanoi to be enclosed by a wall with a controlled access gate, and the first to boldly reject Hanoians' living conventions in favor of "exogenous" housing types

including high-rise apartments and "single family homes of a style foreign to Hanoi's urban landscape" (Labbe and Boudreau 2011: 275):

> Rather than promoting socialist values of collective life, the KDTM [*Khu Do Thi Moi*, or "new urban zones"] emphasize ideas of modernity (*hien dai*) and order *(trat tu*). These intentions underpin some of the legislation devised in Hanoi, promoting the construction of KDTM neighborhoods devoid of vernacular housing types and traditional urban practices (*Ibid*).

As in Vinh City, new housing developments in Hanoi are meant to curtail the "traditional urban practices" seen as destructive to urban order, including illegal housing extensions, overcrowding, informal and "unsanitary" sidewalk cafés, traditional markets, and street vendors. Since the Ciputra first appeared on the Hanoian skyline, over 600 new residential developments have been added to the city (Labbe and Boudreau 2011), many of them in the KDTM model, either officially part of a state prescribed urbanization plan, or drawing inspiration from the same design cues (see Fig. 5.3).



Figure 5.3: Existing (left) and planned (right) "New Urban Areas" (*Khu Do Thi Moi*) in Hanoi

But just who are buying and moving to the gated developments along Hanoi's

outskirts? Certainly, as suggested earlier, those connected to the state bureaucracy have purchased many properties, either as living spaces or investments. Many properties also belong to urban citizens earning wealth in the private sector who wish to establish separate residences for adult children and nuclear households after years of sharing a home with extended family members. Another group of buyers are well-off "post-*Doi Moi"* migrants with a stable job and enough economic capital to overcome the restrictions of *ho khau* and actually gain legal residency in Hanoi through their move to the KDTM (Drummond 2012). There are even legal agencies advertising on real estate websites that will complete the paperwork and petition local city officials to "change the red book" (*ho khau* status) on your behalf. Many foreigners also live in the KDTM and other high-rise apartments across the New City. In fact, my neighborhood abutted Hanoi's very own "Koreatown," an area of imposing buildings filled with the offices of foreign contractors, and more Korean than Vietnamese signage.

But perhaps a more important question regarding the production of urban space and social class is: Who is *not* moving to the KTDM? The prices of these shimmering apartments are grossly disproportionate to the earnings of most Hanoians, many of whom live inter-generationally in the city, taking in sick grandparents and nieces and nephews studying in the city without many opportunities to expand their space beyond illegal extensions. As for the people displaced from razed socialist housing blocks, the meagre compensation paid by the government prices them out of the KTDM, and many end up buying more modest homes in Hanoi's "rural" sections such as Ha Tay and Hoa Binh. Harms (2013) has shown how evicted citizens resist the seizure of their lands by stalling

their relocations—disrupting the schedules of "frustrated" project planners—because they know they cannot possibly improve their situation through the mandated plan. And of course, the informal migrants lacking full rights to the city (chapter three) find themselves essentially precluded from the possibility of buying a home in the city, lacking legal labor contracts and other requirements to change their *ho khau* status (and lacking the money to enlist the help of a "red book" agency). Once praised for their contributions to the state and conformity to socialist values, the peasants and former state workers living throughout Hanoi have been left to fend for themselves against market forces that make prior forms of valued symbolic capital irrelevant.

This is not to say the Vietnamese government did not make plans for the urban poor when designing their new 21st century capital city. In fact, officially there is a requirement among state-driven developments that at least 30% of new housing stock be allocated to medium- or low-income residents (Labbe and Boudreau 2011). However, these social policies work from an incomplete definition of "low income population" (*thu nhap thap*) that includes "civil servants, military personnel and families of veterans receiving social assistance" (*Ibid.*: 279), but not the thousands of informal migrants who face the most urgent housing shortages. Moreover, according to my interlocutors, new developments that include space for low income housing have been plagued by shoddy construction, higher prices than promised, and a general lack of political will to ensure their success. In fact, some projects have been abandoned completely, turning sections of Hanoi's outskirts into "urban prairie." This became clear when I asked a friend in Hoang Mai for a tour of the New Urban Zones in that district. Navigating a moonscape of

construction dust and potholes, we saw the full range of projects, from gleaming new lakefront condos to a vast, eerie space of wide boulevards with half-finished homes used mostly by locals for driving lessons.

Although built with the intention of expanding housing options in the city, the KDTM in Hanoi have in fact served the interests of privileged developers and upwardly mobile residents with enough stores of economic and social capital to join the modern housing movement. And since the virtues of "urban civilization" are widely extolled in Vietnam—from newspaper articles to government discourses to voices on the street—the conversion of this spatial positioning into symbolic capital has been "legitimized" (Bourdieu 1989) for Hanoi's new class of suburban homeowners. As in China, gated communities and social segregation have contributed to new delineations of belonging and non-belonging in diversifying cities (Zhang 2010). Writing on Vietnam, a number of authors have also warned that KDTM have been "catering to and creating a sense of distance marking off the middle class from the rest of the city." (Drummond 2012: 84). This exclusionary tendency takes on all the more importance when revised visions of modern, moral lifestyles and good "taste" depend on participation in market phenomena out of reach for the great majority of Hanoi's residents. Clearly, there have been major changes in the valued symbolic capital associated with different types of urban spaces and housing in Hanoi. Wealth is moving outward as class status becomes expressed through suburban apartment ownership. Once highly sought after for access to commercial street space, homes in Hanoi's crowded central neighborhoods are now "associated with noise, dirtiness, lack of class homogeneity, and lack of good taste"

(Belanger et al. 2012: 11). Habits of communal living and shared domestic spaces for extended families are giving way to desires for privacy, distinction, and the creation of nuclear households.

Built forms that are modern, tidy, and meant to generate urban order extend beyond housing in the consumption choices of middle- and upper-class Hanoians as well. For many suburban residents, especially young people like Evan, food shopping no longer involves a trip to a crowded, "unsanitary" street market, but rather a quick car ride to the Big C and Metro supermarkets located amidst the big-box stores in Cau Giay. Eating out has also taken a turn toward perceived "quality" and "hygiene" as the highly valued street foods associated with Vietnam's famous culinary culture become channelled into modern forms of consumption. For instance, the theme of a popular restaurant in Hanoi called Quan An Ngon involves taking the highlights of Vietnamese street food—once delivered from the village to the city streets by shoulder pole—and serving them to middle-class patrons in an ordered and hygienic space (see also Harms 2011). And perhaps the most iconic (and inexpensive) of all Vietnamese street foods, *pho*, has been "re-domesticated" into a pricy chain restaurant called *Pho 24* where patronage must carry symbolic capital given its popularity as a "date" destination among Hanoi's moneyed youth. Interestingly, most customers agree that the food at *Pho 24* pales in comparison to authentic streetside *pho*, forcing a choice between two varieties of "good taste."

On the other hand, social change related to living and consuming in new kinds of urban spaces has been not totalizing and remains subject to popular critique. While not

necessarily attributed to the penetration of market forces at the expense of socialist values, the most common complaint among Hanoians considering the changes in life in Hanoi during the past twenty years is the atomization of society and breakdown of social networks based on shared spaces of residence. This is a complaint often directed toward new high-rise housing developments in particular. One reflective businesswoman, gainfully employed at a stock brokerage in Hanoi but born in Nam Dinh, lamented that, "with urbanization today, people keep their homes closed tightly, even people sharing the same wall don't know each other well." And while most people I spoke with indeed agreed with cleaning up the city according to the dictates of "urban civilization," they also make concessions to the realities of life in Hanoi, where economic transformations remain incomplete, and where people still need to feed their families using the strategies of old, those "traditional urban practices" (Labbe and Boudreau 2011) condemned by international and state planners. For example, Hanoians from across the social spectrum sympathized with the plight of street vendors from the countryside being cleared away from "showcase" parts of town. Here, my interviewees did make explicit reference to the type of political-economic changes considered "neoliberal" that have eroded the social safety net:

> In my view, this "urban civilization" is right, the Vietnamese government is right. But it has a downside too if the Vietnamese government cannot provide jobs for workers. People must make a living! If the Vietnamese government has money to support the jobless, such as in America or France, the unemployed can still go to the hospital or collect social insurance to ensure life for your family. If the Vietnamese government can do that, go ahead and ban street vendors; if they can't, they should never have banned them at all. No, people still have to go and make a living.

This quote, from Dai the karaoke café owner in Thinh Liet, is revealing as it holds up the United States and France—once considered the historical catalysts for market-based inequalities—as examples of states with adequate social welfare in place for those victimized by market forces.

Another source of resistance and critique of the steamrolling effects of neoliberal modes of urban governance emerge from alternative understandings of place-making and in Hanoi. Preservationists in Vietnam and around the world who wish to protect Hanoi's architectural heritage and public parks against irresponsible development have made their voices heard through small-scale protests and by lobbying local officials (Wells-Dang 2010). The community-building efforts of Hanoi's informal migrants—filling in the folds of unfinished marginal urban spaces—also represent a counter-hegemonic form of place-making at odds with "modern" urban planning. Rather than retreating from the street, the interactivity of these crowded, shared spaces remains central to the social networks and livelihoods of thousands of Hanoians. Their improvised communities and "*nha que*" (peasant/hillbilly) practices may be denigrated as low class or lacking in taste, but for those excluded from formal belonging in the city and struggling to make a living, family and community obligations trump concerns over social status in the city, and certainly trump state ideologies of beautifying and modernizing the city.

Geographic Mobility and Social Mobility

Similar to the "spatial turn" in the social sciences that increasingly acknowledges the role of the production of space in defining social relations, particularly

in cities, a number of scholars have identified a "mobility turn" (Urry 2007) among researchers interested in processes of urbanization and the flows of people and goods associated with global capitalism. Of course, the physical production of urban space often proceeds in concert with developments in transportation: infrastructural improvements such as new highways can bring development to surrounding areas, but can also displace residents and segment existing communities; and citizens' commodity choices (buying cars and motorbikes rather than taking public transportation) and recreational practices (tourism, building vacations home) can condition urban development patterns and transform previously forgotten locales. As we have seen in previous chapters, questions of mobility—of movement and stoppage, freedom and friction, inertia and expulsion—figure centrally in the construction of citizenship in urban Vietnam, and they figure centrally in the production of social class as well. Geographic mobility and social mobility become linked, for example, among the occupants of KDTM who, unlike large families "trapped" in city homes or migrants in boarding houses, have the financial resources to relocate to the suburbs and commute comfortably by car into the city. Connecting the production of space to movements within space, this section looks at the materiality, symbolism, and lived experiences of mobility in Hanoi, examining hierarchies of circulation in the city, new forms of recreational travel, and state and popular perceptions of social class and mobility.

Hanoi is a city in seemingly constant motion. Throughout day and night, its streets famously[4] blur with countless passing motorbikes and other varied forms of

[4] YouTube videos of Vietnam's crowded, fast-moving streets have attracted thousands of viewers.

transportation, from students on bicycles to the occasional Bentley turning heads as it honks and weaves through Hanoi's narrow streets. Motorized personal transportation arrived late in Vietnam, not until the post-reform years of the late 1980s when opening doors to imports allowed Chinese motorbikes to gain a foothold in the Vietnamese market. Since then, and in spite of bloated fees for certain imported vehicles, Vietnamese citizens have seized upon opportunities to purchase motorbikes and automobiles, machines that seem to "embody the promise of autonomy and freedom of movement" associated with market reforms (Truitt 2008: 3). Today, a cheap motorbike can be purchased for around $800, and this financial accessibility has in many ways democratized mobility in Vietnam, for example allowing rural citizens the chance to work in the city, or anyone a chance to escape relatives and neighbours for a moment of privacy by the lake[5]. However, as markets continue to open and options diversify, modes of personal transport have also emerged as a revealing arena of social distinctions and class status in as well.

Just as forms of housing in Hanoi carry messages about their residents, forms of personal transport reflect directly on their riders and occupants. Cars and motorbikes as commodities certainly transcend their functional purposes and carry symbolic capital, but they also allow people to move through space in distinctive ways that bear on class belonging. Drivers of sought after cars or expensive 800cc motorcycles make a habit of conspicuously driving through Hanoi's crowded streets at night, attracting attention on

[5] It is a common sight in Hanoi to find couples (young and old) sitting on their motorbike and canoodling by the city's many lakes. In fact, so pervasive is the sight that images of lakeside couples on motorbikes now appear on postcards and tourist paintings as "typical" Hanoi scenes.

inappropriately small lanes, or letting their alarm system ring just long enough for everyone to eye the source. Cars and motorbikes in Vietnamese cities "not only embody the freedom associated with the expanding marketplace and provide personal mobility, but they also signal a reordering of social stratification" (Truitt 2008: 3) in a modern culture of "automobility" (Sheller and Urry 2000). The implied hierarchy of status associated with different forms of transportation in Vietnam might look as follows: Walking → Bicycle → Domestically Made Motorbike → Honda Motorbike → Vespa Motorbike → Motorcycle → Japanese Car → European Car. Practically speaking, although motorbikes do afford some advantages to cars in navigating crowded streets, they leave riders exposed to Hanoi's unpredictable weather and polluted air. They also limit the distance that can be comfortably travelled for leisure travel—Nam Dinh migrants in Hanoi, for example, often took the bus to their home villages rather than face inclement weather on their motorbikes—and the amount of possessions and purchases one can carry. For these reasons, cars represented the most coveted aspirational purchase besides upgraded housing among most of my interlocutors in Vietnam

Traffic patterns in Hanoi also reflect this hierarchy of circulation, as motorbike drivers know to yield immediately when a car horn blares from behind—they might clear the lane faster still if they happen to notice a blue government licence plate on the car. Some resourceful drivers have even seized upon this situation, installing a startling "car horn" in place of the motorbike's ineffectual "beep," or even buying a black market government license plate. At the bottom of the hierarchy, unable to circulate freely through the city, are the many female street vendors from the countryside who slowly

walk Hanoi's streets burdened with a shoulder pole full of foods or goods, doing their best to avoid police crackdowns on such activities. Many people chuckle at the familiar scene of fruit or balloon sellers packing up and trying unsuccessfully to evade police, but the loss of a day's worth of supplies carries a real impact on vendors' livelihoods, and the precariousness of life clearly impacts the politics of belonging in the city. One anecdote from my field notes stands out in this regard as an illustrative example of class, mobility, and experiences of belonging intersecting:

> *While riding my motorbike just south of downtown, a group of trendy high school students bicycle alongside an older woman from the countryside walking with a shoulder-pole full of children's clothes to sell. As they pedal by, one boy snatches the woman's conical hat from her head while they all ride off laughing, leaving her dejected and embarrassed, futilely chasing after them.*

While this could be dismissed as a teenage prank, it also represents a violent and dehumanising action directed toward a perceived second-class citizen. The drive-by mischief of these urban students, along with the lack of consequences for such actions (despite the crowded street, nobody scolded the youths or helped the older woman), reflect, on a very small scale, how class (and gender) relations can be reflected in differential levels of mobility and in naturalized displays of power and privilege.

Beyond this hierarchy of transportation and circulation within Hanoi, the recreational pursuits of urban residents outside of the city also implicate mobility as a key field of cultural significance in perceptions and performances of social class. Vietnam has experienced "spectacular growth" (Bui and Jolliffe 2011) in domestic tourism in the past two decades, as citizens whose movements were once restricted and monitored—or

compelled through conflicts and government projects—are now free to explore their own country. Advances in bus and train travel, lowering prices for domestic flights, and the widening availability of personal transportation have put recreational travel within the reach of Vietnamese citizens of all classes, though the nature of the travel differs considerably. While Hanoi's emerging middle class enjoys beach holidays and the occasional shopping trip to Singapore, the urban migrants with whom I worked also derived great satisfaction from "getaways" by bus to local temples and historical sites in Nam Dinh, typically while in the area visiting family.

In Vietnam, the *Tet* holiday season in late January and early February provides the most time off from work for leisure travel. While most take advantage of this opportunity to visit family and fulfill ancestral obligations in their hometowns or *que huong*, increasing numbers of middle class and "urban rich" (To 2012) pursue other forms of recreational travel. There seem to be two primary reasons for this change to durable practices of "returning to the homeland" (*ve que*) among city residents. First, while the *Tet* holiday represents the longest break in the Vietnamese calendar, members of the "vacationing class" typically work fewer hours than Hanoi's working class, for whom even Saturday is considered a workday. Occupying government or management positions (or retired or semi-retired), the former have many other opportunities during the year to return to their *que huong* and fulfill ancestral duties and adhere to cultural expectations. In fact, many cases, these experiences of returning outside of *Tet*—for death day anniversaries or other important holidays—can bring even more attention to the contributions of the visiting urbanite, as described in chapter four. Second, though Hanoi

remains a "city of migrants" (Li 1996) owing to most residents' shallow roots in the city, those roots are deepening over the generations, and many urban residents quite simply have too few close relatives in the village to justify yearly visits for *Tet*.

Besides vacationing in a faraway locale, many members of Hanoi's urban middle class have taken to building second homes in the midlands and mountains to the west of Hanoi as an easy escape from the city for holidays and family gatherings. In her analysis of this growing phenomenon, To Xuan Phuc (2012: 143) evokes the scene in Ba Vi, Soc Son, and other highland areas as sleepy village landscapes transform into hubs of urban consumption:

> …luxury villas with expensive amenities such as swimming pools and satellite receivers emerge visibly on hills of evergreen forests, often overlooking rice fields in the valley of beautiful lakes. These villas are protected by concrete walls and heavy gates. The villas do not belong to the villagers, but to people from Hanoi who still work in the city…On a weekday, the village road is occupied b motorbikes and a few bicycles. On weekends the village becomes busy with well-dressed people arriving from the city with their shiny Toyota or Nissan cars.

Like the KDTM ringing Hanoi, the weekend villas constructed by urban residents in these mountainous districts—usually within a few hours' drive from Hanoi—have brought new patterns of *geographic* social mixing as urbanites relocate to rural lands, but not *substantive* social mixing due to the partitioning and policing of private space. Rather, this form of recreational travel has in many cases exacerbated class tensions between urban and rural citizens with apparently divergent cultural values. For example, To (2012: 151) notes how *dai gia* with weekend homes in Ba Vi typically bring their supplies with them, leading to resentment from local shopkeepers, and how some even

"refused to make contributions to upgrade the village road" like other residents, leading to characterizations of newcomers from Hanoi as "very rich but very mean." For their part, To's Hanoian interviewees also betrayed a "strong bias against the villagers" (*Ibid.*), using judgmental terms such as *ban* (dirty) and *lac hau* (backward) to describe the locals.

Nevertheless, "backward" as it may appear to them, the Vietnamese countryside holds a firm place in the consciousness of Hanoians, serving as perceived repository of cultural values and national identity, countering the immorality and spiritual alienation of city life. The mobility of car-owning Hanoians brings about changes to the "imagined boundaries of urban life, extending it outward to envelop the rural as an aspect of urbanity—the possession of its own Other as a retreat from the city" (Drummond 2012: 85). Building a home in the rustic midlands, in addition to being an indicator of wealth, also demonstrates conformity to "traditional" values, though in a thoroughly modern way. By "consuming the goods associated with cultural values, the *dai gia* are seeking to distinguish themselves" (To 2012: 150) as both successful and moral. Of course, as I have argued throughout this work, the personal geographies of Hanoians typically already extend into the countryside, in particular to home and native villages where many middle- and upper-class urbanites have made similar investments in land and lavish homes for family members. However, the construction of second homes in home villages is a rather public affair and often aimed at making visible one's fidelity to family and ancestors. The sites for weekend villas, on the other hand, are often chosen for convenience to Hanoi and are intended as a "private" getaway for a smaller number of family members to escape the stresses and noise of life in the city.

I first visited the transforming Ba Vi countryside when invited to a birthday party at the Pham's country home. Evan and I made the trip by motorbike and by the time we arrived there were already around five cars and SUVs blocking the driveway. Weaving through to the end, I caught my first glimpse of the mountain "getaway" that Evan had been telling me about for weeks. Expecting something perhaps more opulent from reports I had read on the vacation homes of Hanoi's middle class and *dai gia*, instead the property was quite modest, with a two-story main house and a number of smaller buildings scattered down a hill toward a patch of forest. Evan's now retired father lives there full-time for most of the year, tending the garden, upgrading the house, and even keeping a blog documenting his activities and philosophies. Unlike Evan and his siblings who grew up in Hanoi, the elder Pham spent large amounts of time in the countryside of Hung Yen, where the family's gravesite remains, and relishes the quiet beauty village landscapes. Yet when it came time to build a rural retreat for his family, Evan's father decided against his home province as the best site, instead joining many other middle- and upper-class Hanoians who prefer the peace, solitude, and mountain views of Ba Vi Province.

While the Vietnamese media and recent social scientific literature often focus on the material excesses of Hanoians building second homes in the nearby hills, in reality the properties owned reflect considerable diversity, from small cottages and extant village-style homes on purchased land, to the massive and well-guarded villas belonging to members of Hanoi's elite. Despite this, all of these properties and the "weekending" practices of their owners share certain similarities regarding the performance of class

belonging and participation with modern lifestyles and ways of thinking. The class messages carried by grand villas with luxury amenities are perhaps most evident, but what are we to make of the Phams' much more modest property? I argue that the answer lies in the different ways of being modern in Vietnam, or anywhere else for that matter. Certainly, expensive commodity choices and recreational practices can reflect a high status and high quality of life among the wealthy. But the middle-class can also engage in performances of modernity that draw on modes of evaluation besides price and quality, such as those found within the moral and aesthetic economies. For example, in the United States, people can glean social distinction not only by driving a pricy luxury car, but also by driving the much less expensive but environmentally-friendly Toyota Prius (Mukherjee and Banet-Wisner 2012), a form of conspicuous morality demonstrated through commodity choice. Evan's father is not interested in, nor is he capable of, competing for status through the showiness if his property in Ba Vi. Rather, his "back-to-nature" orientation and the emotionally revealing blog he keeps about his garden and life philosophies indexes participation in a kind of "enlightened" modernity where moral codes of individuality, beautification, and self-realization are on display.

I noticed this dual thinking on modernity throughout my time in Vietnam. On the one hand, material wealth allows people to convert economic capital into symbolic capital through possessions and practices thought to be modern. But on the other hand, Hanoi's middle-class aesthetes and youth can also perform an understanding of modern ways of thinking and living by distancing themselves from the predictable materialism of the "*nouvous riches*" and behaving according to alternative—but still thoroughly

"globalized"—visions of the good life that are new to Vietnam. Reflecting "good taste" or tapping into emergent moral and aesthetic cues, symbolic capital in Hanoi can also be accrued by visiting hidden "retro" bars and coffeehouses (rather than the Sofitel lounge), going for a camping trip to the mountains (rather than a group tour of Singapore), or by maintaining a blog about a man and his garden.

Conclusions: Space, Mobility, and Social Class in Vietnam

This chapter has demonstrated how new patterns in the production of space and the ways people move through space can impact understandings of modernity and social class in Hanoi. The effect of policies of neoliberalism on Vietnamese society remains an ongoing debate, but there is no question that definitions of modern living and valued forms of symbolic capital have changed dramatically over two decades of market reforms. Nevertheless, these changes retain an incomplete and "experimental" quality in post-socialist Vietnam. Even as leaders and urban citizens embrace aspects of neoliberalism as "powerful, desirable, and ascendant," they may also perceive them as "new, unusual, or problematic" (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012: 380). I agree with many commentators on Vietnam that the collisions of modern and traditional expectations of life, and of urban and rural bodies and spaces, have created a sense of anxiety or "edginess" (Harms 2011) in cities. Lisa Drummond (2012: 80), reflecting on how to describe "contemporary urban lifestyles" in Hanoi similarly notes that social change has made life "precarious, experimental, testing, grasping, aspirational, [and]

uncomfortable" for the urban middle-class due to an ambiguous relationship to socialist ideology and leadership and an uncertain future.

The indeterminacy and anxiety surrounding capitalist restructuring and class performance manifest in the sometimes contradictory assessments of social identities in urban Vietnam. "To get rich is glorious," once declared Deng Xiaoping, Mao's successor in China and the architect of early reform efforts there. In Hanoi as well, signals abound sending the message that "to get rich is glorious," but while the economically successful find increasing state support and popular admiration, they also find increasing scrutiny in the media and popular discourse over the potentially corrupt sources of income funding their lifestyles. Migrants from the countryside living in Hanoi also face contradictory assessments of their place in a reformed urban society. Some are condemned for "ruralizing" the city and introducing social vices, while others such as roving food vendors get a "pass" for upholding a long cultural tradition to feed their families, or even for adding to the "quaint" beauty of Hanoi.

The production of social class continues to proceed alongside changes to Hanoi's built environment and patterns of mobility, but a wide array of sometimes contradictory forces—neoliberal reforms, socialist traces, globalized ways of consuming, cultural conventions—will influence the direction it takes, provoking more questions than answers about the future of the city: Will Vietnam go the route of China and attempt a massive campaign to urbanize the landscape through the construction of additional modern housing? Will changing laws allow migrants to gain a stronger foothold in the city and enjoy greater social mobility? Will the middle class in Hanoi congeal around

common interests to become a cohesive political voice? Will the overdevelopment of Hanoi's suburbs trigger new evaluations of the center city's value and habitability? Will the higher classes in Vietnamese cities continue to isolate themselves against social difference, or will continued urbanization and rising incomes erode the already-tenuous "distinctions" between people and classes in the city of migrants?

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Chapter Six:

Conclusions: Collective Identity and Collective Action

In this dissertation, I have shown how ideologies surrounding native place in Vietnam bring people together in active and meaningful ways around collective identities: in the city through the robust native-place networks allowing "unofficial" Hanoians to overcome differentiated citizenship; and in the countryside as Hanoians *ve que* to commune with living and deceased relatives. I have also shown how the everyday practices of migrants in the city—networking and building communities around native-place identities—can become a political force capable of destabilizing dominant legal codes and challenging existing ideologies of urban belonging. Of course, these everyday practices exist alongside more formal methods of mobilizing shared identities toward common purposes in contemporary Vietnam, some of which fall under the purview of state institutions (as in the organizations comprising the Communist Party's Fatherland Front[1]), and some of which have been driven by citizens themselves (such church groups and native-place organizations) or by citizens and authorities in conjunction with international interests (NGOs and GONGOs[2]).

While the preceding chapters have demonstrated how social networks allow people to circumvent rather than navigate the Communist Party's legal frameworks, I conclude the work by examining more formal ways of organizing in authoritarian

[1] The umbrella organization overseeing associations such as the Women's and Youth Unions

[2] "Government-organized non-governmental organizations;" see Ren (2012)

contexts, putting native-place associations and other structures of collective action in the context of Vietnam's long "suppressed" (Thayer 2009), but currently strengthening, realm of civil society. It will become clear that civil society remains an ill-defined and controversial domain in Vietnam, but also how the private mobilization of shared identities holds promise for enacting social change. I end the dissertation by evaluating the potential of independent citizen organizing in Vietnam to expand the rights of migrants and other marginalized groups, postulating on how direct and indirect citizen action—both in making claims on the state, and in doing the work of the state—will impact the future politics of belonging in Hanoi.

Identity, Association, and Civil Society in Northern Vietnam

As a general theme, the ability of collective identities to spawn collective political action has been explored widely within the social sciences, from Marxist treatises on building revolutionary consciousness, to ethnographic analyses of how identity politics influence the "emergence, trajectories, and impacts" (Poletta and Jasper 2001: 283) of social movements. A common thread linking these studies relates to the ideological work required among discursive authorities to construct and instantiate a shared consciousness capable of supporting (usually political) goals. The "imagined community" (Anderson 2006) of the nation-state itself—a shared identity among citizens sustained and sustained through the ideological work of nationalism—testifies to the power of group consciousness, as people will take up arms on behalf of people and governments with no "natural" relationship to themselves. Even seemingly "given" identities ascribed at birth

through blood ties, such as membership in a lineage group in Vietnam, must be rationalized through ideologies of kinship that could be otherwise[1], and sometimes even "performed" among increasingly atomized Hanoians, as described in chapter four. It therefore follows that any independent effort to organize people around shared identities—whether ascribed or achieved—manifests human agency through goal oriented discourses and actions. In Vietnam, such efforts provide an important window onto the operations and trajectories of post-socialist civil society.

The idea of civil society usually denotes "the public space between large-scale bureaucratic and economic structures of state and economy on the one hand, and the private sphere of family, friendships, personality, and intimacy on the other," (Adamson 2002: 429) including churches, trade unions, political parties, recreational associations, and other citizen groupings operating largely independent of state forces—and potentially providing crucial checks on those state forces by representing particular interests. However, the distinctions between state and civil society remain tenuous in authoritarian contexts like Vietnam, where the Communist Party tries to maintain a "mono-organizational" grip on society (Thayer 2009), and where few substantive concessions are made to potentially threatening private citizen groups or NGOs.

With this in mind, the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971) steer us toward an

[1] In fact, as many scholars of Vietnam have noted (see Luong 1989, 2006; Choi 2008), understandings of descent can draw upon two "structurally opposing" (Luong 1989: 742) models: strict patrilineal kinship or a second mode that includes bilateral kin, flexibly deployed according to the situation. And we have seen how blood ties become projected onto native-place fellows (*dong huong*), showing again the social construction inherent in any shared identity.

understanding of civil society better suited to the Vietnamese political context[2]. Whereas many liberal theorists emphasize the autonomous nature of civil society, Gramsci argued that their boundaries are in fact blurry, identifying the "realm of civil society as a crucial space in which the state can dominate popular ideas, values, and norms" (Landau 2008: 245). Political authorities do not simply enforce their will through direct coercion among citizens, but rather work to build ideological hegemony through the consent of civil society, comprising two levels of "superstructural" control:

> …the one that can be called 'civil society', that is, the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the state'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the functions of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the state and 'juridical' government (Gramsci 1971: 12).

Crucially, the two levels of state and civil society "mutually reinforce each other to the advantage of certain groups, classes, and institutions" (Landau 2008: 246). Alongside this arrangement of domination whereby subaltern classes consent to their own domination, however, other elements of Gramsci's ideas reserve hope for citizen association as an anti-hegemonic force: in spite of efforts to suffuse civil society with official ideologies, the process is never complete and subject to competing claims, and for this reason, civil society retains importance as a "site to undermine existing values and inculcate new ones" (Alagappa 2004: 29).

Applying these insights to Vietnam and other authoritarian states, we find that

[2] Gramsci's ideas remain applicable across political environments, but here I focus on the elements of his work most instructive in the case of Vietnam.

"certain segments of civil society support rather than oppose the state" (Landau 2008: 246). Moreover, the recent "proliferation" (Luong 2006) of voluntary associations in Vietnam—some with weak or absent ties to state institutions—prompts questions about the extent to which such groups reproduce or challenge hegemonic ideologies, and how they react to liberalizing reforms. Working in Malaysia, Ramasamy (2004) has noted an integral relationship between state actors and civil society "in the enforcement of domination" (204) and how civil society becomes "a coveted terrain for the purposes of political legitimacy (213). Similarly, organizational life in Vietnam has been long been premised on supporting Communist Party ideologies and mandated expectations of citizenship. In this system, "the party exercises hegemonic control over state institutions, the armed forces, and other organizations in society through the penetration of these institutions by party cells and committees" (Thayer 2009: 3). In fact, coopting civil society formed a central piece of Communist Party strategies to "expand the economic and sociopolitical space under its control…establishing its own organizations or supporting others for the exclusive mobilization of specific social sectors" for campaigns ranging from war efforts, local security, population control, and fundraising for local projects (Luong 2005: 124). Self-preservation was part of this goal too: leaders have attempted to minimize independent associations according to Marxist views that "the competitive principles of civil society would overtly or covertly overwhelm the state, and the class that is dominant in the economic sphere would gain control over the state's machinery" (Landau 2008: 250).

The Communist Party tightened its grip on civil society through a number of

measures in the 1950s. The first law on association was passed in 1957, stating that all popular associations must have a "legitimate purpose" and "contribute to the construction of the people's democratic regime" (Luong 2005: 124), leaving little room for voluntary associations operating outside of the state's political frameworks. Also during the 1950s, the Communist Party developed a network of organizations under the umbrella of the "Vietnamese Fatherland Front" (*mat tran to quoc Viet Nam*) in northern Vietnam, the most prominent of which are the Women's and the Youth Unions and the General Confederation of Labor[3]. Early leaders considered the groups of the Fatherland Front to be "transmission belts" (Landau 2008: 250) for official ideologies and directives, tasked with persuading their members to support the party's political and economic goals. Significantly, lineage-based groups—supportive of rival identifications to the nation and rife with "wasteful" ritual practices—practically "ceased to exist" (Luong 2005: 125) during this period.

Today, Vietnamese citizens belong to a wide range of voluntary associations based on common identities—gender, same-age, religious, kinship-based—situated both "within and at the margin of the state's regulatory framework" (Luong 2005: 123). Particularly during the *doi moi* reform era of the past two decades, "numerous registered and non-registered associations have sprung up in both urban and rural communities…in response to a fundamental shift toward a market economy under global influences, as well as to the contraction of the state's role in providing social, health, and educational

[3] Other state-sponsored organizations under the Fatherland Front include the Veterans association, the Union of Science and Technology Associations, the Union of Cultural Artistic Associations (see Luong 2005). The Fatherland Front expanded to include southern Vietnam under its authority in 1977.

services" (*Ibid.*). From the year 1990 to 2000, for example, the number of nationally-registered organizations climbed from 124 to over 200, and regionally-registered organizations from 300 to 1400, the majority related to particular businesses and industries, but also encompassing social service, philanthropic, and recreational organizations (Landau 2009; Luong 2005). Moreover, despite legal frameworks that call for all associations to be approved by "competent state authorities" before commencing activities, recent years have also "witnessed the emergence of hundreds of non-registered voluntary associations based on kinship or communal ties" (Landau 2009: 251), such as the native-place associations (*hoi dong huong*) detailed below. International NGOs, working closely with local officials, have also gained a footing during the reform era, with over 500 entities operating in Vietnamese territory in the early 2000s compared with less than ten in 1988 (Luong 2005).

Scholars have also noted that associational life (around same-age, religious, and kinship-based identities) is stronger in northern Vietnam than elsewhere in the country, owing to the deeper senses of native place (Schlecker 2005), "more nucleated settlement patterns, stronger centripetal forces and community boundaries, more intricate internal networks, and [a]…stronger collectivist orientation" (Luong 2006: 377) in Red River Delta communities. While resisting a clear typology, Rambo (1977) has also argued that northern Vietnamese communities resemble closed "corporate units" with wealth-leveling mechanisms and a shared poverty ethos, while in the south, market-oriented "noncorporate units" with higher levels of family autonomy and social mobility dominate. Overall, these features of Red River Delta communities promote close bonds

and overlapping associations among villagers. As peasants relocated to Hanoi over time, they brought with them these associational tendencies, resulting in "a higher degree of social, spatial, and occupational clustering in cities on the basis of home villages/communes among migrants from the north…than among those from the Mekong Delta" (Luong 2006: 381). Although I did not perform comparative research in other regions of Vietnam, my findings on native-place networks and associations certainly support the view of strong and highly valued attachments to others among residents of Hanoi and delta villages.

The Red River Delta region also spawned the largest direct political revolt of the reform era, when farmers in Thai Binh Province, upset over official corruption and passivity, joined together and violently took to the streets in 1997. Their grievances revolved around local authorities enriching themselves by selling and misallocating communal lands, spending tax revenues on their own private purchases, skimming money from local infrastructure projects, and flaunting their "illicit wealth" (Kerkvliet 2003: 47). When villagers' petitions and complaints repeatedly went unanswered, their tactics escalated, beginning with peaceful demonstrations at district capitals, and climaxing on May 11th, when over 10,000 peasants from Thai Binh and elsewhere "made their way on foot and bicycle" (*Ibid.*) to the provincial capital, resulting in violent confrontations with police and the burning of local officials' homes.

Without excusing the unrest, the Vietnamese government nevertheless responded with new policies designed promote transparency and solicit more input from villages in local administration (Luong 2005). This episode again points to the power of shared

identities in northern Vietnam—in this case, exploited peasants uniting across districts and provinces—to provoke collective action. It is also reminiscent of the distinctions drawn earlier (in reference to urban migration) between working within existing legal frameworks and pursuing alternative pathways to one's goals. That is, the frustrations of trying to navigate a political-economic system rife with contradictions (residency restrictions versus the need for mobile labor, or here, discourses of communal fairness versus rampant corruption), and the impossibility of following official channels, will cause citizens to reject those channels, forcing leaders to react and make accommodations.

To conclude this section, I return to Gramsci and the other half of his analysis of civil society: not just the observation that state interests and civil society can become deeply imbricated, but more importantly his emphasis on the "potential of civil society to act as an arena in which dominant values and ideologies may be contested" (Landau 2008: 252). The Communist Party is also well aware of this potential, remaining determined to suppress "non-socialist" principles (Hansson 2003) for fear that ideological hegemony might be compromised. It is "for this reason that the party is so suspicious of…foreign NGOs that promote democratization, "civil society," and human rights" (Landau 2008: 52). Nevertheless, new collective identities are continually being forged around common purposes in reform-era Vietnam, and organizational life is currently flourishing in Hanoi, calling for fresh perspectives on how an active civil society can drive the expansion of rights.

Native Place Associations in Hanoi

Part of the "explosion" of private activity that has altered the Communist Party's mono-organizational grip on society (Thayer 2009), native-place associations (*hoi dong huong*) touch many themes explored throughout this study, serving the material interests of networking members as well as their social and affective needs. At various points in this dissertation I have described the roles of native-place associations in Hanoi, showing how such groups allow urbanites to achieve an alternative sense of belonging in the city and connect symbolically with the ancestral homeland. However, I have yet to cover the specific goals and operations of these groups, and how they fit into Vietnam's emerging civil society. Mentioned only in passing in social scientific treatments of Vietnam's organizational life (see Schlecker 2005; Luong 2005), there remains no detailed analysis of native-place associations in Hanoi. To address this gap in the literature, in Vietnam I sought out meetings and events sponsored by these groups and spoke with both members and leaders. I quickly learned that the term *hoi dong huong* refers to widely divergent forms of association among diverse social groups, although with the common thread of ostensible shared origins.

The first *hoi dong huong* meeting I attended in Hanoi was organized by a group of students from Nghe An and Ha Thinh Provinces[4] (in Vietnam's North Central Region) attending the National Economics University. This *hoi dong huong* was registered with the university and therefore had official permission to organize. Sitting on tiny stools

[4] From 1976 until 1991, Nghe An and Ha Thinh Provinces existed as a single province named "Nghe Thinh" and the identity forged through shared territory and cultural traditions remained even after the split.

with about 40 other students on a basketball court, the head of the group (only a second-year student) began by introducing new members and cuing others to sing a popular folk song from the region. The rest of the meeting was devoted to planning a summer volunteering mission placing groups of students in impoverished villages of Nghe An and Ha Thinh to tutor children and plan community projects. Student-based *hoi dong huong* groups from Hanoi were also well represented during Hanoi's millennial anniversary celebrations, helping to organize and sometimes acting in the "cultural performances" representing different regions of Vietnam (see Figure 6.1).



Figure 6.1: Hanoi-based *hoi dong huong* members from city universities on hand for a cultural performance from their homeland. Their shirts read "*Hoi Dong Huong Sinh Vien Kinh Bac*" or "Student Native Place Association of Kinh Bac," a historic region northeast of Hanoi centered on present day Bac Ninh Province known for its *Quan Ho* folk music.

Hoi dong huong are also popular with retirees looking for a fulfilling way to spend their free time. I was fortunate to interview a prominent 75-year-old Communist Party member who was the former ambassador to Australia, and who now heads a small *hoi*

dong huong (about 20 members in Hanoi) devoted to a particular village in the former Ha Tay Province. This group meets twice yearly in a restaurant or someone's home in Hanoi to catch up with each other, discuss affairs in the village, plan visits for important events and holidays, and to collect donations for those facing difficulties in the village, most often with funeral expenses.

Spending time with recent migrants and "urban citizens" originally from Nam Dinh Province, I also gained access to the many *hoi dong huong Nam Dinh* in Hanoi. From my vantage point, Nam Dinh clearly had the most visible *hoi dong huong* presence in the city, reflecting both the region's strong associational inclinations and the sheer number of people with roots in the province living in Hanoi. Interviewing the leaders and members of various groups, two very different types of groupings stood out. First, there are the *hoi dong huong* composed of mostly middle-class men and women, "urban citizens" who were either born in Hanoi or who have lived there most of their adult lives. These can be large groups of political and business elites from across the province, or smaller groups focused on shared districts, villages, or communes.

Within to the latter category, a thoughtful retired physician with roots in Xuan Truong District, Nam Dinh, described his motivations to spearhead a *hoi dong huong* in the early 2000s and serve as one of "5 or 6" core members who meet regularly to set up larger meetings and events:

> I was born in Nam Dinh Province and raised for a time in Thai Binh, but came to Hanoi University in 1956 to study and remained to work. After the end of the war, life was difficult initially, and people did not care about *dong huong* relationships so much. But around the year 2000, when economic development raised living standards and made life more stable, people started

> thinking about their roots, their birthplaces, hometowns, how family members in the village are living, where their cousins are now. It was a voluntary process as people saw the need to stick together, and we started to form informal meetings among our countrymen in people's homes. I joined out of emotional bonds to the homeland, where my clan is, and because of the calling I felt to become involved. That's it. It's simply the sentiment of the Vietnamese to stick to the native place, so that no matter where we work or live, we can also gather together. We [along with his brother] started the *hoi dong huong* to be able to meet every year, to know the situation of others and what difficulties we can help with. For example, if I die, these old *dong huong* of mine will help with arrangements and offer condolences (laughs)!

The cited work undertaken by the physician's *hoi dong huong* includes organizing simple trips to native places to give flower garlands to elderly villagers reaching milestones in life (such as living for 100 years), taking contributions to purchase books and technology for Nam Dinh's highly respected secondary schools, and the much more involved tasks of managing efforts to provide relief from floods, or upgrading village roads, schools, and temples. In one example, the physician describes renovations to a sizable temple in his native village which had been "destroyed" over time by neglect and the elements:

> People wanted restore to the temple, considered very important to the village, but there was no state funding for it. First we had to agree on the basic requirements, talk to each other, and determine the amount of money necessary. Then we met with the others [members outside of the inner circle] to announce our plans and invite contributions. There were many people who contributed but no requirements. It only depends on the feelings of each person, their individual abilities to contribute, and willingness to donate to the hometown. For example, some people in the city such as my brother and I contributed two or three thousand [US] dollars. There are people from abroad, from Canada, who contributed even more. Some big business owners from Ho Chi Minh City find it important to have their contributions recorded to earn merit. Villagers themselves make small donations of VND50,000 or VND100,000. It doesn't matter; they will be recorded in the books too.

This *hoi dong huong Nam Dinh* operating out of Hanoi served as a conduit linking people from the village, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and even *dong huong* living in Canada, sustaining a collective identity across space that can be mobilized to perform concrete tasks. When I asked about the roles of the group in forging business connections among members, the physician demurred, asserting that such economic relationships may evolve by chance, but self-interest does not motivate people to join his group[5].

While *hoi dong huong* groups remain most popular with established "urban citizens" and university students wishing to connect in new ways to their homelands, Hanoi's many urban migrants working in the informal sector also organize in this way. Through Dai, the taxi driver we met in chapter three, I arranged to speak with a few members of a non-registered *hoi dong huong* in Hanoi connected to Hai Hau District, Nam Dinh—an urban outgrowth of an extant village association of former soldiers who once served together. Driving over a moonscape of unfinished roads in a dusty part of Thanh Xuan District in Hanoi, I eventually found the warehouse where we were convening and met the middle-aged leader of the group, who works full-time in Hanoi as a beer distributer and who employs a number of *dong huong* who also sleep (illegally) in the warehouse.

While these migrant *dong huong* cited many of the same attributions for sustaining the group as the physician's association detailed above (including disseminating information about the village and its inhabitants, collecting contributions

[5] This contrasts with characterizations I heard of other *hoi dong huong* groups with politically and economically "elite" members, who are thought to join a variety of organizations for exactly this purpose.

for village projects, and helping with funeral and holiday arrangements), they also explicitly stated that a primary motivation for establishing the group in Hanoi is "to help each other in terms of business." One member expanded on this role:

> We joined initially to help each other emotionally through memories of military service and the sorrows of trying to find work and feed ourselves, and now we support each other to 'develop strong household economies' ['*phat trien kinh te gia dinh*'], helping each other with everything in life. It's also fun to participate. I love meeting fellow participants…the first reason is cultivating affection for each other, and the second is to share work and business opportunities, helping each part of the group to rise together and reach our intended goals.

As with the distinctions between recent migrants and established urbanites in experiences of "returning home" (*ve que*), the roles played by *hoi dong huong* in Hanoi also change with duration of residence in the city. Among urban migrants, the shared identities of native place are most often pushed into the service of person-to-person forms of material assistance, while the *hoi dong huong* groups catering to retirees and well-heeled benefactors typically take on more symbolic projects in the homeland.

Before moving on to the place of native place associations in civil society, I will pause to highlight two further insights regarding this form of citizen organizing. First, the geographic scales for group belonging demonstrate considerable flexibility according the goals of the group and the distance of homelands from Hanoi. For example, while Nam Dinh and other demographically dominant migrant groups in Hanoi may organize *hoi dong huong* in the city around shared villages or districts (with populations in the thousands), as we have seen, residents of Hanoi from the two north-central Vietnamese provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh—considerably more remote to Hanoi—cast the net

much more widely, allying with people from the entire "Nghe Thinh" region (with a total population in the millions). Second, it should be noted that, whether officially registered or not, *hoi dong huong* leaders and members see their activities as fundamentally independent of state forces. The physician-leader of the *Hoi Dong Huong Nam Dinh*, for example, told me that even though, "for political reasons," the group has invited district and provincial leaders from Nam Dinh to attend meetings in Hanoi, they intentionally marginalize these guests from the decision-making process: "When they come, we praise them for the work they are doing in the hometown only; this is to make them stop [interfering with our meeting]. They have no power to order anything; this is a voluntary organization, a civic organization, not a government organization."

Native Place, Civil Society, and Rights

Enjoying widespread popularity in the midst of Vietnam's *ve nguon* (return to roots) movement, Hanoi's many *hoi dong huong* must be considered in any assessment of Vietnam's voluntary associations and emerging civil society. We have seen members of these groups position their activities as occupying a different domain in society than state institutions, but can they provide a source of political advocacy among citizens from shared homelands in the city, a counter-hegemonic force linking migrants with established residents to work for the expansion of citizen rights? Or are *hoi dong huong* merely apolitical social clubs focused on private matters and business concerns? And if so, what organizations are capable of addressing the needs of citizens facing legal barriers to free movement and a dignified life in the city? This final section addresses these

questions—looking to post-socialist China for a comparative perspective—and speculates on the future of the politics of belonging in Hanoi.

One strategy for expanding rights through native-place associations involves building coalitions with local provincial authorities who could agitate on behalf of "their" migrants in the city. Despite the fact that the physician described in the previous section did his best to prevent the visiting Nam Dinh officials from asserting their will at *hoi dong huong* meetings, we should not ignore the fact that the official was present in the first place, representing a potential political ally. Such practices of provincial governments supporting "unofficial" residents in the city have been documented in China, where migrants to major cities face similar obstacles to urban citizenship. For instance, in her study of the development and eventual destruction of the full-service migrant enclave of Zeijiangcun in Beijing, Zhang (2001) describes how political connections allowed that "extralegal" community to survive for far longer than expected. Leaders from the sending province of Zeijiang, recognizing the crucial role of remittances in local economies and widening paths to economic success in urban areas, actively advocated for the rights of migrants to keep their enclave, negotiating for two years before its eventual destruction. While Hardy (2003) has noted the historical support of local authorities in Vietnam's Red River Delta in allowing temporary absences among migrants leaving the village to earn a living (against the official stipulations of *ho khau*), political coalitions working on behalf of urban migrants from particular places remain virtually non-existent among native-place groups in Vietnam. One reason for this difference is surely the greater geographic and social distance between major cities and

sending communities in China that allow for more political machinations at the provincial level. Another reason is that the native-place groups most concerned with advancing migrant interests in Hanoi—those established by migrants themselves—have the least political clout, usually unregistered with limited membership and reach.

Outside of cooperation with authorities, native-place associations can also counter differentiated rights among urban migrants through the direct provision of services. Again, looking to China, Eric Mobrand (2004) has described how native-place associations have established schools in destination cities to counter the exclusion of nonlocal children, although a privately-managed migrant school hardly reflects the expansion of public educational rights in the city. In Vietnam, private schools for migrant children, informal housing, and methods of obtaining urban services such as electricity and water "off the grid" have appeared alongside growing numbers of newcomers from the countryside, but these are controlled by locals and have nothing to do with native-place organizations. In fact, these "services" remain sources of exploitation for vulnerable migrants (through inflated prices and selective access) rather than support.

Outside of native place associations, another relevant development in the push for migrant rights in urban China involves local NGOs or GONGOs working to address labor abuses and attend to the welfare needs of workers from the countryside. Concentrated in Beijing and Shenzhen, these groups have succeeded in providing legal aid, resolving labor disputes, and forming vocational programs (Ren 2012). However, the political reach of Chinese NGOs remains limited, and local governments crack down when

advocacy turns to formal labor organizing or coalitions of NGOs acquire too much perceived political influence (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, instead of framing migrants' problems—such as housing, education, labor rights—in political terms to be debated in public, NGOs tend to present issues as technical problems with narrow technical solutions. In Vietnam, domestic migrants' rights groups are usually limited to NGOs working to prevent human trafficking rather than assisting labor migrants. However, in both China and Vietnam, migration and its link to urban poverty has become a hot-button topic among global organizations and NGOs. In fact, I attended no fewer than four international conferences and workshops devoted to the topic during my time in Vietnam, sponsored by groups including the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration. Working with local social scientists, their policy recommendations do receive attention by city and state leaders (see Dang 2010), but these efforts usually proceed over the heads of the Vietnamese citizens whose lives they most affect.

While the foregoing assessment of the role of native-place associations and local NGOs in the expansion of citizen rights in Vietnam seems bleak, there is another way to identify politically-relevant activity among these groups. In thinking about how civil society helps to generate counter-hegemonic ideas and practices, we can draw a distinction between collective action that *makes claims* on the government, and collective action that *does the work* of government. While the capacity for direct political influence in Vietnam might pale even to that of China (as shown in the above examples), we have seen throughout this work how both formal native-place associations and informal native-place networks have taken on new roles once dominated by the Communist Party under

central planning, filling in for the retreat of the welfare state. With regard to *hoi dong huong,* examples include the efforts of wealthy members to upgrade common goods like roads and schools in home villages, and the work of migrant native-place associations to help *dong huong* find employment in the city. Of course, this should not be seen as necessarily oppositional to state forces, since the creation of "self-regulating" subjects and self-help groups is a central piece of the neoliberal rationalities of rule being tested in Vietnam (Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012). Even so, a fine line separates state expectations of self-regulation and citizen demands of self-determination, and freedoms obtained by citizens independently will eventually become the "new normal," undermining discourses of state control, and generating objections to policies that curtail these freedoms.

Conclusions

One thousand years after the founding of Hanoi, the city stands at a turning point, poised for continued rapid economic development while riddled with the growing pains of runaway urbanization The economic, demographic, and spatial changes to the city triggered by market reforms have only intensified in recent years, yet the legal frameworks and official discourses emanating from the Communist Party of Vietnam have not kept up with the pace, creating ongoing dilemmas over the politics of belonging and political input over its future. The future portends yet more diversification of Vietnamese cities and ongoing questions about just who "belongs" there; joining

migrants from the countryside are small but increasing numbers of international workers in urban Vietnam (see Figure 6.2), and their needs will also need to be addressed.



Figure 6.2: Informal (left) and formal (right) employment among foreign workers in Hanoi.

Regarding the expansion of citizen rights in Vietnam more generally, this dissertation has shown how collective action that is indirectly political—what some have called "everyday resistance" (Scott 2008) or "everyday politics" (Kerkvliet 2003)—among Vietnamese peasants has consistently furnished a force for social change, from the revision of frontier development strategies (chapter two), to migrant networking and "unofficial residence" in Hanoi (chapter three), to the revitalization of patrilineages and popular religious practices (chapter four). However, we have also seen glimpses of more direct political agency, in efforts to preserve Hanoi's Reunification Park (chapter three) and through spontaneous social movements in Thai Binh (this chapter). Clearly, both forms of collective action have a role in negotiating the politics of urban belonging: even as opportunities for direct citizen input into decision making are likely to expand, Vietnamese citizens will also continue to exert political influence simply by

independently defining and pursuing their visions of the good life—visions colored by both economic success in the city and moral commitments to the ancestral homeland.

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