THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE: IMPACTS OF LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATION ON THE ELDERLY IN A PERI-URBAN VILLAGE, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the impacts of landscape transformation on local elderly in a rural village in the North of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Employing the villagers’ definition of landscape, I focus on investigating changing processes of houses, home gardens and sacred places in the village from 1986 to the present. The year 1986 is the time when the Renovation policy was initiated nationally, and this shifted the country from subsistence to a more market oriented economy. In order to gather insightful information for comparison two different informant groups have been selected to interview: local elderly and urban elderly. I also sought assistance from an undergraduate student who conducted additional interviews under my guidance.

Findings from field research indicate that the studied landscapes have undergone significant changes since mid-1990 in ways that urban characteristics have gradually replaced traditional settings and values. Key driving forces in this process include State policy and urbanization. These two forces have significant impacts on people’s interpretations of modernity which lead to the landscapes’ changes. New settings of the three identified landscapes have both positive and negative impacts on local elderly. While the new landscapes bring people satisfaction and convenience materially, they also make people feel nostalgic as they have replaced traditional systems where the elderly have more voice with new systems where the elderly have less power.

Under this situation, some traditional values including houses and ritual practices have been revived by the village elderly as reaction to changing processes. This brings to a new interpretation of modernity which is not necessarily associated with development.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“We are now modern. Our village (làng) looks just like an urban town”

(Mr. A, 65 years old)\(^1\)

Background

Dục Nội is a rural village located approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Vietnam’s capital city Hanoi. This village’s landscape from the outside seems to present the typical image of a Viet\(^2\) village as it lies alongside rice paddies bordered by green bamboo hedges that serve as the village’s wall. 1994 was the first turning point of my life, when I left my village to study at Hanoi University.\(^3\) Although it was only 25 km between my village and the university, my parents wanted me to live on campus during my college years. Thus I only visited home on weekends for my first year and then just monthly or bimonthly in the following years. Since then, most of my lifetime has been spent in the city and quite a distance from my home village. This included time working in Hanoi and then, graduate school in Hawaii. Therefore, I was not very up to date about what was happening in the village until my fieldwork back home.

The second turning point was my first visit to the village in 2005 after two years of graduate school in Hawaii. On this occasion, I spent one week in the village visiting my relatives. One afternoon I sat outside, having tea with my uncle. He asked me many questions about America, and I could feel his great surprise at each answer though he tried to hide it. After about two hours of “telling him about the America,” I began asking him

\(^1\) All names used are pseudonyms.

\(^2\) The Viet (Việt) are the ethnic group who make up the majority of Vietnam’s population. Also referred to in Vietnam as Kinh, they account for approximately 90% of the population.

\(^3\) In 1995, the name was changed to Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities, under Hanoi National University.
about our village. He became quite excited and showered me with stories including about the village as if he was afraid there would be no other chance to tell me.

Among his many stories, I could feel his pride about the many changes in the village. He repeated two expressions several times that made me think: “Our village is now modernized,” and “Our village is no longer backward.”4 I confess that when I first heard this, I was unhappy because I felt he was talking to me not as his nephew, the one who was born and raised in this village, but as a stranger, or as a Ph.D. student from America, an outsider. This was also how many other relatives treated me when they first asked me about America, and then proudly told me about the brighter changes of the village. Like my uncle, they told me how many new tall buildings had been built or how many cars there were in the village. They could not be more enthusiastic, and eagerly tried to tell me about the introduction of cable television, internet, cafés, restaurants, supermarkets or foreign companies nearby the village as evidence of our village’s “modernization.” One of my cousins even showed his disappointment when he saw me using my 3G iPhone and he proudly reported that some of his friends were using 4G iPhone and a very fancy iPad.

If that was all that I had learned, I would not have conceived the idea for the research project that this dissertation is based on. Sadly, when I asked my uncle if he was happy with all the changes, I saw a sudden increase of wrinkles on his face and his voice became weaker and weaker. Instead of giving me a direct answer, he began talking about water pollution, noise, dust and many other unpleasant aspects of modernization. He surprised me when he said that “people at my age are so lonely in our own home” and “the village is no longer traditional” or “young people today are not as friendly as we were.” His pride and excitement about the positive aspects of modernization had disappeared and

4 “Làng ta giờ hiện đại” và “Làng ta không còn lạc hậu”
been replaced with deep sorrow and abundant nostalgia. More surprisingly, this was not just the feeling of my uncle, but also many of my other old relatives and other villagers.

That night, after talking with my uncle I could not sleep. I was drowning in the question of what made my villagers including my uncle hold such a contradictory attitude when they talked about the changes of our village. What made them so happy on one hand, while so unhappy on the other? Wandering around with uncertain answers, I thought of my previous fieldwork visits to many other villages during the last 10 years of my schooling and career and found there was something similar among these different villagers. There was the same story and the same contradictory attitude, but I had not thought about it until the conversation with my uncle. Accordingly, the idea of doing research that aims to seek answers for the above question arose.

**Research Objectives and Questions**

While there have been quite a lot studies about Viet villages, there have been very few studies that focus on the changing landscapes in those villages. Departing from this background, this study explores the changes of a Viet village’s landscape from the late 1980s to the present. What are the impacts of these changes on the elderly in the village, and what adaption strategies have the elderly created toward such changes? Descriptions of the village’s landscape change are approached from two different categories: insider and outsider. This means the study compares if there are any different descriptions and evaluations of landscape’s changes from the elderly people’s perspectives and from the researcher’s observations.

Departing from a historical ecological approach, this study focuses on the changing processes of three particular landscapes including houses, home garden, and sacred spaces as key units for analysis. These classifications emerged and were defined by villagers after I asked them to describe their village’s landscape. I employed these categories because I
believe ethnographers should not be satisfied with a mere cataloguing of the components of a cultural ecosystem according to the categories of an outsider’s view (etic). Instead, they must describe the environment from the insider’s view (emic); that is, how the local people themselves construe their cultural system according to the categories of their own ethnoscience (Frake 1962). This approach has been known as interpretation from an emic perspective.

The neologisms “emic” and “etic,” were derived from an analogy with the terms “phonemic” and “phonetic” by linguist Kenneth Pike (1954). He suggests that there are two perspectives that can be employed in the study of a society’s cultural system, just as there are two perspectives that can be used in the study of a language’s sound system. The emic perspective focuses on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society. The native members of a culture are the sole judges of the validity of an emic description, just as the native speakers of a language are the sole judges of the accuracy of a phonemic identification. The etic perspective relies upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for scientific observers in the same way that phonetic analysis relies upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that are meaningful to linguistic analysts. Scientists are the sole judges of the validity of an etic description, just as linguists are the sole judges of the accuracy of a phonetic transcription (Pike 1990).

In Pike’s view, the etic approach is useful for penetrating, discovering, and elucidating emic systems, but it is not “better” than emic claims. He then considers both of them important and perhaps complementary. Besides Pike, anthropologist Marvin Harris also made the distinction between the emic and etic perspectives an integral part of his paradigm of cultural materialism. According to Harris, etic perspectives are an end themselves and are useful in making objective determinations of fact. Harris (1976) argues that etic claims to knowledge are superior to emic claims. He argues that it “depends on
whether it describes events, entities, or relationships whose physical locus is in the heads of the social actors or in the stream of behavior” (Harris 1976, 335). He also asserts that researchers cannot get inside people’s heads by observing what they do, and “depending on whose categories establish the framework, the informant may provide either emic or etic description of the event they have observed or participated in” (Harris 1976, 341).

I disagree with Harris’s statement that informants may provide a researcher either emic or etic descriptions, and only an etic approach could provide objective descriptions. When the ethnographer talks to an informant, the conversation is arranged at a particular time and place, and about an identified topic. The informant understands to whom he is talking, and why such a question is asked. His responses are made by not only his personal thoughts, but also by his self-positioning in relation to the researcher. When asked to provide an opinion about the role of a new village market, a local farmer may tell the outside researcher they are proud of their market as they can easily buy and sell things. On the other hand, he may also tell a district tax collector he does not like it and wishes to have the old-style market where he can buy and sell thing alongside village road without having to pay taxes. Emic description therefore is not necessarily static as it must be compatible with the informant’s expectation and his relation with the outsider.

This study favors neither Pike’s nor Harris’ view; rather, it will examine both, but with an emphasis on the emic, and then compare these two approaches. The comparison of these two views is made possible given the advantage that I have. Since Dục Nội, the village under study is my own hometown where I had lived for almost twenty years: my memory of the past is an “emic” view. More importantly, I have strong social networks through my relatives and my friends in the village, and I am a native speaker of the language. On the other hand, revisiting the village after about 20 years of living in the city and experiencing ongoing changes in the village gives me an “etic” explanation and
evaluation of the changes. Doing fieldwork in one’s own community is an advantageous strategy since it combines “emic” and “etic” (Bernard 2006). This also helps to solve the limitations of either “emic” or “etic” approach that Pike was criticized for as being too idealistic or as Harris was criticized as being too materialistic (Headland 1990). I combine both the views of local villagers with that of those who grew up here but are currently living in the city like myself in order to bridge these two perspectives in my discussions about landscape changes of the village.

For the purpose of analysis, I am focusing on the time period since 1986 when the massive reforms known as Renovation (Đổi Mới) were launched throughout the country. Released from the Sixth Congress, this policy consisted of six new reforms including: (i) decentralization of the state economic management, which allowed state industries some local autonomy, (ii) replacement of administrative measures by economic ones, including a market orientated monetary policy, which helped to control inflation, (iii) adoption of an outward orientated policy in external economic relations where exchange rates and interest rates were allowed to respond to the market, (iv) agricultural policies that allowed farmers for long term land use rights and greater freedom to buy inputs and market products, (v) reliance on the private sector as an engine of economic growth and finally (vi) letting state and privately owned industries deal directly with the foreign market for both import and export purposes. I have specified this time range because 1986 is often viewed as the start of wide socio-economic changes in rural Vietnam (Tô Duy Hợp 2002), and followed by changes in the village landscape (Nguyễn Tùng 2003; Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009; Nguyễn Công Thảo 2011). On the other hand, it is necessary to identify particular landscapes and a period of time as spatial and temporal boundaries for investigation because a landscape’s description and interpretation can only be meaningful if it is contextualized and related to concrete space and time (Long 2001; Weismann 1998).
In order to achieve the proposed objectives, the study will investigate how these landscapes have changed over the past years in terms of natural and social characteristics. Thus, I will not limit my descriptions of changing landscapes to their architecture, design, physical location or construction materials, but I will also consider symbolic meanings and cultural values. I am also focusing on connections between the elderly and landscapes. I have divided my investigation of this transformation process into three different periods including three consecutive decades: the late years of 1980, the 1990s, and the 2000s. The atmosphere of the second half of the 1980s is cooled by initial economic reforms, particularly by Resolution 10 and Resolution 100 as early steps of the Renovation (Ravallion and Walle 2008). Rural farmers were given primary authority to decide their own crop’s input and output, and the State just provided technical support for their farming. The 1990s were marked with the country’s more deep economic reforms, and the country’s integration into regional and international networks. Vietnam became a full member of ASEAN and formally normalized relations with the United States of America in 1995. These are the two significant events that have influenced the country’s development in general, rural region transformation in particular. Finally, the 2000s is the period the country experienced rapid economic growth and urbanization, especially after the country became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007.

While landscape transformation is a complex process that is determined by various forces, this study selects the elderly as its primary source for discussion, and presumes the elderly are the most influenced by this process, not only in terms of physical, but also of mental aspects. The elderly have the best experience about the village landscape transformation during the last three decades. They are also the more vulnerable group given the fact that outmigration of young people to urban areas for better income has been increasing in Vietnam and other regional countries (Khoa, Thào and Kees 2014; Rigg
This leaves the elderly in their village with little care (Khoa, Thào and Kees 2014). This process has gradually marginalized the elderly from decision making in regard to their landscape change because income from off farm and non-farm jobs has become more significant as elsewhere (Rigg 2009; Hirsh 2012). This is different from traditional society when the elderly are highly respected due to their rich farming experience. However, one significant challenge of focusing on the elderly is their memory of the past, which could be unclear sometimes. This problem makes me decide to narrow the investigation period from 1986 onward as moving further back in history may make their recollections less accurate.

This study therefore explores both the positive and negative changes in association with their houses, their home gardens and sacred spaces. In order to distinguish the positive from the negative, the study will employ two different approaches. The first approach is to explore the elderly people’s evaluations of their landscape and why such evaluations are made. On the other the hand, the second approach employs etic explanations by comparing three particular criteria including: level of accessibility, level of comfort and level of involvement that new landscapes bring to the elderly. I have designed these criteria under the perspectives of ecological anthropology. It is presumed that the elderly have been less and less ecologically and sentimentally accessible, and this explains why they do not feel quite comfortable with such a new landscape.

**Research on Human / Nature Relations**

Studies of human / environmental interactions began in American anthropology in the early 1900s. Most notable is Julian Steward’s concept of cultural ecology, which has become a dominant paradigm in this field. Since then, human / environmental relations have been studied under various foci: culturally, historically, economically, politically or spiritually (Kottak 1999; Little 1999; Crumley 2001; Sponsel 2012). Traditionally, researchers in ecological anthropology have tended to focus on small-scale societies, which
has led to theoretical complications in ascribing some type of bounded quality to seamless systems involving societies and natural environments (Ellen 1982).

Recent studies have begun to give theoretical significance to the broader regional, national and global systems that impact local environments (Kottak 1999; Little 1999; Moran 1996). This shift is considered the point that differentiates “old ecological anthropology” from “new ecological anthropology” (Kottak 1999; Little 1999). While the former focuses more on how culture and nature influences each other through the long historical period at local scale, the latter focuses on contemporary environmental problems that often arise from development as consequences of overpopulation, poverty, deforestation, urbanization or policy intervention such as land law or economic reforms (Kottak 1999).

**Rural & Peasant Studies**

Previous studies of the rural world in general, and in Vietnam in particular can be divided into two different periods. The first period started during the 1960s and lasted until the late 1980s. During these four decades, researchers tended to focus on such key topics as village socio-economic, cultural identities, the nature of village economies and village social organization (Hickey 1966; Gourou 2015; Popkin 1979; Scott 1976; Trần Tử 1984). Rural villages as drawn from these studies were rather isolated and mainly subsistence oriented in terms of economic systems (Scott 1976; Nguyễn Đức Nghinh 1980). Further, these villages had clearly defined boundaries with the outside world (Gourou 2015) and included every villager in overlapped social organizations (Trần Tử 1984) or had distinctive legal norms and practices (Popkin 1979). During this trend land use and land tenure also absorbed great attention from Vietnamese scholars, and productive land paralleled private-community ownership was thought to take an important role in

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5 This is the Vietnamese version which translated the original copy in French, published in 1936
balancing and harmonizing internal relations of each village while preventing interventions of external forces (Phan Đại Doãn 1984). Similarly, the villages’ natural landscapes such as bamboo hedges, village temples, water wells, fish ponds or village gates were seen as community constructed and community oriented (Gourou 2015).

Peasant studies prior to the 1990 aimed to “figure out what kind of category peasants belong in; do they have their own culture or economy, or are they always part of larger systems?” (Wilk 2007, 24). They just emerged during a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism (Netting 1993). Studies during this period could be divided into two schools represented by two outstanding scholars who led seemingly endless debates about rural studies during the 1980s: James C. Scott (1976) and Samuel L. Popkin (Popkin 1979). Drawing from case studies of Vietnamese rural society in the early 20th century this debate focused on explaining relations between peasants and the state, about their behavior and choice in collective activities, and about cooperation or competition. Influenced by Chayanov (1970) who explained peasants’ behavior as a consequence of their demand, Scott (1976) argued that rural economy was based on reciprocity and moral order within villages. This explained why the rural world was homogenous and peasants just produced what they needed. The 1986 Renovation reforms were therefore not popular as people favored the “safety first” principle. This made peasants in Southeast Asia see capitalism and colonial intrusion as threats to their moral order so they tended to resist (Chayanov 1970; Scott 1976). In contrast, Popkin argued that moral or cooperative community was in fact a creation of feudalism, but not of capitalism. Their reaction toward capitalism was rational as they were afraid of being excluded from their land, and they were in fact (Popkin 1979).

Since late 1989 and the early 1990s, there has been a shift from viewing rural villages as isolated and static, to seeing them as integrated and an active part of a larger
network. Since the 1986 Renovation rural villages have become fertile sites for many historians, anthropologists or political scientists (Forde 1989; Kerkviet and Porter 1995). Massive transitions in demography, income source and occupation identified elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Rigg 2009; Nevin and Peluso 2008) have also been observed in different parts of Vietnam. Under these transitions, young people tend to leave their villages seeking non-farm jobs and this process makes income from agriculture become less and less important because farming is no longer of interest to the younger generation (Nguyễn Phương Châm 2009; Rigg 2006).

In terms of social and cultural aspects, together with economic transition, traditional cultural practices and social organizations are observed to have reemerged (Kleinen 2007; Nguyen Phương Châm 2009; Lê Hồng Lý 2010). This includes a revival of elites in rural villages in Vietnam on the one hand (Endres 1999; Kleinen 2007) and the marginalization from decision making of the elderly in ceremonies and festivals on the other (Nguyễn Phương Châm 2009). At the regional level, the forces that initiate those transitions in the rural world vary including legal and economic reforms (Bunnell 2004; Nevin and Peluso 2008), urbanization and industrialization (Bunnell 2004; Friedman 2005; Liu 2006; Michael 2002; Rigg 2006) and globalization (Robin, 2009; Li, 2002). In Vietnam, the most important force that promotes rural socio-economic and environmental changes is often associated with the implementation of the Doi Moi policy in which Resolution 10 and the Land Law of 1993 are two key policies (Tô Duy Hộp 2005). Significant signs of the changes are the shifts from central planned and highly self-subsistent into a more market oriented economy and the rapid economic growth during the 1990s (Tô Duy Hộp 2005).

While following the tradition of grounding practical analysis on the local level at a particular village, this study positions the village at a broader regional network. In this
way, transformation of the village’s landscape will be investigated in the context of regional urbanization and implementation of new policies rather than within the village’s boundary itself. Additionally, the study will look at the relations between local peoples and their landscapes as dialectical interactions under which people’s perceptions of modernity are presumed to influence their new landscapes and vice versa.

The Concept of Modernity

Modernity or hiện đại is a complex concept, and it is not easy to have a complete definition. Influential sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990, 1) defines modernity as “modes of social life that emerged in Europe from the nineteenth century onward.” French philosopher Michel Foucault (1990) situates the concept within European cultural history and geography. Finally, Bruno Latour (1993) refers to an extension of scientific and institutional networks defining them as rational and true. These three key theories of modernity have something in common as they see modernity as an invention of “the West”. This implies the advance of capitalism and nation-states over non-European systems and refers to the beginning and the end of modernity to European boundaries. These Eurocentric views are forcefully criticized by Allan Pred and Michael Watts (1992), Ogborn (1998) and Nash (2000). They argue that modernity is contextual and interpreted differently from place to place. In recent years, there has been a movement to study modernity beyond “the West”, i.e. modernity in non-Western contexts, of which Southeast Asia is the most studied area (Bunnell 2004; Ong 1996).

While taking people’s perception of modernity as a theoretical approach for the study’s analysis, this study interprets modernity differently from the above three approaches. It follows Bunnell’s view that defines modernity as “a way of framing specific transformation; it is less an attempt to formulate a universally applicable explanation, than a perspective for the study of particular geo-historical spaces” (Bunnell 2004, 4). It is
contextual in terms of histories and geographies (Nash 2000; Ogborn 1998), and may be “understood in and through specific places and spaces rather than as an exported set of essentially Western processes and institutions” (Bunnell 2004, 31). Under this view, modernity shall not be framed within a unique model that takes “the West” as a sample to follow.

Southeast Asian countries recently have attempted to find a new way of development that differentiates itself from the West (Bunnell 2004; Ong 1996). The case of Multi Super Corridor (MSC) cities in Malaysia is a good example for this trend. Since 1996, the Malaysian government has designated 50 kilometers of land that extends southwards from Kuala Lumpur as a special zone for the development of information and multimedia technology. This project aims to make MSC become not only the symbol of national development, but also the status of transport “hub” for Southeast Asia with rapid “progress” and “development,” while following a non-Western route. The MSC is expected to create a new generation of “intelligent citizens” with a high emphasis on indigenous norms and forms as “cultural resources for a specifically “Malaysian urbanity” (Bunnell 2004, 144). In Vietnam, this development model has recently been seen through the establishment of “industrial zones” where vast areas are designed for foreign mills in various areas of the country, and for big commercial malls in urban area such as in the city of Hanoi (Thomas 2002). This model is also indicated by the Vietnamese government in its Socio-economic Development Plan for 2011-2020.

In Vietnam, the concept of “modernity” (hiện đại) or “progress” (tiến bộ) has been changed and interpreted differently at different periods of time. For Vietnam, “modern history” refers specifically to events in 1945, when the country gained independence from the French after the August Revolution and the government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam was established. This is also the time when the Communist Party was officially
becoming the leading political force (Institute of History 1997). While this interpretation is mostly accepted by Vietnamese historians, some suggested that 1858, the year that the French invaded the country and triggered the fall of feudal regime, should be considered the early edge of modern Vietnamese history (Hickey 1968). The second important milestone in modern Vietnamese history that is often cited is 1954, the year of Vietnam’s victory over France at Điện Biên Phủ. This battle led to the Geneva Accords, which temporarily divided the country into two regions: north and south with two different governments. The end of the American War (or as it is known outside Vietnam as the Vietnam War) in 1975 and the country’s reunification in 1976 is another significant milestone. Lastly, the shift from central planned economy into a market oriented economy in 1986 with the Đổi Mới (Renovation) policy has been the most important transition since the post war era.

However, modernity is a complex concept and is defined differently depending on each context. In a socio-economic agenda, modernity is often associated and interchangeable with the concept of industrialization since they always go together in public and political platforms. This is especially emphasized since Đổi Mới when the country received more and more foreign investment that was followed by increasing new industrial zones (Tô Duy Nhật 2005). In cultural studies, modernity is something different from tradition or sometimes conflicts with tradition, and it is something introduced from the outside world (including the West) that is often interpreted more as urban or more western oriented (Ogborn 1998). In technology, modernity refers to the implementation of machines, and informative techniques that replace manual forces. In lifestyle, it means young people whose style of living is strongly influenced by city people (Bunnell 2004). Generally, modernity refers to people who are more rational than emotional. On the other hand, while modern technologies are often positive, a modern living style may imply
someone who forgets tradition, who is rational and more urban and western-like (Lê Hồng Lý 2009). This can imply a loss of tradition as well.

This study takes local people’s concept of modernity as a starting point for analysis because modernity must “be understood in and through specific places and spaces rather than as an exported set of essentially Western processes and institutions” (Bunnell 2004, 31). It hypothesizes that the changes of houses, home garden, and sacred spaces in the study village are partly influenced by the local people’s perceptions of modernity that constituted in their reaction to urban Hanoi area. This is what people in the village repeated many times during my field research. Modernity from local people’s interpretation means development (phát triển), wealthy (giàu có) or civilization (van minh). Development, as who defines it, is the shift from an agricultural economy into an industrial and commercial economy. Wealth refers to the ownership of western style houses and the operation of business as main income, while civilization implies a higher education and urban lifestyle. However, these three meanings (development, wealthy and civilization) are often interchangeable, and are used to differentiate from backward (lạc hậu) which is defined as superstitious (mê tín), uneducated (thất học) or poor (nghèo năn).

Typically, villagers compare their village’s development with that of urban areas of the city of Hanoi regardless of the fact that the village is still in the metropolitan area6. In this context, Hanoi, like the SMC in Malaysia, is not just the city or the capital, but also a symbol for development, economic growth, modernity and civilization (Bunnell 2004; Thomas 2002). This distinction derives not only from clear geographical boundaries, as the village is on the other the side of the Red River which separates urban areas from rural areas of the city but also from the fact that the village’s economy is heavily dependent on

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6 “Hanoi” commonly refers to the inner city or urban area, while the surrounding rural areas are excluded even though administratively the rural area is included in the city territory. On the highway from Noi Bai International Airport, visitors can easily see road signs indicating the distance between the airport and Hanoi even though the airport itself is in Hanoi territory. In this sense, Hanoi refers to the Returned Sword Lake (Hồ Hoàn Kiếm) located in the heart of the city.
agricultural production in comparison with much more industrial and commercial oriented economy of the urban areas. In addition in general people perceive Hanoi or Hanoian to refer to the city itself and not the rural areas surrounding it.

Meanwhile the perception of modernity for those who were born in the village, but are currently living in city (hereafter referred to as urban villagers) is somehow different compared with that of the villagers. While the villagers often associate modernity with the transition to a more urban-like landscape and with increasing contribution of industrialization, commercial or service sector in their income, the urban villagers tend to refer to modernity as western education or western lifestyle. This is drawn from individual discussions where people affirm that an overseas education in developed countries like the United States, European countries and Australia or working at foreign enterprises are indications of modernity. This can be problematic since what the villagers think is modern may not be considered modern by their urban relatives. This is because the former consider what belongs to the latter as modern, while the latter take western values as modernity instead. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Administratively, Hanoi is recognized as a central city that comprises two areas including urban and rural areas. However, the term Hanoi city or Hanoinian in popular interpretation is just for the urban area or those who live in the urban area that comprises four districts including Ba Đình, Hoàn Kiếm, Hai Bà Trưng and Đống Đa. In 1997 three more urban districts were established including Cầu Giấy, Thanh Xuân and Tây Hồ. In 2003, two more urban districts were added including Hoàng Mai and Long Biên making the total urban districts to nine districts. People in the rural areas do not often see themselves as Hanoian unless when they compare themselves with the people from the outside provinces. Additionally, the studied village Dực Nội, like the whole district did not
belong to Hanoi until 1961 when the National Assembly approved a decree on territorial expansion for Hanoi.

On the other hand, this distinction also originates in the State’s policies, as there are always distinctions between urban and rural areas. In terms of education, students from rural areas have been given more priorities than those from urban areas when they take the entry examination for post high school education. From this perspective, Hanoi is currently divided into four different sub-regions of which the urban areas are recognized as KV 3 with nine urban districts, while the remaining 20 districts are classified into KV 2 (Khu vực 2 or Area 2), KV2-NT and KV 1. This classification means that the required university entry exam’s score of students from KV 3 have to be higher than those from KV 2, KV 2-NT and KV 1, respectively. This policy is intended to create fairness for students from different sub-areas but it could be argued that it has deepened the distinctions between Hanoians and rural people outside Hanoi. On the other hand, prior to the 2000s in many cases having a legally recognized resident title from an urban district was an advantage to getting a job in the city as many employers indicated this requirement in their vacancy announcement.

Furthermore, in Vietnamese there are distinctive terms for urban districts (quận) and rural districts (huyện), and this is another fact that makes most people from rural areas of Hanoi not consider them Hanoian. Though never legally defined and accepted, in daily language it is quite popular for people to distinguish between Hanoi 1 (Hà Nội 1) for urban districts and Hanoi 2 (Hà Nội 2) for rural districts. Hanoi 1 is a metaphor for true Hanoians who are wealthier, more educated and more modern, while Hanoi 2 refers to rural Hanoians. This distinction appears on online blogs, YouTube clips and online public forums with quite serious quarrels among young people, especially after 2008 when the

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7 In daily conservation, Hà Nội Xịn or Hà Nội 1 is often used referring only urban areas of the city as “real Hanoi”
National Assembly ratified a boundary expansion of Hanoi to the whole area of Ha Tay Province. Interestingly, right after this event the logo of Ha Tay Television was changed into HTV 2 (Hanoi Television 2), and that of the former HTV (Hanoi Television) was changed into HTV 1, accordingly.

The different interpretations of what is Hanoi or who are Hanoians as described above thus comes not only from history, geography and wealth, but also from political, social and cultural factors. Under this context, Hanoi is never one single entity but a complex community that comprises various sub-groups. In this sense, the villagers do not see themselves as Hanoians and they are to some degree obsessed with the assumption that they are lagging behind “real Hanoians” in terms of development and modernity.

Having been influenced by the self-classification as separate from “real Hanoi,” Dục Nội villagers use 1995 as the landmark of modernity. This is the time when the “village market street” (phố chợ làng) established in the village where urban style houses were built. This is clear evidence of how local villagers’ perception of modernity is influenced by urban Hanoi, and this is followed by their imitation to urban Hanoi’s landscape since then. Meanwhile, urban villagers see this landmark as a bit later around the early 2000s because they associate modernity with the establishment of foreign textile mills nearby the village. Subsequently young villagers increasingly abandoned farm work to become mill workers.

**Landscape**

Another key concept in this study is landscape. Landscape has been studied from an anthropological approach in recent times (Balee 1998; Crumley 2001; Kendall 2005). Anthropological studies of landscape stipulate that it is historical, changeable, and interpreted by those people who are involved with the landscape (Basso 1996; Hirsh 1995; Munn 2003). Landscape is considered to form part of attempts to foster new ways of being
and seeing (Bunnell 2004). It has been proven here and there that landscape is always modified in the way that best fits expectations of the people who live within that landscape. The boundary of landscape could be at local scale (Bender 1993; Kuper, 2003), or at larger area such as a vast mega city (Bunnell 2004).

Landscape is a concept that is defined differently by scientists depending on their specialization, and “They not only have physical realities, but also a mental, social and cultural ones. An important factor linking natural and human oriented sciences in landscape research is the mutual relationship between people and the landscape” (Palang et al 2005, 4). From an historical ecological approach, landscape is defined as “material manifestation of the relation between humans and the environment” (Crumley 1994, 6), and is considered as a “unit of analysis” (Crumley 1997, 16). Further, landscape is seen as the “spatial manifestation of the human-environment relationship” (Marguardt & Crumple 1987, 1). Balee and Erickson (2006, 2) posit that landscape is like a text “that is inscribed in a subtle, physical sense by learned, patterned behavior and action.” Landscape is not only the present identity that we could visibly recognize, but also the remains of the past (Braudel 1986, 25 in Nguyễn Tùng 2003). Landscape always changes under impacts of various factors, either from outside world, or from internal forces. A landscape consists of different elements. The structure and composition of the landscape, as well as the changes in them, influence the distribution, abundance and dynamics of different species (Morris 1995; Wiens 1995). Its physical and mental boundaries are not necessarily the same (Morris 1995).

A Viet\(^8\) village’s landscape is often grouped into two categories: residential landscape and productive landscape. While residential landscape refers to inner territory of a village where villagers reside, and borders with outside world by clear boundaries;

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\(^8\) Viet refers to the Viet or Kinh ethnic, the majority ethnic group in Vietnam. This is different from Viet in Vietnam as nationality.
productive landscape refers to rice paddy and other artifacts on rice paddy (Nguyễn Tùng 2003). On the other hand, village landscape was also categorized into natural and cultural landscape (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009). This particular division was made for the purpose of discussion about sacred spaces in a Vietnamese rural village, and could be problematic at a broader sense as generalization because from the historical ecological perspective there is no clear boundary between the so-called “natural” or “cultural” landscape. Additionally, Drummond (2000) divides space into public and private to analyze the use and boundaries of space in contemporary urban areas in Vietnam, while Mathew (2003) classified landscape into: physical, imagined and lived space.

French scholar Gourou (2015) provides a very comprehensive description of a Viet village in the Red River delta region:

“From whatever direction, it appears with dark green color, with clear boundaries constructed by surrounding fences. From the first glimpse, a village is not a unit of houses, but green trees. It is fenced by green bamboo hedges with thick and solid layers” (216).

The landscape of a Viet village is also commonly described under two perspectives including physical and spiritual dimensions. Bamboo hedges are, in most cases, the first images that one will see from a distance while visiting a Viet village in the Red River delta region. They are not only physical identities, but also psychological and cultural symbols representing Viet villages. Behind those green walls are some village gates that lead to narrow mud roads, which stretch between fishponds (Gourou 2015).

This study employs the local people’s interpretation that classifies the village’s inner landscape into three categories: houses, home garden, and sacred spaces. These landscapes will be analyzed under the context of the modern and tradition relation. The
analysis will look at landscape transformation as a process of departing from traditional to modernity that the local people pursue.

**Analytical Framework**

This study begins with people’s perception of modernity, which is analyzed as the ground force for any change of housing, home garden and sacred places in terms of structure, arrangement and meaning. These changes are presumed to have impacts on the elderly involvement in decision making, accessibility and comfort toward each of the three landscapes. This process is analyzed from two different views including insider (local elderly) and outsider (urban elderly) as shown in the following diagram.

![Analytical Framework Diagram]

**Site Selection**

Surprisingly it is difficult to provide an exact figure of how many Viet villages there are in the whole country as there has been no record on this matter. However, according to the Government’s Decision 491/QĐ-TTg-16-4-2009, there are 9,121 communes (xã) in the country. We can thus estimate the total number of Viet villages. If
counting on average four villages per commune and 2,000 communes are of the ethnic minorities we can calculate approximately 30,000 Viet villages in the nation.

I decided to choose my home village for my fieldwork for several reasons. Besides helping me to overcome financial challenges, another reason I chose this village is because of its proximity to Hanoi city and urbanization. For my research I needed a distinctive Viet village to look at the ongoing changes over time. My village, which lies in Red River Delta on the outskirts of Hanoi City is experiencing tremendous changes including in landscape during the last decades. It has become more and more “peri urban” and effected by urbanization and expansion from the city. Peri urban is defined as the rural-urban transition zone where urban and rural uses mix and often clash (Lambert 2011). Thirdly, the village is my place of birth and my childhood is imprinted there. However, I have not lived there since 1994 and have become more and more alien to the village because I return to the village just occasionally. This gives me a unique position as both “insider” and “outsider” in relation to the place from where I was born. I am quite familiar with the village in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, while feeling more as a stranger to the village since the mid-1990s when I left for college. This explains why the villagers often, as I could feel, include me as part of the village when they talk about the past; while they attempt to exclude me when talking about the present, as they often begin their stories with something like:

“You know, the village has changed quite a lot”

“You know, the village is as no longer as it was”

While this distinction sometimes hurts me as I have always felt like a permanent member of the village, this also gives me some advantage in recognizing what changes have happened in the village and exploring how those changes have been made. I can simply ask people to educate me about the changes, since they are always excited to tell me. On the other hand, I also have a broad social network with people from the village
as most of my childhood friends and my relatives are still living there. This helps me to build trusted relationships with the villagers, and I believe if I were to conduct this study in another village, or if any “truly” outsider researcher came to my village it would be less efficient and less effective.

However, doing fieldwork in one’s own village also creates some challenges and may impact the research findings or research conclusions. It is easy to be subjective as you come to that place with “preconceptions” and not with an “empty mind” (Bernard, 2006). You may take for granted that what you think is similar with what the people think in fact is quite different. Another risk is falling into an “ethnocentric” attitude when discussing your own people, which may make you less critical or objective. Rapport and familiarity between villagers and the researcher may prevent true and honest statements, because either they assume you already know or simply they do not want to tell you. To mitigate such potentially negative impacts, I brought a research assistant whose responsibility was to ask the same people similar questions.

**Target Research Groups**

Selected key informants represent their people not only because of their age or experience, but also because of their involvement in the interactions with their landscapes. Therefore, key informants should also be selected based on gender since different genders may provide different views of the same topic (Lassiter 2005; Smith 1999). This is a qualitative study with a focus on the elderly so they should be the primary group of informants. For the purpose of analysis and comparison, I selected two key target groups for individual life history interviews. The first group included 72 local elderly villagers who were 60 years or above who were living in the village (hereby refered as local elderly, and the second group included 15 individuals who have been living in Hanoi city for decades with only occasional visits to the village (hereby refer as urban elderly). They
were invited to tell me about their childhood, their family and especially their houses, their home gardens, their public places and their sacred spaces. People were asked to identify what were the most significant forces that took part in changing these landscapes, especially since 1986. Similarly, they were also asked to describe what the most outstanding changes were that they have observed, and what changes they liked most, or least. Upon identification of the changes, people were asked to explain why and how the changes had been made, and what their roles or participation were in this process (See descriptions of the informant by gender, age, economic status and occupation in Appendix 1). In order to identify the elder’s evaluations of the new landscapes, three key indicators were analyzed including the following:

1. Accessibility: This indicator aims to identify whether the new or the modified landscapes are accessible for the elderly, or they are excluded either partly or fully.

2. Comfort: This indicator aims to measure if the elderly feel comfortable with the new landscapes.

3. Involvement in decision-making: This indicator is designed to explore if the elderly take any role in the process of the landscapes’ changing or modification.

To avoid subjective assumptions, and to cross check the information, I decided to hire an undergraduate student in anthropology who was not from the village to be my research assistant. She stayed one month in the village, and asked the same questions about people’s feeling toward their new landscape as I did. She also interviewed some of the elderly who were from the village, but currently living in the city. My assistant conducted 15 interviews. The idea was to compare differences (if any) in the descriptions and evaluations of the elderly on their landscapes between her interviews and mine.

Interviews with local elderly were arranged with random informants from different groups including gender, age, occupation, education and social status. See Appendix 1 for
gender, age range and occupation of the informants. Each interview lasted for about two hours and took place at the interviewee’s house. Meanwhile, interviews with urban villagers were conducted in Hanoi after appointments were made via phone call. A set of guideline questions were prepared for each interview and this was used by both the assistant and I (see Appendix 2).
CHAPTER 2
VIET VILLAGES AND THE ELDERLY IN VIETNAM

“Villages are core elements of a country and the elderly are the roofs of houses. Not only
are villages strong that country is sustainable, and not only are the elderly respected that
the family is happy” (Gourou 1936, 7)

Composition & History of Viet Villages

Villages have been seen as the foundation of Vietnam civilization (Papin and
Tessier 2002). Although the word “làng” is often translated into English as “village”
though there are some other compatible terms in Vietnamese including thôn, ấp, xóm or
trại (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009; Nguyễn Tùng 2002). The establishment of the first
villages in Vietnam is presumed to have begun approximately 4,000 years ago, during the
Phùng Nguyên civilization. However, it was not until the Lý dynasty (10th century) that a
mention of a village appeared in a historical record. It was with the name of thôn as
subordinate administration of xã (commune), i.e. the lowest administration unit (Nguyễn
Quang Ngọc 2009). However, it is doubtful that there were clear distinctions between làng
and xã during this period because they overlapped (Insun Yu 2000). This explained why
làng often goes with xã in daily language, and làng xã is used today to refer to the most
local level administrative unit. However, this discourse was thought to become popular just
since the early 20th century (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). During the 15th -19th century the
terms hương, giáp, phường, trại, đông, sách, thôn or xã were more popular, especially the
term xã as we can see in the collected works of 16th century scholar Nguyễn Trãi (2001).

Làng is a complex concept in the context of Vietnam: it sounds familiar to most
Vietnamese people, but it is difficult to find a comprehensive definition as there is some
variation according to historical period and region. Bùi Xuân Đình (1998) provides a
useful definition: “làng a is traditional living unit of Viet farmers with separate territory,
organization, infrastructure, spiritual practices, dialect, psychology and Council of the Notables (Hội đồng kỳ mục) and these characteristics are quite stable in history” (97). While most scholars agree with Bùi Xuân Đính’s definition, many do not accept the presence of the Council of Notables as part of the traditional Viet village (Nguyễn Tùng 2002).

A Viet village is often comprised of several hamlets with dozens of households who live together alongside a narrow alley (ngõ) and it often has a clear boundary with a separate rice field, a shared village temple and distinctive customs that differentiate each village from the other (Phan Đại Doãn 1992; Trần Tứ 1984). Villages contain different forms of organization including: residential units, blood-based units, economic units and cultural units (Bùi Xuân Đính 1998; Nguyễn Tùng eds 2003; Phan Đại Doãn 1992). The presence of these roles varied in history. During the first ten centuries, Viet villages were basically blood communities with dozens of households from the same kinship. Due to in/out migration and marriage relations, people from other kinship units gradually moved in and made Viet villages become multi-families communities (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). From the Le dynasty onward, villages became stable communities with clear boundaries (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). The economic production of the village was devoted to subsistence at least until the mid 20th century (Hickey 1965; Scott 1979) and each village could be differentiated from others based on cultural features such as customs, dialect or spiritual practices (Trần Tứ 1984; Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006).

Villages as residential units were most distinctive in the early 10th century when Khúc Thừa Đụ regained political control and finished almost 1000 years of colonization under the Chinese (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). From this perspective, a village is a cluster of from dozens to several hundred households that live together on the same living area next to shared paddy rice field land. During this time, “giáp” or “huống” are popular
terms, while “làng” is not yet used. “Giáp” is thought to be associated with giáp in China: an informal organization that was comprised of ten households (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009; Phan Đại Đoàn 1992; 2004).

As a blood-based and neighborhood community, according to Nguyễn Quang Ngọc (2009, 69), “a village is a cluster of several hundred nuclear households who are both relatives and neighbors of each other.” The influence of each of these two relations varies in history. There are often several kinship lines in a Viet village, but just one or two dominant ones. Distinctively, some villages are named after the family name of the most influential family (Diệp Đinh Hoa 2000), similarly to clan name villages in China. Originally each kin group lived in a separate area, but this boundary was gradually blurred by time due to population growth, marriage relations, and other socio-economic factors (Trần Từ 1984).

From a cultural perspective, each village has certain distinctive features besides sharing some general values. That could be outstanding education tradition (Bùi Xuân Dinh 2009), or known as quite active or stubborn (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009). This great cultural diversity makes the generalization of Viet village an impossible mission (Kleinen 2004). Perhaps because of this diversity, along with their official names recognized by the State, each village has a local name that often indirectly introduces something about their culture (Diệp Định Hoa 2000; Phan Đại Đoàn 2004).

From an economic perspective, a village is rather independent with a subsistence economy based on farming, raising livestock and gardening systems (Scott 1978; Trần Từ 1984; Phan Đại Đoàn 1992). Each village has separate farmland with clear boundaries (Nguyễn Tùng 1997). Land ownership is allocated to only those who have full village membership, but not others, including those who lived in the village for years without a recognized legal registration. That is the discrimination between the “chính cư” (full
membership) and “ngu cứu” (secondary membership) which used to be a very popular trend in any Viet village before the 1954 (Trần Từ 1984; Phan Đại Đoạn 1992). Each village often has one village market for the domestic exchange of daily accessories and agricultural surplus products. The State imposes taxes on each village, and the village’s administration is responsible for collecting this tax and does so by imposing a tax on each household (Trần Từ 1984; Viện Sử Học 1979).

Overall, Viet villages generally have the following features:

1. A stable residential unit with identifiable boundaries
2. A community consisting of several kinship groups
3. Possessing a stable farming land area that has a dominant role of subsistence agricultural production, which explains why villages in Vietnam have been typically associated with the rural world and with farmers.
4. There are some non-farming villages, but this number is not very significant.
5. A distinctive cultural community that is easily differentiated from other villages.

The question of when Viet villages with all above features first appeared has not yet been satisfactorily answered. We also do not know what villages looked like prior to the 10th century because of the limitations of historical records. Phan Đại Đoạn (1992) makes a presumption that villages (làng) were not established prior to the 10th but that instead there were simply blood-based organizations comprised of households comprised of blood and affinal relations living together on the same area. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Quang Ngọc (2009, 51) believes that not until the Lý dynasty (1010-1225) do villages appear and this comes from “the demand of administrative management of local government.” On the other the hand Yu (2000) proposes it was not until the Trần dynasty at the latest (1225-1400) that
villages appear and overlap with communes. Yu’s point of view is supported by information from a historical source, the Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư, as the term village appears more often in the book\(^9\) (Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, Ngô Sĩ Liên 1993). During the 15\(^{th}\) century, the words, **huông, giáp, phuông, trái, đồng, sách**, and **xã** (all have similar meaning as **làng**), were more common than the term **làng** (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009).

The phrase “**làng nước**” which literally means village-nation, is one of the most common concepts in Vietnam that is spoken daily. In a scholarly sense, this phrase provides insight into another popular way to talk about villages and nationality. This is different from Chin, where family but not villages often go with nation to make up a general term when talking about nationality: “**Quốc gia**” literally means country-family (Trần Quốc Vương 2005; Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006). Meanwhile, **làng xá** (village-commune) and **thôn làng or xóm làng** (village-hamlet) are also popular terms in Vietnamese culture, and are often used when one talks about villages in general. As explained in the previous section, **làng** and **thôn** have the same meaning, and they are used differently from time to time, from places to places, while **xóm** is often one part of a **làng** or a **thôn** (Trần Từ 1984). This combination of village with nation signals a special relation between villages as the most local of communities and with the nation as a much more complex society.

This is further manifested through a number of proverbs talking about the relationship between the State and villages in Vietnam such as: “**Lệ làng, phép nước**” or “The Village’s custom, the State’s law.” Another phrase is: “**Phép vua thu hạ lệ làng**” or “The King’s law stops at the village gate).” Further: “**Đất có lề, quê có théo**” or “The land has territory”. The countryside has customs” and “**Nhập gia tùy tục**” or “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Finally: “**Có làng mới có nước**” or “There is no State without villages.” These proverbs reflect the fact that villages though under political control of the

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\(^9\) This book is written by various historians including Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Phu Tiên, and Ngô Sĩ Liên. It is unclear when the book was written. It’s appearance is estimated during 1272 – 1697 under Sino-Vietnamese language, then translated and published by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences in 1993.
State, are quite independent from the State, and they remain highly autonomous. This has been proven in a number of previous studies (Trần Từ 1984; Phan Đại Doãn 1992; Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009).

Prior to 1945, in relation to the State, Lang had to fulfill three important assignments: tax collection, labor service and military service (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). Productive land tax and individual tax are two principal types of taxes. These taxes were imposed on each village based on total land area and the male population as declared by the village government. Village leaders were responsible for collecting these taxes. Meanwhile, every adult in the village had to fulfill a certain number of workloads annually. This service was compulsory, and often took each person several days of duty to maintain irrigation systems, public roads or regional dykes. Exemptions were given to the village leaders, the elderly and those who had passed regional or national exams and were recognized as intellectuals. Others who did not want to do this work were expected to pay cash to the government. Overall, the self-management and independence of Viet villages was quite strong regardless of the fact that feudal regimes and later the French attempted to impose their outside control (Phan Đại Doãn 1992).

**Traditional Landscape of the Viet Village**

A Viet village’s landscape can be divided into two categories: residential landscape and productive landscape. Green bamboo hedges mark the boundary between these two landscapes. Each village has its own rice field that separates it from other villages (Nguyễn Tùng 2003). Banyan trees, public water wells and village temples are the most prominent images of any Viet village, and they are symbolically intertwined and imprinted in Viet people’s minds through folk songs and proverbs. The banyan tree (give Vietnamese word here) represents a strong resistance, long life, and is believed to be where spirits and gods reside. In Buddhism, the banyan tree represents intelligence and truth acknowledgement of
the Buddha (Geary, Sayers and Amar 2012). As a country strongly influenced by Buddhism, this explains why banyan trees are often planted by village gates and nearby village temples when a new village is established. This is the way people want to express their hope about a prosperous and peaceful life that the trees’ spirit will bring them.

A Viet village can be recognized from a distance thanks to “the dark color shaping by bamboo hedges…and a village is not just a cluster of houses but of green curtains” (Gourou 2015, 225). Green bamboo hedges with sharp thorns are also an important symbol of Viet villages, especially those in the Red River Delta, and are planted around the village to prevent outsiders from entering. In the Red River Delta region, bamboo hedges encircle the residential spaces and are symbolic of Viet villages and their corporate autonomy (Lundberg 2005). Bamboo hedges also mark boundaries between the two landscapes (production and residential) that construct a Viet village (Nguyễn Tùng 2003). Therefore, customary laws have historically imposed very serious punishments to those who cut down a tree or even a branch of these hedges. In the most serious of cases the convicted person may be exiled from the village, and this is the highest punishment that one may receive (Gourou 2015).

To enter a village, one has to go through village gates. There are often several gates, one in each direction. The gateways are built of brick with thick wooden doors that are locked after midnight and are secured by village guards who are always village adult men (Trần Từ 1984; Viện Sử học 1979). Passing through a gate, visitors will enter the village main roads that lead to small and narrow alleys. Alongside main roads are often ponds that are either natural or man-made (Gourou 2015). Ponds are often created as a result of road construction in the village since people have to dig for land to build roads (Nguyen Tung 2003). Village ponds become reservoirs during the rainy season, and people often wash grasses cut from the rice field before bringing them home to feed their cattle.
Water fern is often floated in village ponds, which become the daily food for villagers’ pigs. Villagers often plant bamboo around their pond as a means of preventing land erosion as well as in order to mark their land from that of the others. On the other hand, locating the village ponds alongside the village’s main roads has the security function that any intruders shall be easily recognized (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009). Road systems in a village are often very well connected and complicated for outsiders, and this is another advantage for security and defense (Gourou 2015; Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009).

Traditional Viet houses in the North are small and low, built by mixture of mud and bamboo trees, roofed by thatch or palm leaves (Gourou 2015; Toan Ánh 1992). Similarly, it is estimated that 95% of houses in the Mekong Delta region are made of plant material (Hickey 1964). The two most popular timber trees used in housing are China-tree (xoan) and bamboo (tre). Houses often face to the south because it is believed that this offers protection from the heat, brings cool wind and fresh air in summer, and keeps the inside warm in the winter. This belief is expressed in a very popular proverb: “Lấy vợ hiền hòa, làm nhà hướng Nam” or “The best wife is the one with virtuousness, the best direction for a house is the South,” and is observed in numerous villages (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006).

A house typically consists of three to four small open sections with one chamber. The ancestor worship altar is always placed on the wall in the central area of the house, and often faces the main door. One or two beds for family members are often placed on the two sides of the altar, and the chamber is always reserved for young couples. Kitchen and toilet are always built separately from the house with a distance that could prevent fire (from kitchen) and bad smell (from toilet). Viet traditional houses are often low with average height of 1.80 m from floor to top roof, and have no windows therefore indoor light is rather weak (Nguyễn Tùng 2003).
Houses are always surrounded by home gardens with plenty of timber trees, fruit trees, herb trees, vegetable and flowers. Typical distribution of a Viet rural home garden is often organized into three different layers. The first layer is marked by circle bushes that take role as fences bordering one’s land from that of the others. Surrounding bushes often consist of different plants such as Dâm Bụt (rose-mallow) or Đinh Lăng (Polyscias fruticosa). These plants are edible, spicy or for health care. As these plants are easy to plant, people could replace them with new species in accordance with each season. The second layer is often for fruit trees including longan, jackfruit, star fruit, guava, and pomelo or water lemon. The lifetime of these plants is often for years, and they are not replaced unless they provide no more fruit. In the center of the garden, it is also common to see a small fish pond where people raise fish and water fern, both mainly for domestic consumption. Home gardens, including fish ponds, take a significant role in the household economy of Viet people, and the elderly are often the ones who take care of, manage, and benefit from home gardens (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2010). There is commonly a bamboo hedge in the southeast corner of a garden, which helps to prevent sunlight in summer and cold wind in winter. Bamboo is kind of a “saving fortune” as it will be cut down for house construction once grown up. It is also material for making basket, hand fan or other facilities (Trần Từ 1984).

A village always consists of two areas: living area and paddy field. The former often takes up about 7.5% of total village land area and the rest is for the latter (Nguyễn Tùng 2003). In living area, each village is comprised about 3-4 Xóm (hamlets) that are a cluster of a dozen households. Xóm is often the living area of one or two kinship units living next to each other along several Ngô (Alley). Each Xóm often has a giếng nước (public water well), which is built, maintained and shared by people within Xóm only. No matter how many Xóm there are, there is always a Đinh (village temple or community
house) in each village. This is the place where people worship the village’s god and where the village court works. It is also for public meetings, spiritual practices, and ceremonial celebrations (Gourou 2015; Trần Từ 1984). The Buddhist pagoda is another popular image of every Viet village, and some villages may have two rather than just one. While the village temple is mostly the place for men, the village pagoda is more associated with women, especially married women (Trần Từ 1984). Additionally, there are often shrines at the entry of each alley as a spiritual house of the dead or land god (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009). The rice paddy field in most cases lie alongside the living area, and are managed by village governors. Productive land allocation is partly distributed to every recognized member who fully obliges assigned duties to the village, and partly for lease to collect tax for public spending (Trần Từ, 1984; Viện Sử học 1999).

The above descriptions may not necessarily represent every Viet village in the country because of the typological complexity mentioned earlier. Rather, they are more about the ones in Red River Delta region.

The Elderly

Vietnamese society holds certain regard for the elderly. Sayings such as “respect the elderly, love children” (trọng xỉ, trọng ấu) express a distinctive value in Viet traditional society (Trần Từ 1984; Bùi Xuân Đính 1987). There are plenty of proverbs about high appreciation for the elderly, including “ask the elderly before leaving home, care for the children when returning home” (Di hỏi già, về nhà hỏi trẻ). There are also certain mandates of power toward the elderly. Beside political power (vương quyền) and spiritual power (thần quyền), “age power” (lão quyền) is an important form of power in Vietnam (Bùi Xuân Đính 1987). Another common proverb is: “the central government values political status, while villages value age” (triều định trọng tước, làng nước trọng xỉ) (Nguyễn Đức Nghinh 1978). Their power is practiced at the family level where the elderly
often have the final voice in important decisions such as weddings and house construction. At the community level, they are given certain privileges such as respectable seats in the village temple or being exempt from the head tax (Trần Từ 1984). This attitude toward age derives from the perception that the older one is, the more knowledge one has. We can see this defined in the following lines which are attributed to the Chinese philosopher Confucius:

- Independence at the age of 30,
- One cannot be cheated at the age of 40,
- One can foresee things at the age of 50,
- One can fully understand things at the age of 60
- One reaches the perfect age at 70.10

There is other historical evidence to show the respectable position of the elderly in Viet traditional society. During the Ly Dynasty (1010-1225) and the Le Dynasty (1427-1789), laws allowed the elderly to pay for certain crimes (Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ 1978). During the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) in the year 1287, the emperor invited representatives of the elderly from the whole country to take part in a meeting in the kingdom’s capital. The goal of the meeting was to determine whether the country should declare a war against the Chinese or accept their colonization. At this time, the Mongols ruled China as the Yuan Dynasty. Apparently, all the representatives voted for a war. Modern Vietnamese historians have analyzed this as a unique event in Vietnam’s feudal history when common people were asked to take part in such important decisions (Hà Văn Tân, Phạm Thị Tâm 1975). This event signaled a high agreement between central government and local people, and led to three great victories against the Mongolian Chinese regime.

10 These are from Confucius (Kongzi). In Vietnamese: Tam thập nhi lập / Tứ thập nhi bất hoặc / Ngũ thập nhi tri thiên mệnh / Lục thập nhi nhĩ thuận / Thất thập nhi tuồng sở dụng bất du cử
In traditional Viet villages, villagers were typically classified into six different groups including: nobles (chức sắc), servant (chức dịch), intellectual (thí khóa sinh), the elderly (hàng lão), the labor age (hàng đinh) and the children (ti ấu). Three among these six groups are classified by age and the elderly is the most respectable (Trần Tử 1984). Appreciation toward the elderly in Viet society is furthermore seen as a distinctive feature of this agricultural society in which farming experience is highly valued.

The position of the elderly in modern Vietnam is also very high. Article 64 of the 1992 Constitution states: “Children have an obligation to respect and to take care of their parents and grandparents”. The Vietnam Association for the Elderly (Hội người cao tuổi) has been established from the national to the commune level. The national day for the elderly was first celebrated in Vietnam on June 6th, 1941. It has become a tradition that celebrations are held for the elderly of 70 years and above. Vietnam’s national government passed a law in 2009 to protect the elderly. The law assures that the elderly receive necessary care from family members and from society. The law reserves special care including financial allowance and health care for the elderly who live alone, or who are recognized as impoverished.

Currently, according to a law passed in 2000, the elderly are officially defined as those who are 60 years or older (Pháp Lệnh Người Cao Tuổi ở Việt Nam số 23/2000/PL-UBTVQH.). This is also applied to the retirement age for men. It is 55 years old for women. Between 1979 and 2009, the percentage of the population that is elderly increased from 6.9% to 9% (General Statistic Office 2009). As estimated in a national population investigation in 2010, 10% of the country’s population will be 60 years old or older by 2017 (GSO 2010). Outmigration of young people is one of the key reasons why less and less elderly live with their children, and most of the elderly live in rural areas (See map

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11 See more at the association webpage at: http://hoinguoicaotuoi.vn/p/gioi-thieu-2.htm
12 General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO)
below). About 43% of the elderly are still working in the farming sector with low and unstable income. It is reported that living conditions of the elderly have improved with increasing rates of access to clean water, electricity, health care and shelter. However, more elderly may not be able to access clean water in some rural areas. By the end of 2009, there are about 1.9 million elderly (22% of total elderly population) living on pension, while 1.7% have no income source and their allowance comes from the State (United Nations Population Fund 2011).

**Figure 1: Elderly distribution by province, 2009**

The Vietnam Association for the Elderly of Viet Hung commune was established in 1995 and had 1,220 members. This is the lowest level of an umbrella organization that includes national to provincial, district and commune levels. This national association for the elderly is recognized and funded by the government. Its principal mission is to create a space for the elderly to entertain and to communicate with each other.
“Our village is three times bigger than that of Co Loa village” (Popular saying in Đức Nội Village)\textsuperscript{13}

The Village

This chapter provides brief descriptions of Đức Nội Village’s landscape during the 1980s in general, and the three identified landscapes in particular. As seen in many previous studies on Viet villages, one of the most challenging obstacles that researchers have had to overcome is the lack of written historical records (Nguyễn Tùng 2003; Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). Researchers are commonly dependent on the “Spirit Book” (thần phả), stone stele (bia) and occasionally on brief descriptions in historical records. Though detailed descriptions about the village in history and aerial maps from the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and the 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries are unavailable some brief information could be drawn from the “History of Communist Party in Việt Hưng Commune\textsuperscript{14}” publication. As the time period of this study is from 1986 onward, most people who are today 60 years old or older could still recall their village landscape during the 1980s. Meanwhile, to crosscheck for general agreement among the informants, responses from earlier informant are checked with the latter and so on.

Like many other Viet villages, besides its official name as Đức Nội, the village also has a Sino-Vietnamese name by which it is widely known in the region: Dộc Village. In Vietnamese, the word Dộc refers to a lowland area. This name is widely used in daily conversation. Today there are a number of rice field areas in the village territory that have names that begin with the letter “d” including: Dộc Cầm (Bird Area), Dộc Đá (Lowland

\textsuperscript{13} The Vietnamese phrase is: “Ba làng Đức Nội, Chín làng Cổ Loa”
\textsuperscript{14} Lịch sử Đảng bộ xã Việt Hưng
area with many Rocks). However, in comparison with neighboring villages, Dục Nội Village’s topography is higher than those of the others. This brings us to another interpretation for the village’s casual name: Độc originates from Dộc, which describes the long but narrow shape of the village. Dộc in this context means “snake” and local people confirm that this best describes the shape of the village.

The village consists of three hamlets including: Đoài (the West), Trung (the Middle) and Đông (the East). Đoài Hamlet is considered as the head of the snake or the oldest brother, meanwhile Trung Hamlet is the body or second brother and Đông is the tail or the youngest. This metaphor helps to make a theory of the village’s establishment history. That is, Đoài Hamlet might have been the first settlement site, and the living area was gradually expanded to include Trung and Đông Hamlets in the following years. It is quite common in Viet society that the original residents are often given higher positions than those later arrivals from neighboring villages such as Dục Nội neighboring village- Quẩy Village. Historically, the ancestors of Quẩy Village lived in Cổ Loa Village. When King An Dương Vương (257-207 BC) built a citadel at Cổ Loa Village, villagers were asked to move and resettle in Quẩy village. For donating their land and their willingness to move for the sake of the citadel, they were named as older brother to the remaining people in Cổ Loa Village. Every year, at the Cổ Loa festival, people in Quẩy village are invited to initiate the opening ceremony and the most respectful positions are reserved for them in festival parties (Trần Quốc Vương 2005).

The question of when Dúc Nội Village was established has been the subject of many studies. The answer is unknown due to insufficient written historical records as mentioned previously (Phan Đại Đoàn 1992; Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). According to legend and the village’s sacred genealogy,¹⁵ the village’s earliest name was Cổ Văn Trang

¹⁵ This is the book that records stories about various gods worshiped in village temples. The book is anonymous.
and was an area where the soldiers of King An Dương Vương lived. Cổ Vân Trang was
adjacent to Cổ Loa citadel, the kingdom of King An Dương Vương, and consisted of eight
different satellite villages: Độc Vọng, Động Đá, Độc Cậu, Độc Cút, Độc Heo, Độc Sanh,
Động Trong and Độc Nội. When King An Dương Vương assigned his people to construct
the citadel, Độc Nội was moved to the present position. Độc Nội was the most populous
village, and was renamed by Dục Nội in the Lê Dynasty (1428 - 1788). The reliability of
this source is questionable since there are no other historical records of this period.
However, there is clear evidence about the existence of the village since the Dinh Dynasty
(970-980 AD) because it was reported in the Complete Annals of Dai Viet (Đại Việt Sử Ký
Toàn Thư)\textsuperscript{16}- one of the oldest historical books during feudal regimes.

The village territory is quite large in comparison with surrounding villages, and this
is indicated in a very popular folk song quoted at the beginning of this chapter: “Dục Nội
Village is three times larger than Cổ Loa village.” Like many other Viet villages, the
village’s paddy fields lie alongside living areas, stretching from the west to the east with
total length about one kilometer. The field is divided into three areas based on
geographical characteristics: Đồng Chiêm (winter crop land) that takes up about 30% of
total productive land area, and lies in the outer territory of the field. This area creates a
curve from the west to the east, and borders with two surrounding villages including Lỗ
Giao and Quậy villages. Topography of the area is quite low, often flooded in rainy season,
so as is just for one rice crop. Taking up about 50% of total farming land, Đồng Mâu (multi
crop land) is located in the central of the field. Besides two annual rice crops, people often
have additional crops in between, such as sweet potato, maize or ground nut. Đồng Báỉ-
the highest area takes up about 20% and it is often in drought with infertile land. Separated
from paddy field by living area, Đồng Báỉ creates a curve stretching from the south to

\textsuperscript{16} Dai Viet is one of the old names of Vietnam during feudal period.
southeast and it is suitable for just perennial plants such as cassava, tea or canari (see Appendix 5 for list of plants in Vietnamese with the English common name). A vast area of Đồng Bái was acquired in 1967 for the construction of Cố Loa railway station, and the approximately three remaining hectares were turned into farming land.

The village’s topography is high from the south and becomes lower and lower in the north. During feudal times, the village was in Đông Ngan District, which could be literally translated as Eastern Forest. The village was surrounded by primary forest from the northwest, by a huge swamp from the north and by Hoàng Hà River from the south. The remains of the river is a long canal system that starts from Cố Loa (in the South from the village), stretches through Đức Tú (east from the village) and reaches to further northeastern villages in Bắc Ninh province.

Though there are no detailed records about the presence of forest land in the east of the village in history, its remains could be found from the presence of a large quantity of peat in a big lake which was about one kilometer from the village to the northeast. Just about 20 years ago, villagers used to collect peat for home fuel, and this source became just scarce after several years under exploitation. This is evidence of the existence of past forest that had been buried because of geological changes that occurred thousand years ago as geographers argue (Lê Bá Thảo 1997). Low topography with various lakes and swamps lying as a curve from the north to the east makes the northeastern area of the village quite empty and wild until early 1990 when a cross-village road was upgraded. By the early 20th century, the southern area of the village was covered by canari, and the area must have been quite large as people used to call this area as canari forest. However, this area was cleared in 1967 for the construction of a railway station.

The village used to have 12 entrance gates according to elderly interviewees’ recollections. Having been destroyed by wars, humans and time there is only one
remaining gate in the west of the village at the present. Like many other Viet villages, two layers of fence protected the village with thick bamboo hedges as the first wall that separated living areas from farming lands, and deep canal systems that were constructed right behind the bamboo hedges. Road systems inside the village were well connected and made outsiders get lost easily. Bombings from 1966 to 1972 during the American War destroyed many houses and created various small lakes and ponds throughout the village, especially alongside the village main road. Many interviewees recalled “there were ponds almost everywhere in the village. After the war, people began planting water-fern in these ponds to feed to their pigs. To prevent land erosion and to protect children from drowning, people also began planting bamboo around each pond. These ponds and bamboo hedges began replacing the living spaces of many families, which explains why there used to be many ponds inside the village. On the other the hand, the bombings also destroyed the village pagoda in Trung Hamlet and the village temple in Đoài Hamlet. The reconstruction of these two religious centers was not carried out until the early 1980s.

The village had two temples and two Buddhist pagodas. This is quite unique because each Viet village usually had only one temple (Đình) and one pagoda (Chùa). Due to the lack of written records, it has been impossible to explain why two village temples and two pagodas existed in the village. From local people’s explanations, this unusual situation derives from the fact that the village was too big in terms of both area and population. A decision was made that two adjacent hamlets would share either a temple or a pagoda. Trung Hamlet Temple (Đình Trung) was the common property of people from Trung and Dong Hamlets, while people from Dong Hamlet had a separate Buddhist pagoda called Dong Pagoda (Phúc Hương Tự). Similarly, people in Trung

17 The bombing of December 26, 1972 alone killed 53 persons, destroyed hundreds houses, Doan Temple and the village clinic. This is recorded in the commune’s archive.
18 People worship village founders and heroes in temples while people practice Buddhism in pagodas. See Appendix 6.
Hamlet shared Trung Pagoda (Chùa Kiến Dương) with people from Đoài Hamlet, and people from the latter had their own temple (Dình Đoài). Under this arrangement, people from Trung Hamlet did not have either a separate temple or pagoda as they shared with the two adjacent hamlets, one from the west and one from the east.

Trung Temple (Dình Trung) was built during the early Lê Dynasty and was one of the biggest community houses in the region as people recalled. The house was destroyed in 1949 during the war with the French and has since been replaced with the office of the Commune People’s Committee. While Trung Temple was completely destroyed and left no remains, Đoài Temple is still maintained in the same place. It was damaged significantly during the American War but was repaired in 1992 with money donated by the villagers. Dong Pagoda was built around the 17th century with an area of approximately 6,000 square meters and was located right in the center of Đông Hamlet. The pagoda was surrounded by orchard and built of brick and roofed with thatch. In 1999, the pagoda was recognized as a historical relic by the Hanoi People’s Committee. Trung Pagoda was originally built in 1710, heavily damaged by bombing in 1972 and reconstructed in the late 1980s.

Besides the above two village temples and village pagodas, there were many other places which were considered as sacred by local villagers. Sacred places were the ones that brought either fearful or respectful feelings. These places were scattered throughout the village. They could be home temples, a vacant lot, and border areas between villages, ponds where someone had drowned or old trees. According to my interviewees, there were fourteen places that were considered sacred. These places could be grouped into three different categories including historical and spiritual places, boundary places, and

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19 These different temples have different purposes, and thus different words. The word Dình refers to a village temple with a village spirit. The word Chùa refers specifically to a Buddhist pagoda.
production places. Meanwhile urban villager interviewees listed only five sacred places. I will discuss a detailed comparison later in this chapter.

Today, Dực Nội Village is one of four villages in Việt Hưng Commune, Đông Anh District. The village is about 25 kilometers to the northeast of central Hanoi, and is recognized as a peri-urban area that is separated from the city by the Red River (Sông Hồng). From Hanoi there are two routes that can be used to approach the village. The first alternative is to cross the river on the Chương Dương Bridge or the Long Biên Bridge, which are parallel to each other. If travelling by bicycle or motorbike people cross Long Biên Bridge, which was built by the French from 1898 to 1902. Meanwhile, cars must go by Chương Dương Bridge, which was built during from 1983 to 1986. Crossing the bridges, after about 30 minutes driving one will approach the village from the southeast. Hoàng Hà River is a large canal that goes alongside a small and curved road that connects the National Highway 3 and Dực Nội Village. As one enters Việt Hưng Commune, high land belts where people plant cassava and other perennial trees are on the left side about 100 meters from the road. Cổ Loa Citadel’s walls become apparent. On the right is a field with an estimated area of two hectares where people in Dong Hamlet plant dry crops such as groundnuts, maize or bean.

The second route is to cross Thăng Long Bridge, which was constructed during 1974-1985 with technical support from engineers from the former Soviet Union. Right after crossing the bridge, take the right turn to a small road that connects Nội Bài Highway to National Highway 3. The road is about six kilometers, and it lies between paddy fields. The distance between Highway No. 3 and the village is about another six kilometers, and road condition is quite good. By this way, the village is approached from the west and one will see the only remaining village gate which is built by brick and quite small. If it were about 20 years ago, by either way, visitors would see a green wall of bamboo hedges from
the distance. This green wall stretches around the village, and creates a typical landscape that could be observed in any other Viet villages in the Red River Delta region as described elsewhere (Gourou 1936; Nguyễn Tùng 2003).

Revisiting the Past 20

After the victory against the French in the War of Independence in 1954, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam proceeded with land reforms and redistribution. Farming land was allocated to each individual household following a relatively equitable manner. However in late 1950 the collectivization of farming came, and people had to hand in their farming land to create collective farms. From the late 1950s to 1988, cooperatives were set up in the rural regions of Vietnam. These cooperatives consisted of several production teams (Đội sản xuất) that included 40-100 people each. People worked for their cooperatives (Hợp tác xã) and their performance was measured by number of working days (Ravallion and Walle 2008). They were paid in units of farming output in accordance with their invested labor. Cooperatives were responsible for farming work arrangement including farming input, labor arrangement, crediting their members’ work and handed in remaining farming output to the State. Health care and education were free and the State provided other goods to people equivalent with what they contributed (Viện Sử học 1999).

This economic picture of rural Vietnam and especially of Viet villages was stagnant and undeveloped during this period because people were not motivated to work and crop productivity was quite low (Ravallion and Walle 2008). Socio-economic stratification among rural villagers rose during this period and farming was the dominant economic activity. As the central government wanted to control all production industries, individual

20 This term is borrowed from John Kleinen (2004)
business and service were discouraged. People just worked for the State, and received their basic needs in correspondence to their contributions (Ravallion and Walle 2008).

Dực Nội Village was not exceptional in this regard. People in the village were divided into ten brigades and food shortages were a serious problem in the 1970s and 1980s because of the American War and a serious flood in 1981. As people recalled, they did not have enough rice, and had to eat whatever foods they could find including those that were hard to eat or normally fed to animals including banana roots, baby jackfruit or they had to eat cassava, potato or sweet potato as a daily meal. People worked in cooperatives and there was no significant difference among them in terms of farming income since they were paid in farming output based on working hours. Other than that, goods such as salts, sugar or daily facilities were provided by the State through local department stores. The only minor difference if any was between those who had worked a lot and those who worked less.

Village Market

Prior to 1986, rural markets had very important roles in villagers’ lives because these were the only places where they could sell or buy necessary goods, and most of these were from either the field or home gardens. Each village had a market that maintained connections with the surrounding markets. This connection was maintained by the rotation of market day among neighboring villages (Nguyễn Đức Nghiñh and Trần Thị Hòa 1995). This is similar to the situation of Dực Nội Village during the pre-Đổi Mới period. As local people recall, the most popular goods that seasonally sold at village market were the items gathered from their home garden or from the field. Though income from the sale was not very significant since it was just occasional and just enough for buying some cheap non-farm products for their lives such as fish sauce, salt, and gasoline, it was especially meaningful for the elderly because it was their only income. They could make savings
from selling fruits on their garden, and use that savings to buy gifts for their grandchildren, or to buy whatsoever they wanted.

Prior to 1986 Doc market was located alongside the village main road, around bordering area between Trung and Đong Hamlet which was most accessible for all villagers. From what the villagers recall, there was not much to sell or to buy here: just some local fruits or vegetables; some fishes, shrimps or eels caught from the field; or some chicken eggs or very seldom a chicken. The village market was also where people seek emergency cash in case they could not make a loan from their relatives or friends by selling whatsoever valuable they had.

Độc village’s market opened every five days that started on the 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th and 25th in a month. In these days, not only the villagers, but also outside villagers came to join the business. This was rotated from village to village in the region under way that ensured there was always at least one market open every day. There was a popular song about regional market network that widely known in the region as below:

After Tó Market is Độc Market,
After Độc Market is Xa Market,
After Xa Market is Kim Market,
After Kim Market is Đâu Market,
After Đâu Market is Tó Market,
After Tó Market is Doc Market.

Thus, as reflected in the song above, all the regional markets were connected. While Doc Market referred to market day in Duc Noi Village, To, Xa, Kim and Dau were names of surrounding villages, and also names of market days. Distance among these villages was just several kilometers. This rotational market day was a smart arrangement of local people

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21 In Vietnamese: “Chợ Tó mở chợ Độc / Chợ Độc Cộc chợ Xa / Chợ Xa xã chợ Kim / Chợ Kim Kim chợ Đâu/Chợ Đâu cầu chợ Tó/Chợ Tó mở chợ Độc.”
as it ensured people could sell or buy necessary stuff almost every day, especially when people wanted to sell farming products which could be ruined in couple of days.

**Housing**

Owning a house was one of the three most important things in one man’s life in Vietnamese people’s perception. That was to have water buffaloes, to get married and to build a house for one’s own. These were also the three most difficult challenges that a man had to overcome as indicated in popular proverbs: “buying water buffaloes, getting married and building house; these are all three difficult things in one’s life” (Tậu trâu, lấy vợ, làm nhà; Trong ba việc ấy ắt là khó lo).

As both local villagers and urban villagers recalled, a house during the 1980s was therefore not just a shelter, but also a symbol of adulthood, prosperity and success. Brick houses were signs of the wealthy and upper class, while thatch houses were indications of poverty or landlessness (Gourou 2015). Brick houses with brick-paved playgrounds in front of the house, with high brick walls surrounding for the landlords, the rich or the local cadres, and this was widely described in many classical novels such as Tắt Đèn (Light out written by Ngô Tất Tố), Chí Phèo (Orphan man, written by Nam Cao), Đôi Mắt (Two eyes written by Nam Cao) or Cai San Gach (Brick Ground written by Đoàn Bổng). Ceremonies were always celebrated when a new house was started building (Lễ động thổ), or completed (Lễ mừng nhà mới). It was common in Viet society in rural world that every unmarried man lived with their parents or older brother’s family until they got married. Not until when he had his own family did he move out and lived on a separate house. If a wedding marked the transition from single into married status, leaving parents’ house to set up post married life in a new house was evidence of independence and maturity. Parents used to celebrate a “separating life” ceremony (Lễ gia ở riêng) for a young couple to report to ancestors that their children had been grown up, and they had fulfilled responsibility in
raising them and it was time for them to be independent. This ceremony was often
celebrated after the young couple had a house for themselves (Trần Từ 1984).

Such important indications of having a house made people prepare for house
construction quite early, often long before they got married. A long-term preparation plan
was necessary for most of the rural people because they were often poor, and incapable of
having sufficient materials for house construction in a short period of time (Trần Từ 1984).
Saving plans were arranged under various forms including land allocation, bamboo or
China-tree (or sapele) planting; brick and tile making. In families where there was more
than one son, current residential land was often divided into portions for each son, or the
parents had to buy separate land in case their available land was too small. They used to
plant bamboo and other timber trees in the home garden as way of preparing materials for
future houses. Similarly, brick and tile making was often arranged after crop time, and
people used to make brick and tile right in their home garden. This practice, at the same
time, helped to create fishponds as people had to dig deeply to seek clay to make brick and
tile. Such preparation was continuously pursued, and normally people had almost all the
necessary material when a son was about to get married and about to separate from the big
family. What they mainly needed was just to ask relatives and friends to come and help
with labor. A similar plan was repeated for the other sons, if any. The house was therefore
made possible with efforts from all family members, and each contributed differently
depending on available capacities: the elderly planted timber trees and maintained home
livestock for cash savings; the young made brick and tile; children took care of cattle after
school time.

Most of the houses in the village look southward as this is considered the best
direction in Viet perception manifested in a popular proverb: “one should marry a virtuous
wife, and to place his house southward” (Lấy vợ hiền hòa, làm nhà hướng nam). Facing the
south makes the house and indoor atmosphere cool in summer thanks to southeastern wind, and keeps the indoor temperature warm as it helps to avoid chilly wind from the north in winter (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006). Furthermore, houses are often built in the center of the land surrounded by the home garden. This arrangement protects houses from strong wind, storm, heavy rain or sunlight by timber trees in the garden. Houses were typically built to be low, about 2.7 meters, in order to protect their house’s roofs from being blown away during hurricane time (Nguyễn Khắc Tùng 2002; Nguyễn Tùng 2003).

Each house typically has at least two entrance doors, one in the middle and one on the left side. Entering the middle door, visitors see an altar for ancestor worship on the wall, about 1.6 meters from the floor. A small tea table with some bamboo chairs is placed in front of the altar, right in the middle of the house. This is where hosts receive guests. A small bed is placed on each side from the middle space, next to a window and looking back to the home garden through small windows. This is where unmarried family members sleep. There is often an enclosed bedroom for married couple or for the elderly in case their children are not yet married (Trần Từ 1984).

Forty years ago, if one paid a visit to Dục Nội Village, one would see only three most popular types of house: brick houses (nhà gạch), tile houses (nhà ngói) and thatch houses (nhà tranh). Brick houses or tile houses were solid and built of brick with a timber frame and tile roof (see Appendix 4). The walls of thatch houses were made of a mixture of mud and thin bamboo. According to interviewees, by the early 1970s about 70% of households in the village had thatch houses. Of the 72 local interviewees only nine had brick houses at that time. Fifty-six houses looked southward, eight looked southeast, five looked northward and three looked westward. Those whose homes did not look to the south were those who had no way to look southward because their land position made either the north or the west the only possible direction to face.
Each housing type is correlated with the owners’ wealth and status. All of the 38 householders who owned thatch houses were farmers with no supplemental income besides farming. Among the nine better-off householders, three had inherited their houses from their parents who were landlords and the other six had income from non-farming jobs including carpentry, tailor and transportation services. Thatch houses were often small with an average indoor area of less than 40 square meters, while a brick house was usually about 20 square meters larger. Each house often had three open chambers in the middle and one or two closets on each side of the house. The two closets were often separated from the three open chambers by a wall and a door, and one closet was for the youngest married couple, while the other was for the elderly. This arrangement was quite popular, and as the people interpreted, it provided the best comfort for the elderly through various forms described as the following.

First, the structure of the houses allowed the elderly to be actively involved and gave them maximum accessibility. As described previously, houses were often made of brick, thatch and tile. These materials were locally available, and the elderly had an important role in preparing most of them. With the exception of brick, which was more often made by young people, the elderly planted timber trees and bamboo in their home gardens, and they were the ones who took care of the trees from the early days to harvest time. The active participation of the elderly gave them the power to decide what to use, when to build the house or how their houses should look like, which is not the case today.

On the other the hand, facing houses southward made the elderly and all occupants of the home the most comfortable as it kept the indoor air not too hot or cold and the low height of houses (less than 3 meters) mitigated the negative impacts from sudden wind and sudden weather changes which were not good for the elderly. The structure of houses created no private spaces, and all spaces were on the same ground for convenient use for
the elderly. Furthermore, the indoor open spaces of the house encouraged an active interaction between the elderly and other family members. With exception of one or two compartment for married couple, all other parts of a Viet house were open and well connected with each other. In a traditional Vietnamese village home, there was no concept of bedroom, dining room or living room. The table placed in the middle of a house was where villagers hosted guests with tea and could also be where the family ate meals. Two beds on each side were sleeping spaces, but could be also used as “party tables” when the family organized ceremonies. The multi-functionality of indoor spaces maintained no boundary from one section to the others, and therefore allowed air to move in and out easily so as keeps the indoor atmosphere fresh and clean. The compartments reserved for married couples or the elderly were also a place to store rice or other valuables. This was accessed through a small door covered by a cloth curtain. More importantly, this created a common ownership and at the same time shared responsibilities over such shared spaces including the ancestor worship altar and the tea table.

Second, the elderly in the household were mainly responsible for ancestor worship that was often arranged on the first or the 15th day of a month following the lunar calendar. Additionally, the elderly were important in making offerings for each death anniversary (ngày giỗ) that was annually held for important ancestors. These traditionally are held on the day the person passed away and the offerings were prepared depending on the economic conditions of each family. The poor might prepare a frugal ceremony among their own small family with just some rice and a chicken egg, while the rich could prepare quite a fancy banquet and invite their relatives and friends. In any case a small cup of wine and water with some betel and areca were considered by all to be mandatory offerings.22 Once all the necessary offerings were prepared, they would be placed in the altar and the

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22 Betel nut and Areca leaves are mixed with powdered lime and chewed as a mild stimulant. The custom is found throughout Vietnam.
oldest member of the family (almost always male) will burn some incense to invite their ancestors to enjoy the offerings. When the incense burned down completely, the offerings were brought down and the family enjoyed a feast together. In such ceremonies, each family member was responsible for certain tasks. The young were assigned to clean the altar; the women were in charge of cooking, the men acted as hosts to their guests (if any) while the elderly were in charge of the ceremony to invite the ancestors.

The way that homes were arranged made it easier for the elderly to be actively involved in the activities of the household. An example the placement of the ancestor altar right in the middle of the house and not very high from the floor allowed the elderly to easily practice their ritual worship. This tradition has been very popular in Vietnam for a long time, and it has also been called the reconstruction of “national cultural identity” (Bản sắc quốc gia) (Đặng Nghiêm Văn 1996). This activity was principally practiced by the elderly, and was only passed to the oldest son once the parents had passed away. Placing the altar in the middle of the home showed respect to the ancestors, and at the same time, made worshiping activities observable to every family member. The offerings were aimed not only to worship ancestors but also to educate young people about their family history.

Placing a tea table right in front of the altar was a way for people to maintain memories of their ancestors because they could “see and feel” their ancestors every day during tea time. This was also where they shared their family histories with friends and guests. The presence of the altar in the most observable position inside the house also prevented family members from doing wrong things since they believed the ancestors were watching and they wanted to make the ancestor proud and not ashamed. On the other hand, the older people were often the ones who carried deep nostalgia, especially when they retired from farming and spent most of their time at home. Altars thus provided an important connection between the past, present and future.
On the other hand, arrangements of the house, kitchen, bathroom and livestock cages also assured convenience and comfort, especially for the elderly. This was indicated in the distance and the position of these surrounding constructions and main house. Vietnamese traditional houses were always separated from the kitchen. This was to guard against fire, especially when houses were made of flammable materials such as thatch and when cooking fuels were often rice straw and firewood. Meanwhile, the kitchen was often built near water or wells so that any errant fires could be stamped out quickly. Livestock cages were placed far from the house right in the corner with the home garden. This arrangement not only provided safety from potential risk of fire, but also assured convenience for the elderly by keeping smoke or bad odors from the livestock away from them.

Third, Vietnamese traditional houses figure heavily into symbolic meanings not just as a shelter (Gourou 2015). In Vietnamese, the word for house (nhà) can also be a metaphor for either the wife or the husband and in daily conversation people often use this term to refer to his or her spouse. The word “nhà” expressed the status and tradition of a family as indicated in various terms which were spoken widely including: family identity (nép nhà), rich family and poor family (nhà giàu, nhà nghèo), good fortune family (nhà có phúc) and hierarchical family (nhà có tôn tì). Since it was also where people worshiped their ancestors as described above, it was the place where people believed spirits of their ancestors often visited. “Nhà” was the starting point for development as defined in another popular proverb: “everything starts with a house” (an cư mới lạc nghiệp). This explained the importance and necessity of having a house in one’s life. Being unable to build a house for their children before they get married was something that made the elderly feel guilty. The elderly therefore took a very important role in deciding when and where their houses would be built and what they would look like. For instance, the ground breaking day of
their house was often compatible with the oldest man’s age and he would be the one who made the first ground breaking. His age sometimes also determined length of the house (Gourou 2015).

**Home Gardens**

Home gardens were an important element that contributed to the complex landscape of rural residential space in Vietnam in general and especially in the Red River Delta region. All houses had small gardens surrounding them, which we call home gardens. The size of each home garden ranged from several hundred square meters at the least to several thousand square meters at the most (Gourou 2015; Nguyễn Tùng 2003). In daily language a garden always comes with a home, evidenced in popular expressions including: “house and garden” (nhà cửa, vườn tược) and “house, rice field and home garden” (nhà cửa, ruộng vườn).

Home gardens were important for many reasons. For Vietnamese villagers, home gardening was secondly important after aquaculture and before farming as indicated in a very popular proverb: “first aquaculture, second gardening and third, farming” (Nhất cảnh trì, nhì canh viên, tam canh điền). Though it was difficult to quantitatively measure the profits that a plot of home garden might bring, gardens offered multiple important functions and contributions to a household’s income. As described in the previous section, home gardens were the ground where people planted timber trees such as bamboo, jackfruit, and China-trees to build their future houses. They also planted fruit trees that brought them not only seasonal fruits, but also seasonal income. The elderly took care of their home garden and they often sold surplus fruits at the village market and used these earnings as their own allowance. Home gardens also provided people some popular medicinal and flavoring plants such as wormwood to cure when one catches a cold, the flowering vine piper lolot whose leaves were used in Vietnamese cuisine, polyscias
fruticosa (*Dinh Lăng*) for medicinal purposes (good for kidney, for instance), *pluchea indica* (*Cúc Tân*), grapefruit leaves (*Lá Bưởi*) and at the same time provided supplemental foods for pigs as people often planted sweet potato in the lower level under fruit trees. It also functioned as fences that marked one’s territory from that of the others as people often planted hibiscus or cockscmb on their land borderline.

The following table describes the 26 most popular species that represent for all different categories with their ascribed functions in the 72 home gardens during the 1980s:

**Table 1: The 26 Most Popular Species in the 72 home gardens**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Position in garden</th>
<th>Harvest/blossom cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Timber</td>
<td>Outer area</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Areca</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Jack fruit</td>
<td>Timber &amp; Fruit</td>
<td>Second layer</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Guava</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Second layer</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Grape fruit</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>China-tree</td>
<td>Timber</td>
<td>Outer area</td>
<td>7-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sapodilla</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Longan</td>
<td>Fruit &amp; Timber</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>5-7 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Plant Name</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Harvesting Season</td>
<td>Maturation Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Betel</td>
<td>Fruit and ritual</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Jujube</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Piper lolot</td>
<td>Spice</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Wormwood</td>
<td>Spice &amp; Herb</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>3-5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Lime</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Pluchea indica</td>
<td>Herb &amp; Food</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Purslane</td>
<td>Foods &amp; Herb</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Papaya</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Starfruit</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Longan</td>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Hibiscus syriacus</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Cook comb</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Outer</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Dyer’s weed</td>
<td>Herb</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 2011 Interviews)
Among the 72 interviewees, during the 1980s the largest home garden was about four sào\textsuperscript{23} (1,440 square meters), and the smallest one was about 200 square meters. These figures were recalled from interviewees’ memories and might be inaccurate. However, no matter how large a home garden was, people classified their plants into five specific categories: timber trees, fruit trees, herbal plants, spice plants and \textit{bonsai} ornamental trees. Some species could be classified into more than one category if its use overlapped. These included jackfruit, \textit{longan} (fruit trees and timber) or piper lolot (spice tree and herbal tree).

Each interviewee was asked to recall the names of every single plant in their garden in the 1980s. The results ranged from 32 species at least to 65 species at most.

As described in the table above, income from home gardens was maintained through four different seasons annually due to a high variety of different species. There was a common arrangement for each type of tree in terms of location. Timber trees, such as bamboo and China-trees were often planted in outer areas along the borders of each household territory. Among 72 informants, 35 confirmed that in the past there were bamboo hedges in their garden. Interestingly, they never planted bamboo next to their houses, in the middle of their garden, or opposite their house’s main door. This was, as people explained because of bamboo’s root structure would damage a house’s foundation if they were too close. Additionally, this was also to protect houses from potential damage during the storm season as trees could collapse or branches could fall down on the house. This explained why most people planted bamboo in the northeast corner (25 cases) or southeast corner (10 cases). These locations helped to prevent hot sunlight, strong rain or chilly wind, while still allowing fresh air for indoor atmosphere. The placement of timber trees in the outer space of a home garden was also due to the fact that these trees had long lifecycles, and it often took years to harvest. For instance, bamboo trees were only ready to

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\textsuperscript{23} Sào is a popular folk measurement unit in Vietnam. It the North, one Sào is 360 square meters, while it is 500 square meters and 1000 square meters in the Central and in the South respectively.
use for house construction after they reached ten years old, while jackfruit trees or China trees could be used after around five to seven years.

The middle area of home gardens was therefore reserved for fruit trees with shorter harvest times such as guava, sapodilla, apple, lemon, grapefruit or star fruit. It often cost just around two years for these trees to be able to provide an initial harvest. Different varieties of fruit trees provided people fruit throughout the year and people recalled that the harvested fruits were used three different ways: home consumption, gifts for friends or relatives and market products. Food shortages were common in the late 1970s and 1980s because of the American War and a massive flood in 1983. Thus people’s daily meals were so frugal that they did not even have enough rice to eat. As a villager I too experienced this. Under these circumstances, fruit from home gardens provided significant energy for family members, especially when most people did not have cash to buy good food. On the other hand, people often reserved the best and the earliest ripe fruits for their old members, relatives, neighbors and good friends. This practice went two ways, and indicated mutual interactions among rural villagers. This was the way they created relationship and maintained integration. In this context, home garden fruit was used as a kind of gift. This was especially meaningful when during these two decades most rural people had nothing to give or to receive since each was equally poor. The remaining fruit was sold at village or regional markets, and the elderly often took this responsibility. On the other hand, many kinds of fruit trees also provided timber for house construction including jackfruit and longan, or provided food for domesticated animals such as bananas.

Herbal trees and spice trees were often planted alongside garden fences. Piper lolot (lá lốt), perilla (tía tô) and wormwood (ngải cứu) were the three most popular species. The outstanding characteristic of these species was that they could be used in multiple ways as food, flavorings or medicine. For instance, people often fried wormwood with eggs or
steamed with baby chicken as special food for the sick. Wormwood could be also used to make “skin massage” when one caught a cold. It was boiled in a big pot, and the ill person would sit nearby and cover him and the pot with a thin blanket. Steam from the pot would help to refresh the respiratory system (he ho hap), and to unblock the skin so sweat would come out. Similarly, people often boiled roots of piper lolot and drank collected liquid to cure toothaches, hand or foot sweating. The leaves were squeezed to decant liquid for those who had been exhausted because of sunlight. Fresh piper lolot leaves were also edible and often used as spice or salad in daily meal. These leaves could be also added into some other food as spices.

Bonsai trees were often planted in the most inner space that was often next to the courtyard. Rose (Hoa Hồng), bougainvillea (Hoa Giấy), Tonkin jasmine (Hoa Thiên Lý) and roe-mallow or hibiscus syriacus (Hoa Dâm Bụt) were the most popular species in the 1980s. Interestingly, as people recalled, they did not often pick roses for home daily decoration, and just left flowers to blossom in their garden. However, during the full moon day or the first day of a month of the lunar calendar, the elderly might pick some branches and put them in a small jar on their ancestor altar for spiritual practice. As similar to some fruit trees that took multiple functions in providing fruit and timber, some bonsai trees were edible such as Tonkin jasmine or areca (Cây Cau). However, it was urban villagers, and not local villagers, who defined these species as bonsai trees. The former just simply called “flower trees” (Cây Hoa) because these trees flowered. Interviewed villagers explained that they planted these trees for their multiple uses including creating shade and preventing hot sunlight in summer or rain and strong wind in the rainy season, providing food and for ritual practices. Meanwhile urban villagers when recalling about their past home gardens tended to express sentimental values of these trees as they thought bonsai
trees made their house nicer and more of an urban style. The better off from urban economic life made them forget practical values that these trees brought forth.

It would be a shame to forget about areca and betel trees when discussing home gardens in the Viet village. Areca is a special kind of tree that represents rural communities, and it is an inevitable image in any description of a Viet village (Gourou 2015). Areca trees are always planted in pairs in front of a house next to the yard. People plant betel trees beneath the shadow of each areca row. Betel was a birthwort, and often climbed up areca trees. Betel chewing was practiced in Vietnam and was associated with the elderly in particular as well as for wedding and funeral ceremonies. Each quid of betel consists of a piece of areca nut and a betel leaf with little lime spread on it, and in some cases, a piece of tobacco as well. Traditionally, Vietnamese people invited their guests to chew betel before starting a conversation. This was explained in a popular proverb: "A quid of betel and areca nut starts the ball rolling." (Miếng trầu là đầu câu chuyện). People also used areca and betel leaves as offerings for their ancestors in the first day and the 15th day, or when they celebrated ritual ceremonies.

**Ponds**

Ponds were both a part of the garden and apart from garden given the reality that before the 1990s in Dục Nội Village there were two systems of ponds: in-home-garden ponds and separate ponds. The former were often created by people with bricks, while the latter were created unintentionally. Man-made ponds were not very popular in home gardens in the village before 1972 according to interviewees. Among the 72 informants, only 15 persons had fishponds during the 1970s, and they no longer have them today. These ponds were the result of people’s land digging for brick production. In 1972, after

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24 A legend about areca and betel tells of a family tragedy in which a twins and the older brother’s wife all died because of an accidental misunderstanding. They stuck to each other after death as evidence for their loyalty. This explains why the betel climbs the areca.
long bombing days by the Americans, several dozen ponds were accidentally created scattered over the village. This explains why 18 other informants had such ponds on separate land or by the marginal hedge of their garden. The general characteristic of these ponds was the absence of aquaculture, as people did not have any significant fishery on their ponds. Though aquaculture was considered the second important production in the farming system of Viet people in many places as indicated in the previous section, it was not the case in Dục Nội Village.

Aquaculture was not popular here for various reasons. First, there was no high demand from the local market in the region since people often caught fish in lakes, ponds or canals from the field for their own consumption. Second, under the central planned economy private business was not encouraged until the late 1980s and early 1990s, and people were busy working in collective farms. Third, the village was next to a fishery community who lived in Lỗ Giao Village in the same commune. People in that village were professionals at fishing. They went fishing almost every day, and came back by late afternoon to sell fish in Dục Nội Village’s market. Regardless of this fact, home and especially village ponds were still very important in a number of ways.

Firstly, these ponds were sources that provided foods for domestic animals. From the villagers’ memories, all ponds in their village were highly dense with water fern, which was used as casual food for pigs. This was an important food source especially in winter season when foods became rare, or during crop time when people were too busy in the field. In such circumstances, people, more often the elderly, just cropped water-fern from their pond, cut it into pieces, and mixed it with rice bran before feeding their pigs. Secondly, people often soaked bamboo trees or other timbers in the pond’s bottom for couple of years before use for their house construction. This was to protect bamboo or timber from being destroyed by termites. In a tropical country like Vietnam wood eaters
were very common, while anti-wood eater chemicals were unavailable. Soaking bamboo or timber into mud was therefore a very smart invention as it made use of available natural resources to make the house’s life longer. Thirdly, such ponds also provided some fish, snail or shrimp that came from small canals during rainy season, or from people’s random release. Fourthly, ponds were also where people washed their farming outputs such as sweet potato or potato before delivering back home, or where they washed mattresses, clothes and farming tools. Ponds were common properties that belonged to every family member, and could be shared for generations. It would be either allocated to one member, or divided for several children once they grew up. Among the 18 informants who had ponds during the 1980s, 11 divided their ponds equally for their sons, while the other 7 persons passed ownership over to their oldest son.

As described above, there were often at least three layers in a home garden that connected to a house by a courtyard: bonsai tree, fruit trees, herbal and spice trees, and timber trees. In some circumstances, the presence of garden ponds created an additional population either in the middle or on the marginal boundary of a garden. Among these three common layers, the outer brought shadow, timber and maintained recognized territory; the middle brought fruits and income; and the inner brought good smell, good atmosphere and sometimes foods or medicines for people.

The elderly were responsible for taking care of all these three layers and home gardening was a good exercise for them because of a number of different reasons. Firstly, working in home garden fit well with the elderly as they might work whenever they wanted without strictly following a fixed schedule, and this was suitable with the elderly people’s health. People might work when they felt well, and refrained from work when they had any health problems, or when they were busy because of personal events.
Secondly, a home garden plot brought many different socio-economic and ecological benefits to a household. It was a natural “air conditioner” that balanced air, sunlight, wind or rainfall around and inside a house. It brought periodical income thanks to the presence of a wide range of different trees that became useful in different seasons. It provided food for both human and domestic fowl and poultry. There were some trees that were edible partly for human and partly for animal consumption. Banana was an outstanding example. People ate fruits; used leaves to wrap cakes, while the body and root were cooked for pigs. Home gardens also provided some kind of savings for future use as in the case of timber trees.

Thirdly, the contribution from home gardens toward the elderly was not just a form of finance. It was also meaningful because it made the elderly feel they were still useful, and not burdens on their children or grandchildren. Income from their gardens helped them to be able not only to pay for their own spending to buy wedding gifts or to buy offering for ceremonies, but also to buy some cookies for their young grandchildren. Such income might not be available and sufficient all the time, but represented their efforts in being independent and in helping their children. Home gardens also provided supplemental foods for their domestic animals such as pigs, ducks and chickens. These are the two most popular livestock in a Viet household. Chickens brought people eggs for home consumption, and this was a very important nutrition source for children, sick people and the elderly, especially when people’s daily menu was quite frugal with frequent absence of protein. Supplemental foods from home garden made a significant contribution to the pig population, and consequently the latter supplied an important manure source for the rice field. The important economic role of the home garden was indicated in the “Vườn- Ao-Chuông” (Home Garden-Fish Pond-Livestock cage or VAC) household economic
development model that was widely promoted by the government during the 1980s (Phạm Xuân Nam 1993).

Together with grandchildren care and home care, home gardening was also where the elderly could make use of their energy to assist their family, and more importantly it made them relax, and made them get rid of being bored, or of thinking that they were no longer useful. Looking at the historical context of the 1980s, one could see the need of having something to do with the elderly. During this period, their grandchildren were sent to school or kindergarten and their children were busy working in the field for cooperatives. Meanwhile, there was no electricity and television. Newspapers were too much of a luxury in the rural world, and going to the temple or pagoda was considered “mysterious” and not encouraged by the local government. Poor transportation conditions and lack of financial resources made travelling unrealistic. “What else could we do so as we would not die of boredom?” This was the question asked by many interviewees, and they just answered themselves as: “We enjoy working on our home garden. It makes us alive, healthy and relaxing” (Mr. T, 87 years old) and “We take care of the garden like we have taken care of our children: to see them grow up, mature and blossom” (Mrs. D, 89 years old). Feedback from 72 informants provided a detailed list of various contributions that a home garden brought to the people, and the collected results are listed in hierarchical order based on frequency rate of the informants’ response in the following figure.
Among the above seven most significant contributions that a home garden plot could bring as evaluated by local people, fruits and timber provision and cool air keeping were most significant. With the exception of leisure space, all other contributions benefited every family member and not just the elderly. The benefits encompassed environmental, economic, and medical to sentimental aspects (see Appendix 6 for images of remaining home gardens).

**Traditional Beliefs and Sacred Places**

From local people’s definitions, places where mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon had occurred, such as the presence of alien trees or animals; where people believed in the presence of ghost; and where people arranged spiritual practices, were considered as sacred. Such places made people either fearful or respectful as people believed improper behaviors at those places could bring them good or bad luck. From this
definition, the interviewed elderly provided a list of 17 places that were considered as the most sacred until the late 1980s and early 1990. Below is a list of some examples.25

**Chúng Sinh Temple (Miếu Chúng Sinh)**

This was considered as the most sacred place in Dực Nội Village though unfortunately it had been destroyed during the American War. The temple was located in the south of the village, nearby today’s Cổ Loa railway station. This was where people worshiped Ngô Đệ, one of Lê Lợi King’s generals. He had stopped here to recruit soldiers before heading to the battlefield to join the King’s troops to fight against the Chinese in the 17th century. After he passed away, he was consecrated as the village’s god, and a memorial ceremony was celebrated on January 12 each year. On the other the hand, villagers also made offerings at the temple when their relatives were sick or dead to seek for his supports. Some people reported they had seen a ghost in front of the temple at midnight or noon. The ghost was sometimes a girl wearing white clothes, or a woman holding a child at other times. People believed that was a “gentle ghost”26 as she had harmed nobody.

**Xóm Miếu Temple (Diêm Xóm Miếu)**

This temple lies in the boundary area between Đoài and Trung Hamlet, right alongside the village spine or backbone road. Nobody knew when the temple was built and whom it worshiped. Some people reported they had seen a haggard girl in white clothes, while some others affirmed they had seen a pair of white snakes inside the temple. The time of such events was around midnight or at noon. People believed it was bad luck to face a ghost here no matter under what form as some people affirmed they had got

25 These are the places that were listed by most of the people. This does not necessarily mean there are only 17 places that are considered sacred in the village.

26 There are often two kinds of ghosts in the villagers’ perception: gentle ghost and bad ghost. While the former does not harm people, seeing the latter brings bad luck or even takes one’s life.
seriously sick or someone in their family died afterward, or some others had been taken around the village without any consciousness.

**Quan Garden (Vườn Quan)**

This was a wild area bordering Trung Hamlet with rice field from the north. Nobody could give an explanation for the name and the origin of this place, which literally means the garden of local leaders. People were afraid to pass this area at noon or midnight due to the rumors that a ghost in white clothes would appear and charm people before drowning them in a nearby pond. Some people affirmed this story, and they believed they had been rescued from the death thanks to the sudden appearance of some passengers whose presence awakened them from the charm. In reality, a child did drown in the nearby pond and allegedly the child had been charmed by a ghost.

**Đình Trung Steep (Đốc Đình Trung)**

The steep is located in the middle of the village, right on the main road that separates Trung Hamlet from Đông Hamlet. Until the late 1980, this area was rather wild with some old trees by the bottom of the steep. This place was believed to have most ghosts in the village as they used to appear behind or on the trees, in pairs or groups. Some were dead after seeing a ghost here because they had been charmed and unconsciously climbed up the trees and jumped down. Some became seriously ill and recovered only after making offerings to the ghost.

**Thờ Pond (Ao Thờ)**

This was a pond with an approximate area of 1,500 square meters is in the north of Trung Hamlet, just next to the village market. After some children drowned here, people
believe there was ghost living in the pond. Like in other places, a girl in white clothes was reported to appear here now and then.\textsuperscript{27}

Besides a shadow of a girl in white clothes or white snakes, there were stories about other experience such as a sudden cry for help, a weird sound or a cold wind from an unidentified direction.\textsuperscript{28} Some people said that when they passed those places, they suddenly felt dizzy, cold or lost control for a moment before everything became normal again. The distribution of these sacred places was all over three different hamlets in the village and scattered from living area to farming area: six places in Trung Hamlet, four places in Đoài Hamlet, five places in Đông Hamlet and two places in rice fields.

The nature of those sacred places was explained as harmonizing different sustainable relations between humans and nature (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009). In relation to the elderly, one significant question must be answered: what was the meaning of those places toward the elderly? In order to unravel this question it is important to look at the historical situation of the society prior to the Renovation. During the American War, and prior to the 1990s as in many other places in the country, religious practices in the village were not encouraged, and in reality were not very active as people were too busy earning their living and because religion was considered superstition. Pagodas and the temple in the village received very little financial support from the local government and from the local people. Meanwhile, going to the pagoda was not encouraged during this period, and the pagoda was associated with women rather than men in Viet traditional society (Kleinen 2004).

From the above descriptions, the structure of sacred places was multidimensional. The combinations of historical, natural, social and spiritual features created sacredness for

\textsuperscript{27} The other twelve sacred places include: Điểm Mái Trước, Miếu Cổng Thường, Công Gióng, Cầu Sen, Đình Trung, Công Hậu, Gò Tay Chúa, Điểm Lác, Chúa Khu Đông, Chúa Khahu Trung, Đình Đoài and Điểm Ngói. 

\textsuperscript{28} In the Vietnamese people’s perception, the color white is used for mourning and funerals. It represents the world of the deceased and is considered the least auspicious color in the five basic elements including: metal, wood, water, fire, earth. See Tran Ngọc Them 1997, 297.
each place. Chúa Sinh Temple was an outstanding example. Historically, this was a worshiping place for a particular hero. Meanwhile, the temple was located under an old banyan tree. This made the place more sacred as in Viet people’s perception there was always a god living in banyan trees or a ghost living in kapok trees\(^29\) (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006). The temple’s surrounding area was also rather deserted and not very accessible. Alongside the road that passed by the temple, there were many bushes and big trees as well. Additionally, there was a big and rather deep lake, about 45 meters to the temple from the north. This lake was created after people dug to make brick over many years. These features established different layers for the temple.

Table 2: Ecological Features of the 17 Sacred Places in the 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sacred places</th>
<th>Natural conditions</th>
<th>Social conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chúa Sinh temple</td>
<td>Deserted, presence of old trees and bushes</td>
<td>Near pagoda; village marginal area; historical hero worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Cổng Thượng temple</td>
<td>Deserted; nearby pond</td>
<td>Near village’s western entrance gate; village’s god worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Xóm Miếu</td>
<td>Deserted garden; next to ponds</td>
<td>Land god worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mái Trước temple</td>
<td>Deserted; old banyan tree and bushes</td>
<td>Land god worship place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Đinh Trung</td>
<td>Deserted; presence of old trees</td>
<td>Land god worship place; next to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^29\) There is also an proverb about this: “God lives with banyan trees and ghosts live with kapok trees” (Thần cây Đa, ma cây Gạo)
<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>temple and bushes</td>
<td>destroyed temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Đình Trung Steep</td>
<td>Deserted with two old banyan trees; Border line between Trung and Dong Hamlet; next to school and commune office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Quan garden</td>
<td>Deserted and empty land; presence of bushes; next to pond; Marginal area; storing destroyed tanks (from the war)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cổng Giếng</td>
<td>Deserted; next to pond and rice field; Northern village entrance gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ngôi temple</td>
<td>Deserted with bushes; Populated area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cầu Sen</td>
<td>Next to village buried ground; nearby inter-commune road; Shelter for farmers in rice field; where to celebrate funeral ceremonies for those who die outside the village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Worship pond</td>
<td>In the middle of rice field; deep and slippery; Created from people’s brick making; where people soak bamboo/timber before use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cổng Hầu</td>
<td>Next to deserted ponds; thick bamboo hedges; Southern village entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Tay Chùa mound</td>
<td>In the middle of an empty lake nearby Kien Duong pagoda; high, wild with presence of The mound has gone because of land erosion; the lake becomes a fish pond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Lác temple</td>
<td>Deserted, presence of plant diversity and an old banyan tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Phúc Hương pagoda</td>
<td>Surrounded by bushes; high plant diversity; not populated space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kiến Dương pagoda</td>
<td>Surrounded by bamboo hedges and bushes; deserted area; high plant diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Đoài temple</td>
<td>Nearby water-fern ponds and two old Banyan trees; surrounded by deserted space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above descriptions, the 17 sacred places carried one of the following social and natural characteristics:

- Deserted area with presences of old trees/bushes
- Religious or spiritual centers
- Historical relics
- Village boundary areas
- Water resource for farming
- Shelter for local farming during working hours
Ecologically, the general feature that most of these places share is the presence of high plant diversity. Many plants are edible, either for human or for livestock. There are also various animal species living in bushes, on the trees or in the water. Each place is an ecosystem with interdependent elements. They are the products of human-nature interactions over time for generations, thus besides ecological values, there are historical and cultural values carried by and conserved in each place.

**Figure 3:** Location of the 17 sacred places

**Figure 4:** Ecological feature of the 17 sacred places

The above categorization shows that most of these sacred places are located in Trung Hamlet, and they are mainly spiritual places such as temple, shrines or pagoda. Among these places, some represented for the whole village, and were symbols of the village such as Chúng Sinh Temple (where people worship the village deity) or village entrance gates (territory markers). The temple represented for the village history and tradition that every villager was part of it, while village entrance gates marked the village territory that separate people’s land from that of the others. This explained a common descriptive motif of Viet villages that often focused on the temple, or started from an outer area to an inner area of a village (Gourou 2015; Nguyễn Tùng 2003). On the other the hand, sacred places existed in every hamlet, and they were indicated in a general motif that
created sacredness for each space through the looming of white snakes or a girl in white clothes.

Another question needs to be asked is what were the relations between these places and the sacredness of those places? Or how did these characteristics make people either respectful or fearful. In my earlier work (2009), I proposed a theory that these places had been spiritualized because people wanted to balance two relations: human-nature and human-human relations. Deserted places with old trees or bushes might bring potential dangers for humans, especially for the elderly and children. Such dangers might come from insects, poisonous animals, drowning, climbing accidents or sudden climate incidents such as thunder or cold wind. Such places wear a curtain of mystery with looming ghosts that kept people (especially children) away from potential risks if they hung around those places alone.

Meanwhile, such spiritual behavior also helped to maintain necessary distance between villagers and their environment, and to limit intervention of villagers on each space, especially when it brought benefits for the whole village. For instance, old trees such as banyan provided shade for everyone in summer; firewood for daily cooking, or shelter for various kinds of birds including flower pecker, owl and sparrow, or other animals such as snakes, bats, centipedes and beetles. Regarding human-human relation, such places educated people about history (via the worship of historical heroes), maintained public ownership and prevented any private acquisition (deserted land areas), protected public assets from disturbance or destruction (community house; temple; pagoda) or prevented outsiders from illegal intrusion (village entrance gates; village boundaries). The historical and spiritual values of such places were hindrances that kept not only villagers, but also outsiders from occupying those places, and turned them into their private assets as people were afraid of breaking moral values (if occupying historical places) or of
being punished (if occupying spiritual places). These dimensions have proved to take important role in biodiversity conservation through long history of not only Viet villages but also many other upland villages of ethnic minority peoples in and out of Vietnam (Nguyễn Công Thảo 2009; Sponsel 2001)

The elderly often told ghost stories and when talking about such places, they were sharing their history and tradition. Stories of ghosts of sacred places attached with either legend, invented, imagined or true stories. For instance, Chùm Sinh Temple was associated with the legend of an historical hero who was a real figure in the 15th century. The presumption of the presence of looming white snakes or white clothed girls around Cổng Thượng Temple, Đình Trung Steep or many other places was people’s imagination, while warnings about the charm of a ghost at other places such as Quan garden or Ao Thờ was made after the occurrence of an actual drowning. Such places were also the threads that connected the elderly with their past. They reminded them about their childhood, their lives and their history, and they were passed down to the subsequent generations.

**Beyond the Landscape**

Landscapes have different influences over different groups (Crumley 1994). On the contrary, different social groups also have different interpretations of each landscape they are living in (Robin 2000; Balee 1996). This relation is determined by socio-economic and political conditions that direct the use of each landscape and reflect people’s behavior toward the State (Thomas 2002). In recent years, the spiritual approach to ecology has been introduced as way to re-envision the relationship between human and nature. This approach has been pioneered by anthropologist Leslie E. Sponsel (2013) among others who focus on exploring people’s spiritual aspects that direct them to treat the surrounding environment.
These various approaches toward human-nature relations reflect the complexity of this relationship and without a holistic view it is not possible to unravel the multi-dimensional interaction of a particular community with its living environment. This section, by looking at socio-economic, political and spiritual conditions, provides further explanation for the establishment of houses, home garden sand sacred places in the Vietnamese village. It will start with exploring how people’s perceptions of landscape have influence on the construction of their houses, home garden or sacred places. People’s perceptions will be examined under particular socio-economic situation of the Pre-Doi Moi (Renovation) period. Participation of the elderly in each landscape and role of each landscape in managing human-human and human-nature relations will be also considered from the local people’s view.

The word for landscape in Vietnamese means public scenery (cảnh quan), natural scenery or beautiful scenery (phong cảnh). This explains the focus on rice paddy, natural places, community temples or other public places in many descriptions of a Viet village (Nguyễn Tùng 2003; Gourou 2015). The word landscape conveyed historical values and represented cultural identities and prosperity of a village. A village with an old and huge community temple was often associated with a long history and big population, while vast rice paddy evokes an outstanding wealth of its villagers (Phan Đại Doãn 1984). This connection was understandable since prior to the 1990s many Viet rural villages had farming as the most important income and it attracted the majority of rural laborers. People often spent most of their lives living in the village with rarely travelling away from home for off farm jobs.

Prior to 1945, farmland was therefore the most important property, and indicator to evaluate the level of wealth of not only a village but also a household.\textsuperscript{30} Two popular types

\textsuperscript{30} In the Land Reforms beginning in 1954, farming and land ownership were important indicators used to classify people into landlord or not.
of farming land in rural villages included private land and community land. Private land belonged to individual households who inherit land from their ancestors, or who bought from the local government. This type of land was recognized as private property, and was not under management of a village. On the other hand, community land was the State’s property and was passed on to the local government for their management. This area was distributed to an individual family in the village with a certain tax (Phan Đại Doãn 1984). From what was reported in early 20th century elsewhere average community land area was around 40-50% (Gourou 2015). Most of the 72 interviewed elderly in the village could still recall around a dozen of landlords in the village prior to the 1954 when Land Reform began and they affirmed the popularity of private land that was under ownership of just quite few landlords in the village. In 1955, 46 landlords who owned approximately 100 ha were prosecuted and their land was confiscated and divided into small pieces for local people in the whole commune. Though there are no data on public land during this period, if we compare with about current 500 ha of farming land, we find that 1/5 of the commune’s productive land belonged to just 46 persons. There was a total of around 1,000 households during this period according to interviewees.

After the Land Reform, each household was allocated some relatively equitable farming land depending on the number of individuals in the family. However, very shortly after these land allocations were made, all villagers were asked to hand in most of their farming land to cooperative farms where they worked as wage-labor until the government launched the 1986 Renovation. This explains why prior to the Renovation, houses and home gardens were the two most significant private assets that one might own, and why the elderly wanted to talk about them, but not the others.

In my study, the elderly classified their changing landscape into three particular types including houses, home gardens and sacred places. This was influenced by the fact
that these were their most interactive spaces where they could be clearly aware of any changes and in reality they had realized significant changes. For most peasants in the Red River Delta region, houses were considered “the face” of a family and represented its history, social status and economic conditions (Trần Tự 1984). This explains the use of the word for house as metaphors for wife or husband in daily language.

A house, just from its outward appearance, could tell visitors how many generations had lived there. It was an important property that the oldest son inherited from his parents whom he had to worship. Once his parents passed away, he also carried ancestor worship as the task passing to him from his parents. A house therefore had an important meaning to the elderly. It was often the biggest property that they had as inheritance for their children. It showed their lifetime contribution, and they often felt guilty if they were unable to build a concrete house for their children before passing away. A house also indicated the traditions of a family as it was made from the contributions of every family member or even cross-generation members as described in the previous section.

Similarly, home gardens were supplemental spaces that decorated the meanings of houses and that benefited from the contributions of the elderly in one family’s development. House-home garden or rice field-home garden were expressions that often went together in daily discourse. A house was always surrounded by a garden plot, which provided supplemental income to that from farming. This was especially important given the socio-economic conditions during the late 1970s and 1980s. During these periods, the centralized economy gave the State absolute power in controlling the market and together with the exhausted post-war economy this situation cost people time and energy to apply for any housing material to purchase including bricks, tile or timber. Meanwhile, there was no guarantee that their request would be approved. Under these circumstances, home
gardens became important as resource base where people could plant timber trees or make brick or tiles for their future houses. Additionally, the absence of large scale fruit tree zones followed by a weak fruit supplier network explained the presence of plenty of fruit trees on each garden plot because they were to satisfy domestic consumption.

The structure and meaning of houses or home gardens reflected domestic-oriented strategies that the villagers created to adapt to socioeconomic conditions. It assisted people to make use of their local and available material resources in response to external resource shortage and the State’s strict control over resources. Meanwhile, the spiritualization of certain places in the village was people’s strategy to nurture their spiritual lives in response to the State’s anti-religion policies. This was especially meaningful during the 1970-1980 because the government did not encourage religion and often labeled ritual ceremonies as “superstitious” (Kleinen 2004). As indicated in many other studies, Vietnamese people were animistic and believed that everything was imbued with a spirit. An old tree or a strange shaped rock could be a living space of a deity who could be a historical figure or imagined character (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006; Trần Quốc Vượng 2005). However, during the pre-Đổi Mới era local governments who named themselves communist attempted to change this tradition. They did not believe that there were spirits or ghosts and accused religion of making people weak. The official ideology was influenced by Marx’s definition of religion, which said: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people” (Marx 1844).

Trung Temple, one of the biggest temples in the region, was destroyed in 1964 and replaced with the commune office. This is further evidence of the government’s attitude toward religion and spiritual beliefs. Meanwhile, ritual ceremonies were not encouraged and some were even prohibited. Thus the process of spiritualization in some public places
was partly people’s reaction against local government’s anti-religion policy and partly people’s strategy to create new spaces where they could practice spiritual beliefs that had been maintained for generations. This practice became even stronger when the village temple was destroyed and spiritual practices labeled as superstitious because people needed to have an alternative paradigm for their spiritual life. This reaction was similarly reported in the changing use of public places in Hanoi City that have been used as public spaces for people to protest against some government policies (Thomas 2002).

Besides the meaning of balancing human-nature and human-human relations, construction of sacred places in the village indicated people’s desire to keep their village history alive through generations. The case of Chủng Sinh Temple where a historical hero was worshiped and consecrated as the village’s deity is an outstanding example. Making this place sacred was the best way to educate young generations about its history primarily and the village’s history respectively. The elderly had important roles and carried this task as memory keepers or storytellers. First lessons and stories were often told to children by their grandparents who took care of them as babysitters when their parents worked in rice field because kindergarden was not popular during old days. Because the elderly world was mainly within the village, they did not know much about the outside world. Meanwhile, their children were too young to understand contemporary adult things and so telling old stories or legends was how they taught their grandchildren about their village’s history, about life, about necessary knowledge and precautions or simply just to sooth babies from crying.

A five chamber-house made of brick and timber was a representation of wealth because it was the crystallization of different values as people affirmed. During the 1950s and 1960s, it was associated with the rich, village landlords or local officials. After the American War in 1975, Vietnam’s economy was seriously damaged and the whole country
had to work together to heal the war’s wounds. In the 1980s, a five-chamber brick house was therefore a big fortune, and only 5% of the households in the village owned this type of house. It was a big fortune because without financial support from relatives, it would take roughly twenty years to prepare the necessary resources to build a house.

Meanwhile, even when people could afford to build that dream house, it was not easy for people to purchase the necessary materials such as timber, brick, and cement or lime because these were managed by the State. As interviewees recalled, they had to prepare a proposal that clearly quantifies the amount of each material needed for their house and submit this proposal to the local government for approval. There was no guarantee that they would be allowed to purchase the requested amounts since the production capacity of local factories was often far less than demand and priority was given to public construction, not private. Some families might have bamboo in their gardens, or could subsidize brick making as their members could work after hours for the cooperatives, but they would still have to buy cement, timber or lime. The scarcity and high cost of construction materials made the dream of having a brick house a luxury.

Another factor that had influence on the popularity of old style houses in the village was its connection with the outside world. While thatch-houses could be entirely made by local people using local resources, construction of brick houses necessitated input from the industrial sector for cement and lime. Meanwhile the industrial sector represented the most civilized and revolutionary force, and becoming a worker was a significant shift from underdeveloped into developed. This discourse was promoted by political ideologies and manifested in daily slogans in which workers were the most progressive and pioneering force of the Party. On the other hand, very few people practiced carpentry during this period, while this was the most important work in the construction process. This explained the common hiring of outside carpenters who would be in charge of designing a house’s
structure and especially the house roof. As people recalled, there were only eleven new brick houses built in the whole village during the 1970s, while only nine were built in the 1980s.31

Among these twenty house owners, three were tailors, two were carpenters, two were transportation service providers, three were teachers, seven had small home-run businesses and three had relatives coming back from the Soviet Union from their undergraduate education. None of these people were solely farmers as their only income. This confirmed people’s assertions that without non-farm income, it was impossible for a family to afford a five-chamber brick house since farming for the cooperative was just barely enough for survival.

Having been influenced by Confucianism for centuries, Vietnamese people followed the Confucian social hierarchy in which intellectuals were at the top and peasants, workers and businessmen were below them accordingly. In this system businessmen were at the bottom and experienced significant discrimination from the public. They were considered cheaters who lived by telling lies to others for profit. In Vietnamese, business people were called “evil businessmen” (*con buôn*). However, this perception changed as people recognized the saying “no prosperity without doing business” (*phi thuong bat phu*). Attitudes have shifted and today business people are highly respected and admired to the extent that there is a national Day for Business People. Every year, on October 13th various celebrations are arranged across the country to acknowledge the great contributions of business people.

The association of five-chamber brick houses with wealth or development therefore brings us to a theory of transitional process in the rural region of Vietnam under which certain values have been replaced by new ones. During the period of French colonization,

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31 The total household during these two periods was around a few dozen, about 5% of the total houses in the village.
prosperity or development was connected to landlords or the nobles, and their wealth was gained from large-scale land ownership or political power. During the American War, the discourse of wealth was blurred as the mission of national liberation and unification had top priority, and slogans like “everything is for the South” were daily objectives. After the war, the country was united and most rural peasants worked in cooperative farms (Viện Sử học 1979). Thus, generally there was no distinction between rural villagers in terms of economy. In this context the emergence of outstanding persons whose income was not from farming was something admirable because getting rich became a reasonable wish, and to become rich, farming was not enough.

During the 1980s there was a popular saying that ranked the four wealthiest people in the village: “Richest is Bảo, Sừ is the second, Như is the third and Chính is the fourth” (*Nhất Bảo, Nhì Sừ, Tam Như, Tứ Chính*). This trend of grouping four key persons that represented a certain area was quite popular in Viet society, and was observed elsewhere (Bùi Xuân Đình, 2013)32. Among these four men, Mr. Bảo was from Đoài Hamlet, while the other three were from Trung Hamlet. Nobody could recall who composed this ranking and based on what specific and quantitative criteria that one was on the first or the fourth. However, they all had non-farm income which was quite stable and came from different sources. By the late 1970s and 1980s, Mr. Bảo had a cart with an ox for goods transportation for the villagers. As there were no trucks in the village at that time, he had quite good business since people had to hire him to deliver brick, tile, timber and other facilities. He had four sons and two daughters who lived together in a brick house, which was built in 1971. There was a rumor that he found a golden frog when clearing a bamboo hedge in his garden. Meanwhile, Mr. Sừ was a famous tailor whose customers included not only villagers but also many people from surrounding villages and communes. Mr. Như

32 This discourse was even recorded in academic and art agenda. “Lâm, Lê, Tấn, Vương” were the four famous historians and for decades they have been considered “the four poles” of Vietnam historians (*Tứ trụ triều đình*).
and Chinh on the other hand, were carpenters who produced tables, wardrobes and beds to sell in the local market.

Besides their non-farming incomes, these four “rich men” also owned five-chamber brick houses, and black and white televisions. During the 1980s, there were only ten televisions in the whole village. A black and white television at that time represented not just wealth, but also modernity, development and progress. This was because a television truly cost a fortune, and few families in the village could afford them. Interviewees remembered that it cost ten tons of rice to buy a television. With an average rice productivity of five tons per hectare, one could imagine how luxurious it was to have a television. A television was also a door to the outside world. It was how people learned about news elsewhere in the country as well as the globe. This was extremely important because there were no cinemas in the area, and radios provided just “sound” but not “truly active pictures” of the world, as villagers said. It was also the fanciest entertainment the villagers could seek at that time, as the Internet, cafe, and live music were not available until the mid 1990s. Because electricity did not come to the village until 1987, people had to use rechargeable batteries for their television sets. Because of this, people did not have the opportunity to watch television every day but just on weekends.

This analysis fits well with what has been discussed about the trend of favoring non-farming jobs in Southeast Asian countries from 1970-1980 (Joseph and Peluso 2008; Hirsh 2012). However, in the context of Duc Noi Village, this attitude was not immediately followed by an increasing trend of outmigration of young people from rural to urban areas as observed elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Rigg 2009; Hirsh 2012). The elderly and their children still lived together, and the elderly were not yet too lonely in their villages until the mid 1990s. This was because though farming was no longer the principal income, and the opportunity for non-farm jobs was available locally, thus outmigration was
not yet popular. The situation changed in the mid to late 1990s after the occurrence of various significant historical events, which are discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

NEW LANDSCAPES: MARCHING TOWARD MODERNITY

“Our village is now different, very modern, just like Hanoi” (Mr. D., 68 years old)

The Village’s “New Clothes”

After centuries of “sleeping” behind thick bamboo hedges, Viet villages in general, and Đức Nơi Village in particular has been awakened and begun to wear new socio-economic and ecological “clothing.” Since Đổi Mới, the village has undergone tremendous changes, and Mr. D.’s statement above reflects this process. This chapter provides a brief background of Đức Nơi Village in the post-Đổi Mới era. I reconstruct the journey by which the village has transformed and become “very modern just like Hanoi” as Mr. D. states above. The most significant features of the Đổi Mới at both the national and local levels will be described to provide the context of changes related to houses, home gardens and sacred spaces in the village.

Đổi Mới or Renovation

Đổi Mới (Renovation) has abolished the system of bureaucratic, centralized management based on state subsidies, and moved to a multi-sectored and market-oriented economy. This allows the private sector to compete with the State in non-strategic sectors (Ravallion and Walle 2008). In rural areas, the collective-based economy was replaced with the household economy and Land Use Certificates (LUC) given to households for at least ten years. Farmers, not cooperatives, have become responsible for all farming stages. They could decide what crops to cultivate and to whom they wanted to sell their farming outputs. This has led to the gradually decreasing role of local cooperatives that used to take the leading role in farm management prior to Đổi Mới.

Nationally, 1986 is the landmark for Đổi Mới as this was the year of the 6th national congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party where the Đổi Mới policy was approved.
This discourse has been indicated in the public agenda as well as in academic forums. However, the actual initiation of this policy was different from place to place. In Dục Nội Village, the implementation of Đổi Mới was actually initiated in 1989 when the general spirit of Renovation was put into action by the commune government. Since the early 1990s, farmland that had previously been managed by cooperatives was allocated to individual households with assigned quotas. Local farmers were free to cultivate whatever crops they wanted. Cooperatives just provided technical support including irrigation service, seeds and fertilizers. After people turned in their quota, they were free to sell the surplus outputs to either the State or the market. From interviewees’ recollections this encouraged people to work harder and this in turn increased farming productivity since people truly felt they were working for themselves.

In Dục Nội Village, allocations of farmland to individual households were completed by 1995 and by the end of 1997 LUC provisions were completed as well. As defined by the 1993 law, although the State reserved ownership rights, people had the right to use, inherit, lend, rent or mortgage their allocated lands. These rights have been represented in LUC for each household. Names of the holders and size of allocated land are clearly indicated on this legal paper. On the other hand, people were free to open businesses, to buy and sell farm products, industrial facilities or constructions materials, which had previously been strictly controlled by the cooperatives. The Renovations were very soon followed by significant landscape changes throughout the village. The following narrative provides a brief description of the transitions that are considered as having important influences on housing, home garden and sacred spaces from the local villagers’ view.
Demolishing Old Symbols

While 1986 is often viewed as the landmark of the Renovation in the national political and academic agenda, local commune officials as well as villagers often mark the early 1990s as marking the end of the subsidy period (thời bao cấp) and the start of the Renovation. This is because this is when symbols and institutions of the centralized and subsidy economy eras were deconstructed at the local level. These symbols included stock houses (nhà kho), public drying grounds (sân kho), poultry farms (trại trái chăn nuôi), tofu houses (lò đậu) and general department stores (cửa hàng bách hóa). This also illustrates how there is often a different perception of history at the local and the national levels.

During the era of cooperatives there were three distinct levels: high, medium and low cooperatives. This classification was based on cooperative sizes and the management of cooperatives. However, from local villagers’ perspectives they recall cooperative as only one form of production management in the pre-Renovation era.

On the other the hand, this also shows that symbols of the national agenda may not necessarily resonate with the local people. Although approved in 1986, the Renovation did not have an impact immediately at the local level. This explains why local people in Dục Nội Village do not recall 1986 as the year of the Renovation changes but instead choose the years that particular events directly impacted their lives.

The Stock House

During the era of cooperatives, the area that today holds the village market was then the stock house and public drying ground. These were considered the property of the cooperatives. During this period, rice was harvested, dried and stored here as the State’s extended rice storage unit. For the purpose of storing rice for a long time, often for one year at least, the stock house was built with concrete and had a total area of 400 square meters. The estimated height of the stock was about eight meters with very thick brick
walls and a tile roof. During the 1980s, the stock house was the biggest building in the whole commune.

Meanwhile, there were two public drying grounds in Trung Hamlet, which were paved by brick. The first ground was adjacently to the stock house, while the other was on the other side of village road, just ten meters from the stock house. Each drying ground had an area of approximately 2,000 square meters. These were also leisure grounds where children played games in the late afternoon. In the second drying ground, there was a stage where local people sometimes had the opportunity to watch dramatic plays or movies in the evening. On such occasions, children used to mark their seats on the ground quite early in the day. They used chalk to draw their outline and write their name or just placed a small mat to notify others about their reservation. There were also two other public drying grounds: one in Đông Hamlet and one in Đoài Hamlet. The estimated area of each area was around 2000 square meters. On the ground in Trung Hamlet there was a stage for occasional entertainment purposes.

A few years after the Renovation, in 1993, the stock house and the first drying ground were privatized in a land auction. The road area became private land, and people started building houses after the auction, while the inner area became the village market. Meanwhile, the second drying ground was divided into two parts. The front part was for the construction of a new community house, and the back part became a kindergarten, both for people in Trung Hamlet.

**The Poultry Farm and Tofu House**

The poultry farms stretched across a vast area of estimated two hectares to the north of Trung Hamlet, bordering on the rice field. The farm was where the cooperative assigned livestock, the group raised pigs. Once pigs became big enough for slaughter, they would be transported to the slaughterhouse that was located in another district. People who worked
in the farm were similar to those who worked in the fields in the sense that they were paid following the number of actual working days in a month. Payments were made in rice, meat, cloth or any other necessary goods with subsidy coupons.

The tofu house was located next to the stock house. This was where the cooperative produced tofu for local consumption. Like poultry farms, the tofu house was run by a cooperative through some assigned members. Tofu-making began in the morning and villagers could come and buy tofu or tofu soup from 10:00 am. People did not need subsidy coupons to buy tofu because the soybeans were available and locally grown. The waste from making tofu was used to feed pigs in the poultry farm.

**The Commune General Department Store**

The only general department store in the commune was located across from the secondary school. This was the most outstanding symbol of the subsidy period according to interviewees. The store was a concrete building with thick brick walls and a tile roof. It was probably as made of concrete as the stock house since there were many goods sold and stored here. Prior to the Renovation, this was the only legally recognized commercial center in a commune where people could buy every goods. Each household was distributed a certain amount of subsidy coupons for different goods. The amount of coupons was dependent on the household size and on each household’s contribution to the cooperative as measured in number of working days. Theoretically, people could buy their desired goods with suitable coupons, however because of scarcity people had to come early in the day or they had to wait in a long queue, or not be able to get what they wanted. It was not uncommon that people failed to buy something, and their coupons became useless as demand surpassed supply. This explained why villagers wished to have a relative or a friend working at the store since she or he would reserve the best for them and they did not have to worry about being in a long line or finding that the goods had run out.
The above places were imprinted deeply in the local people’s memory as the symbols for the subsidy period. They often mentioned about the hardship of waiting in a long line at the general department store where it could even cost them one day just to buy some gasoline, a significant example of such a difficult time. These hardships were initially removed in 1989 when farmland was allocated to each individual household in Đức Nội Village. After this event, the role of the cooperatives became much less significant. As people were foremost responsible for their crops, the cooperatives just assisted in selling seeds, fertilizers or pesticides and in providing irrigation service. There was no more need to maintain the public drying ground and the stock house because people dried rice on their own ground. People were free to sell their farming products to either the State or individual business people as business became open for the private sector. These situations led to the demolition of the stock house, public drying ground, poultry farm and tofu house in 1993, and the general department store in 1995.

The demolition of these symbols from local villagers’ memory was the most significant signal that marked the end of the subsidy period, and quickly led to the establishment of new symbols for the post Doi Moi era which is described below.

The Establishment of Village Street

After the demolition of local cooperatives, the stock house, and the general department store, and the destruction of the brick pavement public drying grounds, these places became empty. In theory, these places were still public properties and were managed by the commune people’s committee (CPC). Meanwhile, according to Renovation policies, people were encouraged to run their own businesses and commercial exchange was about to develop in the village. Thus, is late 1992 the CPC decided to call for an auction on a public drying ground including the stock house. This bid was said to collect necessary money for the construction of village roads and the village market, as
well as to give people opportunities to do their own business. In these areas, land alongside the village main roads was divided into small plots and sold in a silent bid. Each plot was three meters wide and fifteen meters long on average.

The bid resulted in 23 winners. Interestingly, none of them were full-time farmers. Among the 23 winners two were tailors, one was a carpenter, one was a doctor, four were teachers, one was a district post office staff, three were local teachers and eight were farmers with stable income from other non-farming jobs such as transportation or electricity maintenance and five were returned overseas workers. This was understandable because each plot cost nearly a fortune, so very few people could afford to buy it.

Right after the auction, the CPC asked all winners to build a concrete house that was at least two stories high, because the CPS wanted to create an urban appearance for the village. The CPS thought this would show the success of the Renovation policy. This is, of course, also determined by the reality that with those who live alongside road, land area became smaller and ranged from 40-80 square meters. This made the maintenance of brick houses surrounded with home gardens unrealistic. Consequently, by early 1995 completion of all the buildings brought a new look to the area. From appearing as an empty and unpopulated land, it became highly populated. From a large and open drying ground, it became filled with small concrete buildings. From a public space, it became a private asset. From farming-supported function, it became a commercial place. This area also became the first area in the village where there was high concentration of tall buildings and of

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33 In the early 1990s there were some villagers who returned from the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries after the collapse of communism there. These villagers usually became the *nouveau riche* since they had savings from years spent working overseas. Their relative wealth meant that they were able to built multiple story dwellings in the early 1990s.

34 Interviewees recalled that each plot cost around 30 million Viet Nam Dong, and that is equivalent to about 2,000 U.S. Dollars.
business interactions. This marked a significant shift in that houses were not only living spaces, but also family business spaces because all the owners opened a small shop in each first floor and lived in the second floor. Thereafter, villagers coined a new word to refer to this area that was subsequently used widely in the village: the “village street” (phố làng) or the “market street” (phố chợ). This concept referenced the emergence of this new residential/commercial space, which the villagers considered as the most urban and most modern of the whole village.

Living Extension Areas

Like many other villages in the country, the population of Dực Nội Village has rapidly increased during the 1990s and 2000s (9,352 peoples compared with 10,023 peoples). This growth brought pressure on living spaces for newly married couples. For that reason, in 1993 the CPC decided to open a land sale that aimed to sell residential land in three areas in the commune: one in the former poultry farm, one in the south near the Cổ Loa railway station and one to the west of Dực Nội Village. The southern area was formerly a barren area with such poor irrigation that people could hardly grow any crops but cassava. The distance between this area and the village was about 1.5 kilometers and it was thus separate from the village. The area to the west was near an inter-commune road and a former brickmaking area. Differing from the previous bids, this land sale was for eligible people only: they had to be from families where there were at least two married couples living under the same roof. A fixed price was set for each piece of land and eligible persons had to submit land purchase applications to the CPC for approval.

This sale resulted in seventeen families settling in the southern area, 35 families settled in the former poultry area and 21 new families in the western area. Though these three areas were not in good positions for business at that time, and there were no

35 In the local idiom, “high buildings” (or nha tang, nha gac) refers to any nontraditional house with more than one story.
requirements about new houses, most of the people who settled in these areas decided to build tall houses. Interviewees explained that these new houses could be built that way because of the new availability of cement, steel and brick. More importantly, all of these people were young couples who wanted to live in “new houses” unlike those their parents lived in. After the “village street” was established, these three expansion areas contributed a new look to the village. In one sense, it was the dominance of urban architecture over traditional styles and the replacement of commercial space over living space. In another sense, it was the change from favored living places in the village central area to the nearby road area. Additionally, the establishment of the Village Street as well as living extension areas brought a new living pattern which consisted of a nuclear family under each house. It has since been common to see a young couple living with their children in such a new house. This is quite different from previous decades when there were often three generations or several marriage couples living under the same roof.

**Western Commercial Space in the Village in the 2000s**

While the Village Street was established in early 1990, followed by the living extension areas in the late 1990s, the village western commercial space emerged in at large scale a bit later, not until the early 2000s. This area belongs to Đoái Hamlet, and encompasses a curve from the southwest to the northwest side of the village that lies alongside an inter-commune road. This area has become increasingly commercial space since the late 1990s as it has a number of geographical and socio-economic advantages that people could use to either open business for additional income or to rent their land. First, this area is the border zone between the village and the district town. This is a great advantage since villagers in this area could open a small business to sell agricultural products as well as daily goods to the town residents who live just on the other side on the road. This is also promising because town residences are reportedly wealthier than
villagers since they have stable incomes from their monthly wages. This makes these town people become the favored customers of village sellers and explains the spontaneous establishment of a new market alongside the road since the early 2000s. Nowadays, this market is much more bustling than the old village market and the best foods are sold here but not in the village market in the village street area. This is because its customers are mainly town residents who spend more and bargain less, as explained by sellers in the market.

Secondly, a Japanese company and a Taiwanese company appeared on the other the side of the road and established two factories. These two factories employ several thousand people. Most of these workers are from outside provinces so they create a demand for rental housing. Taking this opportunity, many peoples in Đoài Hamlet have built hostels to rent to the workers. This enterprise brings those entrepreneurs significant income. Besides hostels, many residents have opened small grocery stores, cafés, hair salons, electronics shops, motorcycle shops and Internet shops. Primary customers of these shops are workers from these factories.

The establishment of commercial space in this area was followed by significant ecological changes. Orchards were replaced by hostels and lakes or garden ponds were filled up to build new houses and shops. Until the early 1990s, there were a dozen ponds in Đoài Hamlet and one big lake near the road on the western edge of the village. These were natural reservoirs in the rainy season, and they offered various practical contributions to people’s lives including: growing water-fern to feed to livestock, primary washing area for farmers after the harvest, places to soak bamboo before building a house, an open space for air flow and a natural air conditioner and a place for water buffaloes to bath (or even children). As described in the previous chapter, most of these ponds were accidentally created or in some cases enlarged by the bombing during the American War, while others
were the result of digging to make bricks. Villagers cited this list of benefits from their many memories from childhood involving the ponds. I will detail the impacts of these transitions in the next chapter.

The establishment of commercial space in the village western edge has brought a new appearance to the front of the village as the architecture appears more and more urban and modern. Together with the establishment of Village Street and the expanded living areas, these transitions make a significant impact on the changes of the four identified landscapes as described in following section.

**The Village Landscapes in the Post- Renovation Era**

The dissolution of the subsidy period and the emergence of new living spaces mark not only the changes of the Renovation era, but also the emergence of new landscapes in the village, and in houses, home gardens and sacred places. Overall, public ownership has been replaced by private ownership and the natural landscape has been replaced by man-made landscapes. This transition has been quickly followed by changes in houses, home gardens and sacred place. The following section provides a description of these three new landscapes in the village in the post Renovation era.

**Houses**

In 1986, by the time the leaders of the Communist Party approved the Renovation policy, there were only five houses with high floors in the whole village. Of these, two houses were in Trung Hamlet, two in Đoài Hamlet and one in Đông Hamlet. That is very few of the thousand or so houses in total, which were mostly small brick houses or land houses with few concrete brick houses. Each of these five house owners had a significant non-farming income. Between the two owners in Trung Hamlet, one was a skillful carpenter who made furniture for villagers and for regional customers. While he specialized in carpentry, his wife and his children worked in the field as farmers. The
second high floor house owner in Trung Hamlet like his wife was a tailor. They had no farming land, and besides tailoring, they opened a small shop to sell groceries as their house was alongside the village main road, right at today’s village market area.

Meanwhile, between two high floor house owners in Đoai Hamlet, one had an ox cart that brought him additional income from transportation service besides farming, while the other was a state official at the district level. The fifth owner in Đồng Hamlet was a high school teacher who had lived in Hanoi City for years before returning to the village. Interestingly, though people named those houses as “high floor houses,” they all had only two floors with an average height of eight meters, which was about 2.5 times higher than that of brick houses. Among these first five high floor house owners, two were among the four richest men in the area according to the list in Chapter 2. That was the carpenter in Trung Hamlet and the cart owner in Đoai Hamlet.

During the late 1990s and the early 2000s there was a rapid demolition of brick houses and an increase of multiple floor buildings in the village. As reported by the CPC, there were on average sixteen construction proposals submitted each year since the mid 2000s. This was a legal requirement that applies to any building that exceeds two floors. Although, of course, in many cases nobody asked for permission. By the end of 2013, my field observations estimated that 85% of houses in the village have more than one story, ranging from 3-5 stories. The view from the top of a high building in the village offers a colorful picture of red, pink or green steel-made roofs and all tend to look toward the road but not toward the southeast as they once did (see Appendix 5). This transition has changed from a five-stall brick house as a symbol of wealth to one with high floors. The differences between these two types of houses are significant, in terms of not just material, structure and architecture, but also of arrangement and meaning.
First, while the materials of brick houses are mainly locally made and created from the local environment (as described in the previous chapter), materials of the new houses are from outside the village and are products of the industrial sector such as brick, cement and steel. Bricks are no longer locally made since the early 1990s because most of the land has been allocated to households so free land digging is not permitted any more. Meanwhile, brick purchase from a local factory also has influenced the end of brick production at the household level. Differences of material also make villagers more dependent on the outside market. Bricks are mainly bought from a local firm name Brick Company 382, which is a state-owned firm. People could also buy this product from a local brick workshop owned by a villager. This man has been the CPC chair for several years. After retiring in 1988, he opened a workshop to make bricks on a vast land hired area that used to be canary land. During the American War, most of the canary trees were destroyed and this area became barren after 1975. As this area was not accessible to irrigation systems, the CPC decided to lease the land to this man for brick making.

Like brick, cement and steel are bought from the outside market freely as long as one can afford. It is especially convenient since the early 2000s because there have been more and more business people who sell these materials in the village. The replacement of bamboo, timber and rice thatch with concrete has devalued the role of home gardens as a timber source. This indicates the interactive relations between different elements in an ecosystem. The existence of any particular landscape is always for a certain purpose, or it always takes a certain role.

Second, when compared with brick houses, high floor houses encompass a similar ground area averaging 60 to 80 square meters. Of interviewees’ 72 houses, the largest is 120 square meters, while the smallest is 40. The highest has five floors and the lowest has two floors. Meanwhile, the width of the houses ranges from four to eight meters, while the
length averages 10-20 meters. However, the location of new houses is different from that in the past. Putting aside the exception of new houses alongside roads where people have no alternative places for their homes, all other new houses have been relocated to marginal areas of each household’s land. This means that instead of standing in the central position of each plot, new houses are nowadays placed in the corner, right at the territorial line of each family. This creates a new setting for new houses. The distance between neighboring houses becomes closer and in many cases, one’s house wall may even lean on the neighbor’s wall. The natural transitional zone of the past between houses is lost. Also, the new houses are placed to face the road and not the eastern or southeastern direction as before.

On the other hand, new houses are also followed by new structures and indoor arrangements. While the living room is still placed next to the entry door with a table and some chairs as in the old houses, the setting of other spaces has been changed significantly. That is the emerging concept of “bedrooms” as most new houses in the village have several rooms that are separated like those in houses in Hanoi City. This is quite different from the former arrangement when sleeping spaces were open, and there was only one closed room for a young couple. Another difference between the old and new houses is that ancestor altars have usually been moved to the topmost story in the home. If the altar is left on the ground floor, it may be moved lower on the wall than in the traditional home. In addition, the kitchen, bathroom and rest rooms have been also moved to inside the home and have become part of the indoors.
Construction of New Homes

Changes in the architecture and material of houses are followed by changes in who builds them and how. With brick houses, people in the village did not have to hire outsiders to be in charge of construction because most adult men knew how to do this. However, as most of them are not familiar with new style houses they must hire outsiders to help. These are typically residents of neighboring communes who learned these new building techniques from working in construction in cities. Since the early 2000s, there have been more and more of these skilled laborers in the village. They are mainly young people who have learned new skills from outsiders. Beyond this process, the role of the elderly has been gradually marginalized since they are not familiar with new techniques (this will be discussed in the following chapter). This change in roles and knowledge further disempowers the elderly in the village, making them feel useless as indicated in the
following statement: “we have no voice now. They [the children] just decide what they want to build and we could do nothing but accept” (Mr. B., 81 years old).

This situation is proven by the fact that of the 72 interviewees, 68 have new houses and young people were the ones who decided 56 of those 68 new houses. It is reported that in these cases, young people have the final decision about size, direction and height of the new houses. Moreover, they are also the ones who decide when and where the new house should be built, and who to hire for construction. In the remaining 12 cases, the decision making was discussed and negotiated between young people and their parents, but the voices of the latter are often the final decision according to the elderly.

Home Gardens

Political, socio-economic changes and housing changes since the mid-1990s were followed by changes in home gardens of various ways including garden size, plant diversity and plant arrangement. The general trend of this transition has been the reduction of garden sizes; the reorganization of plants and a decline in plant diversity (see Appendix 7 for images of new home garden).

Size of New Home Gardens

As indicated in the previous chapter, interviewees stated that each family formerly had a home garden plot with an average size ranging from 400-600 square meters. This figure has been reduced significantly since the mid 1990s. Among the 72 informants, 68 no longer have a garden on their land because it has been replaced by a paved brick playground while four reserved small areas for fruit trees in an area that ranged just 40-80 square meters. The average size of their home gardens today is around 60 square meters and nobody has a garden that is larger than 100 square meters. Compared with home gardens of the past, which used to take up at least 75% of a household’s total living land, this transition has significantly reversed the proportion of home garden to living space.
The decreased size of home gardens does not increase the size of houses, but rather is due to the expansion of another outdoor feature. Most interviewees reported that they still live on their land without a significant change in demography, since the adult married members have moved out and lived separately. Meanwhile, changes in the area allotted to home gardens are due to the increased size of the brick paved patio. Before the 1980s, few families had a patio of brick paving, and the average size of each playground, if it was present, was only 60-80 square meters. The primary function of this space was where people dried their farming products, laundry or where they celebrated ceremonies. Having a large brick paved ground during this period was expensive. My interviewees recalled that the floor inside many homes was quite barren and without bricks.

However, while these patios increase in size, they are today not used for practical purposes as they were in the past. This may be due to the fact that fewer villagers are farming today, thus they do not need a patio to dry their products. About 75% of the interviewees have since lent their farmland to others, thus they do not have crops at all and live from non-farming income. Most families have washing machines, and they often hang their laundry on the top floor of the house to dry. On the other hand, children are sent to the kindergarten in the hamlet as soon as they reach 16 months, and the older kids go to study in the boarding school in the commune. This means that the patio is empty during the day, and so it may just provide space for ornamental bonsai trees of the Japanese style.

The replacement of home gardens with patios has had negative ecological and economic consequences on the one hand, while also negating the practical value for the elderly in a household, which I will explore in the next chapter. The only contribution, according to interviewees, is to make the homes look nicer, cleaner and more “city-like.” This interesting perception has something to do with people’s interpretation of wealth and of urbanity. During the pre-Renovation period, having a brick house with a brick patio was
a dream of most villagers in particular, of most rural people in Vietnam in general, and was
associated with wealth. Houses with mud walls, barren floors, a thatched roof, and land in
front of the house, were associated with the poor, while brick houses with brick patios
represented the rich. This is well illustrated partly through the definition of the four richest
men in the village described in previous chapter.

On the other hand, during the early years of the post-Renovation era, urban
architecture had significant influence over the villagers, which was indicated in the change
of housing described previously. Most people once they had a new house decided to pave
over their gardens with bricks though their household size remains the same as before
because married members have moved out and lived in separate places. Explanations for
this decision are varied including:

- There is no need for home gardens, as fruits are cheap and available at village
  market
- Timber and fruit trees may damage the new house (by their roots or branches)
- Home gardens are living spaces of mosquitoes and of dangerous insects
- Brick patios look nicer and cleaner than home gardens do

These interpretations are from local villagers. While the first one reflects an
emerging market economy, the other three indicate people’s new attitude toward the home
garden. They do not find gardens useful because fruits are now available at market thanks
to Chinese imports or from other domestic specialized fruit tree zones. Home livestock are
no longer popular, so as they do not also need space for their animals. In addition, the new
houses are now built mainly of cement and steel so timber trees are not needed. Improved
local health care makes herbal trees unnecessary. Additionally, the reality that more and
more households have air conditioners contributes another reason that people shut down
their gardens.
Besides these socio-economic changes, people’s new attitude towards their gardens is also influenced by their desire to be more urban. From local villagers’ view, urbanity conveys material manifestations including houses, clothes, transportation vehicles, occupation and wealth. From this interpretation, particular symbols of urbanity are constructed in people’s perception as comparison with non-urbanity or countryside (nhà quê): high buildings vs brick houses; brick paved ground vs garden; western style clothes vs local made and old style costumes; car vs bicycle; dirty vs clean and farming vs non-farming. One of the most significant examples for this division is indicated in people’s personal identification card where in the occupation career section; there are just two options to fill in: farming and non-farming. From this perspective, maintaining home gardens means keeping “old style” lives. They are dirty especially in the rainy season, when dead leaves fall down and rot. They are thought to be ideal place for mosquitoes and other insects though this is just people’s assumption without any clear evidence. This explains why most of local villagers prefer brick ground, and this has fostered the replacement process.

Meanwhile, from the urban villagers’ view, urbanity is associated more with living style, rather than material conditions as people talk about modernity vs backward, and high education vs early school drop-out. The only similarity they share with local villagers is their association of non-farm jobs with modernity, while attaching farming with being backward. This explains why most urban villagers actually want to see their relatives maintain home garden as from their evaluation its ecological and economic values are still significant, especially for the elderly. They regret that home gardens are disappearing in their hometown, and disagree with their rural relatives that replacing home gardens with brick ground is moving toward urbanity. Differing from local villagers, urban villagers find home gardens still useful because they provide “fresh and safe fruits” which are not easy to
buy at market due to overuse of chemical pesticides or fertilizers that could be a risk for consumers’ health. On the other hand, urban people find gardens ecologically useful as they bring fresh air.

**Plant Arrangement**

Home gardens used to be green space that wrapped houses in the middle and surrounded by three layers of vegetation as described in the previous chapter. These green spaces are thought to make people healthier, and to reduce stress (Selhub and Logan 2013). However, this arrangement has been rapidly changed since early 1990 and three-layer arrangement has become much less popular than it was before. None of the 72 informants have their houses in a central place with surrounding gardens. A general trend is that people reserve a small plot in front of the house, near the entry gate ranging from 10-30 square meters to plant decorative *bonsai* trees, while their new houses are built right at the corner, and look toward road and face a big brick paved ground. Residential area nowadays consists of just two spaces including houses and playgrounds, mainly.

The replacement of brick paved grounds over orchards or home gardens was initiated since mid-1990, rapidly developed since early 2000. Among the 72 informants, the first one who decided to cut down all trees in his garden in 1993 was an overseas worker who returned Vietnam from former East Germany after the unification of the West and the East regime in this country. With savings after seven years working abroad, the first thing this man wanted to do after arriving home is to replace his parents’ brick house with a more “modern” house. Modernity, according to his explanation in this context was “urban-like” or “city-like”. He kept referring to a district town with emerging high floor houses as a significant symbol of “urbanity” or “development”. This made him decide to build a new house regardless of the fact that the old house was still under good condition since it had been built just seven years ago. This decision was especially important when
he just returned from a recognized more “developed” or “modern” country. He wanted to show villagers not only his wealth from a long time working overseas, but also his “progressive” awareness of “modernity.” This decision was followed with the demolition of both the old house and the surrounding home garden.

Fruit trees such as jackfruit, apple, grapefruit, guava; spicy trees such as la lot, wormwood, and timber trees such as bamboo and China-trees were cut down because of the need of ground for construction. The old house that was in the centerl and looked southeast was pulled down, while the new house’s position was placed further back to the west corner looking straight to the north. This change was to enlarge an open ground in front of the house. While cutting down trees and clearing bushes, he bought some *bonsai* trees from the district town market to decorate the front of his house. When celebrating the open house party, he invited all closed relatives and nearby neighbors, and he was very proud of his new house. From his interpretation, the new house made him “different” from many other villagers, not only the poor but also the rich who were staying with old houses.

This practice is popular among all 72 interviewees though in some cases, there were additional explanations. Six of the 72 key informants explained that the replacement of new houses over old houses derived from the fact that their old houses were in poor condition and they had to divide the land for their children. Even in these cases, implication of new houses as manifestations of “modernity,” “wealth,” “success,” or “development” were still mentioned.

The disappearance of home gardens and formerly popular trees has led to the introduction of new plants which had been considered “wild” (*Hoang dại*) in the previous period. These included Chinese banyan (*Xi or Xanh*) and Cycas revolute (*Vạn Tuế*). Their “wildness” label came from the fact that they mainly grew up in barren areas in natural ways without human care. Big and old trees like Chinese banyan trees were even thought
to be living spaces of ghosts (Trần Ngọc Thêm 1995). Interestingly, since the late 1990s they were planted in ceramic pots that placed in the patio in front of each house. This arrangement brought plants closer to the living space, but in a different way. Instead of letting trees live naturally on the ground as part of nature, trees were “captured” in narrow pots as “decoration” for people’s living space. People cut, formed or bended trees following in whatsoever shapes they wanted under name of bonsai.

**Plant Diversity**

Home garden changes of size and plant arrangement were followed by the relevant decease of plant diversity. As listed in the previous chapter, since the pre-Renovation onward, there used to be around 31 species in the village home gardens that could be classified into five categories including timber, fruit, spicy, herb and bonsai. Among the 72 investigated home gardens, the most diversity had 37 species, while the least included 19 species. By early 2012, on average each home garden had only six species; the most diversity was 12 species while the least consists of five.

**Table 3: 12 Species in a Home Gardens in post- Đổi Mới Era**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ói</td>
<td>Guava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Bưởi</td>
<td>Pomelo/grapefruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Chanh</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mít</td>
<td>Jackfruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Đu Đủ</td>
<td>Papaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Hồng Xiêm</td>
<td>Sapodilla</td>
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Among these five categories, a decrease was seen first and most in timber and followed by fruit, spicy and herb trees, while *bonsai* have significantly increased. The most general explanation for the decrease of those first three categories is they no longer have practical values, and this was analyzed in the previous section. By the end of 2012, at a village-recognized *bonsai* expert’s ground there were 14 different species. This is the most populous and diverse *bonsai* garden. The owner, Mr. X. was a retired commune cadre who had been working for the commune government until the late 1990s. After retirement, he had a lot of free time, and decided to plant *bonsai* in his garden. He did this to relax and also to show other villagers that he was modern. He explained that quality of life was not just what you ate, wore or in what kind of house you lived, but also how urban you were. Creating a *bonsai* garden was therefore how he distinguished himself and appeared more stylish than others in the village. This way of thinking is popular elsewhere (Selhub and Logan 2013). Mr. X. thus bought some *bonsai* trees at the district market to put in his garden. He enjoyed taking care of them everyday. Gradually, he enlarged his collection of *bonsai* garden in quantity and species type. Of the 72 interviewees, Mr. X.’s *bonsai* garden

<p>| | | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Xoan</td>
<td>China-trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ngải Cửu</td>
<td>Wormwood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Hoa Hồng</td>
<td>Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Cau</td>
<td>Areca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Chuối</td>
<td>Banana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Khế</td>
<td>Starfruit</td>
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</table>
was atypical because in most of the other cases, young people were the ones who created a bonsai garden in order to give their new home a new appearance.

The increase of bonsai was associated with the introduction of new species, while traditional trees such as rose, Tonkin jasmine (thiên lý), Bougainvillea (hoa giấy) and Areca trees have become less popular. In the case of the above man’s bonsai garden, all 14 species were new plants that were brought from an outside environment such as: Chinese banyan or Cycas revolute. These species had natural environmental origin, but with human’s intervention on their shapes. While former bonsai trees were allowed to grow freely and also had a “decoration” function, they could be practically useful for some other purpose including foods, drink or medicine, new bonsai trees were just for “watching” as people explained elsewhere (Selhub and Logan 2013). Before 1990, bonsai trees were local species. People did not have to buy as they could ask each other for seeds and branches to plant, or just layered themselves for planting. Meanwhile, most of today bonsai trees were bought from outside, mainly from district town or from professional bonsai gardeners in the town. Interestingly, some species, like Chinese banyan, used to live in wild areas only, and used to be considered shelters of ghosts, but after becoming bonsai they represent “urban” or “modern” styles without any negative repercussions.

Table 4: Comparison of Bonsai Before and After Đổi Mới

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bonsai trees</th>
<th>Before 1990s</th>
<th>Since 1990s</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions</td>
<td>Decoration, eating, drinking and chewing</td>
<td>Decoration, business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins</td>
<td>Locally planted</td>
<td>Outside species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>In home garden</td>
<td>Out of home garden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The increase of bonsai is interpreted by both local villagers and urban villagers as a sign of moving from “eating to live” (ăn để sống) to “living to eat” (sống để ăn). From villagers’ perspectives, past hardships made them prioritize sufficient foods as primary demand for survival. This explained the popularity of fruit trees, spicy trees and herbal trees in their home garden. After the Renovation, food security has no longer been a problem and the modern health care system has been significantly improved. Furthermore construction materials are available at the market. The presence of the commune clinic, several pharmacies and private health centers in the village provide people instant support once they become ill. These improvements have devalued the role of traditional gardens, and are quickly followed by the building of bonsai gardens with completely new setting as shown in the following Figure.

**Figure 7: New Garden Setting**

![Diagram of New Garden Setting]

**Transformation of Sacred Places**

Like houses and home gardens, the seventeen sacred places in the village have also undergone significant transitions which can be framed in the four following trends:
secularization of some former sacred places, revival of Buddhist pagodas, the development of home shrines and the expansion of the boundaries of sacred spaces. Some general consequences of these processes include the significant decline of planting at those former sacred places and the replacement of living space over natural space. Likewise, these processes are also followed with new transitions including privatization of formerly public owned assets and the establishment of commercial spaces as described in the previous chapter.

**Secularization**

As described in the previous chapter sacred places were thought to be shelters for either ghosts or certain spirits, and thus villagers were either fearful or respectful. From this view, any unfriendly intrusions were prohibited since people believed such practices would bring them bad luck. The sacred nature of those places protected them from privation ownership or from becoming incorporated into man-made landscapes for decades. However, this protection was removed in various ways since Doi Moi, including privatization over public land, conversion of spiritual places for profane use and the demolishment of ritual symbols.

In 1992, the Việt Hùng CPC arranged a land auction silent bidding intended to sell land in the Đình Trung Steep area. This area used to be public land and had been left unoccupied with a large, old banyan tree that sat on the top of the Steep. The steep was deemed a promising area for the development of commerce because it lay alongside a cross-village road and was opposite the village school. For that reason, the CPC decided to divide this land into 14 small pieces, each with 45 square meters, to sell to the villagers. Immediately thereafter, villagers began to open small shops to sell ice cream, candy, clothing, toys and many other goods. From an empty area, this has become populated and the old banyan tree was cut down and the bushes were cleared. General fear of this place
quickly disappeared even when one had to go by in the evening as the electronic lights from shops were always on. Ghost stories about this place became less and less common.

Another example of this trend is the case of Chúng Sinh Temple. This was considered the most sacred place before the 1990s, as this was where people worshiped the village’s spirit. However, like in Dinh Trung Steep, this land was quickly occupied with new houses in 1997. The temple became a tiny sacred place located among many profane spaces. Similarly, from a residential place with various water-fern ponds fenced around by thick bamboo hedges, Cổng Hầu has become a profane space after people filled up their ponds and built houses since 1998. On the other the hand, some other sacred places have been occupied and used for non-ritual purposes. In 1999, a young woman occupied Mái Thượng Temple and opened a small tailor shop. The temple had been ruined shortly before this date and left empty because it had been too old and in bad condition for years. This young woman who had recently finished high school but failed in going to higher education and whose house was near the temple decided to borrow this land from the hamlet and built a small shop to run her own business.

Meanwhile, the remaining sacred places that were formerly outdoor shrines on the land of families who lived alongside the village road were removed when people built new houses or opened shops for home-run businesses. By the early 2000s, there were no shrines left alongside the main road. This followed the conclusion of outdoor ritual practices that arranged on the first and fifteenth days of the month (lunar calendar) or on certain anniversary dates. Meanwhile, parallel with this process was the revival of certain sacred places that are still respected by Đúc Nội villagers. By the end of 2013, some of the seventeen formerly sacred places had become profane and no longer recognized as sacred (thiêng) by both the local elderly and the urban elderly, while others are still recognized as sacred. The ones that have become considered as profane (trần tục) are often associated
with formerly uninhabited places or associated with ghost stories while their remains are associated with either historical or religious relics. However, the sacred quality has new meaning for villagers. They are no longer fearful, but just respectful of sacred places such as pagodas and temple.

Ecologically, this conversion of sacred places into residential and commercial places has had significant influence on the rapid decline of plant diversity in each place. Old trees such as banyan, bamboo or Chinese banyan were cut down and ponds were filled and replaced with houses or new high buildings. In the 17 formerly sacred places, it was estimated that five old banyan trees were removed, five bamboo hedges were uprooted, six ponds disappeared and eight outdoor shrines were closed. Meanwhile, once public properties have now become private assets. Their contributions to public life in the village such as providing shade, water and a place for rituals have now been to individual households as discussed in the second chapter.

This ecological transition from plant diversity to residential, from public-oriented to private-oriented, and from ecosystem to man-made system, and the ownership shifts have brought new attitudes and practices from the local villagers. These community properties were formerly managed by the village and benefited the public. However, after having been occupied by individuals, these were no longer public spaces but had private boundaries established by brick walls, houses or shops. These new conditions brought profane activities of everyday life and gradually secularized the sacred meanings. Ghost stories gradually disappeared and people were no longer fearful or respectful of those places. Interviewees explained that those places were no longer sacred because they were occupied by humans and “ghosts or spirits must have left to go somewhere else.”
**Buddhist Revivals**

There are two Buddhist pagodas in Đức Nơi Village. One is in Đông Hamlet (Phúc Hương Pagoda) and the other is in Trung Hamlet (Kiến Dương Pagoda). During the cooperative period, these were places for elderly women following the tradition that pagodas were for women and the village communal temple was for men (Trần Ngọc Thêm 1997). After the Renovation, there have been significant changes in these two pagodas including size, architecture and arrangement.

In terms of size, before the 1990s both pagodas had only one building each. Each was quite small with a total area of around 60 square meters and was built of brick and tiled with thatch like other common houses in the village. Since the late 1990s, donations from people and the government have had important influences on the upgrading and expansion of pagodas. For example, Kiến Dương Pagoda in Trung Hamlet today has been expanded and consists of four different buildings each for a different deity (see Appendix 8 for images of the two pagodas).

Interestingly, today, villagers worship not only Buddha and his subordinate deities but also Ho Chi Minh, Mother Goddesses (Đạo Mẫu), and even General Võ Nguyên Giáp in these pagodas. Pagodas have become spaces of not only old women, but also the young including men. People go to pagoda not only twice a month (in the first and the fifteenth day of a month) or in the New Year, but also every day. Many original villagers who are now living in cities also go to the pagoda when they visit their relatives in the village.

A Buddhist monk who is officially recognized and appointed by the Buddhist Sangha of Hanoi (which is a local extension of the National Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam)

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36 General Võ Nguyên Giáp (1911 – 2013) was the first General in Vietnam and was known for leading the battles against the French and then the Americans, including the 1954 Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in which the Vietnamese defeated the French. Since his death, Giáp has become spiritualized and thousands of people visit his grave daily.
manages each pagoda. The monk who is appointed by the Sangha has more influence in the lives of villagers than in the past. If invited, he will come to each family to organize ritual ceremonies such as new house celebrations, full moon days, long-life celebrations, funerals, ceremonies for the deceased or when people get sick or want to pray for good luck. This new role has empowered local monks on the one hand, while enlarging the influence of Buddhism in the village.

**Development of Buddhist Altars and Mother Goddess Home Shrines**

Prior to 1990, there was always one altar in every house in the village as stated above. There, people worshipped their ancestors, Hồ Chí Minh, the Buddha and local deities. However, since the late 1990s, besides ancestor worship altars, more and more villagers have built a separate altar to worship Buddha (Appendix 10). This practice derived from a belief that there must be separate spaces for ancestors and for Buddha since this would make their worship more effective and more respectful. This belief stemmed from a very profane reality that offerings to Buddha must be strictly vegetarian foods, while offerings to the ancestors could include meat or fish. Additionally, this transition indicates an increased influence of Buddhism on local people after several decades of “sleeping” under restrictive policies from the State. Buddhism is officially recognized and supported by the State and is the largest religion in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Buddhism is also the most influential at the local level in most Vietnamese villages (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006; Trần Tử 1984).

By the end of 2013, 37 of my 72 key informants had Buddha altars that are placed in the second floor of their homes. Their ancestor altar remained in the first floor at the same position. However, field observations showed that ancestor altars have been placed about 30 centimeters higher than they used to be and so have the new Buddhist altars. Apparently this change correlates to the increasing height of new houses, as described in
the previous section. The Buddha altar is placed in the second floor, or on the top floor. People explain that this gives separate spaces for people to practice their ritual beliefs. In a family, while the oldest man is primarily responsible for the care of rituals at the ancestor altar, the Buddha altar is the separate space taken care of by the oldest woman who also prays there twice a day, once in early morning and once in the evening.

The emergence of Buddha altars inside houses relates to a trend through which women seek to establish a space for themselves to satisfy their ritual practices. As described in the previous chapter, ancestor altars are reserved for men, especially in special cases such as Death Anniversaries or New Year feasts. This is because ancestors in this context refer to the deceased on the husband’s side only, which corresponds to patrilineal kinship system followed in Vietnamese tradition. Thus women were not provided space for their ritual practice, especially given the fact that the indoor space of the old houses was limited. New houses with more space make the opening of a separate altar possible. At the same time, this also indicates the emerging role and voice of women in their own family (Ngô Đức Thịnh 2001; Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm 2009).

Another change related to indoor sacred places is the emergence of shrines for the Mother Goddesses in homes (Appendix 10). This is a popular belief and practice of the Viet people who worship female deities and female historical figures across the country, similar to other ethnic groups in the country who have similar practices centered on women (Ngô Đức Thịnh 2010). After decades of “sleeping” this practice has been revived and rapidly developed nationally in the 2000s. This is in part because of the Renovation and the official recognition and permission for religious and ritual practice from the government. By the end of 2013 there were eighteen Mother Goddess home shrines (eight in Đoài Hamlet, six in Trung Hamlet and four in Đông Hamlet). The owners of these shrines were old women ranging from 63 to 71 years old.
It is interesting that these home shrines are not only for local villagers, but also for outside people. While ancestor altars or Buddha altars are mainly for family worship, Mother Goddess shrines are also for the public. People come to celebrate ceremonies together in the hope that their families will be happy and receive good luck. Differing from ancestor and Buddha altars, Mother Goddess home shrines are also where people want to communicate with the dead by asking about their lives in the “other world” (thế giới khác) and asking for their support (Ngô Đức Thịnh 2010).

**Expansion of Sacred Space Boundaries**

It has been the conventional view that Viet villages were closed worlds with fixed boundaries both physically and spiritually (Bùi Xuân Dính 1997; Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). There was a popular proverb that “each village worships its own god” (thần làng nào làng ấy thờ). This explained why when asked about sacred places, villagers listed seventeen places located inside their village territory. State policies toward religious practices and economic hardship meant that villagers rarely left their village for spiritual purposes. However, this situation has changed since the late 1990s.

Nowadays, people often go to temples, pagodas and historical relics in places outside of their village. For Dục Nội villagers, these places include Đền Trần in Thái Bình Province, Bà Chúa Kho Temple in Gia Lâm district and Hương Pagoda. These have been nationally recognized as sacred places in the post Renovation era and they attract people from all over to come and worship. On such occasions villagers often go in groups that mainly consist of and are organized by women.

**Beyond the New Landscapes**

After providing these descriptions of the transitions of the three landscapes in Dục Nội Village, this section discusses how the government’s policies impact this process in
general and the interconnection between people’s concepts of modernity and the establishment of new spaces in particular.

**State Policies**

In countries like Vietnam, State’s policies have a significant impact on not only what people think, but also what people do. The Renovation has been seen as marking a benchmark for the development of the country since the late 20th century. This section focuses on basic policies that have impacted the emergence of new houses, home gardens and sacred places in Dục Nội Village. These policies are relevant for such transitions.

**Decentralization, Privatization and modernization**

Under the Renovation, two significant processes have been initiated since the early 1990s in Dục Nội Village: decentralization and privatization. These processes have been implemented under new perceptions of modernization. Modernization did not become a popular slogan in political circles until 1986. Instead, prior to the Renovation, collectivism and socialism were the driving ideological discourses. This explained the establishment of cooperatives across the country and the fact that production materials including land were managed by the State. However, since the Renovation, modernity has become more and more popular with the State’s recognition of the private sector as an important force for the country’s economic development. Meanwhile, free commercial exchange and urbanization have been valued as significant signs of modernity (Thomas 2002; Ravallion and Walle 2008).

Malaysia provides a comparable case study to Vietnam. In 1996, the Malaysian government announced a vast area to be designated as a special zone for the development of the country called the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). This megaproject encompasses a 50-kilometer corridor of land that extends southwards from the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. This project aims to establish a wired and interconnected urban zone.
conducive to high-tech investment and to create an “intelligent landscape” for the country (Bunnel 2004). This ambitious project has resulted in the emergence of “cities within a city” with various high-tech and international financial centers where “intelligent citizens from all over the world come to work. This affirms that the Malaysian government is aware of and believes in “the role of urban space in positioning nation-states in global cultural-economic networks” (Bunnell 2004, 142).

Similarly, the Vietnamese government and its Renovation policies have made “modernization” and “urbanization” important targets, especially for the capital city of Hanoi. Subsequently, new urban zones planned by the government have emerged since the early 1990s. In the early 1990s, Hanoi’s territory was approximately 92,000 hectares, 9% of which were classified as an urban area. The master plan that was revised in 1998 called for an increase in urbanized areas by 25,000 hectares to cover 27% of the province’s territory. In May of 2008 the National Assembly approved the expansion of Hanoi’s territory by 3,300 square kilometers. It did so by integrating portions of neighboring provinces’ territories. This decision has also made Hanoi one of the seventeen biggest capital cities in the world. The expanded Hanoi nowadays includes one provincial town, twelve urban districts and seventeen rural districts (compared with nine urban districts and five rural districts previously).

This expansion policy has had significant influence on land planning at the district and commune levels including Viet Hung commune. This has thus created new landscape at the village level. This is a legal pre-condition for the establishment of “urban-like” areas in Đức Nội Village including the “Village Street” and “Western Commercial Zone” described in previous sections. The establishment of these two landscapes has quickly been followed by new houses that are more like an urban setting. Similarly, the rapid decline of agriculture and the replacement of home gardens with brick-paved grounds with bonsai
have something to do with the emergence of fruit tree and vegetable zones in the district as well as in neighboring provinces. On the other hand, the secularization of formerly sacred places in the village has been determined by the privatization of public land and has therefore led to the decline of agriculture while the emergence of new sacred spaces like home shrines or Buddha altars has been made possible by new government policies toward religious and spiritual practices. Since the Renovation, people have been given more freedom to practice various spiritual beliefs and such practices are no longer considered superstitious as they were in the past. On the contrary, spiritual practices in general and Buddhism in particular has been encouraged. This is indicated through increasing participation of Buddhism monks in State-organized festivals and ceremonies and the rapid upgrading of Buddhism pagodas nationally.

The above analysis indicates a transition in recognition of modernity from the macro level in Vietnam. Prior to the Renovation, modernity was equated with socialism and a subsidized and centralized economy (Ravallion and Walle 2008). This was considered a higher development compared with feudalism or capitalism, and this discourse was quite popular during this period as declared in many official claims of the Vietnam Communist Party. Modernity in this context is a “new way of being and seeing” as defined by Bunnell (2004) in the case of Malaysia or as a “way of framing a specific transformation” (Ogborn 1998; Nash 2000). This transition has led to a process of decision making as passed down to the local level and then individual households. While villagers had to work in local cooperatives, to plant crops that were decided by their cooperatives and to take care of crops under the strict supervision of their cooperatives prior to the Renovation, they are allowed to decide whatever crops they wish to grow and whatever investment they wish to make since the Renovation. This is a big change since local farmers now have become true owners on their farms. Besides, they could decide where to
buy crop varieties, fertilizers as well as pesticides, either from government companies or from the private sector. Similarly, people have been given more freedom to make decisions relating to their houses, home gardens and sacred places.

Privatization in this context refers to the process of allocating public land from cooperatives to individual households and to the acknowledgement of private businesses as legal activities. From now on, people could run their own business as long as they pay taxes and abide by the relevant regulations (Ravallion and Walle 2008). Quickly after these processes have taken place, villagers’ finances have been significantly improved and this brings new concepts of “nice house,” “typical home garden” and “scared places” to villagers which will be discussed in the following section.

**Religion is No Longer “Opium”**

The Vietnamese government tended to accuse religious and spiritual beliefs of being mere superstitions in the pre-Đổi Mới era. However, the 7th national meeting of the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1991 identified and approved a mission of building a “modern culture with national identities” with recognition of spiritual practices as significant forces that form “national identities”. Shortly afterwards, the 1992 Constitution affirmed that “peoples have the full right to follow religion or not. Religions are equal by law and religious places are protected by law” (article 70). Since then, there have been various state policies that aim to provide more freedom for beliefs. Local governments have thus provided financial and legal support for the reconstruction and upgrading of temples or pagodas. These policies aim to use Buddhism and its followers on the one hand and to avoid criticism related to human rights on the other hand. Additionally, empowering Buddhism is also believed to be a good way to prevent an increasing influence of European-originated religions such as Catholicism (Lê Hồng Lý 2009). The state’s new attitudes toward religion is an important condition for the rapid revival of ritual practices.
that were having a “long winter’s sleep” since before the 1980s. This is especially true when ritual practices to worship local deities or historical relics are often defined under the name of “revisiting tradition” (Kleinen 2004).

In the context of Dực Nội Village, after the privatization process has taken place in seventeen formerly recognized sacred places and decades after abandoning village temples and pagodas with insufficient care, local governments decided to renew the village temple in 1997. This project was sponsored by the CPC with donations from rich villagers. The temple is recognized as a historical relic (Di tích lịch sử) in 2001 by the Hanoi city government. This recognition is followed by further financial support from the government and donations from wealthy villagers. Accordingly, in the early 2000s the two Buddhist pagodas received funds for reconstruction and renovation. Similarly the CPC decided in 2007 to allocate Ngôi Temple and Cổng Thượng Temple, which had been used as kindergarten in Trung Hamlet (Ngôi Temple) or were occupied by people for personal business in Doai Hamlet (Cổng Thượng Temple) for hamlet management. After this decision was made, the necessary funds were provided for people in each hamlet to rebuild and to convert these two places back to temples.

**Villagers’ Views of Modernity**

Prior to 1945, in traditional Vietnamese society, intellectuals were classified as the most distinguished class, followed by peasants, handicraft men and merchants accordingly. This hierarchical career ranking system followed Confucian ideals and was popular and widely known. This ranking placed intellectuals in the most respected position, although they were not always the richest. Likewise, merchants were often the richest, although they were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and a stigma was attached to their careers.

37 In Vietnam, historical relics are often classified into two categories: provincial relics and national relics. While the former is approved by a province government, the latter is approved by the central government with representation from the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Culture.
Business people were often seen as liars who would ignore honor and who would try to get a profit no matter what. This explained why they were discriminated against and seen dishonorably as “damn merchants” (con buôn). Peasants have always been the majority community in a Vietnamese village and were almost always poor. Most farmland was owned by landlords. The peasants were subsistence farmers who rarely had a surplus and whose lives were heavily dependent on the weather. Meanwhile, artisans were a very small group in Vietnam’s traditional society. In this context, intellectuals represented the most ideal position.

Prior to the mid-1990s in Đức Nơi Village, the concept of modernity was not widely referenced in daily life. Instead, people talked about wealth or the lack thereof. This was reasonable since most people were farmers their main income was from farming. High poverty rates made people think about wealth as their first priority and dream. Indications of wealth were therefore mainly material-oriented with houses, farming land size acquisitions and non-farm incomes as substantial figures. Meanwhile, during the pre-Renovation era, most farmland was managed by cooperatives so houses and non-farming income became the most significant indicators. This situation explained the ranking of the four rich men in the village in the pre-Renovation period as described in the previous chapter.

However, after the Renovation there have been more rich people in the village and more people could work to have brick homes like the former four recognized richest men. Meanwhile, non-farming income has become significant and most families rely on it. In such circumstances, having enough food to eat is something most villagers could barely afford. The village is no longer closely integrated, as it has been integrated more and more into regional and national networks. More and more young people leave the village for non-farming jobs in cities. These processes, together with government policies that favor
urban areas have brought local villagers modernity or urbanity as new concepts that did not exist in previous eras. These new concepts have been followed by new meanings and new indicators that tend to be divorced from values of the past.

Houses are no longer just living spaces, but also business spaces. This has significantly increased the price of land alongside the road. People prefer to live near roads where they could open a shop for business. From worthless land where nobody wanted to live, this area has become the most expensive and considered the best place to live. This is a big shift since people used to prefer to live near village temples or in central areas as they did in the past (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006). This explains why the commune government had to organize auctions in what is today the “village street” to assure equality since many people wanted to buy, but land was limited. This was also the first auction not only in the village, but also in the commune, since residential land was only allocated to people at no cost in the previous period. This was a similar situation to three other living extension areas described in the beginning of this chapter.

The trend of marching toward the roadside has been quickly followed by changes in house architecture and home gardens. People want to have “urban-like” houses because new houses make them “different” and more “urban”. People want to have high floor houses because they create separate spaces for different members. They have indoor kitchens and restrooms just as those in the city. People clear home gardens and replace them with bonsai to display their wealth and to make their space fancier like parks in urban Hanoi. They make more donations for village pagodas to show their beliefs in the Buddha with the hope to receive more as urban people do.

These processes initially departed from the Hanoi urban areas before expanding to the district town in late 1980 and in early 1990, and this was quickly imported into the village since 1993. They indicate influences of “urbanity” as “modernity” from the
government discourse on local villagers. When people are asked to define modernity and tradition in relation to houses, home garden and sacred places, they tend to attach urbanity settings with the former, rural setting with the latter accordingly.

Table 5: Interpretation of Modernity and Tradition According to Villagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscapes</th>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Modernity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houses</td>
<td>Brick or wooden houses</td>
<td>Concrete and high floor houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home garden</td>
<td>Presence of five different types of trees with fish pond</td>
<td>Bonsai garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred places</td>
<td>Village pagoda/temple; places with presence of ghosts or unexplainable occurring; old trees or strange shaped object; place that worship local gods; mainly within village territory</td>
<td>Village pagoda/temple place that worship local gods; Encompass village boundaries; Mother goddess worship; historical relics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, new interpretations of modernity have influenced not only people’s houses and home gardens, but also their interpretations of sacred places. Prior to Doi Moi, sacred places were bounded within village territory. This was because of the village’s isolation from the outside world on the one hand and of the government’s strict control over religious practices on the other hand. Meanwhile, each Viet village used to have one temple and one pagoda, mainly (Gourou 1936; Trần Tür 1996; Trần Ngọc Thêm 1996). Under this situation, the existence of other “sacred places” inside the village was an
adaptive strategy to maintain public ownership over certain areas, to protect plant diversity from being overexploited and to maintain harmonious relations with their neighbors and the deceased on the other hand, as described in the previous section. This explains why people talked about sacred places in their village, but not those in other villages. Villagers are mostly aware of sacred forces connected to their ancestors, local gods, spirits, and ghosts as well as the Buddha.

These circumstances have rapidly changed since the mid-1990s. Socio-economic transitions together with urbanization have removed the fixed boundaries that once bounded the village so tightly. While more and more sacred places become profane because of land privatization, people begin to learn more about outside sacred places from their off-farm jobs or from occasional travelling. More importantly, ritual practices and beliefs in deities are no longer considered superstitious since the Renovation. Religion is no longer considered as opium, but as a legal right under the Constitution. This is an enormous shift, since after the Renovation the central government recognized that religion is a natural demand and everyone has the right to follow and to practice his or her beliefs. Since the early 1990s, many pagodas, temples and home shrines in urban Hanoi were rebuilt or upgraded, and so were those in neighboring provinces. After decades of “sleeping”, rituals and ceremonies have been revived and in some cases even supported by the government (Ngô Đức Thiện 2001). Consequently, ritual practices have become most active in cities in general and urban Hanoi in particular (Lê Hồng Lý 2009). Pagodas are no longer places for women, but also men, including intellectuals and business people. Many rituals and ceremonies have been revived and publicly celebrated, attracting thousands of people. Catholic churches have become spaces for not only followers, but also for non-Catholics, or even non-religious people who come for fun on special occasions such as Christmas Day (Ngô Đức Thiện 2001). Going to pagodas, temples,
home shrines or churches has apparently become part of a new lifestyle and not only a pure ritual practice.

These transitions, from government policies to urbanization movements have influenced the reemergence of new sacred places in Dục Nội Village on the one hand, such as home shrines and Buddha altars, and on villagers’ integration into regional and national spiritual networks on the other hand. Local villagers, especially the local elderly, now have access to sacred places outside their village.
“It seems our village is in the middle of nowhere, a bit urban, a bit rural, a bit something in between. I do not recognize my own hometown” (Mr. K, 70 years old)

“Well, the village is no longer rural. City people who come to our village must be very surprised. We have everything they have” (Mrs. B, 64 years old)

By the early 2000s, houses, home gardens and sacred places in Đức Nội village have undergone massive changes. They look more metropolitan after the introduction of new architecture and new settings over these three landscapes. How do the elderly think about these changes and what are their adaptations toward such new landscapes are the key questions that this chapter answers.

**Between Local Elderly and Urban Elderly**

The two seemingly contradictory statements above are quotes from two different older men, and they just touch on one of the key questions that this study aims to answer, that is: How do the elderly feel about their new landscapes? The first statement above is from a 70 year-old man who worked as a teacher until he retired about 15 years ago. He moved to Hanoi in his late 20s, the mid 1980s, when he was given a teaching job. However, many of his relatives still live in the village and he often returns on the weekend. Meanwhile the second statement is from a 64 year-old man who is a farmer and has spent his whole life living in the village. It is easy to feel the distinctive sentimental messages hidden behind each of these statements. The first seems to carry a deep nostalgia for the past, while the second shows pride in the present. These two different attitudes are from two persons of the same generation, born in the same village, but who are living in different places.
Therefore, it is important to raise the question: Why do such opposing sentiments exist within individuals who spent their childhoods in the village? What are the forces that bring these differences and are there any hidden messages beneath these evaluations of their new landscapes? To answer these questions, a comparison of local elderly and urban elderly is made. Urban elderly is limited to those who were born and grew up in the village, but have been living in Hanoi city prior to the Renovation. This excludes those who only left the village recently. The reason for this selection is to test if there are any differences between these two groups regarding their feelings towards the changing landscape over three decades. They spent their childhoods together and experienced the older landscape together, but have observed the changing landscape from different perspectives: some as insiders while others as outsiders, at least to some extent. Additionally, my research assistant, who is a true outsider to the village, asked these questions as well. I believe the relationship I have with my villagers might influence their answers. This is because they think I am an insider like they are and so they may underestimate some important things that they assume I already know.

As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, many villagers were very surprised when as a Ph.D. student from an American university I decided to return to conduct research in my home village. From their perspective, I might have done something else in the city or overseas more relevant to my dissertation, and they found it rather funny and weird that I would spend time asking them about such everyday things about the village. This explained why people often laughed and even became suspicious when I asked them about the village’s history. This reality brings not only a practical challenge, but also a theoretical one for those who want to do field research in their home communities as discussed by anthropologist Russell Bernard (2006).
Landscapes from Local Elderly

There is a popular statement that local villagers, especially local elderly, express when they are asked about their feelings toward the village in today’s general landscape: “pushing the green and pulling the grey: we have now just houses and houses, while trees have gone”. “Pushing the green” refers to the wide scale decline of farming while “pulling the grey” refers to the rapid increase in concrete and many storied buildings in the village. It reflects a deep nostalgia for the past, the time when bamboo hedges, old trees and orchards surrounded the entire village. A general impression I could sense during my field research was the fact that the local elderly were both happy and sad about their new landscapes. It is quite easy to see this sentiment when people talk about the village. They might proudly discuss certain changes, while quickly showing regret about other losses. However, this seemingly contradictory attitude is not seen when people talk to my assistant, as people seem to clearly favor the new landscape over the old one. The following section focuses on comparing people’s evaluations of houses, home gardens and sacred places, as the three most significant landscapes in villagers’ views.

New Houses from the Local Elderly Villagers’ Perspectives

Nowadays, houses still represent wealth, success and also the “face” of the family. This is similar to villagers’ who dreamt of having five-compartment brick houses that were popular in the pre-Renovation era. This attitude is proven by villagers’ excitement when they talk about when and how their new houses were built. They tend to estimate that such new houses cost them around 600 million Vietnamese Dong, which is equivalent to 30 thousand American dollars.38 That is a large sum of money, so obviously not every family could afford to replace their old home with a new one. However, since villagers tended to see a new house as a new “face,” they often borrowed money from relatives, friends or

38 According to the exchange rate in September, 2013.
even the bank to start construction as soon as they have about three quarters of the necessary amount. Among the 72 key informants, 51 borrowed money from relatives to build a new home. Villagers perceived building a new style home made them feel equal to their friends (bằng bạn, bằng bè).

As one villager stated: “we want to be just like others. Even if we must eat less or take out a loan” (Mrs. L, 68 years old). This explains the increasing trend of replacing old style houses with new ones even though the former were still in good condition. It is common that shortly after a family builds a new house, the neighbors will do the same. However sometimes this results in the inability to finish the new home. Some people could only afford the basic frames of their new homes and not the paint, doors, windows or indoor furniture.

Those new meanings have arisen after the establishment of the Village Street in the mid 1990s. This is a kind of chain reaction since Village Streets were strongly influenced by the development of the District Street (Phố huyện) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as described in the previous chapter. Similarly, the District Street is a product of an urban expansion project initiated by the Hanoi city government following the Renovation. People are happy with their new houses because they are symbols of urban culture. Having urban-style houses also makes them feel like city people and erases feelings of inferiority. This way of viewing new houses is widely agreed upon by villagers.

More importantly, having such new houses, as people explain, indicates a continuous development of one’s family that passed down from older to younger generations. A very popular proverb in Vietnamese affirms “it is good fortune when children are more successful than their parents” (Con hơn cha là nhà có phúc). With this in mind, new houses provide not only shelter, but also are evidence of success. New houses are seen as built by people with good jobs and high incomes to afford such expensive
houses. Meanwhile, the success of young people is seen as the result of good education that they receive from their parents, as well as from overall good fortune in the family.

However, these new urban-style homes do not always satisfy villagers or make them happy. For example, one older villager asserted that: “we are living inside a box, not in a house” (Mr. Y, 71 years old). The elderly often describe their new homes as matchboxes (hộp diêm) in reference to their narrow width and discrete spaces inside. The elderly in the village often express this feeling because they feel they are not taken care of enough (không được quan tâm) by their children. They often complain that in the evening after dinner, their children and grandchildren only go to their rooms to watch movies or play online, while during the day they are away from home. Thus, the elderly feel lonely and like they have nothing to do, especially when television is full of romantic or action movies from the West that the elderly are unable to understand or are not interested in watching. The elderly therefore often express these negative feelings about new houses.

The village elderly also state negative opinions about the new homes indoor and outdoor environments. First, they complain that the indoor atmosphere is stuffy because each floor is divided into small, closed rooms that prevent the flow of fresh air. An elderly male villager said that “we sometimes could not breathe well if there is not enough fresh air inside our house” (Mr. D., 75 years old). The elderly also tend to see the new houses as made of concrete and lacking in shade from trees and in a colorful atmosphere without farming or home gardens. In eliminating such greenery, shelter and food for birds has been destroyed. The elderly are sad that the birds that used to gather around their houses do not come any longer. With this decrease of animal and plant communities in the village, there is a decrease in animal as well as plant biodiversity. The elderly feel this makes their homes and the village boring (buồn chán). In the meantime the elderly feel that concrete makes the home’s indoor temperature hotter in the summer because they believe cement,
brick and steel absorb heat. On the other the hand, during humid days, there is a high incidence of humidity and this makes their floor slippery. These complaints indicate the physical inconveniences that the elderly have experienced with their new houses.

Many elderly feel that new home construction has caused their views to be less listened to and less important. For example, one villager said: “We are now useless. Our voices are not listened to. We can do nothing but watch and accept whatever our kids want to do” (Mrs. N, 77 years old). As this quote shows, new houses are seen as making the elderly opinions less important. People often complain that decisions related to the home are made by their children. This includes when, where and especially how new houses should be built. While young people explain that this is because their parents have no experience about new house architecture, the elderly perceive this as a lack of respect for them. They feel they are not listened to because they do not bring home any income. It is common to hear the elderly disagree with certain features of their new homes, such as:

- Well, the toilet should not be placed in the living room or next to the bedroom.
- The stairs are too high and dangerous for us and for our grandchildren.
- If they listened to us, the painting would not be this ugly.
- I do not like the floor material. It is too slippery, but our warnings are not heeded.
- They [young people] have money so they just do what they want. Our words are worthless.

These complaints indicate the unhappiness of the elderly because they feel that they are excluded from decision-making. Another villager stated: “every house is getting so closed with high brick walls and concrete door gate, we visit each other less and the neighborhood is too different today” (Mrs. L, 75 years old). This is a common statement from the elderly when they are asked to share their feelings about how new houses are
arranged. In their view, replacing plantation fences with brick walls and open gates with locked gates makes them feel distanced from their neighbors. They feel hesitant to walk over to see their neighbors when they see that the gates are locked. Also, because of the high brick walls, they are uncertain if their neighbors are at home or if they are busy. This makes them feel more claustrophobic and bored inside their “matchbox” house, especially when they have a lot free time during the day. This is totally different from the past when everyone was very comfortable to visit each other without prior notice.

On the other hand, my research assistant asked similar questions to explore the elderly attitudes toward their new homes. My research assistant is not from my village, and has no relationship with the villagers. She spent one month in my village interviewing elderly villagers who I had also interviewed earlier. Interestingly, there are some differences between what she collected and what I collected.

Some of the elderly villagers discuss the positive features of the new houses. For example, one older man said: “you see, our houses are just like those in cities. They are even bigger” (Mr. Tr, 68 years old). This is one among several common statements that affirmed the positive features of new houses. People are quite proud of having their houses similar to those in Hanoi or to those in the district’s urban area. They see air-conditioners, indoor restrooms, Internet or cable television as important indications of “urbanity” that have enhanced their new houses, and that have made them “similar” to urban people. This makes them proud of the reality that most of the old houses in their village have been replaced by the new ones: “you see we have very few brick houses, at least three quarters of them are new” (Mr. H, 81 years old).

Holding this view, replacing brick houses with urban style houses is an inevitable trend and as a general rule for any community as the latter is seen as more “progressive” (tiến bộ) than the former. This transition is thought to be something similar with the
movement from mud houses to brick houses during the mid 20th century. Mud houses represent poverty and backwardness, while brick houses represent wealth and education. Urban-style houses indicate development and modernity.

“We have new houses, but indoor furniture is not as fancy as those in cities. We have just frames, but not content” (Mr. K, 75 years old). This quote shows another view that the elderly have regarding their new houses that they shared with my assistant. It is not necessarily a contradiction with the previously described pride in their new homes, but rather indicates their dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the new houses. “Fancy” in this context refers to expensive electronic and bathroom equipments which are imported from Japan, European countries or the United States. People often affirm that their televisions or DVD players are made in either Vietnam or China, which references a reality that they are somehow not as wealthy as those in cities. They also affirm that the architecture of their houses is not as stylish as those in Hanoi city. This is because villagers typically hire local architects to design new homes, or they simply select a model from a catalogue provided by the construction firm.

**Findings between the research assistant and I**

The above analysis has unraveled some differences between what my assistant and I found. It raises an interesting theoretical and methodological issue that anthropologists often experience today. This concerns the reliability of data collected, and that fieldwork is strongly influenced by the position of a researcher or his or her relationship with the study community (Bernard 2006). This is especially significant today when anthropologists spend less time in the field, in comparison with those in early twentieth century.

It is normal that local informants may provide a different response to the same questions when different researchers ask them. Aside from the art of interviewing, the nature of the study; the age and gender of the researcher, and even the time and place of an
interview may influence what will be shared (Bernard 2006). For these reasons, my research assistant, who is not part of the village, also conducted interviews. As mentioned above, there were some differences between the information each of us gathered. This shows how relationships between a researcher and local informants have impacts on people’s responses. As analyzed above, people tend to talk about “physical perspective of new houses” to the assistant, while they focus more on “sentimental aspects” with me. The question here is: What lies beyond such different emphasis though people are talking about their new houses?

As mentioned above, in the villagers’ eyes, I am a young intellectual who has been living in Hanoi since 1994, and has received an advanced level of education in the United States. By the end of 2014, I was one among a very few in the village who have studied overseas, and especially in such a modern country. The United States is the richest, most urban and most modern country in most people’s eyes. This view is influenced by mass media and Hollywood movies, since most Vietnamese people have never been to America. At the national level, Hanoi is the capital city, and consequently it represents the best place. Villagers generally think that I am very lucky to have had the opportunity to live in such modern places. They emphasize the sentimental rather than the physical aspects of new houses because they assume their houses must be much smaller and cost much less than where I have lived in the United States or in Hanoi. Little do they know this perception is largely false since in America I lived in a tiny dormitory room on campus and likewise my home in Hanoi is only 40 square meters. In fact, my home should be called a “matchbox!”

Instead of proclaiming pride in their new houses, villagers tend to reference them in conversation with me as evidence of progress and development. I could feel their hidden messages during our interviews as: “well, we are marching forward too, we may not be as
rich, modern and urban as those places, but we are improving and will be modern very soon.” This message is often indicated linguistically in the way people use the personal pronoun “we” (chúng tôi) without using the exclusive word “me” (tôi). They sometimes answer me with a presumption like “it might be not a big deal for you to have this house, but for us it is really something.” Occasionally some elderly express that they are proud of their children in a very clever way, as in the following statement, “although my children are not very well educated, they work hard and have a stable non-farming income. After several years of saving, they sooner or later can have a new house” (Mr. T., 68 years old).

“Very well educated” in this context refers to educational background. Though most of the informants’ children have already finished high school or even college and have become schoolteachers, they are still considered “not very educated” (không được học cao). This is because people are making a comparison with my educational level.

Meanwhile, it seems that people are more comfortable talking about the physical meanings of their new houses to my research assistant whom they know from a more rural area. They are even proud when comparing their village with an urban area, holding such a firm belief “we are almost the same, or at least we are not far behind the others”. It should be noted here that my assistant always starts by stating where she is from and what she is studying in Hanoi. In fact, she has only lived in Hanoi for three years, and Đức Nội Villagers can tell just from the name of her hometown that it is poorer and less urban because it is a very rural area about 300 kilometers away from Hanoi. With this information, people’s answers seem to compare their village with that of hers, but not with that of Hanoi as they do with me. This attitude is also observed when people talk about things that make them feel unhappy or unsatisfied with their houses. When the listener is me, complaints are more about space, atmosphere or convenience. When roles shifted to
my assitant, people start make comparisons between their houses and those of urban people in terms of material, style, quality or price.

Such different attitudes show a reality that people may have different opinions about a certain change, or their evaluations may have different layers. Do you have an adequate sample of interviews to determine the diversity of reactions and perspectives on changes in the village? This is because people interact, in this situation, with landscape in multiple ways. Moreover, their information sharing is always strategic, depending on who the listeners are and what their answers are for, at least from their interpretations (Bernard 2006). This challenges anthropologists, especially those who work in applied fields about how to “get to what people truly think” as Smith (1999) stated. Collaborative ethnography is therefore suggested as one of various solutions (Lassiter 2005). There is a dynamic of mutually influential interrelationships between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Home Gardens

During my fieldwork, the interviews were often made outdoors. The elderly sounded very excited to tell me about their past home gardens. They would show me where there once was a bamboo hedge or certain fruit trees. They could also remember exactly when such trees were planted and cut down, how they looked and what benefits each tree provided. Sometimes, I felt as though they were talking not only about trees, but also about their friends and their history. For example, this pomelo tree is associated with their first child being born, and that guava tree was planted when they built the house, and so on. Such stories indicate their deep nostalgia for their home gardens. An elderly villager stated: “fruit today is more available at the market yet does not taste as good as those from our gardens” (Mr. Y., 73 years old). Thus, people often compared the practical values of their home gardens in the past with the less practical, entertainment values of the bonsai gardens in the present. They seem to favor the past and often tell me about fresh and safe fruits
compared with the not fresh and unsafe fruits today sold in the market due to chemical substances (fertilizers and pesticides). They regret the lack of shade on summer days, the different types of vegetables for daily meals and the herbs for medicinal uses like to treat colds. “Our home gardens in the past had many functions. They provide not only fruit, but timber, spices and herbs” (Mrs. N, 67 years old).

Though holding such deep sentiments about their gardens in the past, people feel that it is difficult to restore them. This is partly because of population pressures as indicated in Chapter 4. Of the 72 informants, 17 of them have divided their residential lands for their children. They see this as a key factor that has significantly impacted the loss of home gardens. Interviewees believe that their orchards disappeared in part due to the new homes, which are moved to the back corner of the lot, toward the road and with new construction materials. Further, this caused a substantial decline in animal husbandry, which has eliminated a source of fertilizer for the trees, and the availability of fruit for sale in markets, and their children want bonsai gardens instead of home gardens.

In this context, bonsai gardens represent a family’s urban quality, because bonsai were originally developed and displayed in Hanoi in the 1980s before being brought to the countryside. During the 1980s very few families in the village had bonsai gardens and instead saw trees only as wild and growing free in the forest or deserted areas. Therefore, nature becoming “urban” in this way was a social process influenced by urban culture. If large green orchards with fishponds and brick houses and brick grounds represented wealth and development in the pre-Doi Moi era, the presence of bonsai gardens marks the introduction of these new social values from city to villagers. It signals the shift of the village from closed to open and integrated it into larger networks.

The two pioneering men who introduced this sort of bonsai in the late 1980s in the village were two photographers who provided camera service for villagers in wedding
parties. They also took portraits for villagers in their own homes, which the villagers used to decorate with. They placed some bonsai trees that they bought from the district town. They believed this attracted more villagers, especially young people to come and have their pictures taken. In fact, most of their customers are local students who would come and take pictures on special occasions such as birthdays and graduation days to have a souvenir of their school time. Their favorite scenes were in front of the bonsai trees or in front of painted pictures that illustrated urban architecture. This practice developed in the early 1990s and has rapidly declined since the late 1990s when people could afford to own their own camera or visit Hanoi to take pictures.

Bonsai gardens on the other hand are thought to make people’s new houses look nicer and more exceptional because their height is lower than that of a house. In the Vietnamese language, there is a common phrase “house and home garden” (nhà cửa, vườn tược) that indicates the connection between houses and gardens. Brick houses fit well with “green gardens,” while urban-style houses need to have the new decorated surrounding landscape. This way of thinking affirms the reality that people’s living spaces are comprised of interactive elements.

Like their attitudes toward new houses, there are differences between what my assistant collected and what I collected regarding interviewees’ thoughts about their past and present home gardens. The most significant difference is their strong pride in their bonsai gardens today and the nostalgia of their home gardens in the past. While people trend to express their deep sorrow about the vanishing of their past home garden when talking to me, surprisingly they talk more about their bonsai garden when talking to the informant. They think the maintenance of homes gardens is not necessary anymore because they are no longer essential: “fruit has more diversity and is available at the village.

39 This is quite different from the situation today in which young people prefer to take pictures at historical relics, old temples or pagodas. In Hanoi, their favorite places are Long Bien Bridge and the city Opera House, which were both built by the French in 1899 and 1901.
market from season to season. You just go and buy the kind of fruit you want” (Mr. B, 67 years old).

Today there are five full-time fruit vendors in Đức Nội Village’s market. They opened their shops in the early 2000s and they make a living by buying fruit wholesale at the district market and then sell it with a higher price in the village market. The first full-time fruit vendor opened her shop in 1997 after several years of selling candies for village students from the nearby secondary school. The second one began her business in 2003 after her husband rented a small shop in the village street area to sell mobile phones. She used the shop’s front area for selling fruit. Meanwhile, the other three have engaged in this business since the late 2000s. There are also several other fruit vendors in the village’s new market located in the west front area, near a Taiwanese shoe company. Interestingly, all five vendors are women from Đức Nội Village. This recent practice of wholesale and retail differs from the past when villagers might sell their extra fruit harvested from their home gardens. The shift has brought opportunities to buy many newly introduced types of fruit, including those from southern Vietnam or China. Therefore fruit from home gardens has become insignificant because there is no market for small quantities of fruit. Therefore, the availability of numerous kinds of fruit at the village market is a significant factor in the declining importance of home gardens.

Before 1996 there were several orchard gardens where people specialized in banana, grapefruit, longan and jackfruit. Among these families there was a man who did not stay on his vast orchard garden as he was living with his family on another property. He just built a small house to use as a resting place during his working hours. At that time, fruit from gardens provided significant income so he would spend the day in the garden to take care of his crops of banana, grapefruit and longan. However, since 1997 his garden is empty because he does not want to work in it anymore. This decision is due to the fact he
has been unable to sell his fruit at the village market because villagers now buy fruit from the other market where they can buy many different kinds of fruits. Such professional vendors have established strong relationships with their customers.

While explaining that home gardens are no longer needed people often say that bonsai trees make them feel more relaxed and also that they match their new houses. People feel relaxed because they do not need to spend much energy in keeping the garden clean as in the past, since there is no need to sweep dry leaves or to pull weeds.

**Working in Home Gardens While Taking Care of Bonsai Trees**

Interestingly, in Vietnamese there are two terms that show people’s attitudes toward this transition. In the past, “làm vườn” referred to “gardening or working in the garden,” while “chăm sóc cây cảnh” has become a more popular term that means “taking care of bonsai trees.” The phrase “làm vườn” implies work that requires more physical energy like “làm ruộng” (farming), while “chăm sóc cây cảnh” refers to work that requires less energy but more skill and is relaxing work. This way of thinking indicates the fact that local villagers label “làm vườn” as activity aimed at food production, while “chăm sóc cây cảnh” refers to entertainment and leisure time. “Làm vườn” is associated with those who still need food or income from home gardens, while “chăm sóc cây cảnh” implies those who are better-off who and have passed the need for food and seek non-physical contributions to their gardens. From this perspective, “làm vườn” is still a farming activity, while “chăm sóc cây cảnh” is somehow associated with more urban work.

**Beyond the New Landscapes**

People’s attitudes toward past and present gardens as analyzed above, are differently addressed. It is important to explore what forces influence this difference, especially when the assistant and I interviewed the same people with similar questions. Theoretically and methodologically in my opinion there are at least three factors: the
rapport between a researcher and local people, people’s interpretations of the researcher’s work and the position of the interviewee in relation to the researcher.

When my research assistant interviewed villagers about their *bonsai* gardens, their attitudes reflect an interesting reality. They try to make her understand that their village is marching toward urbanity and modernity, and *bonsai* trees are outstanding examples. They plant trees for fun not for food, and these trees are obviously brought into their village from the city. This attitude indicates the fact that people are trying to get rid of the so-called peasant mentality (*nhà quê*), which they have always been labeled as. Because people do not know my research assistant, they try to keep their “face” by trying to make the impression that the village is progressing and with new gardens they are contributing to this process. They want to prove that, although they are old, their thinking is similar to younger and urban people. Young people and city people want *bonsai* trees, and they feel the same. They are still part of the village’s shift as are the young villagers.

This attitude is different from what people try to show me. They favor *bonsai* trees, but often show me their regret of home gardens, as they are sure I know how urban my village has become and they do not feel the need to impress me. On the other hand, the fact that a son of the village has returned to study his village history for his advanced degree in the United States must influence people’s feelings about the past. Since I have rapport with the villagers, they are comfortable to share what they truly think. Additionally, people may think their history must have something interesting and valuable to make me come back for this research. Thus, they want to show me that they are also well aware of the village’s history and have some memories about the past in their heart. During our discussions villagers often mentioned “losing tradition” (*mất gốc*) as an increasing problem for the younger generation. They are happy that I am willing to spend
hours asking them about the village and about their lives, something that no one has ever done before.

Another factor to explain the different responses that my research assistant and I received has to do with the perceived purpose of our research. Although we both explained many times very clearly that our research is for my doctoral dissertation to explore the transformation of the village landscape from the late 1980s on, people still believe that we are doing historical work for conservation purposes. Meanwhile, many people think my assistant wants to study poverty and socio-economic conditions of the village. This interpretation probably makes them tell me more about history with regret while directing my assistant toward contemporary settings with obvious pride.

On the other the hand, while people maintain a certain distance between them and the assistant, they feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts with me. When criticizing some aspects of bonsai trees and implying deep sorrow of past gardens, I feel people want to express their upset feelings about the young generation who seem to ignore the elderly and who seem to be more and more distant from them. The hidden message may be their dissatisfaction of being marginalized from decision-making as it related to not only the setting of home garden, but also of their houses. They want to be respected and listened to as much as in the past. I also felt they released a burden after telling me about what they dislike; a burden they have kept in their mind for years. This kind of feeling is obviously not easy to share with a stranger like my assistant. When talking to her, people try to hide their sorrow, and focus more on positive values of their new “home gardens.” This reaction is influenced by a popular way of thinking in Viet people’s culture that advises people “good things should be shown while the bad should be hidden” (tốt trưng ra, xấu xa đậy

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40 In rural Vietnam, people tend to assume one as a historian or cultural study researcher if he/she spends time asking them about their past and their customs. People also believe the study is for conservation purpose. This way of thinking is influenced by the fact that rural villages are primary research areas of historians and cultural researchers. Terms like ethnologists or anthropologists are quite unfamiliar in their vocabulary.
lại) or “one should not show others their naked back” (*Không vạch áo cho người xem lưng*). This explains why they intentionally show their pride with the new home garden settings to the assistant.

**Sacred Places**

People trend to label contemporary sacred places in the village with spiritual and historical relics including the village temple, village pagoda and home shrine. Natural sacred places with belief in ghosts have disappeared. The first place that most of the people refer to is the village temple, Đoài Temple, which is located in Đoài Hamlet. This is where people worship one of the village’s deities connected to a historical hero from the 15th century. The second most popular place is Kiến Dương Pagoda in Trung Hamlet.

The first impression I could easily sense is that they are proud of having their village temple recognized as “historical relics” by the Hanoi government in 2001. Villagers perceive this decision as an official recognition of their long tradition. Significant financial support from the government and especially donations from wealthy villagers have brought renovations to the temple as described in the previous chapter. People are proud because they believe their temple must be ancient (*cổ xưa*) and traditional (*truyền thống*), and their worship is the right thing to do. This makes them proud because of the fact that just about a decade before such worship was decried as superstition and the temple was left empty with no care. As one villager said: “we have nicer pagodas and temples. We have more things to offer our deities and our ancestors” (Mrs. V., 68 years old).

People are also happy because they are able to prepare more offerings for their deities or ancestors these days. Offerings can be food or other donations. As the temples or pagodas have become better looking with more statues inside, people think they are obligated to make donations for the maintenance and the expansion of such places. This is especially necessary when they believe that their lives have been significantly improved.
thanks to their ancestors and local deities. People feel happy also because they have better shelters to provide for the spirits because these places have been rebuilt, painted and decorated much more beautifully than before. Kiến Dương Pagoda in Trung Hamlet is an example. Prior to 1990, it was just a small building with a total area of 45 square meters. Presently, it includes four different big buildings. The main building was built in 2005 with financial support from the Hanoi Buddhist Union and with donations from many villagers. Made of brick with a concrete and timber frame and a tile roof, it has a total area of 200 square meters. A separate house was also built next to the main building, which has become a private residence for the monk. One year later, a second building appeared, just approximately 20 meters behind the first one. Two other satellite buildings were built in late 2008 with a tall, concrete wall circling the whole pagoda. These transformations have turned the pagoda into a nice looking building that can be recognized from a distance.

While the elderly feel that they have been marginalized from decision-making related to the new setting of houses and garden, they seem to be more satisfied with the reviving of certain sacred places. This is because they feel that they still have power and respect from other villagers. Their voices are listened to and they still have influence in maintaining certain sacred places. The reviving of Lác Temple in Đoài Village or Ngói Temple in Trung Village are two other examples. These two places used to be occupied and used for different purposes: Ngói Temple became a kindergarten for kids in Trung Hamlet and Lác Temple became a tailor shop owned by a young woman in Đoài Hamlet. In 2009, when a bigger two-floor kindergarten was built next to what is today the village market area, Ngói Temple was no longer a school. For several months it was rented to a man to store his construction material. Because Ngói Temple was in front of his house, next to the village main road, he wanted it so he could enlarge his property and have access to the road. A proposal was sent to the Việt Hùng CPC for approval. However, the elderly
in Trung Hamlet were very angry when they heard about this, and they sent the CPC a letter with signatures from people in the hamlet to reject this demand. People rejected the man’s demand because this was a public and sacred place where people worshiped local deities. From the elderly perspective, it was time to return Ngói Temple to being a temple as before. Ultimately the commune government approved this request and even provided a small amount of funding (about 2,500 USD) for Trung Hamlet to rebuild this temple. With significant donations from each household in the hamlet, Diem Ngoi was rebuilt in early 2014 (see Appendix 9). Interestingly, the construction and daily maintenance are managed by the elderly for the most part. Today, whenever they discuss this, it makes them very proud of their contribution to prevent their public land being privatized and desacralized.

This situation is similar to Lác Temple in Doai Hamlet where the elderly successfully fought to prevent their temple from being turned into a private tailor shop. They also called for support from the local government and donations from people in Doai Hamlet to rebuild the Temple in 2012 (Appendix 9). The similarity between these two places is that they are quite valuable land as they both lie alongside the village main road, and convenient for home-run business service. Another example is their effort to save two banyan trees: one behind the CPC office and one in front of Đoài Temple. In 2004 when the CPC office was about to be replaced by a new one, the old banyan tree would have been cut down if it was not for the intervention of the elderly who lived nearby. Despite being in a far corner of the land and having no impact on the construction, the engineers wanted to pull it down. Fortunately, the elderly’s resistance forced them to change their decision and the tree was saved. Similarly, when the pond in front of Đoài Temple was filled, the old banyan tree was also about to be cut down as one household wanted to enlarge his land. He explained that the tree might damage his house’s foundation.
However, the elderly rejected this idea and sent a protest letter to the commune government. The tree was saved due to their action (See Appendix 11).

Another satisfaction of the elderly is the appearance of new sacred places, including home shrines and the expansion of their spiritual practices. These processes give them more space to satisfy their spiritual demands. Village pagodas or village temples are no longer the only place where they could practice their ritual beliefs. Thanks to new national policies about religion and ritual practice, and also better economic and infrastructure conditions, the elderly in Đức Nội Village can easily travel outside the village to sites regionally and nationally. These places are historical relics or religious centers. Among such externally recognized sacred places, Hương Pagoda, Yên Tử Pagoda, Hùng Temple, Trần Temple and Bà Chúa Kho Temple are the most popular. These places are rather far from the village with an average distance of 30 kilometers. While they are open around the year, the biggest festival days are often celebrated in early spring, mainly during February and March in the lunar calendar. The elderly whose families are better off often travel to these places in a group consisting of a dozen or so people from their village. Several trips are organized each year and on these trips people carry with them not only ritual beliefs and well prepared offerings, including food, fruit, and paper money, but also appeal to deities or the Buddha with hope for health, happiness, union and prosperity for their families. For those who are poor or too old to afford such trips, village pagoda or home shrines are preferred. There are dozens of old women who take daily volunteering shifts to work at Kiến Dương Pagoda as cleaners, clerks or cooks. They feel they are serving the Buddha, and hope any past sins will be forgiven so hell will not be their destination after death.\(^{41}\) Home shrines are also places that people come to organize rituals to sweep away bad luck and to bring fortune for all family members.

\(^{41}\) Hell, according to Buddhist or local beliefs, not the Christian hell.
However, the elderly also indicate some aspects related to sacred places that they dislike or feel unhappy about. They often talk about them with long sighs or deep sorrowful eyes. This feeling comes from either the arrangement or management of certain sacred places, or the inappropriate behavior of young villagers or even local monks. This is an increasing trend, which can be seen elsewhere in other countries such as Thailand (Ward 2013).

Regarding the arrangement and management of sacred places, people complain that they are not as oriented toward the public as they should be. From their view, it is not necessary to build brick high walls around and to place concrete gates in front of Đoài Temple, Kiến Dương or Phúc Hương Pagodas as these should be open spaces that are surrounded by vegetation not fences. The elderly think this would make those places more “traditional” and more “friendly,” especially since there is no concern for security or burglary. They do not find any reasonable explanation for the existence of main gates which are locked all the times, except during festival days in Đoài Temple. They even do not understand why the temple is not open so that anyone can visit whenever they want, especially since there is a man who was hired to take care of the temple. They also see the high brick wall surrounding Kiến Dương Pagoda as a waste of money and unfriendly, especially when many trees have been cut down during the construction period. They believe this is the reason why there have been fewer birds in the pagoda’s garden. On the other hand, water wells and ponds have been filled up in both Đoài Temple and Kiến Dương Pagoda and this has upset many elderly: “they just clear, cut, fill up anything they want without consulting us. Destroying something is always much easier than growing it” (Mr. K, 73 years old).

From the elderly belief, the presence of water wells or ponds in such sacred places is intentional and they function to balance yin and yang according to feng-shui philosophy.
They do not accept the explanation from local leaders that with the availability of pipe water, such settings are no longer necessary: “those are not a matter of water. They are the origin of life and the connection between the sacred and profane worlds” (Mrs. T, 68 years old). This way of thinking is popular in Vietnamese society. In many other Viet villages, temple ponds are considered the “dragon pulse” (long mach), which indicates the starting point and the heart of the whole village that connects past, present and the future. Thus any disturbance of ponds may bring serious bad luck for all villagers (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006; Trần Quốc Vương 2005). Additionally, there were three categories of trees including shade trees; flower trees and fruit trees planted in village temples and village pagodas.

Shade trees such as the Chinese banyan tree and bamboo are often planted behind or on two sides of the building. They are considered the shelters of deities as well as of wandering spirits. Ficus religiosa (Bồ Đề) represents knowledge, free will and philosophy. This tree has something to do with the legend of Buddha who sat under the shadow of the tree for 99 days in meditation. The fig tree (Cây Sung) represents prosperity because it is not only very fruitful but also related to Buddhism. The frangipani tree (Cây Đại), in the Buddhist view, is the tree that delivers energy from heaven to land and water for the start of any life (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006). The numerous thorns of the Bombax ceiba tree (Cây Gạo) are considered as ladder steps that connect heaven and Mother Earth, and this explains why people are respectful of this tree. As the most popular tree in the rural world in Vietnam, bamboo represents the union of believers in Buddhism or gentlemen with high virtue in Confucianism.

Flowering trees such as areca and jasmine are often planted in the front area. These species represent purity that fits well with the temple or pagoda. Their fresh and cool smell makes people feel relaxed, and helps to release people’s worries or life burdens when they come and pray. Fresh flowers are also often picked in the first and the 15th day to place in
the altar or shrine as offerings. People also scent areca and jasmine flowers with green tea before brewing for better flavor when drinking. Meanwhile, fruit trees are often planted in the middle of the pagoda grounds. Harvested fruit are often sold to provide an additional financial source for each pagoda’s maintenance (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006; Nguyễn Đăng Duy 1997).

Presence of water wells, ponds and plant diversity around temples and pagodas has been imprinted in many elderly people’s mind as a familiar model. This explains why they are upset when those arrangements are replaced with new ones. New arrangements are quickly followed by the disappearance of symbols and meanings that are labeled with each tree and so cutting down a tree is cutting a memory.

Walking out of the physical space of sacred places, the elderly in Dực Nội Village are also upset at the unpleasant behavior of many young people. They complain that young people often dress improperly when they go to the pagoda or temple with many young girls wearing skirts while their male friends wear shorts. The elderly believe most young people go to sacred places just for fun or for their own benefit since they do not know anything about who is worshipped in the pagoda or the temple. They talk and laugh loudly and show no respect to both deities and others. “Young people go to church just asking the Buddha to give, but they are not willing to give. They tease each other, use cell phone and show no respect to the Buddha. How could the Buddha accept their prayers?” (Mrs. L, 67 years old).

Moreover, the young often accuse the elderly of being superstitious or complicated because the elderly often dress carefully, and prepare offerings by themselves for the Buddha at the village pagoda, or deities at the village temple. While young people think homemade offerings are a waste of time and cash offerings are enough, the elderly believe their offerings must be sincere and from heart. While young people are materialistic, old
people are more sentimental and moral. These different opinions make old people feel their children are buying or bribing, but not worshiping deities. One villager said that: “they do not remember any important dates for family ceremonies. They do not remember our village’s festival day. They do not remember Buddhism’s most important ceremonies. Are they truly believers?” (Mr. L, 75 years old).

The elderly also feel unhappy with young people because they seldom go to the church or pagoda. They just go when they have problems with love affairs, business or their careers. They donate to the church, pagoda or kin ancestor house because they want their names carved on the donation board as way to show off their wealth. They may remember every friend’s birthday, but not any single important date related to their ancestor worship ceremony or Buddhist calendar. This is not good from their perspective as it has something to do with family tradition.

The elderly also feel unsatisfied when their children do not want to go to the pagoda or temple with them. They prefer to go by themselves or with their friends, while the elderly want their whole family to go all together with the belief that it is better when they pray together. The elderly complain that young people do not often stay in the places long enough. They think their children should not leave at least until one joss stick completely burns, and they are afraid that their children’s prayer may not reach the Buddha or deities. Many female elderly in Đức Nội Village go to pagoda in the first and the fifteenth day of the month in the lunar calendar. These are two important days in Buddhism as the former is the start of a cycle while the latter is the full moon day. Some even eat just vegetables on these two days as a way to refresh their body and to keep themselves “clean” without killing any animals. However, this practice and taboo is not followed by young people, and most of them are unaware of the lunar calendar.

42 Most Vietnamese do not eat certain foods on these two days including dog meat (thit chó), duck (thit vit), squid (mu cong) or silver carp (ca me) because they believe these foods bring bad luck for the month.
Sacred Places from another View

My assistant’s findings in regard to what the elderly feel about their new sacred landscapes are quite similar with mine in terms of positive points. It is reported that they spend hours talking about how the Đoài Temple or Kiến Dương Pagoda have been rebuilt, upgraded, and recognized by the State, and how their villagers have taken a role in these processes. They are proud that there are more statues in temples and pagodas or nice looking horizontal lacquered boards on their ancestor altars. People often try to impress her by emphasizing how old are the Đoài Temple or the Kiến Dương Pagoda. They are very proud that Đoài Temple is a worshiping place for the General Lê Lợi troops who rose up against the oppressive Ming Dynasty in the 15th century. This detail is repeated during the conversation, and it indicates that they are not only simply proud of the temple, but also of their ancestor’s contribution to the country fighting against Chinese invading regimes. People feel proud of such a long history connected with their village.

The Đoài Temple was recognized as a provincial historical relic in 2001. The local elderly are proud of their contact with a Sino-Vietnamese professor who came to research the village in 2000. She spent time studying the stone steles and old books in the temple and came to a conclusion about how old the temple was. With her findings, the Viet Hung commune government and Đức Nội elderly asked her to help with a proposal that was submitted to the Hanoi government for their approval of the temple as a provincial historical relic. Known and told by different elderly, this story is used as evidence that the age and origin of the temple has been investigated, checked and confirmed by both scientists and the government, not just by their imagination or boasting.

Interestingly, when discussing the revival of Ngói Temple and Mái Trước Temple, the elderly do not refer to the risk that the two places are about to become private assets. It

43 The Ming Dynasty was a Chinese Dynasty (1368-1644) that invaded and ruled Vietnam from 1407 to 1427.
sounds like they are afraid that the sacredness of these two places would fade from the assistant’s eyes if they told her that the villagers were about to take over the places. Instead, they concentrate on telling the assistant about how much money has been donated for the rebuilding, and how they took part in construction. They are proud because after several decades of “sleeping” these two places have “awakened” and now function as ritual space thanks to their intervention.

On the other hand, what the elderly emphasize with the assistant, but not with me is their attitude toward the vanishing of former sacred places which used to be associated with public or natural places such as Đính Trung Steep, Thờ Pond or Cau Sen. Surprisingly, they see the transformation of such places into living and private spaces as an inevitable change. They admit that past beliefs in the presence of ghosts is not rational or correct. Most do not now think that ghosts are real and could harm people. They believe that they will be protected from any evil when they show respect and absolute trust in their ancestors, village deities or the Buddha. They see that the transition from wild, empty and public spaces into commercial and private places is necessary because it helps to bring them a better life and bring their village a more urban face. Therefore, the emergence of commercial shops in Đính Trung Steep or in Mái Trược Temple is seen as a necessary change, especially when business demands have rapidly increased in the village.

**Beyond the New Landscape**

The elderly sound more excited when talking about sacred places as compared with their attitude when telling stories about houses or home gardens. They are happier with the new settings of the village temple or the village pagoda. What the assistant and I gather from our conversations is basically similar, not as much different as it is with houses or home gardens. This reality is probably influenced by the elderly interpretation and positioning toward sacred places.
First, sacred places such as Đoài Temple, Kiến Dương Pagoda, Ngói Temple or Lác Temple seem to be the only remaining areas in the village where they could maintain their active role without sharing power with any other groups including young people or local leaders. Like in many other rural villages, more and more young people are leaving Dục Nội Village for nonfarm jobs. Places around the village market or alongside the village main roads that are advantageous for business have been privatized for the remaining wealthy people. Meanwhile, decision making related to the arrangement or the setting of new houses or home gardens are often in the hands of young people who control one family’s income. Farming land has been left empty with fewer crops because its income has become insignificant and farming is no longer the primary occupation of most villagers. Livestock has also become rare. In addition, young people use public spaces such as school playgrounds or hamlet community houses to play sports in the late afternoon. At present, there are very few places for the elderly in the village besides village temples or pagodas and so they often complain.

Fortunately, sacred places are the areas that are still dominated by the elderly because other groups just come occasionally. They become a kind of private space or “asset” of the elderly. Moreover, those places carry history and memories inside, and this is just what the elderly find most interesting and familiar. Since most of them rarely leave their village, their world is still mainly bound within the village’s territory. However, many elderly feel worried that their temples or pagodas shall not be taken care of properly in the future when their generation passes away. They are afraid that tradition and history will be forgotten.

Secondly, while past sacred places were often associated with ghosts or mysterious things as ways of protecting public places from privatization, contemporary sacred places are more associated with people’s spiritual beliefs and historical tradition. Interestingly,
prior to the Renovation, the village temple or village pagoda was rather “quiet” due to the strict control policy of the State as well as because people were so poor that just earning for a living was their primary priority. Socio-economic improvements after the Renovation and an increasingly liberal attitude about religion and ritual policies from the State have significant impacts on the reviving of the temple and the pagodas. This transition has seemingly “unchained” the elderly. State policies have liberated them from practicing spiritual demand, while better economic condition allows them to devote more time and even money to satisfy their belief. People feel that they have been released from such a strict religious control that used to be popular during the cooperatives time. This, from the elderly interpretation, is an admission from the State that their former policies were wrong, and they have been right in trusting in the Buddha or local deities.

Thirdly, the victories of the elderly in protecting the Ngói and Lác Temples from becoming private assets indicate their effort to have increased voice in the whole community, especially when they seem to be marginalized from making many other decisions. They want to alert other groups that they are not yet the past, and there must be space for them as emphasized in the following profound statement: “We have experience which young people do not have. They think money could solve everything, but life is not just money. Without us there is no nowadays village. We also need places to enjoy life” (Mr. B, 72 years old).

Fourthly, the elderly in Dục Nội Village also seek new sacred places outside their village such as Hung temple or Hương pagoda. This has therefore enlarged boundaries of their sacred places. Through these new boundaries they are able to get involved in the 44 From 1954 to 1975, many village temples and pagodas in rural areas in Vietnam were pulled down by local government as they needed space and material for local government offices? Such places were often blamed as superstition and remains of feudalism. People were discouraged from practicing spiritual beliefs. In Duc Noi Village, the Trung Temple, one of the biggest temples in the region was pulled down by Viet Hung commune government in 1967. Quickly afterwards, the commune office was built on the former site of the temple.
regional or national networks, while reinforcing their spaces for their spiritual needs. This movement could be compared with young people’s efforts to seek non-farm jobs as channels to improve their lives. This is also their compensation for their lost spaces including home gardens, temple playground, or young people now oriented to mass media.

Overall, while secularization has become an increasing trend and impacted the younger generation, religion or spiritual practices are still popular with the elderly. While most of villagers say they are not religious and note that on their identification cards, and although the number of sacred places in the village has decreased, villagers seem to be more spiritual and have made great efforts to revive their past landscapes, or to find alternatives for their spiritual practice. This phenomenon is also happening in Thailand and elsewhere (Sponsel 2001; Sponsel 2013; Descola 2013).

**Landscape in the Urban Villagers’ Eyes**

An elderly male interviewee asserted that: “they do not have to copy everything from cities because they could never do that. It is better to maintain and be proud of their own identities” (Mr. V., 69 years old). Mr. V. was the first of fifteen urban villagers that I interviewed. He is a retired officer who was the general director of a State-owned gasoline company. He left the village in 1979 and has been living in the city since. I paid several visits to his house in the morning, and we drank tea together. He is also the person that introduced me to other urban villagers. In the following sections, I will analyze the fifteen urban villagers’ attitudes to what is going on in their home village with special attention to their houses, home gardens and sacred places.

**Two Views of New Houses**

Mr. V. also stated: “clothes do not make the man”, as he told me his feeling about the setting of new houses in his home village. Like many other urban villagers he is happy that nice looking and concrete high floor houses have replaced destitute houses. He agrees
that such new houses bring much better shelter spaces for the villagers, especially the elderly. Whenever visiting relatives in the village, people feel comfortable because they could still use indoor bathroom with hot showers, or hygienic toilets that they are familiar with in their city houses. They also find the new houses cleaner and safer, especially during the rainy season or hurricane period. Likewise, urban villagers see new houses as evidence of development, progress and success for the family. They agree that the new houses represent a new “face” for each family, thus there is nothing wrong with the emerging “urban-style” houses in the village.

However, unlike local villagers, urban villagers do not believe their relatives should build “tube houses” (nhà ống) that are very popular in the city of Hanoi. These tube houses are very tall and have multiple stories, but are very narrow to fit the extreme population density and cost of land in the city (see Appendix 13).45 Each square meter may cost several thousand American dollars so people must build these tall tube houses to create more living space. This is different from the village where each family owns an average of 300 square meters of residential land. Urban villagers also argue for outdoor playgrounds in front of each new house so that children or the elderly may spend time there. This is especially necessary when there are no parks or flower gardens (vườn hoa) in the village.46

On the other hand, old houses in good condition are not necessarily replaced, and traditional houses are not always representative of the “past” or “rural.” If traditional houses are upgraded or modified, they can be even more convenient for the elderly. This is because they have more open spaces, and are cool in summer and warm in winter. This explains the emergence of new old style houses in the village recently. Among these, Mr. V who was mentioned in the beginning of this section builds one. In 2008 he returned to

45 Tube houses (nhà ống) refers to a style of house that is very common in the very densely populated city of Hanoi. These are small and narrow but multiple-story houses with an area of less than 30 square meters.

46 “Vườn hoa” or flower gardens are public places in Hanoi that are smaller than parks. Each garden is typically several hundred square meters. This is where people exercise in the morning or afternoon. Because some flowers are often planted around these places, people are used to calling them flower gardens.
his home village where his parents were living in an old house in poor condition so he decided to replace it with a new house. The house was built of brick, with a wooden frame and tile roof. The new home’s architecture was the same as the old one but just bigger and with more stories. Mr. V. explained that he prefers the old style, which is more convenient for his parents who are too old to go up and down the stairs every day. Another man who is a director of a state-owned construction company also made the same decision three years earlier in 2005, when he paid for a new house to be built for his parents. That house is decorated in a style that was popular for rich families in the era before the Renovation (see Appendix 12).

These examples show another trend in which rebuilding and reviving old styles could be another way to show one’s prosperity, especially since the costs to reconstruct this style of house is nearly the same as building a new house due to the increasing price of timber and wages for skilled carpenters. Shortly after these two houses, some other local villagers decided to build old style houses. One of them is a retired high school principal who already had a three-story house in the center of the village street. In 2010, he decided to demolish his old house in its original location and built a new house in an old style. This house cost him about 70 cubic meters of timber that cost about four hundred million Vietnamese dong (about 20,000 USD). He estimated that with this amount of timber he could build a three-story house. Adding up other costs including brick, cement, tile and labor wages he believes this house is much more expensive than the new style one. Among the 72 local informants, seven people have done the same and two received financial support from their children in the city.

This revival of old houses does not occur among those who have never been living in new style houses. All seven cases either have children living in the city already, or have new style houses elsewhere. Moreover, having such houses rebuilt can be expensive,
especially since they are often bigger and built with expensive timber. This indicates people have juxtaposed new houses with old houses, and some of them still favor the latter. Aside from the positive aspects of old houses that people, especially the elderly, believe in, for example, the seasonal temperatures (cool in summer and warm in winter), this practice reflects the fact that people want to maintain their identity in the name of conserving tradition. This is shown in the following statement: “If the village is just full of high-story houses, it is no longer a village, but a ward. New houses are not traditional. We should keep them alive for future generations” (Mr. Y, 77 years old).

On the other hand, while the rural elderly do not like the division of indoor spaces into small and separate rooms inside new houses, the urban elderly find this arrangement suitable because it gives freedom to different members in a family. They explain that young and old people have different schedules (including sleeping and waking) as well as hobbies so as they should have separate spaces to avoid unnecessary conflict. This opinion shows the influence of urban culture on urban villagers who have been familiar with an individual oriented life style in city. This is also the most significant difference between local and urban elderly because local elderly are still familiar with traditional, family-oriented lifestyles.

**Nostalgia for Past Gardens**

A successful businessman and former villager who is now living in Hoàn Kiếm District, one of the central areas of urban Hanoi stated: “It is much better to eat what you plant, especially when you are never sure about quality of fruit you buy from market” (Mr. L, 68 years old). He said this after I asked him about the disappearance of fruit gardens in his home village. Many times during our conversation he emphasized his regret that there are fewer fruit gardens in his village. He explained that he feels fruit with unclear origins is dangerous: “We are worried about eating fruit from the supermarket where quality control
is not guaranteed. If I had land, I would plant fruit myself.” This statement reflects an increasing trend which is that currently city people in Hanoi often rent land in suburban areas and hire local farmers to plant vegetables, fruit or even raise pigs for their families to consume. This practice has been influenced by an increase in food pollution in Hanoi that is reported everyday in the newspapers. This makes most urban elderly feel that their relatives in the village should revive their home gardens to supply basic necessities for their daily diet including vegetables, fruit or medicinal herbs. On the other hand, home gardens also provide shade and are “natural air conditioners” for houses, especially when power outages are so common in rural villages during the summer.

Regarding the increase in *bonsai* trees in Dực Nội Village, the urban elderly see this trend as positive because their presence symbolizes better living conditions. However they believe that one should have basic skills and knowledge before deciding to plant *bonsai* trees. This suggestion originates from their observation that many local villagers play at *bonsais* only in imitation of others. One villager told me: “They spend a lot of money to buy bonsai trees just to show off their wealth. Many of them do not know how to trim or to shape their trees. After several months, their trees just grow free without any shape” (Mr. T. 74 years old). This statement is from a man who is currently a high school teacher in Hanoi. His younger brother lives in the village with his parents and is a successful timber dealer. After the younger brother built his four-story house in 2002, he went to the district town and bought a dozen *bonsai* trees including Chinese banyans and placed them in front of his house. However because he was unskilled in trimming and he was so busy, he just left those trees alone and did not care for them. After a year the trees have grown and no one can recognize their original shapes. Additionally, he bought trees of different species, unlike professional *bonsai* gardeners. His own brother labeled him “half-countryside, half-urban” (*nửa quê, nửa tỉnh*).
Additionally, the urban elderly see no “close interaction” between individual *bonsai* owners, or between the trees and its owner. They do not like the way villagers buy *bonsai* without establishing a *bonsai* community or a club where people could exchange knowledge or experience for better care of their trees. In the perspectives of the urban elderly, this spontaneous introduction of *bonsai* makes local villagers become amateur *bonsai* gardeners. They see trees without proper care as meaningless, since trees have spirits and convey sentiment as well. They even accuse those villagers of showing off their wealth which does not make them appear elegant or fashionable.

**Sacred Places**

Like rural villagers, urban elderly are proud to see the revival of the village pagoda and temple. People even believe these places should have been upgraded earlier because they carry the village’s traditions and history. They especially view the Đoại Temple as honoring the village spirit, and it is the only remaining temple.47 This explains why when the temple was upgraded in 2001 most donations came from urban villagers and the greatest sponsor’s name has been carved in the first position on the donation board. Each year on August 11th when the village celebrates their festival at their temple most of the urban elderly return home with their children. People want to show their children the history of the temple with the hope that they will remember their homeland and be proud of where their parents were born and grew up. They want to remind their offspring of their origins, and of the fact that, besides living in the city, they still have connections with their home village. One villager said: “We want our children to remember their origin and to show respect to our village temple. If they respect deities, they will respect us” (Mrs. N., 65 years old). On the other hand, they also want to make their villagers understand that they are always part of the village, no matter how long they have been away. This way of

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47 The Trung temple was demolished in 1967 and was quickly replaced by the commune government office.
thinking is very popular in Vietnamese culture and explains why most urban elderly want to be buried in their home village (Trần Ngọc Thêm 2006; Trần Quốc Vương 2005).

Likewise, the urban elderly view the disappearance of former sacred places that were linked to ghosts as progress because they do not really believe in ghosts any more. Moreover, they presume that leaving such commercial land empty would be a great waste, and the villagers should use them for economic benefit. Departing from this platform they feel the replacement of commercial spaces over wild land with old trees or ponds alongside the village main roads is a necessary sacrifice. This attitude is well indicated in the following statement by an elderly villager: “Land is now gold. Land alongside the road is even a diamond. If you have a small shop, you will have a stable life, and you will not have to do farming work (Mrs. Y., 62 years old).

This explains why some urban villagers invest money to buy land in areas where there used to be ghost stories, such as Đình Trung Steep or Cổng Thượng Temple. For example, Mr. V. bought 120 square meters of land in Đình Trung Steep. Likewise, they view the filling of ponds along village roads as necessary since these create more living and business spaces for their villagers. They believe that the availability of pipe water and the decrease of livestock are sufficient reasons for ending the role of ponds or water-fern ponds. Similarly, maintaining outdoor shrines dedicated to specific spirits in front of the new home is thought to detract from the urban appearance of the new architecture, and to create contradictory reflections for visitors and so as they should be replaced.

Interestingly, while the local elderly do not mention to either my assistant or I the reemergence of ancestor houses or ancestor graves as common spaces for all members, the urban elderly spent a lot of time telling us about this. They often compare their ancestor houses or graves to others and feel happy if theirs is bigger or older. This attitude shows a silent competition among different families in calling for donations to rebuild ancestor
houses and ancestor graves. In this circumstance urban people are significant sources of finance because they are thought to be richer than their village-dwelling relatives. Among various families, the Công, Cao and Ngô families have the biggest ancestor houses in the village. This is because these families have more people living in either Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City who have donated millions of Vietnamese $dong$ (ranging from 300-500 USD each). This willingness to pay is influenced by people’s belief that acknowledging their ancestors’ blessings will help them succeed and prosper. This way of thinking is indicated in the popular proverb: “one should acknowledge those who planted the tree when picking the fruit” (ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây, or uống nước nhớ nguồn).

On the other hand, the urban elderly seem to not be pleased with the rapid increase in business activities around the village temple. They view the presence of a bar selling beer and hair dressers in front of the temple gate as negative forces that negatively impacts the sacredness of their village temple. While supporting the emergence of business spaces around the village, the urban elderly think there should be exceptions around the temple and business should be not the first priority. Together with rural elderly, they contribute to requests for local government to protect the old banyan trees in front of their village temple, as described above. Similarly, though satisfied with the physical improvement of conditions at Kiến Dương Pagoda, they are not happy to see so many donation boxes inside different areas of the pagoda. They think one box in the main building is enough because there is only one Buddha in the pagoda.

Such concerned attitudes are further reinforced when the monk at the village pagoda bought himself an Audi A4 car in 2011 because this is a luxury car and costs approximately 100,000 USD. They wonder how the monk could have that much money since, most people, not even those who work as business people in Hanoi city, could afford such a car! Villagers suspect this car is linked to the recently increasing donations and
question if those donations have been used properly. They also do not understand why the monk needs such an expensive car when he has devoted his life to the Buddha who always sets an example in maintaining just a frugal life. This is another example of the other side of some Buddhist monks in the contemporary world (Ward 2013).

The differences between “first eyes” and “second eyes” or the contrast between local elderly and urban elderly relating to views on new landscapes in Đức Nội Village is of course influenced by many different forces including State policies, socio-economic transition, urbanization or even globalization. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss how these forces impact people’s perceptions of modernity and how this process has impacted their views toward the indicated landscapes.
CHAPTER 6

MODERNITY: A JOURNEY OR A WAY OF SEEING?

In this study, I have employed Bunnell’s (2004: 4) definition of modernity as “a way of framing specific transformation.” While in his study he uses this definition as “less an attempt to formulate universally-applicable explanation, than a perspective for the study of particular geo-historical spaces,” my study juxtaposes that idea with the transformation process in a particular rural village in Vietnam. In this sense, modernity is not an “evolutionary process” that takes the west as central and it is not necessarily associated with technological improvements. Modernity in this sense is also different from other approaches that compare modernity with tradition. It is not actually true that the past necessarily represents tradition while the present or the future represents modernity.

Modernity in this sense is also not necessarily associated with any particular political shift, such as the popular division of Vietnam modern history that takes either 1858 or 1945 as turning points. However, modernity is often influenced by State policies no matter where it is practiced: rural or urban, lowland or upland, ethnic minority peoples or ethnic majority peoples. The case of the Multi Super Corridor in Malaysia, as discussed previously in this dissertation, is a good example of how policy may shape modernity at the macro level (Bunnell 2004). This chapter explains how Doi Moi reforms have impacted people’s perceptions of modernity and how these perceptions have preceded landscape transformation in Đức Nội Village. It will also bring more insight to explanations and understanding of the elderly attitudes toward their different changing landscapes.

Key Policy Landmarks

Subsidy Period

48 1858 is when the French began to invade Vietnam and is used to mark the decreasing role of the Vietnamese imperial regime. 1945 refers to the August Revolution and the initial victory of the Communists over the French in northern Vietnam.
The American War ended in 1975 and was followed by the reunification of South and North Viet Nam. At the 5th General Meeting of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) in 1982, farming was identified as the pioneer sector that needed to cooperate with industrialization.\(^{49}\) Thereafter, the government organized farming cooperatives across the entire country, each of which led to state-run agriculture and production. Farmers including those in Dực Nội Village had to work for cooperatives to receive a subsidy of food, health care and education from the government. This was called the subsidy era and lasted until 1986.

**Renovation Period**

At the VCP’s 6th Meeting in 1986, the Party recognized a need to abolish its centrally planned and subsidized economy and decided to encourage a multi-sector economy and to prepare the necessary conditions for industrialization. The private sector was recognized as a significant force that could have positive contributions to the economic development of the country. This was an especially important change that brought along the subsequent renovation including the dismantling of cooperatives, the subsidy system and the allocation of farmland to individual households. Consequently many other properties that were owned by the cooperative such as stock houses, dry grounds, general department store, livestock farms, tofu houses and water buffalo stables were sold to become private assets. These processes occurred differently from village to village throughout the whole country, and were actually initiated in Dực Nội Village in 1991.

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\(^{49}\) The General Meeting is organized every 5 years for the Party central election and for declaring macro guidelines for development strategies in the coming 5 years.
Post Renovation Period

In 1991, the 7th VCP Meeting identified a new development strategy that was conveyed in a popular slogan: “build a modern culture with a traditional identity” (Xây dựng nền văn hóa tiên tiến, đậm đà bản sắc dân tộc). The government emphasized the concepts of modernity (tiên tiến) as the key objective. Five years later the 8th Meeting of the VCP identified the promotion of industrialization and modernization as the most significant goals with the intention of leading the country to become an “industrialized country by 2000. The 9th General Meeting in 2001 reaffirmed that a market economy with a socialist orientation was the country’s general economic model. The 10th Meeting in 2006 focused on comprehensive renovation with the goal of escaping from underdeveloped status as soon as possible. Consequently, the 11st Meeting in 2011 reemphasized a market economy with a socialist orientation as the backbone of the national economy (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2010).

Each of these seven General Meetings of Vietnam Communist Party from 1981 to 2011 was followed by the release of a number of particular policies. For instance the 6th Meeting was followed by a policy that gave farmers full rights and responsibilities for their farmland while the 7th Meeting was followed by the 1993 Land Law. The 8th Meeting was followed by the Revised Land Law in 1998. However the 6th Meeting in 1986 is most often referred to as the landmark of the Renovation because it signaled the end of the subsidy period and the emergence of the market economy.

Modernity as a Way of Seeing

Prior to the Renovation, a centrally planned economy with farming cooperatives at the local level was seen as the best system for economic development in rural Vietnam. Cooperative ownership was dominant and perceived as a standard value and any efforts to pursue private ownership were strictly prohibited. In this case, people had to share a
similar view of development, progress and modernity that was often defined as “socialism,” “collectivism” or “cooperatives-ism”. Dực Nội Villagers were therefore bound to this boundary as people in other rural areas across the country. This way of seeing was strongly influenced by the State and represented by the cooperatives at the village level. During this period, the State wanted to establish a system where each person’s socio-economic life was similar. Social stratification was not supposed to emerge. This explained why most villagers believed in the general representation of “brick houses” and large fruit gardens with fishponds as signs of wealthy families.

Everyone tried to work hard for the local cooperative so they would receive their subsidy coupons. Most people were unable to afford to have a new house, and even to those who could were strictly controlled by the limitations placed on purchases of materials. Additionally, people were even afraid to show their wealth to others. Because the government controlled businesses, living alongside the road was unattractive and was an important factor explaining the existence of much unused land along the roads. During this period, differences between urban and rural people were insignificant as both lived under the subsidy system. For most Dực Nội villagers, their world was bounded by the village boundaries and they knew very little about the urban areas in the country. This was similar to urban people who knew very little about the rural village world.

However, since the Renovation, people are freer to follow what they truly want as privatization and businesses have been legalized and encouraged, while they have the necessary resources thanks to economic improvements. The collapse of local cooperatives and the increase of business, non-farming work and rapid urbanization have enlarged people’s networks, allowed the introduction of new values that were not available prior to the Renovation. Farming is no longer the only choice because people have experienced

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50 Many elderly in Dực Nội Villagers talked about how “secretly” they had to kill their chickens for their sick children as they were afraid that they would be accused of being rich for luxury.
benefits they receive from non-farming activities. This is a significant starting point from where people depart from their desires as well as their ambitions. The rapid blooming of different business activities in the village street area in the early 1990s is an example. Since then, people have had opportunities for alternative occupations that could be business, service, labor, education and handicraft production.

This diversity of occupation has consequently brought people different perceptions of values that range from person to person. Their views have been influenced by villagers returning from former Socialist countries in Eastern Europe and by emerging successful business people in the village or relatives from Hanoi, or even by Japanese or Taiwanese companies near the village. Nowadays people have different interpretations of modernity and act in various ways to pursue such new values. Some buy land along the village road to open a shop, while others have rebuilt their houses. Some have spent their savings and their children’s money to invest in land alongside the village road areas, while others have bought land in the district town or in Hanoi. Some have invested in their children’s educations, while others have sent their children to work overseas. Lastly some villagers have even moved to Hồ Chí Minh City in southern Vietnam to seek new life opportunities.

The key similarity among villagers is their labeling non-farm work and privatization as modernity. This explains why there have been fewer people who farm, regardless of the fact that land has been allocated to individual households and irrigation systems have been upgraded. Furthermore, there has been outmigration with an increasing number of young people who leave the village (Rigg 2002). However, people also have different strategies to insert the modern into their landscapes, such as: building urban-style houses, replacing fruit gardens with bonsai, reviving traditional values and practices. These processes will be discussed in the following section.
Modernity and Emerging Landscapes in the Village

The emergence of the village street area in the early 1990s was a benchmark that triggered rapid changes related to houses in Dục Nội Village. This transitional process is divided into two periods including: the emergence of urban values from 1995 to 2010, and the revival of traditional identities since 2010. The first was initiated in the early 1990s, after the Viet Hung commune’s council released its resolution that provided detailed guidelines for the implementation of the Renovation in the whole commune. Areas that were symbolic of the subsidy system and local cooperatives were privatized. From publicly owned spaces, they became household assets. From farming-oriented they became business and commercial places. From similar architectural styles they became urban diversified houses. Interestingly, the earliest residents of the village street area were those people who were not associated with farming before. They were those whose income was from non-farming activities including tailoring, transportation service providers, school teachers, medical doctors, returned overseas workers and pharmacists. This indicates that even during the cooperative period, non-farming income was still significant for some people in the village. They made enough savings to be able to win in the 1993 land auction and to afford the construction of new houses, while the majority of villagers who had worked for local cooperatives only just barely survived. Besides income, those people had connections with the outside world more so than other villagers. This connection was created by their work, and thanks to such connections, they travelled outside the village more often than others and knew more about urban architecture. Shortly after the village street area emerged as a new urban space in the village, urban-style houses rapidly developed in residential living extension areas (formerly livestock farm land) and the western edge along the inter-commune road in Đoài Hamlet.
Modernity in this period was strongly influenced by urban values, and this was also indicated in the replacement of bonsai gardens over fruit gardens and in the revival of historical or sacred places and the disappearance of ghosts in the wild and in public places. Meanwhile, those with relatives who lived in the city or those who had experienced urban architecture also pioneered the second wave. They wanted to revive traditional houses as a way to show their uniqueness from others who are still marching toward urban culture. Like the first way, they are better off than most others. Those who decided to restore their traditional houses intended to deliver two messages. First, they were showing their respect to tradition and second they were showing others that they are not blindly submerged under the “urban culture.” Additionally, some families have started growing vegetables in their garden and bonsai (See Appendix 13). Some sacred places also have been revived as discussed in the previous chapter.

Like in the first wave, government policies significantly impacted the revival of traditional identities in the second wave. The 2001 Cultural Heritage Law became an impetus for the leverage of the reemergence of historical and cultural relics recognized in the country. By the end of 2014, there were 124 historical and cultural relics in Đồng Anh District recognized at the provincial and national level. Among these relics, Cổ Loa Citadel is the most important as it is 2,000 years old and has been recognized as a national heritage since 1961. Meanwhile, in Viet Hung Commune there are three village temples and two Buddhist pagodas that have been recognized as provincial relics, including Đoài Temple and Kiến Dương and Phúc Hương Pagodas in Đức Noi Village. Official recognition of these relics is always followed by official certification and financial support for reconstruction, upgrading or management. State’s recognition is not only for historical, cultural or religious relics, but also private assets especially houses. This movement has

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51 Interestingly, among those four individuals who were previously recognized as the richest in the village, two decided to rebuild traditional houses instead of urban style houses on their land.
shed light on actual values of “the old” which used to be considered as remains of feudalism or of superstition in the pre-Renovation era.

Besides official government policies, social movements from urban areas in general, and Hanoi city in particular, also impacted the revival of traditional houses and gardens in the village. Two decades after the Renovation thanks to economic growth, more and more people in Hanoi city want to buy land on the outskirts of the urban area as either a real estate investment or the creation of a new space for their families. They want to build timber houses in traditional styles for weekend vacations. Some even buy stilt-houses of ethnic minority peoples in the upland regions and place them on their new land. Among these people, Mr. Thành Chương is the most well-known. He is a famous artist from the Old Quarter of Hanoi who decided to buy a one hectare plot in Soc Son district in 2001. He has spent a lot of money to build a complex of buildings following the old architecture representing different eras, cultures and regions of Vietnam. His complex is called “Thành Chuong’s Viet Palace” and has become a tourist site since 2004 when an article in the New York Times recommended it.52 His palace is an outstanding representation of the desire to return to past architecture that exists in many urban people’s minds. Alongside Láng Hòa Lạc Highway, there have been hundreds of villas owned by rich people from Hanoi. These villas’ architectures are combinations of modern and tradition. This way of seeing traditional houses has had a significant impact on the revival of nine older-style houses from 2005 to 2014 in Đức Nội Village as discussed in Chapter 5.

On the other hand, more and more people in Hanoi when buying land in suburban areas decide to build livestock cages where their hired labors raise pigs, chicken or vegetables for their own consumption. Less wealthy families could hire unused farmland for growing food or some even plant vegetables on the top floor of their houses in

52 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/20/travel/vietnams-folk-history-reflected-in-buildings.html?_r=0
the city. This practice has become more and more popular because people are afraid of unclean or unsafe vegetables, meat and fruit from the market. This concern is reinforced because there has been an increase in reports of food poisoning from the mass media. Accordingly, there is even a chain of “clean vegetable shops” named “Bác Tôm” in Hanoi where organic vegetable and “countryside meats” are sold albeit with higher prices than other shops. The revival of vegetables in home gardens in Dúc Nội Village or alongside roads in the field is the result of people’s increasing concern about their safety as the following statement shows: “you can only trust what you yourself produced. People risk other people’s lives just for profit” (Mrs. X, 63 years old).

This analysis has explored that in part because of Đổi Mới both the country and Duc Noi Village’s economic conditions have improved significantly. Legal reforms were followed by social changes both of which have impacted local people’s interpretations of modernity as well as their practices toward landscapes. This is similar to Li’s (2007) identification of demography, economic patterns and land ownership as three significant forces pushing rural change in Indonesia. The table below summarizes key transitions from both villagers and government perspectives.
Table 6: Two Views of Modernity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>State’s Views</th>
<th>State’s Practices</th>
<th>Villagers’ Views</th>
<th>Villagers’ Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre Renovation</td>
<td>Socialism construction;</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Foods sufficient;</td>
<td>VAC system,(^{53}) commitment to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralized Planning and</td>
<td>Cooperatives in rural areas;</td>
<td>Subsidiary education and</td>
<td>local cooperatives for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subsidy Economy; State’s</td>
<td>farmers work for subsidy coupon;</td>
<td>medical care;</td>
<td>subsidy coupons, Self-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strict control over all major</td>
<td>Local general department stores</td>
<td>brick houses;</td>
<td>brick making;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>economic sector; Public</td>
<td>as key goods suppliers;</td>
<td>electricity;</td>
<td>High plant diversity home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ownership over private</td>
<td>Individual business strict</td>
<td>television; tape players;</td>
<td>gardens (timber; fruits, spicy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ownership;</td>
<td>control policy;</td>
<td></td>
<td>plant or flower);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Industrialization;</td>
<td>Production materials in hand of</td>
<td>Work in non-farm sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Materialism over mentalism</td>
<td>State’s sector;</td>
<td>including local firms and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strict control over spiritual</td>
<td>factories; Have significant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>practices</td>
<td>income from non-farm activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Multi-sector and</td>
<td>Decentralization;</td>
<td>Business; Land</td>
<td>Home run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{53}\) VAC or Home Garden; Fish Pond and Animal Cage (Vườn- Ao Chuồng in Vietnamese) was a popular farming system during this period consisted of gardens, fish ponds and livestock as the substantial economic activities to supplement farming.
| Renovation | market economy; | Farming land allocation to individual households; Free private business market; Supports to traditional festivals, historical and spiritual relics | ownership; Urban identities (houses, clothes, lifestyle, etc); High education; Identities reconstruction; Non farm income over farming income | business along side village road; New house and garden setting; Regular schooling for children; Pagoda and temple reviving; Out-migration to cities; Non-farm job preference |

**Modernity, New Landscapes and the Elderly**

The elderly have often been marginalized by urbanization and modernization, especially in developing countries like Vietnam. This explains why modernization theory has been severely criticized over the last few decades (Thorson 1995). This situation has increased in rural areas where non-farming income has become increasingly significant (Rigg 2001; Rigg 2005). The elderly farming knowledge and experience becomes decreasingly valued when the younger generation leaves their village to work in non-farming occupations (Rigg 2006). “One day everyone will be the elderly. We are your future. If you don’t listen to us now, who will listen to you?” (Mr. B, 70 years old).
Mr. B.’s question indicates the challenges that rural people and especially the rural elderly must confront today. These challenges are consequences not only of demographics, economic patterns and land ownership as identified in Indonesia by Li (2002), but also of the so-called “social re-identification, spatial relocation and spatial interpenetration “that have been occurring elsewhere in many Southeast Asian countries (Rigg 2009). Unfortunately, in these processes there are often differences between the young and older generations. While old people trend to revive the past by reorganizing traditional festivals and reviving traditional values (Kleinen 2004), young people want to seek new values in more developed countries or in urban areas to become less “wild” (Peluso and Joseph 2008).

In the context of Dực Nội Village, this contrast materializes not only between the older and younger generations but also between the elderly who live in the city and those who have remained in the village. This is indicated by their attitudes toward new houses, home gardens and sacred places as described in the preceding chapters. Young people and the urban elderly who both prefer urban style homes have excluded the elderly from the decision making process in part because they control income, and partly because local elderly do not have knowledge of new architectural styles. The elderly are happy with their new houses because they give a new appearance to their families despite the fact that the elderly also perceive many inconveniences in the new settings. Meanwhile, both the urban and rural elderly feel nostalgia for their gardens that their children want to replace with bonsai trees. Reviving sacred places in this context results from the efforts of rural elderly who want to create their own space and maintain traditions, identities and bring luck for their families. However, from the perspective of some of the urban elderly, this process is too expensive and is undertaken improperly or reflects superstition of the younger generation. Each group has thus sought various alternatives, and this makes the rural
transition in general and Dực Nội Village’s transition in particular a fruitful inquiry for future study.

**What is the Future of the Village Landscapes?**

Descola (2013) discusses the interactions between humans and nature and identified six modes of relations: exchange, predation and gift on the one hand and production, protection and transmission on the other hand. The later three modes represent a diachronic development that refers to the increasing influence of human over nature in history. Here I explore the questions: What will it look like in the future, and what forces will impact the emerging forces in this relation? Scholars from various disciplines have discussed these topics. Of these, Sponse (2012) has explored from an anthropological perspective the relations between religion and contemporary environmental problems. Marten (2001) has explored the solution of reducing consumption and Crumley (2001) has studied the empowerment of indigenous knowledge as well as environmental democracy.

At the local level, the future scenario of landscape is also a big concern for Dực Nội Villagers. During our conversations, people often ask questions without expecting any response because they know such questions are difficult to answer. Among such questions, the following are the most relevant to my topic of houses, home gardens and sacred places:

- Will there be enough residential land for our children in the future?
- Should we live in concrete boxes like city people without orchard gardens?
- Why do temples and pagodas become more commercial and oriented to the wealthy?

These are rational and practical concerns. The population of Dực Nội Village has increased rapidly in recent years and yet land is not “breeding” but rather declining, in the
villagers’ words.\textsuperscript{54} From 1990 to the end of 2014, there have been approximately 10,000 square meters of farmland converted into residential land. These land reallocations were initiated through land auctions as described in previous chapters. Additionally, building a new school, roads and other administrative buildings have also led to significant land acquisition. Hundreds of ponds in the village have been filled up and replaced with houses and “there is hardly an empty place in the village” according to interviewees. Thus the commune government has approved a policy to allocate residential land only to those whose families consist of at least three married couples and who live on land smaller than 100 square meters for each couple. Meanwhile, land prices continue to increase and not all families can afford to buy land for their new married couple(s). The most popular alternative is to divide the family’s present land into smaller pieces for their children (See Appendix 14). However, this practice may prove impossible in the future because there will be no more land to divide. In this situation, the poor elderly will be affected the most because they will be unable to afford to buy land for their children. This means their future extended families will be forced to live on the same piece of land and there will be less space for them.

On the other hand, there is no longer any remaining residential land not only in the village but in the whole commune. This means that, if the population keeps increasing, then sooner or later more farmland will be converted into residential land. A local leader, who has been working in land management for decades estimates that over the next ten years 10\% of the farmland will be turned into residential land. If this is true, the average amount of farmland per individual will certainly decrease significantly and will impact village food security and especially the poor.\textsuperscript{55} This shift in land use will most likely cause

\textsuperscript{54} Compared with 2000, the village’s population by the end of 2014 increased by 125 persons. This includes newborn babies and immigrants.

\textsuperscript{55} Presently there are approximately 360 square meters per individual. Most farmers today are those who have no other options such as networks or skills for non-farming jobs. Many must borrow land to grow crops.
an increase in out-migration among young people who will go to cities to work in other occupations. In comparison, this has already happened in many rural communities across Southeast Asia (Rigg 2006; Rigg 2009). The elderly will be left in their home villages, and the connections between them and their children will be weakened even further (Kees, Khoa and Thao 2014).

Landscape is always a system, so any changes in one part are followed by changes in other parts (Crumley 2001). This means that challenges toward residential land will increase pressures on home gardens. At present, although most former orchard and gardens have disappeared, there still is typically several trees or *bonsai* trees left outside each house. Among the 72 key informants, only one does not have any trees outside his house, while the other 71 either have some trees, or just *bonsai* trees. This massive decline is thought to significantly impact local villagers, as evidenced in the following statement: “We will have to buy everything from market. Our future generation will not be able to distinguish trees, birds” (Mr. B, 67 years old).

This statement originates from the situation today when true home gardens as in the past have disappeared in the village, especially for the 72 key informants. People must buy their fruit at the market and herbal treatments for the sick are no longer popular. Plant diversity is an important condition for animal diversity, and thus, biological diversity in general. In the past, there were bird nests in home gardens and people could recognize various bird species. The appearance of some birds or other animals marked the shifting of the seasons or predicted weather changes. For instance, screamers marked spring, sparrows signaled summer, frogs were followed by rain, the height that birds flew signaled a sunny day, and butterfly migration was followed by poor weather. These important signals and experiences originated in the past when farming was the primary economic activity. On the other the hand, a decline in biodiversity will be followed with increasing dependence on
outside markets, and people will have to pay more for fruit transported from other parts of Vietnam or even China. It seems that the elderly will suffer the most from this because they do not have stable incomes and must rely on their children.

On the other hand, the elderly list the risks that occur as a result of the disappearance of home gardens, as indicated by the following statement: “Houses are just too close to each other. What will happen if there is a fire? If there are gardens, they will help prevent fire from spreading to the neighbors” (Mrs. L. 64 years old). This concern is very practical since fire could happen anytime, especially since families use gas for cooking. Additionally, electric short-circuits could also cause disastrous fires. Elderly interviewees state that home gardens could help as “fire prevention zones” in case of such accidents. That is another reason why they used to build their houses in the middle encircled with the home garden. My field observations also affirmed this concern when the distance between houses is so closes and lacks a “green zone” between them. At the same time, fire extinguishers and fire alarm systems are not present in the village. Roads are two small for fire engines to approach the village. Meanwhile, water wells and ponds have been filled up and family water tanks are too small to put out large fires. This scenario has lead to an increase in energy consumption because villagers depend on gas or electricity for fuel. This is different from the past when people could make use of dead tree branches or leaves for cooking. Additionally, losing home gardens as “natural air conditioners” as observed by many local elderly will also make indoor temperatures hotter in summer and colder in winter so they have to rely more on electric fans or air conditioners.

While the future scenarios of house and home garden settings in Dục Nội Village are likely to create more negative impacts on local elderly, surprisingly sacred places as the supposed elderly-oriented space also seem to marginalize local elderly, especially the poor. This process stems from a process called commercialization by some local elderly: “you
are respected more with big donation. Poor people like us cannot afford so we are voiceless during festival or ceremony days” (Mrs. H., 63 years old). Entering Dức Nội Village temple or pagoda, visitors can see the donation board (see Appendix 8) where donors’ names are listed with the details of their donations. These donors are typically wealthy villagers or urban villagers living in the city. Although donations are voluntary with no minimum donation many villagers feel that big donors are given more respect. For example, during festival days donors are invited to sit in the front row in order for performances. Some are even invited to join the advisory board for celebrations. Consequently, these wealthy villagers become the center of festivals while the majority of villagers are simply observers. This situation has occurred in many other villages in the country (Lê Hồng Lý 2009).

Another concern that the village elderly have about the future of the village’s sacred places is the indifferent attitude of young people since they know very little about the deities worshipped inside the temple or pagoda, or the history of each sacred place. Young people resist going to the temple or pagoda and seem to lack respectful attitude or trust in deities or the Buddha. This makes both local and urban elderly worry that the village temple will be left empty without sufficient care except during festival days or the Buddha will be unhappy to see their young people come to pagoda without sincere trust. This worry is juxtaposed with the elderly concern about their children’s weak memory of family history since many do not clearly remember their ancestors’ death dates. They worry if their children will worship ancestors properly and at the right time. They complain that young people who bring in the primary income for their family have overlooked tradition since they overlook taboos at these times, like eating certain kinds of meat or inviting friends instead of relatives to the home at the death anniversary ceremony.\footnote{Such as dog meat, which is commonly eaten at certain times by certain people but is to be avoided around the time of ceremonies like the death anniversary.}

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elderly often critique the way that these young people prepare and make the offerings to
the ancestors. Traditionally, the guests are supposed to wait until the incense has burned all
the way down and then ask permission, before eating the feast. So some young people are
accused of not following this rule. Additionally, some even celebrate ceremonies just on
the weekend either before or after than the actual death anniversary date because of their
work and friends’ schedules. One elderly villager complained: “if the death anniversary is
celebrated on the wrong day, how could the ancestor return home to receive the offerings?”
(Mrs.T.78 years old).

On a broader scale, the above concerns and statements indicate a break in
perceptions between the elderly and young generations. While the elderly see the temple or
pagoda as history and symbol of the village, young people are likely to see them as places
for only rituals. While the elderly view the manner of ceremonies as more important than
the offerings, young people tend to care more about the material aspects. This explains
many elderly concerns that in the near future death ceremonies will be organized as parties
where their children invite friends to come to drink and eat. Necessary ritual practices and
arrangements such as preparing offerings, praying and making speeches or inviting guests
may be forgotten. Their ancestor altars will be “cold” on other days as the younger
generation may be too busy and may not care about the key ceremony days of the lunar or
the Buddhist calendars.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

As the most populous ethnic group in the country, the Viet or Kinh people have been studied from various disciplinary perspectives including anthropology. Most of these studies have focused on the rural world with the village as the primary unit of analysis. This made sense since until the early 1990s most Viet people lived and do live today in rural settings. Throughout the 20th century, the debate between Scott and Popkin has been a key theme and has inspired many other scholars who want to research Vietnamese villages. From Scott’s (1977) concept of a “moral economy,” Viet villages represent a closed world dominated by a subsistence economy and a conservative society uninterested in risking investment. Two years after Scott’s book was introduced to readers, Popkin (1979) began a dispute with not only Scott but also with other scholars of peasants with his agreement that Vietnamese peasants are in fact quite rational. They are bounded within close villages and a subsistence economy, but they do dare the risks of investment in seeking better lives. This dispute has significantly influenced Vietnamese historians and anthropologists, and it has forced them to reconsider whether Viet villages are as closed and separate as they previously assumed (Nguyễn Quang Ngọc 2009). Since the late 1990s, studies of social and cultural change in Viet villages have become more popular (Kleinen 2004; Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm 2009; Lương Văn Hy 2010).

However, studies of the changing landscapes in Viet villages are not yet popular though they are sometimes briefly mentioned here and there (Nguyễn Thị Phương Châm 2009). On the other the hand, village landscapes are often analyzed in relation to the whole villager as a community and in this case tend to be seen as static and separate from each other (Nguyễn Tùng 2003). This study tests a new approach that focuses on a target group (the elderly) and follows their preferences regarding the most significant landscapes that
they interact with over the last three decades. It explores interrelations between houses, home gardens and sacred places, but does not view them as separate identities.

Field investigations in Dục Nội Village have reconstructed these three village landscapes in the pre-Renovation era and their transitions since the early 1990s. These processes were initiated after renovation policies were implemented, especially in the agricultural sector. Local cooperatives were dismantled and replaced with individual household farms, which has in turn unfettered local farmers from imposed allocated work in exchange for subsidy coupons as prior to the Renovation and instead has allowed and encouraged them to work with more motivation. This is one of the key forces that have lead to significant crop productivity increases and other socio-economic developments. These are relevant preconditions for continuous and rapid changes in houses, home gardens and sacred places in Dục Nội Village.

Firstly, concrete and multiple story homes have gradually replaced brick houses. This transformation has brought not only new urban-like architecture, but also outdoor and indoor arrangements for houses. Houses no longer sit in the middle of the land but have been moved back into a corner of the land or next to the road. Houses no longer face to the south or southeast and instead face the road. This transition shows the increasing pressures on residential land for local villagers on the one hand, and also a more commercial-oriented purpose of houses on the other the hand. Meanwhile, indoor arrangements of these new houses has created more private spaces through separate rooms, and this setting makes the elderly feel lonely as they are uncomfortable living in such small and separated spaces. Additionally, ancestor altars have been moved from the ground floor to the top floor of the house because many people think altars should be on the top so they will not be stepped on. This new practice has also made it inconvenient for the elderly since they must climb the stairs to the top floor to tend the altar.
Secondly, home gardens in the village have also undergone tremendous transformations including: becoming smaller with less plant and animal diversity and focused on bonsai trees. While pre-Renovation gardens have significant ecological and socio-economic roles and are oriented toward the elderly, post-Renovation gardens have become very small since land has been divided into small pieces for newlyweds. The three layer arrangement of pre-Renovation gardens was a genius of adaptation by villagers to the environmental and socio-economic conditions, with timber trees or bushes planted in the outer areas to give shade for houses and to mark territories and limit negative impacts on houses such as falling dead branches or root extensions. Second, gardens had fruit trees or ponds planted or placed in the middle to make it easier to care for and to prevent fruit from being stolen. Further, gardens had flowering or herbal plants planted in the inner areas to bring good smells and decoration for the house. These trees were planted and cared for by the elderly, in part so they could sell the fruit for supplemental income and as investment for their children’s future once timber trees could be harvested. These areas were replaced with bonsai trees that were brought into the village from the urban market. Consequently, the elderly have lost not only a source of income, but also a space where they could work or relax.

Thirdly, the sacred places of the village have undergone different transitions, which have caused different trends. One trend is the secularization of various sacred places that used to be public places with high biodiversity. The second trend is the revival of certain traditional spaces such as the village temple and Buddhist pagoda, and the emergence of new spaces such as Mother Goddess shrines with regional boundaries. The trends of secularization, urbanization, commercialization and population growth are key forces that have contributed to the transformation of many places formerly recognized as sacred into private lands with residents and commercial activities. This process has replaced ritual
symbolic and ecological characteristics with new symbols of wealth, commercialization and private ownership. Meanwhile, during the last two decades some historic and ritual places have been revived thanks to support from local government and donations from local people. The cases of Đoài Temple and Kiến Dương Pagoda are two outstanding examples. However, this transition does not really replace the disappearance of sacred places for the elderly because there has been an increasing involvement of young people in these places. Moreover, the rich seem to have more influence and active participation in the pagoda or temple because they can make bigger donations than those elderly who are poor.

The transformation of these three village landscapes has had both negative and positive impacts on the village elderly. Physically, they feel uncomfortable with the settings of new houses, home gardens or sacred places in their village because these changed landscapes provide them less access, less comfort, and they feel voiceless and less engaged. On the other hand, local elderly sentimentally feel happy because the new setting indicates their village and their families’ movement toward modernity, urbanity and prosperity. However, this binary attitude is somehow different from urban elderly. They see the physical changes, such as those in housing architecture, as inevitable and necessary on the one hand, while at the same time viewing the increasing influence of urban culture as a threat to traditional practices and not as the best decision (bonsai garden, for example). The key similarity between both local and urban elderly is their concern about the process of commercialization that has occurred around their sacred places.

This study has examined how perceptions of modernity have influenced people’s decisions to establish new landscapes. Modernity as interpreted in this study does not represent a specific developmental stages or values. Rather, it is way of seeing for Đức Nội villagers, and it changes from time to time. In the pre-Renovation era, modernity was
associated with cooperatives, industrialization and wealth, while after the Renovation it implies business, non-farm work or urbanity. Modernity therefore is a complex term that can only be fully understood in a certain time and context. Methodologically, this study encompasses both etic and emic analysis via the involvement of a research assistant, and the participation of both local and urban elderly as key informants. Additionally, I myself can be placed somewhere between etic and emic as I used to be part of the village, but have lived away in the city for more than 20 years.

Given the constraint of limited time, resources, goals and the scope of project design, this study does not use quantitative and other technical tools to measure ecological transitions or to quantify their impacts on local people in general or on the elderly in particular. This is therefore a suggestion for future studies that seek to dig deeper into such topics.
APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Descriptions of the informants by age, gender, economic status and occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Local elderly</th>
<th>Urban elderly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age range</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>60-70 years old</td>
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<td>Non farmer</td>
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<td><strong>Economic Status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Sample Questions for Life History Interviews

1. What are the most significant landscape changes of the nowadays villages comparing with the pre- Đổi Mới period?

2. How has your current house been built? What is its history? How does it differ from the past one?

3. How have your current gardens been arranged? What is its history? How does it differ from the past one?

4. What are the most significant landmarks in your life? Why do you choose those landmarks?

5. Where and what are places that used to be considered sacred by you and other villagers? How have such beliefs been established? How are they perceived today?

6. What do you like most from your past/present houses? Explain why?

7. What do you like least from your past/present houses? Explain why?

8. What do you like most from your past/present garden? Explain why?

9. What do you like least from your past/present garden? Explain why?

10. How do you feel about today’s ritual practices/ritual ceremonies arranged in your family/village?

11. If you had power to decide, what would you do to make your house better?

12. If you had power to decide, what would you do to make your home garden better?
Appendix 3

Some Images of the Contemporary Village
Appendix 4

Some Images of Remaining Brick Houses
Appendix 5

Some Images of New Houses
Appendix 6

Some Images of Remaining “old” gardens
Appendix 7

Some Images of “New” gardens
Appendix 8

Some Images of the village Pagodas
Appendix 9

Some Images of Reviving Sacred Places
Appendix 10

Some Images of New Sacred Spaces
Appendix 11

Some Images of Remaining “old” trees
Appendix 12

Some Images of reviving “old” Houses
Appendix 13

Some Images of New Vegetable “Gardens”
Appendix 14

Some Images of Fragmented Residential Land
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