

SURVIVING TRACES OF PHAPRIES AMONG THE E-DE PEOPLE (*)

PHAN HUU DAT

In 1991, in an article published in the 4th Ethnology Review titled, *Traces of the 4-class system in the Central Highlands of Vietnam*, on the Nie and Mlo “*he dong*” lineage system, I held that his lineage system is a rare vestige of phapry and is still maintained in the E-de society today. In this research paper, I will return to this important issue and clarify my opinions.

When studying primitive society, Professor G. I. Persix said that in the period of disintegration of the primitive society, there appeared a type of neighbor commune with the characteristics of many traces of a clan society. This is called the primitive neighbor commune (Persix, 1995).

Dr. Luu Hung, after studying traditional villages of the Thuong (Montanard) Land came into the following conclusion: “Such a village evidently no longer bears the characteristics of a clan commune, but is not yet a real neighbor commune. It can be identified as a type of primitive neighbor commune” (Luu Hung, 1994, p. 237).

It is known to everyone that in an article discussing social relations in Russia (1875) F. Engles opposed the viewpoint of the populist faction represented by Tkatrov, saying that Russia could advance toward socialism through communes. Engles held

that the road to socialism is not through communes but through proletarian revolution. However, in case of the victory of the proletarian revolution and the shift from production material to collective ownership, the customs of communes and traces of ancient collective ownership are a strong means to shorten the transition process to socialism.

The study of traditional social institutions of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands will actively contribute to the process of building a new socialist-oriented political system in Vietnam.

Thus far, local and foreign scientists have often said that the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands of Vietnam have maintained many traces of a primitive society. This is entirely true. Yet how are these traces manifested? Scientists often produce evidence on different aspects of life in ethnic communities. On religion and belief, they are the traces of totemism, a typical religious form in a clan society. In terms of ownership, it exists in the form of a collective and public ownership system within villages. In terms of marriage and family, it is the traces of the group marriage system and of the matriarchal system housing a community in traditional long

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houses. Traces are also illustrated in the paternal or maternal lineage system and the system of residence in marriage. In terms of society, traces are manifested in the operations of village life abiding by customary laws and the role of village patriarchs. Thus far, no research has been conducted on reproduction of primitive social structure of the clan society here. According to the common diagram of humankind, we can imagine the social structure to be a four-storey building, starting with the first to the fourth storey are clan, phapry, tribe and tribe alliance.

Of course, the society of ethnic minority groups in the Central Highlands, prior to 1945, was a disintegrating primitive society, with the clan society structure no longer fully practiced. However, scientists could in some rare cases find the remnants of a primitive society that once had a strong presence.

Professor Be Viet Dang and Nguyen Nam Tien, in their paper on *Dual organization of the E-de*, said that in the current E-de society, there remain many family lines, but they all can be grouped into two blocs (or two systems) – the Mlo and the Nie. Marriage within a family line is strictly banned. Today, marriages between people from two surname groups in the same family tree exist, but the E-de people consider them violations of the customary law. The clan's dual characteristics or the division by half of a tribe is evident through the song that states:

Adult Mlo has to raise Nie, adult Nie has to raise Mlo. The two family lines raise each other and marry each other (Be Viet Dang and Nguyen Nam Tien, 1979, p. 2).

According to Professor Khong Dien's paper, *Social Characteristics of Marriage and Family of local ethnic groups in Truong Son - Tay Nguyen*, another notable feature of the E-de ethnic group is that there are many family lines (*Djue*), but actually there are two main groups – Nie and Mlo, each having several lines of descendents and marriages between lines that are banned. This may be the remaining vestige of a dual clan organization (Khong Dien, 1977).

On the social relation of the E-de people, Professor Be Viet Dang writes more specifically: "The traces of dual organization are also found in the Nie and Mlo family lines, called *djue*, of which the family lines of the same *he dong* (lineage system) can exist due to their separation. Many Nie as well as Mlo family lines still maintain their original surname, which is added to a new name such as Nie Kdam, Nie Sieng, Nie Son, etc., and Mlo Duon Du, Mlo Hut, Mlo Duon Dao, etc. Marriage is banned not only in the same family line but also in the same lineage system. Violations of such a principle are considered incestuous and fines come in the form of roosters, white pigs or white buffaloes." (Be Viet Dang et al., 1982, p. 92).

In the French book, *Ethnic minority groups in Vietnam*, a group of authors including Professor Dang Nghiem Van, Chu

Thai Son, Dr. Luu Hung wrote: “If in the E-de ethnic group, there are many lineage systems, all come from the two original lines of Nie and Mlo” (Dang Nghiem Van et al., 1986, p. 261).

Dr. Vu Dinh Loi (1994) comments in the book *Traditional Family and Marriage of the Malayo - Polynesian Truong Son - Tay Nguyen ethnic groups*, as follows: “The number of families of the E-de ethnic group today is many in which some family lines are separated into many sub-lineage segments. But in reality, the local E-de people believe that there are only two family lines - Nie and Mlo. All other family lines come from these two original family lines” (Vu Dinh Loi, 1994, p. 87, 91). The exchange principle is clearly manifested in the traces of the dual organization and group marriage in E-de society, with the fact that men from one family line have an obligation to marry women from the opposite family line and vice versa.

According to Nguyen Thi Hoa, in her doctoral thesis entitled “*Housing and in-house activities of the E-de people in Vietnam*” (1996), “The dual exogamous principle of the E-de is very clear. At present, many Vietnamese ethnologists believe that the whole E-de ethnic group has been born from two major family lines - Nie and Mlo and the exogamous principle is only applied between these two family lines whose scientific name is dual organization. Many authors have produced numerous materials about the development of the family lines from the two original family

lines, the Nie and Mlo” (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 72).

Thu Nhung Mlo Duon Du, in her doctoral thesis in 2001 entitled “*E-de Women in Ethnic Social Life*”, “Legend has it that the E-de had many different family lines which came from different clans, each clan had its sub-clans and continued to develop. It is estimated that the E-de had more or less 50 big and small family lines of which Nie and Mlo were the two original clans (mother clans) and from these two original clans came smaller clans, i.e. the current family lines” (Thu Nhung Mlo Duon Du, 2000, p. 45).

From those opinions, we can see that some Vietnamese scientists, when mentioning traditional family and marriage institutions of the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands in general and the E-de ethnic minority group in particular, use the terminologies of dual organization and *he dong* (lineage systems).

When applying the terminology of dual organization, some scientists have identified it with exogamy, the marriage between two clans; however, a distinction must be made.

Exogamy is a marriage institution in a clan society, under which, sexual relationships within a clan are banned. Men from clan A can only marry women from clan B and men from clan B can only marry women from clan A. This exogamous principle is so important that it is considered the main typical characteristic of the clan. If there is a clan, there must be

exogamy, regardless of whether it is a matriarchal or patriarchal clan. This exogamous principle appeared in primitive society, when the clan institution was shaped and lasted until the clan was disintegrated and the principle disappeared.

Dual organization is a social institution existing completely within the hypothetic sphere. Today people, whether living in the Amazon forests in South America or in Southeast Asia, in the Calakhari desert in South Africa or on an isolated island in Oceania, or whether they are in the lowest level of social development, have by far surpassed dual organization. Dual organization, according to one hypothesis, appeared in the primitive stage of clan society, dating back about 50,000 years. According to archeological separation, it was in the early post old-stone age, under which the clan social structure was hypothesized to be as follows: Two exogamous clans often exchange relations through marriage. Alongside the development of the clan society and the separation of the original clan, dual organization was turned into a two phapry system. At present, in the world, dual organization is only reflected in mythology or in the primitive worldview of the ethnic groups. According to Michel Panoff and Michel Perrin, for example, it is believed in mythology that the two brothers from the dawn of humankind are two “cultural heroes or life spans of humankind depending on the opposition between day and night, heaven and earth, sun and moon,

etc.” (Panoff and Perrin, 1973, p. 84). People think that the Egyptian concept of the existence in the old time of two “Nom”, one in Upper Egypt and the other in Lower Egypt or the military organization of the Asian nomads which was divided into two arms – right and left is the old vestige of the dual organization. In my opinion, the Vietnamese legend about Lac Long Quan and Au Co who gave birth to 100 eggs which turned into 100 sons wherein 50 followed their mother to the mountain and the other 50 followed their father to the sea is also an old vestige of the primitive dual organization. It is similar to our concept of the opposition between the mountain and coastal regions, fairy and dragon, red (white) and black, which also reflects dual organization.

The ethnic groups in the Central Highlands of Vietnam have already entered the disintegration period of clan society, thus the use of the terminology of dual organization or traces of dual organization is unsuitable.

In ethnology, when talking about marriage and family, the terms lineage, issue, stock of descendants are used to refer to people who share the same ancestry, regardless of their maternal or paternal lineages. Whereas, the term *he dong* (lineage system) is rarely used. For traditional E-de society, I think, there is no need to use new terminology – *he dong* as it is unsuitable to the primitive social structure with the full links: clan, phapry, tribe and tribal alliance.

In the book *Ancient Society*, L. H. Morgan defined phapry as follows: “It is an organic unity or an alliance between two or many clans of the same tribe to achieve some common objectives. Those clans were often formed due to the segmentation of an original clan” (Morgan, 1971, p. 99, 101, 115). The American Indian tribes comprise a big number of phapry... (Morgan, 1971, p. 99, 101, 115). Marriage between members of the same phapry is strictly banned. This shows that clans of each phapry came from an original clan. Members of a certain clan of the *Cho Soi* (Wolf) phapry can marry any woman, members of any clan of the other phapries and vice versa” (Morgan, 1971, p. 99, 101, 115).

F. Engles, in his work *Origin of Family, Private Ownership System and the State*, wrote: “Among a large number of Indian tribes of more than five or six clans, three, four or more clans are seen associated with a special group whose name in the Indian language based by Morgan on a corresponding Greek word called feratery (phapry). For example, the Seneca tribe has two phapries: one comprises of clans from the first to the fourth (Wolf, Bear, Turtle, and Beaver) and the other comprises clans from the fifth to the eighth (Deer, Snipe, Heron, and Hawk). In further study, it is noted that those phapries are mostly typical of the initial clans, i.e. the initial sub-segments of the tribe. When the tribe developed, each clan was separated into two or more segments and then each segment is an independent clan, and the

initial clan comprised of smaller clans is considered to still exist as a phapry. In the Seneca tribe, legend has it that the Glu Clan and the Deer Clan were the two original clans, from which other clans were derived (Engles, 1995, p. 137).

From the views of Morgan and Engles cited above, it can be said that: the *he dong* in traditional marriage and family institution of the E-de in the Central Highlands of Vietnam was phapry – a link of the primitive social structure: clan - phapry - tribe - alliance of tribes.

In the work of Professor Be Viet Dang, Chu Thai Son, Vu Thi Hong and Vu Dinh Loi mentioned above, there are two phapries including:

1. Nie: Nie Kdam, Nie Sieng, Nie Sor. With this phapry, the original clan was Nie.
2. Mlo: Mlo Duon Du, Mlo Hut, Mlo Duon Dao. With this phapry, the original clan was Mlo (Be Viet Dang et al., 1982, p. 92).

In the work of Dr. Vu Dinh Loi in 1994 mentioned above, the two phapries of Nie and Mlo have the following clans:

Nie: Nie Kdam, Nie Sieng, Nie Hrah, Nie Mla, Nie Buon rit, Nie Kgok, Nie Kpa, Nie Suk, Nie Gieo, Nie Buon Ya Kuk, Ad.frong (?), Nie Ale... (Vu Dinh Loi, 1994, p. 88, 98).

1. Mlo: Mlo Duon Du, Mlo Hut, Mlo Duon Dao, Mlo Kpor, Mlo Dao, Mlo Kdoh (Vu Dinh Loi, 1994, p. 88, 98).

In Nguyen Thi Hoa's doctoral thesis in 1996, it was found that the Mlo has the

following clans: Mlo, Mlo Duon Du, Mlo Hut, Mlo Duon Dao while the Nie has the following clans: Nie Kdam, Nie Sieng, Nie Troi, Nie Hra, Nie Mo, Nie Chieng, Nie Mla, Nie Bontap, Nie Suk, Nie Sor, Nie Kmriek, Nie Buon Rit, Nie Cam, Nie Bao, Nie Gok, Nie To and Nie Chieng (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 74).

Vietnamese ethnologists have recorded a great achievement in discovering the two *he dong* Mlo and Nie in the E-de ethnic group. However, while some confirmed that it is not convincing to say that in the E-de group, all families come from the two original family lines of Mlo and Nie; Nguyen Thi Hoa, in her doctoral thesis, based on her own ethnological fieldwork material, wrote that among the 66 families of the E-de Kpa in Buon Ma Thuot, 29 come from Nie family line and 20 come from Mlo family lines and the remaining 17 do not belong to either these family lines.

She also highlighted that in most of the E-de ethnic areas, not all E-de people consider themselves to come from the two family lines of Nie and Mlo.

Thu Nhung Mlo Duon Du, in her doctoral thesis, introduced a very interesting legend of the E-de. “The E-de legend has it that the E-de escaped Adren Cave (in the Northern part of the present day Krong Ana district) to the earth surface. Because they lived for so long in a dark and narrow cave, they tried to find the way to get out to the surface. According to the story, families followed one another to come out of the cave:

Ayun ta elan, Eban dong ro, Mlo dung rue, Hue kia bang...” (The Ayun people cleared the road, the Eban people followed, the Mlo people followed the Eban while Hue people stayed to guard the cave...). Also, according to this legend, the Nie Kdam people were the last to leave the cave. The Hue family alone, to this day, still resides in Cue, Dukman commune, Krong Ana district, the area near Adren Cave that gave birth to the E-de people. Therefore, according to this legend, the E-de in fact has many different family lines. It is estimated that there are more or less 50 big and small E-de family lines, including Nie and Mlo, the two biggest family lines and most are widely known (Thu Nhung Mlo Duon Du, 2000, p. 45).

In terms of family lines, aside from the Mlo and Nie, Nguyen Thi Hoa also provides many valuable materials as follows:

a. *The Bonzah Family Line* has the following families: 1. Bonzah, 2. Bonzah Koh, 3. Bonzah Aroh, 4. Bonzah Man, 5. Bonzah Edul, and 6. Bonzah Lan.

b. *The Bun Krong Family Line* includes: 1. Bunkrong, 2. Bunkrong Pan, 3. Bunkrong Hmok, and 4. Bunkrong Zah.

c. *The Azun Family Line* includes: 1. Azun, 2. Azun Cu, and 3. Azun Tul.

d. *The Ktol Family Line* includes: 1. Ktol, 2. Ktol Blon... (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 75).

I believe Nguyen Thi Hoa’s argument is reliable. The E-de has undergone a very long history of existence. If the E-de ethnic

group, with a current population of 270,348 is recognized as having only two family lines, i.e. two phapries, then the E-de only had one tribe comprised of those two phapries. World historical evidence shows that most of the ethnic groups do not only have one tribe (a tribe has about 2,000 people), but many tribes, even the alliance of tribes. For example, the Iroquois has five tribes: Seneca, Cauga, Onondaga, Onayda and Mehao with a total population of 20,000. In early 15th century, those five tribes rallied into an alliance of tribes very well-known in history. The ancient Greek in the Baltic region had four tribes, each comprised three phapries and each phapry had 30 clans. For the ancient German, the alliance of tribes was formed since the time of Cesar. For its part, the ancient Romans had three tribes, and according to legend, each tribe had 100 clans.

Throughout thousands of years of development in the conditions of disintegrating primitive society, many E-de phapries have segmented. Talking about phapry (i.e. the mother clan), with the marriage exchange between two phapries which is regular and compulsory, we can now only produce evidence of the two phapries of Mlo and Nie in the E-de ethnic group.

The vanishing of most of the E-de phapry is understandable because in many cases, weakened tribes did not have an intermediate organization that is phapry. However, with the two phapries Mlo and Nie, we can see that up to now, they are still strongly viable. World history

materials show that in the declining period, marriages between clans in a phapry are not strictly banned by customary law, while within a clan, this relationship is still strict. Whoever violates it is charged with incest and duly fined.

In the E-de ethnic group, the marriage between two phapries is still strictly banned just like between members of different sexes in the same clan. However, the functions of phapry are not the same as in the past. Of the seven phapry functions mentioned by Engles in his work *Origin of Family, Private Ownership System and the State*, the E-de phapry still maintains the function of regulating marriage for reproduction of races, the function of unity and mutual-help. Other functions relating to social and religious characteristics are not clearly manifested as in the past (Engles, 1995, p. 138, 139).

Through studying the Mlo and Nie phapry in Vietnam, it is noted that the number of clans in these two phapries is not even. The Mlo only has seven clans while the Nie has 18 clans. The uneven development in terms of the number of clans and members of each phapry certainly leads to the expansion of marriage, i.e. two phapries, which in addition to exchanging marriage relations are forced to ally with other phapries and clans through marriages. For example, the Mlo enter into marriage with the Ban or the Nie enter into marriage with the Bonzah (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 77, 79, 80, 81) or Nie with Ksor, Nie with Ale, Nie with Hrlan (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996,

p. 77, 79, 80, 81) or Nie with Adat, Nie with Kanai, Nie with Trei (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 77, 79, 80, 81); or Mlo marry Adat, and Mlo marry Trei, etc. (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 77, 79, 80, 81).

Although the phapry organization in the E-de ethnic group in Vietnam can be partly restored through the studies of Mlo and Nie, it's hard to restore the E-de tribe, let alone the alliance of tribes, because of scattering pieces of materials and in the traditional social structure of the E-de, tribe is higher than phapry, and under phapry is clan. Although there are some materials about the great and small matriarchal family, about marriage, customs of residence in marriage, the death system and regulations on inheritance, traces of public property system, and primitive religious forms relating to matriarchy, it is difficult to restore a clear image of the ancient E-de clan.

In the Central Highlands, besides the E-de, traces of phapry can be found in some other ethnic minority groups, although they are not as profoundly clear as those of the E-de. For example, in the Jrai ethnic group, the Rcom phapry has two clans – Rcom Trong and Rcom Det, and the Ksor phapry has two clans – Ksor Ton Trong and Ksor Sa Bom, etc. The Chu-ru ethnic minority group has the Jnung phapry comprised of two clans - Jnung Sang and Jnung Rop (Vu Dinh Loi, 1994, p. 86-87).

Awareness of the existence of phapry allows us to imagine the picture of marriage and family of the ethnic minority groups in

the Central Highlands to be less complicated. It even requires no use of new terminology, i.e. *he dong* (lineage system) and avoid using a terminology which is a prefix to refer to a phase of the traditional social structure as pointed out by Nguyen Thi Hoa: “People think that there are affined families (from the same origin), and this is expressed in their prefix” (Nguyen Thi Hoa, 1996, p. 74).

In short, writing about marriage and family of the E-de people so far, Vietnamese ethnologists use the term *he dong*, while it is more accurate to use the orthodox terms phapry. In fact in the past (1979) some ethnologists such as Prof. Be Viet Dang, Nguyen Nam Tien, or more recently (1994), Dr. Vu Dinh Loi in their research papers about the E-de mentioned the terminology phapry, yet, the main awareness is still around the terminology *he dong*. The above-mentioned scientists did not use the scientific concept of phapry to clarify issues relating to the marriage and family institutions of the E-de people.

Those materials about the E-de phapry may not be sufficient. They are just considered an issue raised for continuing scientific discussions.

Nevertheless, the restoration of traces of the Mlo and Nie phapry (*Dijues*) of the E-de will be of great significance. It proves that the Central Highlands of Vietnam promises many valuable ethnological findings, contributing to providing materials in order to restore the long history of

humankind. It also proves the unity of humankind, whether they are Northern American Indians or Australian aborigines or Southeast Asian local groups. The existence of phapry in the E-de ethnic group at present does not refer anything to the group's slow development, as thought by some European and American scholars. It only illustrates the fact that it is maintained due to specific conditions and history and shows a unity in diversity of the road of development of mankind.

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