

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF VILLAGE DIVISION IN THE NORTHERN DELTA REGIONS DURING FEUDALISM <sup>(\*)</sup>

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Being settled by generations of Vietnamese farmers, the village in the Red River delta has undergone a long development process. Despite poor crops, famines, epidemics and wars, villages have been increasingly expanded in terms of population size, organizational structure and social relations as time has gone by. Apart from village formation due to land expansion, there was also new village formation by original communities through village division, which was for various reasons. The natural type of village division was provoked by a population increase of such a degree that the size of a village could not “afford” such a large number of villagers and the various ensuing social relations. However, in many other cases, the village division was caused by conflicts among different village factions as a result of the characteristics of these small-land-holding wet-rice farmers living in a bureaucratic monarchical society. Most of the village divisions were “peacefully” settled, while quite a few were done tensely, with a resort to various tactical approaches.

This research on different categories of village division not only seeks an insight into the characteristics and development of the Vietnamese village in the past, but also hopes to discover some of the ways our forefathers conducted village management in order to draw lessons for management

of rural society under the current circumstances.

To clarify the topic, the concepts used in the research are defined as follows:

- *Village division*: the separation of a village (i.e. a community which possesses a distinctive geographic area, social organizational structure, social conventions, psychology and characteristics) into two or three new villages. This division tended to take place when there was overpopulation, unsettling conflicts in the community, or geographic separation of a new community that was naturally living away from the original village with full acceptance of the community and little interference from the feudal state (except for some cases brought to the courts, or village division resulting from the formulation of a new commune).

- *Commune division* (popularly called “*the effort of establishing a new commune*”): is the division of a grassroots administrative unit in the countryside of Vietnam into two (or more) smaller units. Among from other reasons, a commune division was mainly provoked by *conflicts of conventions, psychology and administrative management between two (or three) villages of the commune*. In many cases, a village division was accompanied by a request for commune division. No matter what reason, the state tended to interfere in the “effort of establishing a new commune” and would accept or refuse, depending on its related benefits.

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## 1. A number of typical village divisions

### 1.1. From a village of territorially based “giap(s)” to the development of new villages

A typical case is the Thinh Liet village in Thanh Tri district, Hanoi. The village’s Nôm (demotic script) name is “Set.” According to the elderly in the (current) villages, the original Thinh Liet in the past had 9 *giap(s)* (a *giap* was a social institution consisting of male villagers) named from *Giap Nhat* (One) to *Giap Cuu* (Nine). Inferior to other *giap(s)* during village ceremonies, the people in *Giap Cuu* campaigned to the authorities to allow them to have their own ceremonies, and later on this *giap* became a separate village (the Phuong Liet or Vong village, presently Phuong Liet Ward). The remaining eight *giap(s)* of Thinh Liet were also divided later on into eight corresponding villages (each with its own communal house and Buddhist temple, village spiritual protector, and village conventions). Each of these villages was named after a relevant *giap* (i.e. the villages of *Giap Nhat*, *Giap Nhi*, *Giap Tam*, etc., which were popularly called *the eight Set villages*). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century those eight villages made up Thinh Liet commune which was under the Hoang Mai canton, Thanh Tri district, Thuong Tin [bigger] district, Son Nam [region]. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, only *Giap Nhat*, *Giap Nhi*, *Giap Tu*, *Giap Luc* and *Giap Bat* remained, because *Giap Tam* and *Giap Ngu* merged into *Giap Nhi*, while *Giap That* merged into *Giap Bat*. Those five villages were made into five separate communes that, together with the Tuong Mai commune, made up Thinh Liet district under

the Thanh Tri district, which was popularly called *the Set district*. Nowadays, *Giap Bat* is a separate urban ward, *Giap Luc* is part of the Tan Mai Ward of the Hai Ba Trung district, and *Giap Nhat*, *Giap Nhi* and *Giap Tu* are villages of the Thinh Liet commune of Thanh Tri district.<sup>1</sup>

The above phenomenon (a transition from territorially based *giap* to separate villages) was also found in the *Bach Sam* village. In the past, *Bach Sam* canton, or commune (Duy Tien district, Ly Nhan prefect, Ha Nam province) was divided into six *giap(s)*: *Nhat (One)*, *Nhi (Two)*, *Ba (Three)*, *Tu (Four)*, *Ngu (Five)* and *Thuy Chu*. Those *giap(s)* were later made into separate villages with their own communal houses, temples, village spiritual protectors and conventions. The fact that the territorially-based *giap* became a separate village is an interesting ethnographic phenomenon of the history of the Vietnamese village in the northern delta regions which has not been adequately studied.

### 1.2. Transformation from one village to two territorially defined villages

This type of village division took place when the village population began to rise, which led to the creation of community conflicts, mainly between territory-based neighborhoods (clusters of hamlets) and between village factions. Facing irresolvable conflicts, these neighborhoods would divide the village in either of the two following ways:

<sup>1</sup> This part is kindly supported by the investigation statistics of Ngo Vu Hai Hang, BA. (Institute of History)

- The people in each neighborhood would build its own Buddhist temple and worshipping shrine for the village spiritual protector (the village spiritual protector in the newly-built shrine could be that of the old village or, in many cases, a new one); the people would later on build their own communal house.

- When they could not afford to build a new communal house or temple, the people in the two neighborhoods would negotiate for division of the existing communal house and temple. After that, they could form a new commune or share the same commune with the newly separated neighborhood. Based on the particular situation, the feudal state could accept or deny the separation.

Following are two examples of this type of village division:

+ The case of the *Gia village (Yen So, Dac So)* in Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay province: in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the original village named Co So was divided into *Gia Thuong* village (*Gia Tren - Upper Gia*) also known as *Yen So* village, and *Gia Ha* village (*Gia Duoi-Lower Gia*) also known as *Dac So* village. This village division, which was conducted in 1490 after King Le Thanh Tong issued the regulation on commune divisions<sup>2</sup> (the 21<sup>st</sup> year of Hong Duc's

reign), was mainly because of a large population which led to difficulties in village management. Co So was originally a crowded village. According to Pierre Gourou, in his book *The Tonkin Delta Farmer*, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Yen So was one of the 58 villages in the Tonkin (Red River) delta which had more than 5,000 inhabitants (Gourou, 2003). However, the division of the village was not recorded.

+ The case of the *Nghia Lo village (Ke Nghia)*: This village was founded long ago in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was part of La Noi canton, Tu Liem district, Hoai Duc prefect, Son Tay region. According to the legends, Nghia village became crowded by the first years of the new first millennium AD. This village was home to Lady *A La nang De* — a general of *Hai Ba Trung* (two heroic ladies). During the development process, the village had undergone conflicts between two neighborhoods within the community. One included the hamlets of *Lang, Dong,* and *Chua* while the other block was comprised of three other hamlets: *Dinh, Cong,* and *Giua*. The two neighborhoods later became two separate villages with their own communal houses, temples, shrines, village spiritual protectors, and village conventions. One village was *Nghia Tren (Upper Nghia)*, also known as *Tho Vuc*, and consisted of the hamlets of *Lang, Dong* and *Chua*. *Nghia Duoi (Lower Nghia)*, also known as *Yen Dinh*, included the rest of the hamlets. The border between the two villages was an area approximately 100 meters wide which still exists to this day. According to the village elders, during

<sup>2</sup> According to this stipulation, *big communes* of more than 500 households and having at least another 100 households above 500 would be allowed to have a new commune established for the additional 100 households; upon official consideration, the original and the newly-established commune must divide the farmland and common properties amicably (See *Dai Viet Su Ky ToanTh- [Great Viet Complete History Book]*, Volume II, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1983, p. 551, and see Phan Huy Le: "Ke Gia — A Typical Fighting Village and the Hero Ly Phuc Man," *Ethnology Review*, Issue 2/1985, p. 21 - 28)

the division, *Tho Vuc* village was given title to the communal house and worshipping objects (excluding the ritual palanquin which was taken by *Yen Dinh* village) while *Yen Dinh* was given ownership of the temple. The people in *Tho Vuc* kept worshipping to Lady *A La nang De*, while the people in *Yen Dinh* turned to worshipping the votive tablet of Nguyen Khang — a general of the Emperor Gian Dinh Tran Ngoi (in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century). The local elders believe that this village division took place under the rule of Lord Trinh Sam when a lady from the Cong hamlet was a concubine of the Lord. Thanks to the lady, the inhabitants of the hamlets of Cong, Dinh, and Giua had the permission to divide the village. The book, *The Name of Vietnam's Communes and Villages in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, only mentioned *Nghia Lo* commune in *La No* Canton, Tu Liem District, Quoc Oai [bigger] district, Son Tay [region] and did not list the names of *Tho Vuc* and *Yen Dinh* villages. It remains unclear why the author did not mention those hamlet-villages, and it is possible that the village division had not taken place at the time of recording. It is a pity that there currently remains only a bell of the Bao An temple (in the *Yen Dinh* village) in the former *Nghia Lo* village, which was finished on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June of the King Minh Mang's 20th Year (1839). This bell was the earliest Sino—ancient Vietnamese scripts that mentioned the names of *Tho Vuc* and *Yen Dinh* villages. Though divided into two different villages, the two neighborhoods remained under the same

commune of *Nghia Lo* until the August Revolution, and now they are merged under the name of *Nghia Lo* village in the *Yen Nghia* commune, Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay province. This is an exemplary case of dividing an original village into two new territorially defined villages.

### 1. 3. *From farms to villages*

Riverside villages often own alluvial wharfs in the rivers. To protect its land ownership and its crops, villagers were sent to those river wharfs to set up farms. Families with many sons were the pioneers, as this was their obligation to the village as well as a way for them to access land. Starting with a few initial families, many other people (usually the poor and families with many sons) came to settle at the river wharfs while maintaining their relationships with the inhabitants of the original village (i.e. participating in the village activities and paying contributions to the village in the name of the original *giap* or hamlet). When the new farm became crowded some time later, the settlers tended to separate from the original village community to form their own village.

The La Phu farm of the La Phu village (presently in Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay province) is an example. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, some original villagers went to settle at the river wharf by the Day River. The settlers gradually increased in number, forming the five *Ben* hamlets (Vietnamese for “river watering places”): *Ben Chinh* (Main), *Ben Trung* (Central), *Ben Thuong* (Upper), *Ben Ha* (Lower) and *Ben Tan*

(New). Later on another hamlet nearly one kilometer from the river bend was named the *Chua* (temple) hamlet. Those six new settlement hamlets formed *La Phu Bai* (*La Phu River Watering Place*). Although they populated their own hamlet with temples and Earth Genie shrines, the new river wharf settlers continued to join in the activities of the original *giap* where they were from. However, since they lived quite far from the original village of *La Phu Dong*, the river wharf settlers gradually expressed somewhat of a tendency of “separation.” For example, many of them no longer joined in the activities that their original *giap* and *mon*<sup>3</sup> held at the communal house of the original village. This tendency of “separation” reached its peak in the early 1920s when a number of the hamlet dignitaries, hamlet officials and rich people, for their own purposes and benefits, campaigned in “effort of establishing a new commune” for the riverside settlement. They intended to formulate a new commune named *Tan Do*, comprised of the six riverside hamlets or the whole land mass of La Phu from the dyke to the Day River. To gain a smooth village division (also a commune division), the leading figures had made use of the power of the chief of Ha Dong province - Hoang Trong Phu — in the form of pressure upon

<sup>3</sup> *Mon*: one of the ranks in the village communal house. The La Phu village divided its male citizens into six rank groups: *sac* (those who received royal diplomas of honour), *tu van* (*Confucian scholars* - those who followed Confucianism), *cha* (*giap* men who had at some time worked as ceremonial foremen), *cu thuong* (the village elders above 70 years old), *cu ha* (those between 50 — 69 of age) and *binh* (current and former members of the military).

the Hoai Duc District officials. The leaders mobilized the riverside hamlet inhabitants to rebuild the Temple of “The Houseboat God”<sup>4</sup> into a communal house of “San” (≡) configuration, which featured a front building of five rooms and two other back buildings of 3 rooms each. The leaders begged the villagers to worship Hoang Cao Khai (Father of Hoang Trong Phu), and also held a festival of “welcoming the new village spiritual protector” which Hoang Trong Phu and his lady attended. However, 26 tax payers of *Ben Trung* hamlet and a number of inhabitants in other hamlets brought the case to the authorities because they did not agree, so the commune division request and the corresponding map were turned down when submitted to the Hoai Duc District officials.

Though the “effort of establishing a new commune” failed to succeed, the riverside hamlet of La Phu Bai was formed as a separate village-like residential community with its own communal house, temple, village spiritual protector, and village conventions. In addition, the people

<sup>4</sup> The La Phu Bai area enjoyed a flat wharf along the Day riverside and the Ben hamlets which was very convenient for a boat quay. The original residents had made use of the bed to trade bamboo and wood. This was the distribution station for bamboo, wood and different types of forest products from the highlands to be shipped down the Day river to the plains provinces (when the Day dam was built after 1936, the Day flow was blocked so that the wharf was not used anymore). Thanks to the warp, a class of bamboo and wood traders, dockers, and miscellaneous goods traders came into existence in the Ben hamlets. Many rich people among them built the Temple of the Boathouse God, in order to pray for profits in trading. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the initiative for transforming La Phu Bai into an independent village-commune was brought by rich traders of that class.

were entitled to privatizing 27 hectares of originally public land. After the August Revolution, La Phu Bai merged into the hamlets of Dong Nhan Farm (inside the dyke), part of the original La Phu village, to become the Dong Nhan village — which is currently Dong Nhan village of the Dong La commune. The original La Phu Dong village became another commune, and both of them are in Hoai Duc district (Ha Tay province).

The separation of a farm to form another village as seen in the La Phu Bai example mentioned above was one of many cases the author of this research has investigated at various field sites. However, it is noteworthy that not every village with a wharf underwent village division or turned its their wharf farm into a village. A lot of villages on the banks of the Day River, presently in Hoai Duc district (Ha Tay province), such as Yen So, Dac So, La Tinh, Yen Lo, had wharf farms, yet they experienced no transformation of a farm into a separate village because of a high degree of uniformity between the original community and the farm community, and because of the tight management of community life. The transformation in question merely took place when some powerful people initiated the transformation for their own purposes and benefits.

#### ***1. 4. Transformation from a big village into two territory-free villages***

The La Ca village can exemplify this type of village division. The village existed in the region of “seven La villages, three Mo villages” in Tu Liem district, Quoc Oai district, Son Tay region in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the scripts found on the steles available in the village, by the mid-

16<sup>th</sup> century, La Ca was quite densely populated (*Ca* in the village name means *big*) with twenty hamlets: *Dang Dong, Dang Gieng, Vot Bong, Dang Gao, Dong Ma, Ngo Ke, Ngo Ma, Dang Trong, Ngo Soi, Dang Tren, Vang Noi, Vang Ngoai, Duc Thuong, Duc Ha, Ngo Ca, Ai, Cho, Tien, Vang, and Voi*. The male villagers were divided into seven *giaps* - *Thuong Thanh, Hoa Lac, Dong Tinh, Dong Dai, Trung Thon, Thuong Nguyen* and *Nguyen Thon*. Later on, those *giap* were further divided into smaller ones so that the original *giap(s)* were instead called “hamlets” or “small villages.” Each of those hamlets initially was comprised of a number of *giaps*, each of which was made up of three lineages. Therefore, the La Ca village, in the past, consisted of seven “hamlets” with 21 *giaps* and 63 lineages which were later divided into two communes. No elder in the current village could remember all of the names of the 21 *giaps* and the lineages in each of the *giaps*.

Due to population growth after a certain period of development which created new demands for community activities and social management, the original La Ca village had been then divided into two villages which were also two communes.

- The *La Noi* village (commune) consisted of three “hamlets”: *Thuong Thanh, Hoa Lac, and Dong Tinh*.

- The *Y La* village (commune) consisted of four “hamlets”: *Dong Dai, Trung Thon, Thuong Nguyen* and *Nguyen Thon*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is argued that the village initially formed various small *giaps* which later united to become seven hamlets as mentioned above. Therefore, a

The village division remains unrecognized. The text carved on the “*Hoa Nghiem tu bi*” stele established on May 20<sup>th</sup> in the Sung Khang 10<sup>th</sup> Year of King Mac Mau Hop (1575), which is currently preserved at Hoa Nghiem temple, had recorded the names of the two communes of La Noi and Y La. It can therefore be assumed that the village division took place after the stipulation of commune division issued by King Le Thanh Tong in his Hong Duc 21<sup>st</sup> Year (1490), as mentioned in an earlier section. It should be noted that the two new communities shared the temple, village conventions, village spiritual protector, and festivals, although they had two different councils of village notables and officials for the two separate village-communes. More specifically, inhabitants of the two new villages shared farmland and inhabitation. That is, they co-resided instead of being clearly divided: a family next door may be part of the ranking system of the other village and be subject to administrative management of the other commune. In the La Ca communal house there exists to this day a pair of wooden panels with scripts transcribed as follows:

Two communes, seven hamlets, with harmony throughout, hold big joyful festivals,

Inside the communal house are three worshiped divine statues: one god and two fairies — a true supernatural power.

Throughout my many years of research on villages and communes in Vietnam, I have encountered many other cases of *giap*-based village division. Following are some examples:

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hamlet in this case is not referred to as a village, but as a *giap* cluster.

- The *An Ninh* village (currently in An Binh commune, Nam Sach district, Hai Duong province) was divided into two village—communes of *An Dong* and *An Doai* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The An Dong village was made up of four *giaps*: *Nghiem Ta*, *Nghiem Huu*, *Nam Trung*, and *Nam Thuan*. The An Doai village consisted of four *giaps*: *Dong Ta*, *Dong Huu*, *Kinh*, and *Thuan*. Though divided into two autonomous communities and also two independent administrative units, both of the communities shared a communal house, temple and yearly festival (Fieldwork data and Luong Viet Uyen, 1994).

- The *La Khe* village (next to the La Ca village) - currently in Van Khe ward, Ha Dong town, Ha Tay province — was divided, under the King Dong Khanh’s era (1886 - 1888), into four village-communes: *Dong*, *Nam*, *Tay*, and *Bac* (i.e. *East*, *South*, *West*, and *North* respectively). Each of the villages consisted of a number of territory-free *giaps*.

- Another example is the “*Tu Xa*” (the four-commune block), currently in Lam Thao district, Phu Tho province. The original village of *Ke Gap* was divided into four village—communes: *Thach Cap*, *Van Cap*, *Hung Lam* and *Chan Vi*, and, the name “*Tu Xa*” stemmed from that division. Each of the village—communes was made up of several *giaps*. The Thach Cap commune was later further divided into two *giap*-based village—communes of Thach Cap and Dong Think. Hence, the four-commune block became a five-commune block (Ngu Xa).<sup>6</sup> All of the five village-communes existed under the same principle of

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<sup>6</sup> This was different from “*Ngu Xa*” by the shore of West Lake, currently under the Tay Ho district (Hanoi), which is a gathering of bronze molders of

“co-farming and co-residence” found in the La Ca and La Khe villages.

- Another typical example of this type of village division is found in the *Ta Thanh Oai* village (currently in Ta Thanh Oai commune, Thanh Tri district, Hanoi). Far back in its history, this village consisted of twelve *giaps*. The resulting conflicts among the lineages due to increased village population during its development led to a village division into two smaller villages of *Hoa Xa* and *To Thi*. The two new villages were territory-free but *giap*-based. Eight original *giaps* forming the village of *Hoa Xa* were *Duc Lam* (East and West), *Hoa Xa* (East and West), *Phuc Lam* (East and West), and *Duong Khoi* (East and West). The other four original *giaps* making up *To Thi* village were *Dong Thuong*, *Tay Thuong*, *Dong Trung*, and *Tay Trung*. Each village had its own dignitaries and officials, and its own ritual ceremonies and ranks. Yet the two new communities remained in the same cultivating and administrative territory of the Ta Thanh Oai village-commune. According to *Lu Su Dien Yeu Dieu Le* (a Chinese script book written in the Canh Thinh’s 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 1794, and currently preserved in the village communal house), the village division took place in the Canh Thong year under King Le Hien Tong’s rule (1498 - 1505).

In addition, according to an investigation by Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan working for the Hung Vuong Museum in Phu Tho province, the “Tam Canh” (three Canh villages) region in Vinh Phuc province also underwent a village division under the

principle of “co-cultivating land and co-residence” as mentioned above.

The division of a village into two or more new villages within the original village without defining territorial boundaries, but in the *giap*-based principle is also a unique phenomenon in the Tonkin (Red River) delta — a quite interesting topic that historians and ethnographers should further investigate for an insight into the unique social organization of the Vietnamese village in the Tonkin delta during the feudal period.

## 2. In pursuit of an explanation

The above mentioned examples merely demonstrate a variety of types of village division that have occurred in Vietnamese villages in the Tonkin delta during the feudal era. The causes of those village divisions, as mentioned in the earlier part of this writing, were the developments of different rural communities of Vietnamese small land holding farmers under feudal rule.

The first case (i.e. from a territorially based *giap* to becoming a village) was not widespread because a *giap* — as explained by the ethnologist Nguyen Tu Chi and tested through field study — was the organization for male villagers from different lineages and hamlets within a village. Basically, a *giap* was territory-free (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1996, p. 198). The transformation of a territorially defined *giap* into a village is one of the most *extraordinary phenomena* that I have ever recognized in the Tonkin region. In its nature, such a transformation is not much different from the transformation of a hamlet (or a cluster of hamlets or a farm) into a village.

The third case mentioned above (i.e. transformation from a village-dependent farm into an independent village) resulted

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five communes from different regions, who were going to Thang Long for job.

not only from a village's expansion in size (inhabitation) and population but also from a tendency of people to assert their independence by separation, and more importantly, a "centrifugal" movement of smaller residential communities away from original ones. This is the second most common law of Vietnamese village development throughout village history (the most common is the establishment of a new village based on an existing village's model after soil reclamations of different forms).

The other two cases, besides similar reasons to the reasons that provoked the third case, were mainly caused by conflicts between factions within a community. When a serious conflict occurred between two territorially-defined factions (as in the case of the villages of Tho Vuc and Yen Dinh), the settlement was not complicated. Each party "secretly" prepared for the formation of a new village (i.e. construction of temples and shrines for worshipping different village spiritual protectors) until the time came when they had the complete infrastructure for separate community activities and a separate village name. The party conflict might have also remained unsettled so that the two involved factions had to negotiate for an immediate village division (i.e. territory definition, division of the village public land, common properties and religious constructions). Therefore, the settlement of such a community conflict resulted in a specific village division as the conflicts were mainly located in or fixed to two defined territories.

In many cases, however, internal village conflicts took place among different factions co-residing in many hamlets, lineages or *giap* clusters. In other words,

those conflicts were not located within territories for a territory-based village division but a "scattered" division instead. This is the cause of the fourth type: the *giap*-based village division.

It is widely known that the Vietnamese village in the midland and the delta of North Vietnam was a private ownership society of small land holding farmers "encompassed" by a bureaucratic monarchical state based on Confucian ideology. There were no clear-cut social classes among those communities, evidenced by the fact that the few land owners had such modest land ownership that they could not form a dominating economy-based social class in the village. Between the two extreme classes (i.e. land owners and poor peasants) were a number of other classes (i.e. rich farmers, upper and lower middle farmers, and farm-laborers). Even the boundaries between two adjacent classes were not clear-cut and stable because class division was usually influenced by poor crops and unsound village customs (i.e. weddings, funerals, rank buying, promotion feasts and even gambling). While the village issues provoked by social classes diminished, the grading of citizens based on seats in the communal house, titles and ranks, property, and age emerged to become the "central axis" of social life in the village. That was the main way in which most male villagers could present their social status (those who had ever been state or village officials enjoyed a favorable status in this village hierarchy). On the other hand, most of the Vietnamese villages were also communes (See Bui Xuan Dinh, 1998; 2000) so every male villager, in addition to trying to get a favorable rank, aimed to get a position in the commune-level official administration, which was a symbol

of state power in the village. Nguyen Tu Chi indicated well that it was those efforts that were the basis of factionalism. Each party consisted of a number of figures, usually influential people, who were retired state officials, canton chiefs and deputy chiefs, first and second notables, and village mayors or rich land owners of one or two powerful lineages. Each party gathered a number of land-hungry or unaided peasants to compete for benefits. Village factions had willing speech but not willing hearts directly or indirectly (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1996, p. 185). Those competitions were further fuelled by the jealous characteristics of small land holding peasants, and by a catalyst of conflicts between pairs of lineages: bigger lineages versus smaller ones (i.e. many males versus few males); long-term residential families versus short-term families; learning families versus families with little learning; powerful families versus powerless families. The party-to-party tension was even multiplied by the advice of some upper middle peasants — the middle class of the village economy and society. This prolonged conflict made the village-commune management so unstable and ineffective that a resulting village division would benefit the power of different factions. However, it would be difficult for such a division to occur when people of different factions co-resided in different village territories.

Under such a circumstance, the *giap* organization became a useful and effective tool for village division. Under the principles of age and class (age is the main social environment for promotion — people of similar ages are of equal rights and obligations — Tran Tu), the *giap* helped create an illusion of a democratic and fair society. This allowed everyone to live in

temporary ignorance of party-against-party conflicts and pressing matters of competition, while they were also facing everyday life matters and the pressure of heavy taxes. The divisions made them believe in a brighter future. The *giap* contributed to harmonizing conflicts between village factions. That was the basis for territory-free, *giap*-based village and commune division. In this case, the *giap* had two important functions. The first was as a key element in the village and commune organizational structure, taking up most of the jobs in community life (Tran Tu). The second was as an institution that helped harmonize community conflicts and settle a complicated issue: the unique form of *village division and resulting village formation* in the Tonkin delta: *territory-free villages within one original village*.

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