

STUDIES OF FISHING COMMUNITIES IN VIETNAM (*)

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1. Overview of fishing communities

The coastline of Vietnam is 3,260 km long with a series of islands and archipelagoes. Along the coastline there are many pools and gulfs which are very favorable for fishermen's livelihoods. Besides the sea, there are many rivers and streams. According to the statistics, Vietnam has 2,360 rivers, of which 106 are big rivers. As a result of tectonic processes, the estuaries are in funnel form and are called amphibian areas by researchers, because they are part land and part water. This typical landscape is concentrated in the estuaries of two big rivers: the Red River and the Cuu Long River. Rivers and estuaries are places that have favorable natural environments with various aquatic resources, and for this reason have been accessed and exploited by Vietnamese farmers for a long time. In some estuaries, especially in the coastal area of the North Central region, there are pools or, big lagoons, created by land extensions, of which Tam Giang - Cau Hai lagoon (Thua Thien - Hue) is the largest, covering 22,000 hectares and is a favorable location for over 100 thousand fishing inhabitants.

In addition to estuaries, lagoons, gulfs, and ponds in Vietnam, there are also many lakes, particularly in the North. In the Red river delta alone, the surface area that is

covered by water is 8,668 ha, accounting for 25% of the total area of the whole country. This area is also an important environment for many aquatic species and has been exploited by Vietnamese farmers for their livelihoods for a long time.

Based on the criteria of residential patterns, fishing communities can be divided into two groups: mainland residential groups (living on the mainland and on islands) and aquatic residential groups (living on the water). The interesting thing is that due to their residential characteristics, the nouns used to indicate their traditional social units are different from mainland inhabitants. The grassroots administrative unit of land-based inhabitants is called the *lang ca* or *lang bien*, while the grassroots administrative unit of aquatic inhabitants is called the *van*. Moreover, the difference is not only significant with regard to words but also with regard to differences in name. In the past, the Vietnamese community in general had a contemptuous attitude toward aquatic inhabitants, and although the unit of the *van* of aquatic inhabitants had the same function as the *lang* it was not ranked in the same way.

Statistics, even the statistics of the fisheries sector, have not yet determined the number of fishing villages and even available data are only estimations. However, we can say that the population of

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fishing villages and the number of fishermen originating from fishing villages is now a big number. For example, it was estimated that in the 1930s, there were about ninety fishing villages with 33,000 inhabitants in the Northern delta. But in fact, the number of fishing village inhabitants in the north was few; these people were mainly concentrated in the Center and the South. According to the statistics of Thua Thien - Hue department of agricultural and residential settlements, after 1975, there were more than 110,000 aquatic fishing inhabitants. Unfortunately, these statistics did not show the number of fishing villages in Tam Giang-Cau Hai lagoon. Mr. Tran Van Tuan, who is originally from a fishing village in Tam Giang and is now a lecturer of ethnology at Hue Science University, said that in Vinh Ha commune alone (a commune in Tam Giang lagoon), there were twelve fishing villages. This number can help make the estimation that there are hundreds of fishing villages in the entire Tam Giang - Cau Hai lagoon.

In the canal areas of the Cuu Long River delta, aquatic residents used to catch fresh water fish and have developed sea fish catching for the past three decades.

As we know, in the past physiocratic society, aquatic residents (*without an inch of ground for a hole*) were usually despised by society and considered a marginalized group. The scorn was indicated in how they were called. For example, in Quang Ninh or Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, local people called aquatic residents *ha* with a connotation of inferiority. In Thua Thien Hue these people were called *moi*, meaning barbarous. In some

places, aquatic residents were called *muong nuoc man* (salt water people). In Cua Sot, Ha Tinh, the name "Bo Lo" for those people was understood as inferior, etc.

2. Main groups of aquatic fishing inhabitants of the Vietnamese sea

As described, along the coast of Vietnam, there are many communities of aquatic residents. Based on many field studies, and analyzing their fishing tools, we can divide these communities into two main groups. One group includes people who catch shrimp and fish in rivers using *dang and day* and the other group includes people who angle fish in the sea with a *cau* (rod) and a *luoi rut* (seine). Based on their place of origin, we can also divide those communities into two groups: one group of people who were originally farmers in the interior fields and one group of people who have long lived on the sea.

It is also possible to divide each of the above mentioned population groups into smaller groups using the method of Mr. Tran Tu Kinh (1972), Tran Quoc Vuong (2000, p. 20 - 27), Nguyen Truc Binh (1972), Diep Trung Binh (1985) and other scientists. These authors divided the community of aquatic inhabitants in the South of Hai Nam island into the following groups: "Ryu Kyu people from Okynawa, Cao Son people from Taiwan, Hak Ka people from the coast of Phuc Kien and Quang Dong, Le people (Diaiao); Dan and Sin people from Ha Long bay, Bo Lo from Cua Con, Cua Lo, Cua Hoi, Nghe-Tinh, Cham, and He people from Re island, Hon Tre, and Phu Quy islands. These anthropologists consider all of the people to be descendants of Malayo-Polynesian people.

Nguyen Dang Vu (2002) in his Ph.D dissertation wrote that in Quang Ngai there had once been an ethnic group called the Ma Da in epitaphs of the Cham people. According to Professor Dang Nghiem Van (1983, p. 39 - 40), this ethnic group lived along the coast of Quang Ngai province. It is possible that they were a group of Cham people who existed and lived in the deserts and cold areas along the coast of Quang Ngai for many centuries before they were Vietnamized or perished. The authors of the Book *Quang Ngai Chi* (written in 1932 and printed in 1933), also described the Tho people who existed in Ly Son who only knew how to transport oysters, mussels, and limestone to the mainland, but did not know how to produce lime to cook sugar candy (Nguyen Ba Trac and authors, 1933). Through available documents and my field data, I would like to re-acknowledge the characteristics of some main groups.

2.1. Sin and Dan peoples and the community of aquatic inhabitants of the Tokin Gulf

Before 1979, the Sin and Dan peoples lived in the waters of Bach Long Vi (Hai Phong), Ha Long and Bai Tu Long (Quang Ninh). During the border war (1979) most of them migrated to the sea area of Guang Dong, China. The few remaining people have changed their culture and joined other local groups, which makes it difficult to recognize them. Before, these water residents were considered as belonging to the Chinese community in Quang Ninh province and were divided into two groups with different names: the *Tan ca tau* (Dan

gia lao) consisting of people living on fishing boats and the *Sin tau* (Thon lao) consisting of people living in villages who did farming (Nguyen Truc Binh, 1972). According to some sources of data, the Dan people lived not only in Quang Ninh, but also in the basin of Tay Giang, and in Ma Cao and Hai Nam islands of China. Currently, there are no documents explaining the meaning of the name “Dan.” In ancient times, there were some groups living in Southern China, such as the Lac Viet, Ly, O Hu, Dan, and La peoples. The book *Tuy Thu Nam Man Truyen* recorded that the “races of Nam Man mixing among Chinese people were called Dan, Nhuong, Ly, Lao people, etc.” Some scholars believed that the Dan people originated from the Viet or Choang ethnic groups (Nguyen Truc Binh, 1972). According to Nguyen Truc Binh, the Dan language has many common characteristics with Tay-Thai languages. Tu Tung Thach said that the Dan people who live in China might come from an island, possibly Hai Nam Island or Nam Duong Island. They have the same ancestors as the Mien and Le people. Some people even thought that the Dan people were the inhabitants of old Lam Ap (Tran Tu Kinh, 1972). In sum, researchers have not yet reached agreement about the origin of the Dan people. Some thought that they originated from the Viet ethnicity, while others thought that they were originated from the Nam Dao ethnicity or other ethnicities. However, the interesting thing is that there are basic features in the life of the Sin and Dan people that are common to the lives of other water residents originating from Nam Dao.

As described, in the last years of the 1970s, some Sin and Dan people migrated to the other side of China's border, but many water residents remained in the Tonkin Gulf. This aquatic fishing community had two distinguishable groups. The first group was people who were originally from farmers who lived on fishing using weirs and stow nets in rivers or seaports. The second group was people who were not originally farmers, but instead had been living on the sea for a long time, located in estuaries but only going fishing in the sea for a living. The fishing tools and techniques of these two groups are very specialized. Therefore, people fishing in rivers could not fish in the sea, and vice versa, people fishing in the sea could not fish in rivers. One special feature of Ha Long Bay is the topography. Thanks to this, the island system here created a wall to prevent wind and storms, building a residential "water area" and a safe fishing place for water residents, who were originally farmers, to go far from the mainland and earn living by fishing in the sea. This created a special feature in terms of the distribution of water residents in the area.

2.2. *Bo Lo people in the North Central Sea*

This group is located along the coast from Thanh Hoa to Quang Binh. Local people there call them *Nooc cau* or *Bo Lo* or *Bo Chinh* people. Before the revolution in August 1945, *Bo Lo* was the name of a group that was considered by people in Cua Sot to be *muong nuoc man* (*salt water people*).

In Lach Quen of Thanh Hoa province, there is a communal house called Cham

communal house. In the *Daily Recitations* (*Nhật trình kể ra*) of the Bo Lo people, it was said that their ancestors lived in Thanh Hoa:¹

... When dogs sit alone it is only a small form

But only when dragons lie in horizontal lines is Lach Quen clear

Ancestors were happily married

Who lived in this area...

(Chó ngồi nhoi một hình tho lỗ

Rồng nằm ngang mới tỏ lạch Quèn

Ông bà đã kết nhân duyên

Khi xưa hai cụ ở miền chôn đây)

More interesting is that in our survey of Bo Lo people in Cua Sot, Ha Tinh, we found poetry that some local literate people use to worship their ancestors, such as the poem below:

... In the past, Cat Hoai families, Sao Toai people did not have deaf ears, cloudy eyes, painful backs, or weary feet.

Lach Sot still had rivers, Ho Lo still had mountains...

¹ It can be said that before having modern tools and techniques, most fishermen only did fishing onshore, except for the Bo Lo people who were able to travel offshore. With skillful seafaring techniques, they could see mountains, the sun, the moon, and the stars to determine directions. When vision was obscured and nothing could be seen, they saw water *yang* crashing at the boat side. In order to make a map to go along the coast, they had a poem to tell about the landmarks along the way. The recitations were divided into two parts: one part telling about how to go up North and one part telling about how to go down South. The starting point for going North or South was Quang Binh, Quang Tri that was formerly called Bo Chinh. The northern destination was in the Thanh Hoa sea area and the southern destination was the Vung Tau-Ba Ria sea area.

(Nhớ khi xưa dân họ Cát Hoài, người đời Sào Toại.

Tai không điếc, mắt không mờ, lưng không đau, chân không mỏi.

Lạch Sốt còn sông, Hồ Lô còn núi...)

Local people explained that “*ho lo*” is a patch of weeds in a Quen rivulet in Thanh Hoa. However there is not complete record so the fact is not clear.

What is *Bo Chinh*? According to some authors, the name *Bo Chinh* used for the Bo Lo people is only the name of the former Bo Chinh district (Nguyen Duy Thieu 2002; 1993; 1989). The Bo Lo people said that their ancestors have lived in Cua Sot for eight to ten generations.² In terms of pure physiognomy, it is easy to make a distinction between them and the indigenous people; their skin is darker, their hair is curlier, and their lips are thicker. At the first glance, they rather resemble Cham people.

Are they descendants of the ancient Chiem Thanh people? Thai Kim Dinh, a very popular liberator in Ha Tinh said that besides the Bo Lo people, there used to be some Cham people in the sea area from Thanh Hoa to Quang Binh. There were some periods when Cham people existed for 70 years in the Thanh Nghe area, until the period of King Le Dai Hanh, when the Cham people moved south. There were some records during the Ly Nhat Quang period of traces of Cham villages in the Truong Xa area (five villages) and in Ve Chinh (Nam Hoa and Ha Phu that are now in Thanh Chuong ward, Nam Dan

district, Nghe An province). In discussions with us, Mr. Thai Kim Dinh raised the question, “Are there Cham people along the North Central coast?”

In fact, in our opinion, this issue is not simple. Among groups of people in the coastal areas that are similar to the Malayu people, it is not clear who are the descendants of Cham people and who are the descendants of “pre-Malai” people, as they are called by researchers. This is very complicated (?).

How about the word *bo lo*? In modern Vietnamese, *bo lo* has no meaning. Through discussions with our colleagues, we can only guess that this word is from Ma Lai. In the languages of the Nam Dao people, *bu-lao* or *pu-lao* means “island.” In the South, this word is Vietnamized to be *cu lao* (Thuong, Thoi cu lao, etc.). Is it possible that in the coastal area of South Nghe Tinh, *bu lao* is Vietnamized to be *bo lo* as a name for the group of island people, according to the thoughts of the local people? And, despite the fact that we have no evidence, we and our colleagues wonder whether they originated from Nam Dao. In Hawaii, there is an American journalist who specializes in studying and writing about the way of life of Polynesian people on islands of the Pacific area (Krauss, 1988). After studying water residents in Tam Giang - Cau Hai lagoon, and coming back to Hawaii, he wrote a series of articles about the way of life of these water residents.³

² According to the ethnological calculation, each generation is from 20-25 years.

³ The title of the article is: *Like Polynesian – water is their world* or: *The Vietnam - Polynesia connection*.

2.3. *Ha people in South Central sea*

In the South Central sea, there are many groups of water residents who are fishermen, of which some of them have settled for a long time in Dam Mon peninsula in Van Thanh commune, Van Ninh district. They have also lived in Dong Cau village, Suoi Tan commune, Dien Khanh district and other areas of Khanh Hoa province. They are called the *Ha* people.

The word “*Ha*” has at least two meanings. The first meaning is the opposite of the word *Thuong* and is used for the group of inhabitants who are distributed throughout the lower area: *Ha* people compared with *Thuong* people. People living on the sea are called *Ha Ban* people by the majority people. The second meaning has social implications with disdain, implying “inferiority,” and is used for “mean” people in society. Regarding their livelihood, the *Ha* people in Khanh Hoa also earn their living by fishing in the sea.

Regarding the *Ha* people, Mr. Le Quang Nghiem explained that, “According to local people, *Ha* people are, *Thuong* hybrid people; but they are *Ha* – *Chau* people, may be *Phu-Nam* people originated from Indonesia who came to build a kingdom in the South of Vietnam and had a glorious period (6th century). When being annihilated by *Kho Me* kingdom (Cambodia), *Phu Nam* people lived in the South Central of Chiem Thanh. Viet people called them *Ha Chau* people to distinguish them from *Thuong* people. At present, *Ha* people have totally acculturated to Vietnam” (Le Quang Nghiem, 1970, p. 31).

Although there are no traces of this group, with field observations it can be supposed that this is a group of people that originated from Nam Dao.

Naturally, it is likely that, in reality, the words such as “*Dang*,” and “*Dan*” also imply other meanings. In the Guang Dong sea of China, there is a crowded community of people called the *Dan Ha* people. Nguyen Truc Binh (1972) said that “...in ancient times, among the groups living in the south of the residential area of Han people, there are Lac Viet, Ly, O Hu, Dan, and Lao clans...”

According to the General Summary of the History of Vietnam, in the tenth century, the *Dan* people had lived in Vietnam (Trung Quoc - NDT). “They could not speak Chinese”...“and they used boats as houses and lived on the water.”⁴

There was a period when thousands of *Dan* people moved to settle in the Quang Ninh sea area. Before the liberation (1955), Chinese farmers in coastal villages called Chinese fishermen living on boats in Quang Ninh coastal area “*Tan ca lau*” (*Dan* people).⁵ At the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, when the border conflict between China and Vietnam happened, this group of people moved back to settle in the Guang Dong sea area.

Our field surveys in the areas bordering the current residential area of the *Ha* people (i.e. Phu Quy island) show that, there had

^{4, 5} Summary General History of Vietnam (Việt sử thông giám cương mục chính biên), Tome III, Volume 13, Literature-History-Geography Publishing House, Hanoi, 1957, Ch., b.1, 31 (notes according to Nguyen Truc Binh-1972). Other reference: Tran Tu Kinh (1972).

been many historic exoduses of people from southern China through these areas. From the above fact, in terms of research, we cannot exclude the possibility that for a certain reason, a group of Dan people drifted to the Khanh Hoa sea area, and due to a long period of separation from their original community and coexistence with local people, their ethnic characteristics were gradually Vietnamized. In such a case, when connecting Ha people with other groups of fishermen scattered along the South China Sea coast, we can also think further about their Nam Dao origin. However, even with this supposition, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Ha people used to be a part of the group living in the Truong Son-Tay Nguyen mountainous area, and for some reason moved to settle in the coastal areas.

Thus, based on initial studies, it can be said that the *Bo Lo* people in the North Central sea, the *Ha* people in the South Central sea, the Sin and Dan people in the Tonkin gulf in the past, and some aquatic resident groups all originated from the Nam Dao people. However, this is only the origin, and in the present time, they have all, with the exception of the Dan people, been totally Vietnamized and become a part of the Kinh (Viet) people. In terms of study, it is still necessary and interesting to find out their origins in order to understand the origin of the Kinh (Viet) people.

3. Some lifestyle features of aquatic fishing inhabitants

3.1. Livelihood methods

Although their main livelihood activity is catching aquatic and sea products, the two groups of water residents have

different tools, techniques and fish-catching objects. Water residents who were originally farmers use *weirs* and a *stow net* as well as *push nets* and *trawls* to catch aquatic products moving with the tide in rivers or seaports. Water residents who have been living on the sea for a long time only go off-shore to catch big fishes with two tools: *rods* and a *purse seine*. People living in rivers always tend to extend their fishing area to the sea while people living in the sea never go to the river. It must be said that water residents in the sea deeply understand the sea, and have skillful nautical experience and techniques. Since fishing has been equipped with modern tools, water residents have gone far away to do off-shore fishing, while fishing inhabitants in rivers and seaports have tended to change to aquaculture.

3.2. Residence form – houseboat

Each aquatic fishing family usually lives in a houseboat. In addition to its function as a house, the boat is also a fisherman's tool for production. Using a boat for fishing, the people have two advantages: the ability to move quickly to catch fast-swimming fish, and the ability to travel far to places with a lot of fish. The structure of the houseboat should be suitable to the natural conditions of each specific sea area. For example, in the Tonkin Gulf sea (from Ha Tinh to the North), where there are many storms, boats should have large and shallow beds and low boat sides. This structure will help keep the boats from capsizing when there are storms. The disadvantage of this boat is the large contact area with the water, thus the resistance force of the water limits the boat's speed. In the

area from the South Central sea to the South there are less storms, therefore the boats are narrower and have higher boat sides. With this structure, the area of the boat contacting the water is less, and the boat can go faster. The disadvantage of this type of boat is that it is easy for it to capsize when there are storms. It can be said that in order to fish effectively and to ensure life safety, the technical aspects of boat design should be suitable to natural conditions of each area. Those who do not respect this principle will have to pay with their lives. For example, fishermen in Quang Ninh said that boats of the Sin and Dan people (from Quang Dong, China) have a triangle structure (their prow is pointed and the steering side is very large), thus they normally turn around when there is a storm, and can not go to find shelter. Fishmen in Quang Ninh still remember the storm of March 1, 1974 of the lunar calendar, with hail that killed many Sin and Dan people. Fishermen who live on the mainland and only use boats for fishing pay some attention to the safety of boats. Water residents use boats for both fishing and housing, therefore they pay more attention to the safety of the boats. In the past, each family used to have a boat and the whole family lived as nomads in the sea, both onshore and off-shore. All of their living activities, such as funerals, weddings, holidays, and ceremonies, were organized on boats. Recently, together with the innovative progress of the country, each better-off household has two or three boats: one for a house, one for fishing off-shore and one for traveling short distances for living necessities. The trend of

separating the fishing boat and the houseboat has developed strongly in recent centuries, when a big part of the water residents changed from using houseboats to using raft houses.

The boats are made of wood and planks, while the rafts are made of bamboo, reeds, and other material. Based on their functions, there are at least two types of raft. The first type is used as a production tool and the other is used as a house for living. The raft mentioned in this research is used as a houseboat for living. This type of raft has appeared in recent centuries when fish cages were developed for river fishing. In the sea, raft houses appeared later. For instance, in Ha Long Bay, people have just changed from off-shore fishing to fish cages in 1994. Accordingly, the majority of water residents have changed from living on houseboats to living on raft houses. Differing from fishing rafts, raft houses ensure two functions. First, they have “cages” on the bottom to raise fish and a house on the top for living. This type of raft can move from one place to another place, but is basically anchored, thus it is bigger and larger than houseboats. Thanks to “agricultural and living settlements,” aquatic fishing communities started to have the conditions for attaining education and health care access for their children, which improved their cultural and social life in general. It is not an overstatement that raft houses in some ways have released fishermen from houseboats. It also means that raft houses liberated people who lived in low ceiling, narrow houseboats and had “curved backs, short necks, went as if running, and spoke as birds sang, etc.”

3.3. Social structure

In the past, inhabitants in fishing villages were not considered as original, main inhabitants but as aliens or people in other's service. Therefore, in Vietnam traditional social institution, fishing villages were only self-managed units. Depending on each feudal dynasty, inhabitants in fisherman's association were members or marginal of agricultural society. Therefore, social institution of fishing villages still reserve many old features.

The principle of grouping inhabitants in fishing villages is based on two main relations: *consanguinity* and *working relationship*. Therefore, social structure of fishing villages is much simpler than that of agricultural society. Their highest social self-managed unit is *van* (association), the below is the family (their representative is the family head), the lowest is patriarchal nuclear family. In general, traditional social structure of inhabitants in fishing villages can be summarized as follow: households in the same family normally do the same work (using specialized tools and catch certain aquatic and sea products etc), live together in the units of *vung*, *chom*, etc. (like hamlet in the shore). *Vung*, *chom* are only self-managed units and some *vung*, *chom* form *giap*. Self-managed "mechanism" of *giap* is formulated by clan representatives (clan heads). Some *giap* group into *fishing villages*. In terms of administration, a fishing villages is similar to an agricultural village, but it was not allowed to participate in "selection" of district officials – higher level than village.

3.4. Some religious beliefs

People in fishing villages worship their ancestors (patriarchy) and implement "*fishing ceremonies*." Agricultural inhabitants have ceremonies relating to each step of the agricultural production cycle, and so do fishing inhabitants. In all activities from buying boats, nets or other tools, to starting the fishing season or each seatrip, fishing inhabitants perform worshipping ceremonies. While agricultural inhabitants base their activities on the weather, fishing inhabitants base their religious activities on the water. Residents fishing in rivers or seaports usually worship the snake genie (*tam lang*, *ong dai*, *ong cut*, *xa kang*, *con/can*, etc.). Water residents fishing in the sea worship *Mr. Whale*. Both of these water resident fishing groups worship the water mother *Mau Thoai*, as well as specific saints of each seaport (Duc Thanh Tran, Duc Ong Le Khoi, etc.). In addition, they also worship various righteous and malicious deities of the sea.

It can be said that groups of water residents along the seaside – who may have originated from Nam Dao – have the following general features:

- In terms of physical features, they look like Polynesians
- They live on the water
- Relationships are established in a vertical "net" among aquatic inhabitant groups with same origins. This is different from the water residents who were originally farmers. These water residents have limited relationships with people on the mainland or in some neighboring seaports, which we call horizontal "nets."

- They fish in the sea using two different tools: fishing-rods and purse seines (their ancestors used these to catch sharks).

- They are skillful sailors and fishermen.
- They live in groups, such as households or boats with people of the same clan. These people usually do the same work and form small residential groups.

- Their highest social institution is the fishing village, which is a self-managed group established by the “clan heads.”

- All of their activities of daily living are done on boats. In the past they even buried their dead in the water, while recently they buy land to bury the dead.

- The main deities are Ca Ong, Mau Thoai and the specific saints of each seaport, etc.

4. The current issues facing residential fishing communities

Although no accurate statistics are available, it can be said that there are now ten of thousands of water residents living in the rivers and seas of Vietnam. Since the period of cooperative mobilization (1959-1960), and the period of agricultural and living settlement mobilization (from 1967 to present), water residents have often received assistance from the State and donor organizations to settle on the land. However, they still maintain the practice of migrating between the land and water settlements. This practice is still a question for researchers and policy makers.

i) Exhaustion of resources

As mentioned, traditionally, each group focused on the exploitation of one

resource, which created a relative balance between people and nature, and ensured relative social balance. However, in recent decades, everything has changed. There has been a big increase in the demand for aquatic products, especially from large and expanding export markets. On the other hand, since the implementation of the renovation policies, the economy has been moving toward a market driven economy and the State has increased its investment in aquatic products. Outsiders have swum in and scrambled to exploit the resources of the fishing communities. Overexploitation of aquatic resources causes the risk of resource exhaustion. People who have been living on the water for a long time have lost resources, have been forced to migrate to other places, or have become hired laborers and accepted the fate of poverty. The “outsiders” invest in offshore fishing, aquaculture, aquaculture services, and tourism, which forces indigenous people to take jobs as hired laborers with low wages. Recently, although the economic value of aquatic products has increased, most fishing inhabitants still live in poverty with a large proportion of them having the risk of losing their source of livelihood, etc.

The above method of aqua cultural economic development obviously causes resource, environmental, and social conflicts, etc.

ii) Housing

As far as we know, because recent market demands for shifting from aquatic exploitation to aquaculture, a large number of water residents have changed from living in houseboats to living in raft houses.

Compared to houseboats, raft houses have more favorable conditions for water residents, but they are quite expensive. The people's income is low and the longevity of raft boats is short. The current price of a house raft of medium quality in Ha Long is about 20 million VND. This amount is too large for the income of most fishing inhabitants. Therefore, not all fishing households can afford to buy a raft house. For instance, in Cua Van fishing village in Hung Thang commune, Ha Long City, which is a UNESCO world heritage site with a high potential for tourism, the State and international organizations provided support for housing. However, only 91 of 127 water resident households have raft houses, while the others still live on narrow houseboats. Where can we get the land to help them settle on the shore? What should be done to help fishing inhabitants escape poverty and have safer houses?

iii) *Life safety*

It can be said that fishing inhabitants always face the risk of accidents. Fishing inhabitants in Ha Long are still frightened when recalling the accident caused by the 1974 storm, in which hundreds of fishermen died. Fishing inhabitants in Tam Giang - Cau Hai lagoon, Thua Thien - Hue cannot forget the 1985 storm, in which many of their relatives died. For fishing inhabitants, there is no year without loss. This was an old story when they lived on houseboats, but how has this changed now that they what live on raft houses? People living on raft houses in Ha Long said that there is, big cave, called Hang Ca, about one kilometer from Cua Van fishing village. In this cave, the water level is hundreds of meters deep,

with a stone cave above it, and fishermen used to put their boats in the cave to avoid storms. The cave is large enough for hundreds of boats. Now that they live in raft houses, they can not move their homes into this cave when there is a storm. The regulations regarding the preservation of Ha Long as a world heritage site state that fishermen are not allowed using concrete poles to anchor their rafts. The fishermen can only use normal iron anchors which easily slip when there are big storms. What will happen to their lives in the event of a big storm? In the past, fishing inhabitants were quite spread out and if they could not move their boats into caves during storms, at least they could take the elderly and the children into the caves on the islands. At present, in order to preserve Ha Long's natural beauty for the purpose of tourism, fishing inhabitants must focus their work on certain villages, and as a result will not know how to protect old people and children when there are storms. People living in raft houses always worry about their safety. They have not yet found a solution to save themselves.

iv) *Basic services*

In the past, people living in fishing villages moved around in small groups because they were able to move quickly and their houseboats were quite mobile. They could stop in any location to sell and buy necessary goods. Nowadays, a large proportion of fishermen concentrate their work in big communities and have settled on raft houses. Therefore, to meet the essential needs of people in these fishing villages, services need to be provided in an organized way. The people in the fishing communities can adjust the services of exchanging and

trading the necessities for their daily living. However there should be support from the State and external sources for some services that fishing inhabitants have not yet been able to managed by themselves. One example is in regards to *educational services*. In some fishing villages, there are floating shools that allow the children to go to school. However, despite great efforts, these schools can only teach children until they are in grades five or six. Children who want to study in higer levels have to go ashore to live and study – a very difficult feat which is not common for fishing inhabitants. In terms of public education policy, why are there boarding schools for children on the island, but no boarding schools for children of fishing villages?

There has been no other social service provision, such as community health care services, or cultural life insurance for people in fishing villages. With the efforts of the local government, and financial support from some international donors, there have been some “multi-function” boats built in some districts with many fishing inhabitants. Despite great efforts, these districts can only finance the activities of these boats, such as medical examinations and cultural activities, (film presentations and performances) one to two times a year. Therefore, it seems that the development gap between people living on the land and people living on the sea is still big and will take a long time to narrow.

v) *Environmental issues*

In the sea and river areas of the country, there are about ten thousand of water residents. All wastes from their living activities are directly poured into the rivers and the sea. Consequently, water pollution

has increased, causing negative impacts on the sustainability of water and sea products, as well as the health of the people living in fishing villages. There has also been a loss of beauty in the sea’s ecological tourism areas, as well as an exhaustion of water and sea resources, negative impacts on protected sea areas and other risks and problems. At this point, leaders have not yet found effective control measures.

5. Conclusion

At present, the sea plays a very strategic role in all sectors of coastal countries. Exploiting resources from the sea – including seafood – is a critical practice. However, in order to exploit those resources, we need to fully understand the sea and the communities living by the sea. While land-based farming communities, urban communities, and midland and upland communities have been carefully studied, the communities of fishing inhabitants have been overlooked. As a result, societal understanding about the fishing communities is generally very poor.

Improving our understanding of fishing communities in general and water residents in particular is an urgent need. In terms of learning, there remain many “traces of old culture” in these fishing communities which can help us understand the social and cultural development of the Viet (Kinh) people in Vietnam.

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