

CHAPTER III

THE COTU PEOPLE IN HUONG NGUYEN COMMUNE

In this chapter I provide the specific characteristics of the Cotu people in the context of Vietnam in general and of my research site in particular. It is an attempt to describe the origin of the Cotu people in Vietnam society in order to understand how the Cotu people are called “People living at headwater, or watershed dwellers.” It is also an attempt to review the history, traditional social structure, traditional livelihood activities, as well as the indigenous knowledge and belief system in daily activities of the Cotu people of Giong village in Huong Nguyen commune.

3.1 Origin of Cotu People in Vietnamese Society

Based on historical documents available, many researchers claim that Cotu is an ethnic group whose dwelling place spreads along an East - West direction in Central Vietnam, from Boloven plateau in Laos to the coastal area of Vietnam (Tuan et. al. 1984:185 - 200; Tuan 1994:12-20; Van et. al. 2000:77- 80; Thong 2004:12). Besides the Cotu people living in Laos, residential areas of the Cotu people in Vietnam are concentrated mainly in Tay Giang, Dong Giang and Nam Giang districts of Quang Nam province, and spread out in western mountainous areas of Nam Dong districts, including six communes: Thuong Quang, Thuong Long, Huong Huu, Thuong Nhat, Thuong Lo and Huong Son, and the southwest of A Luoi district, including Huong Nguyen and Huong Lam commune, in Thua Thien Hue province (Thong 2004:43 - 45). Quang Nam is considered as a main dwelling place of the CoTu where connects with the North of Tay Nguyen.

Settlement scope of the Cotu people range in high mountains sloping in the northwest and southeast, and limiting by the Ngoc Ang Mountains on the south and the east and by the Pouak mountains on the west and the north. This area can be considered as a bumpy plateau which gradually raises from a narrow coastal plain separated by a mountain system with some mountains that are thousands of meter height, for example, Atouat is a highest mountain, about 2500m that extends to the

Tahoi plateau and spreads along the Laotian - Vietnamese border. The Cotu people normally live along mountain slopes and valleys of Giang, Kai and Bung River (Thong, 2004).

Therefore, writing about the Cotu people, Schrock, Pichon, Howard, Mole, and Costello (cited in Thong, 2004) emphasized that dwelling place of the Cotu people is very perilous and isolated. From 1966, in order to illustrate the perilousness and isolation of Cotu's dwelling place, Schrock et al said that:

There isn't any road to go to the Cotu dwelling place, the roads that were built spreading along Thu Bon River and connecting Danang with Kontum in the period of French domination are very difficult to recognize. Some trails are also difficult to access, even looking at it from a plane.

(Schrock, 1966:349)

When discussing the origin of the Cotu people, most research work by foreign ethnographers have made brief and similar comments in terms of the origin of the Cotu people:

Based on their language and cultural characteristics the Cotu people are arranged on a group of community that speak Mon - Khmer language, and admitted that their origin is from valleys of Mekong upriver, in Van Nam Province of the South of China.

(Frank, 1964:94; Coedes, 1956:1-16)

Mole (1970:138) claimed that the Cotu people had migrated to the valleys of the Mekong River and after returned to mountain areas or continued to migrate to the coast of China but they had been forced to return the mountains. The Cotu people in Vietnam, Schrock (1966:300 - 301) asserted that the dwelling place of Cotu people was naturally in coastland areas and they migrated to present dwelling place by the force of Kinh people in the process of their migration to the South. Tuan (1978:67) and Thong (2004:12) argued that the ancestral land of the Cotu was originally composed of large areas that include plains, midlands, and mountain regions, and they have related to the Cham, Kinh ethnic groups as well as others residing in the Truong Son - Tay Nguyen mountainous region.

Therefore, relying on ecological characteristics of dwelling areas Hoffet (1933:1- 43) asserted that the Cotu community are divided into two groups: *Zal*, High Cotu sometimes called Cotu Lao and *Ép*, Low Cotu, and had at least four subgroups: *Ngung Bo* and *Thap*, *Ataouat* or *Ka-Taouat* and *Cao*. The Cotu people living on the

western high mountain are classified into two subgroups: *Ataouat* living in the center and on the northwest. Cotu dwelling places are found mainly in Hien District of Quang Nam province and in surroundings of the southwest of Thua Thien Hue province, the south of A Luoi District; and *Cao* living further on the west of Quang Nam province and nearly the Laotian - Vietnamese border was found on the west of Boungh River. The *Cao* often live through the Laotian - Vietnamese border. The Cotu people living on the eastern lowland include two subgroups: *Ngung Bo* and *Thap*. The *Ngung Bo* lives on the north of Phu Loc District, Thua Thien Hue province. The *Thap* lives on the south of Cotu dwelling place, near Danang City. Phuang or Phuong, another subgroup of Cotu people, lives on the western Thua Thien Hue Province and the east of Ashau *Aso* valley (Howard, C. Michael & Kim Be Howard, 2002:430).

In fact, according to the classification of Cotu people, they divided themselves into three groups: *Zal*, High Cotu, *Ép*, Low Cotu, and *Âm Pâng*, Middle Cotu, and they can be regarded as the units in the process of developing into local groups, forming their own characteristics in the field of language, customs and everyday cultural behavior (Thong, 2004:34-35).

Cotu is an ethnic people whose explanation about their name is complicated. When mentioning their name, Mole said that:

Cotu mountainous tribe has many names, such as Teu, Kato, Cao, Attouat, Nguồn Ta, Kao, Khat, Thap, Phuang, Ta River - Van Kieu, Kaoto Kanto...
(Mole, 1970:137)

According to the explanation of Pichon (1938), Cotu do not mention their name but it is a general term that indicates primitive man. Schrock (1966:347) asserted "Cotu means barbarian which is called by neighbouring ethnic people. The Cotu people call themselves *Ma nui*." Meanwhile, Hickey (1993:108 - 109) acknowledged that Cotu name aimed to indicate people living at the headwater of the mountain regions. According to Pichon (1938), in 1913, Mr Sogny determined that the Moi people (Cotu) formed an own ethnic group with a general vernacular. He estimated about 250 villages with more than 10,000 people. He called them Cotu and started to study their language and custom. However, Duc (2002) said that Cotu was a long-standing name that they called themselves and recorded by Sogny.

On the other hand, based on the explanation about the meaning of name of the ethnic group and their daily language, Thong (2004:31-32) asserted that “*Tu*” from “*Cotu*” language aimed to indicate highest positions of something, for example: *Tu long* means the top of a tree, and *Tu dak* is upriver; and “*Coh*” used to indicate the direction of something, for instance: *Coh ping* means above, and *Coh jub* is below. Therefore, the combination of *Coh* and *Tu* is a explanation about the name of Cotu people aims to determine their dwelling places that is head of water or upriver. Nowadays, Cotu is the main Cotu name that they and the Vietnamese government recognize, and the Cotu people are understood as watershed dwellers.

3.2 History of Cotu People in the Giong Village of Huong Nguyen Commune

History of Cotu people in the Giong village of Huong Nguyen commune has been marked by three periods: Pre - revolution (before 1975), after revolution (after 1975 to 1995) and after fixed cultivation and resettlement (from 1996 to the present).

3.2.1 The Period of Pre-Revolution

According to historical documents and the stories of the old people, before and after the August Revolution in 1945 to December 31, 1952 most of Cotu people of Giong village lived in Xal village of previous Huong Lam commune that is current Aroang commune of Aluoi District at the watershed of Bo River. From January 1953 to December 1959, some Cotu people of Xal village migrated to live scattered along Giong and Arim streams that previously belonged to Huong Nguyen commune of Huong Tra District, Thua Thien Hue province. From that place, the emigrated Cotu from Xal village associated with the native Cotu of Huong Nguyen lived there in order to form a new village that called Giong, named after Giong stream. Therefore, some people have asserted the ancestor of Cotu people of Giong village is from two different groups: a group belonged Xal village of Huong Lam commune and another ones is the native Cotu lived along Giong and Arim streams that belonged previous Huong Nguyen commune; but other ideas have believed that the origin of Cotu people of Giong village is the Cotu people of Xal village belonged previous Huong Lam commune.

Some sources of information reveal that the causes of emigration of Cotu of Xal village are due to lack of cultivation land, over crowding in old place and their farming habits (shifting cultivation) on the one hand, and due to having broad cultivation land and the fertility of the soil, and being nearly sources of water in new location on the other hand. After Giong village formed in Arim and Giong streams, all local people concentrated on finding good land to slash and burn cultivation, stabilizing house and livelihood, restoring traditional activities and ceremonies, and reorganizing framework of organization of village such as: electing a village head called *Takoh Vêêl* and a council of the village elders called *P'taha* that included the assistants of the *Takoh Vêêl*, building a Community House called *Guol* house, and setting up customary laws and so on and so forth.

In that time, although the material life of local people was still deprived due to their self-sufficiency economy that depended entirely on the nature (shifting cultivation, and gathering and hunting), community solidarity of the Cotu people of Giong was very well. Everyone protected and helped mutually in times of distress; they always shared experiences with each other in productive activities, and everyone distributed an amount of wild animal meat and performed traditional dances together when anyone in the village hunted big game or when the village organized traditional rituals.

From January 1960 to July 1968, due to influence of the Vietnam War, the Giong village was burned and destroyed; most houses, gardens, fields and kitchen gardens of local people were damaged by the violent attacks of American soldiers, many households had to evacuate and hide in small caves and shelter-trenches along the stream of the mountain. At that time, in order to guarantee the local people's safety, the village head and the council of the Giong village elders decided to separate the Giong people into three groups: the first group including six households (about 25 persons) evacuated to Cha Huom stream, the second group (about 23 persons in seven households) moved to Arai stream, and the final group with eight households (about 30 persons) hid at Quynh Doi stream. It could be seen that the life of Giong village's people was very miserable at that time. They did not have houses to live in, food to eat and clothes to wear; wild vegetables and forest fruit became essential food of all

local people, animal skin and tree bark were used to make their clothes. Many households died or became ill from lacking food or were killed in the war.

From 1969 to 1972, the Cotu people of Giong village from the three groups mentioned above assembled and sheltered along Ma Hoang stream and some other small streams to evade the barbarous attacks of American soldiers. The life of local people was more and more destitute, all households had to gather wild vegetables and forest fruit to survive. Although they had to suffer great hardships, they never discouraged in the fight against American imperialism. Under the leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party and President Ho Chi Minh, everyone in Giong village united to make a stand against the enemy and helped each other to overcome obstacles in their daily life. Most the Giong' people joined in militia and guerillas groups which coordinated closely with local military to confront a far superior enemy forces and to dig the air-raid shelters; at the same time they gathered forest products and created primitive weapons to supply the military.

In the period of 1970 - 1972, an estimated 50 people of Giong village died due to starvation, diseased and attack of enemy. Only 15 households with 40 persons of Giong village survived. Those survival households were divided into two groups in order to stabilize their lives and concentrate on productive activities.

3.2.2 The Period After Liberation 1975

From May 1975 to June 1979, all the Cotu people of Giong village were reunited with their families and their community along the Giong stream. They rebuilt their thatched cottages and concentrated on swidden cultivation, livestock breeding, and other traditional activities like hunting, gathering forest products and weaving. In addition, the traditional ceremonies and framework of organization of the village were gradually restored and maintained.

In 1980, the Giong village emigrated from Giong stream to Xa Lon estuary stream in order to establish swidden cultivation. From 1981 to 1985, under the guideline of the Government and the Party, People's Council and People's Committee of Huong Nguyen commune decided to displace Giong village to the flat regions along Arim stream

belonging T-junction of the way No. 73 and 74 there Huong Nguyen commune's center was located. After 1985 to 1995, Giong village removed again to Arai stream junction.

In December 1995, the people's committee of Thua Thien Hue Province, District people's committee of Aluoi collaborated with Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and department of "Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement of the province" set up "Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement project" for all Huong Nguyen people in general and the Giong villagers in particular settled along the highway 49 and nearly Ta Luong stream where there were potentials for farming and conditions for improving infrastructure and the other social services.

3.2.3 The Period After "Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement"

After setting up the Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement project in December 1995, People's Council and People's Committee of Huong Nguyen commune organized the meetings in order to propagandize and mobilize all local people to implement the project. With the efforts of leader staff of commune, of villages as well as of all local people, on April 30th 1996 all Giong people moved to new location (current dwelling place).

In the first three years after resettlement in new location, the Cotu people of Giong village and Huong Nguyen commune were almost discouraged because they had to confront with some difficulties, for example, they were unaccustomed to ecological conditions of new dwelling place, and to new productive technology and cultivation methods popularized by the government such as technique of planting wet rice, of gardening, of planting rubber tree, and of livestock breeding. Moreover, traditional activities such as hunting, slash and burn cultivation, wood exploitation have been prohibited, and the daily activities have been controlled by the government, and so on.

Until now, their lives are fairly stable; they feel more secure about the new dwelling place; they are gradually acquainting themselves with a great many innovations with a view to making their life better although they still confront with some disadvantages.

3.3 Traditional Social Structure of the Cotu Community in the Old Village

According to Cotu people's point of view, the existence, the prosperity or the perishing of a village takes place on the basics of a philosophy, of the level of viewing the society of human beings living in a real community. In traditional social structure of the Cotu community, "*Chrval*" (region or commune) could be considered as a highest social unit set up in a large residential area including many "*Vêêl*"s (villages). However, the currently information of "*Chrval*" is not enough to determine its popular existence and its important role. The scope of "*Chrval*" might be larger or smaller than current commune unit.

The head of "*Chrval*", called "*Takoh Chrval*", was normally a head of a "*Vêêl*" that was the most prestigious of all heads of the "*Vêêl*"s in the "*Chrval*". The role of "*Takoh Chrval*" was not clear, his name was known thanks to the role of the prestigious head of the "*Vêêl*" called *Takoh Vêêl* instead of the role of "*Takoh Chrval*." He played an intermediary role in cases of territory conflicts and breach of customary law of the community (Thong, 2004:281-283).

"*Vêêl*" (village) was considered as a basically social unit in the Cotu community. It was formed from a scope of real community that included blood-relation people (*Kabhuh* or *Tor*) and the neighbors who were living and working together. According to Thong (2004:282), the social order from high to low level of the Cotu village is: "*Vêêl*", village - *Kabhuh*, Clan - *Diamo*, Sub-clan - *Dhung*, family - *Tapéeq*, sub-family. However, the existence of *Diamo*, Sub-clan and *Tapéeq*, sub-family are not clear. The social order and harmony of the "*Vêêl*" is built from the regime, the organization, the relations based on the blood lineage and the neighborhood through villages, ancestral branches and families. According to the observed result in Giong village, the social order of Cotu people was divided into three levels from high to low: "*Vêêl*", village - *Kabhuh*, Clan - *Dhung*, family that can be demonstrated by the figure 3.1 below.

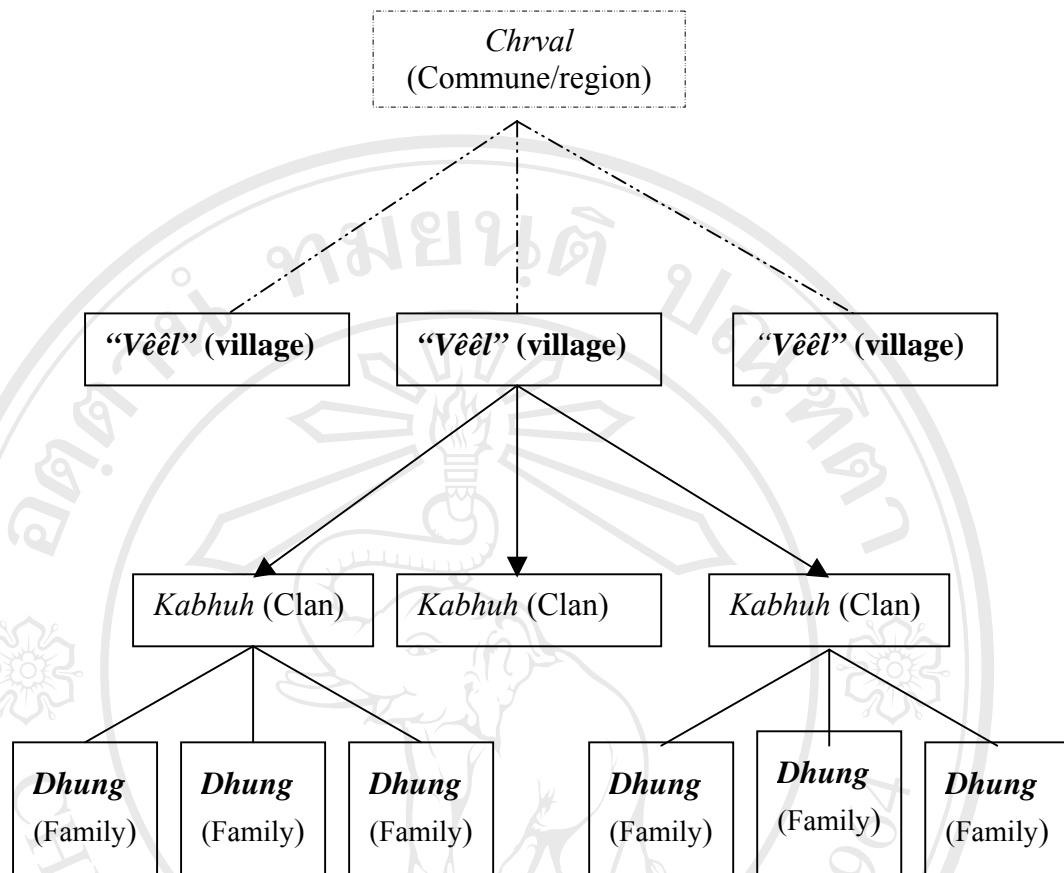


Figure 3.1 Traditional Social Structure of the Cotu Community

Source: The synthetic result of observation in Giong village on November 2004

Each “Vêêl” was managed by a self-governing apparatus that consisted of a *P’taha* (a council of the village elders) included the rich, sacrosanct and prestigious elders (*Mabhui*). The head of the traditional council (*P’taha*) was a traditional village head called *Takoh Vêêl*, and the assistants of the *Takoh Vêêl* like: *Abhô Yang/ Xrâm/ Manri ve Yang* (the sorcerer), *Takoh Kabhuh* (the patriarch), *Cavan* (the rich), *Manúih Papráq bhmã* (the arguer), *Takoh takop Wêêl* (the military leader). The traditional self-governing apparatus of a “Vêêl” of the Cotu community is briefly described following figure 3.2 below.

The members of council of the village elders were experienced people, native intellectuals, rich, aged and prestigious and understood custom, tradition, regulations, rituals and ceremonies of the community. They helped *Takoh Vêêl* (the traditional village leader) organize all activities and teach their members to live ethically and to do farming effectively. The *P’taha* (traditional council) had the power to dismiss the

Takoh Vêêl if he did not fulfill his responsibility. However, currently the traditional role of village elders' council is not recognized.

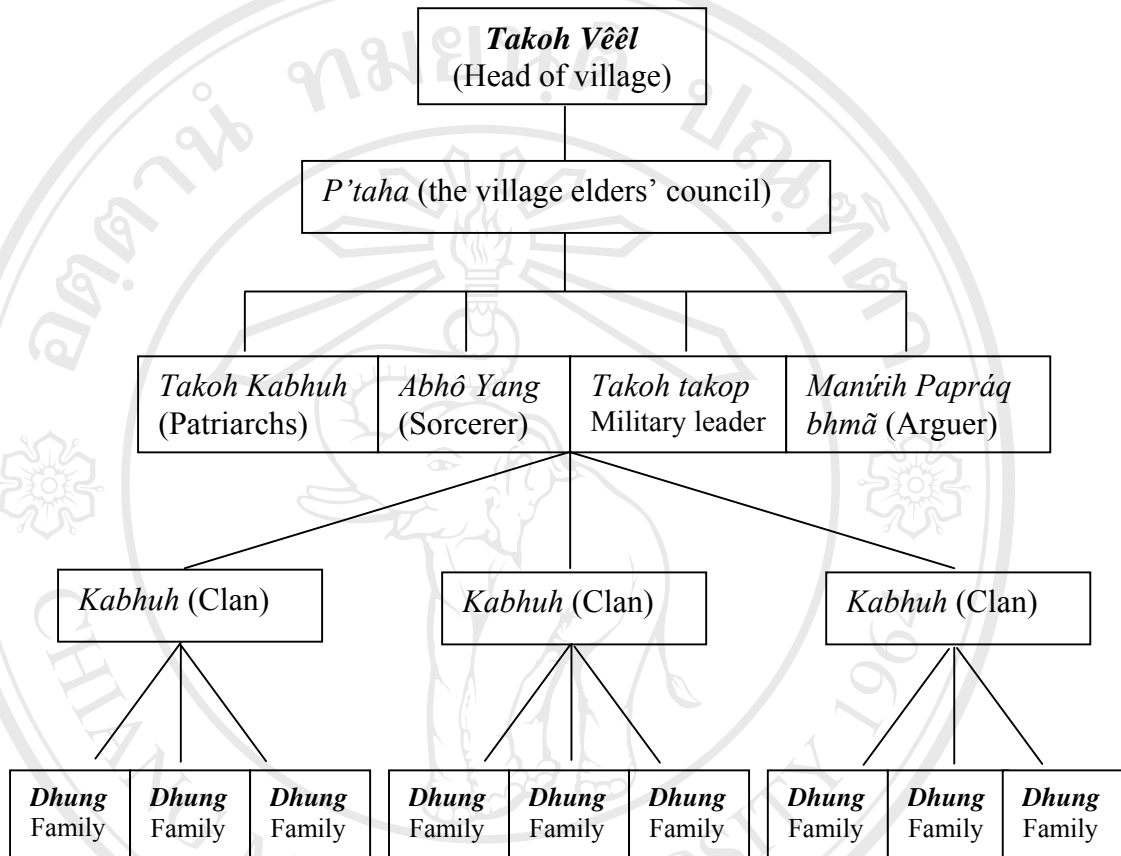


Figure 3.2 The Traditional Self-Governing Apparatus of a “Vêêl” of the Cotu

Source: The result of observation in Giong village on November 2004

In the *P'taha* (traditional council of village elders), the *Takoh Vêêl* was a respected head with experience in cultivation, ritual, and social aspects. He was selected by all villagers and made responsible for leading and organizing all social, economic and cultural activities of the community. The prosperity or decline of the village depended mainly on the leading talent of *Takoh Vêêl*. He managed the properties of the village (land, forest, river, stream and livestock), directed important activities such as selecting places to build new village and *Guol* (the Community house), organizing production, collective hunting and rituals, and resolved the conflicts among the individuals in the village and between the village with neighborhood villages.

Abhō Yang played a very important role in communicating with the *Yang* (God), and retransmitted the pinion of the *Abhurom* (the spirits) through rituals to spray for bumper crop, health, and prosperity, or to express the villagers' gratitude toward the *Yang* and the *Abhurom* for their prayers in their daily life. The appearance of *Abhō Yang* with his role was formed since the point of view: "All fortune in the nature belong to the *Yang* and *Abhurom* who have power for rewarding or punishing every individual or community, so all daily activities have to ask the pinion of *Yang* and *Abhurom*."

Takoh takop Vêêl (the military leader) was an important assistant of the *Takoh Vêêl* (the village's head) when the wars or struggles occurred. He had to take full responsibility for organizing struggle against the enemy, defensive, and training compact youth to protect the security for the village. He also represented the village to organize the collective hunt every year. *Takoh takop Vêêl* had to be brave and strong, and have much experience in fighting and hunting.

Maníih Papráq bhmā was a representative of village elders' council responsible for customary laws and judging individuals or households that break the regulations of the community. He played an intermediary role for mediating of the conflicts between the individuals or the *Dhung*s (families) or the *Kabhuhs* (the Clans) in the village. At the same time, he maintained an important role for creating interrelationships with other neighborhood villages in terms of cultural, economic and social activities. In these interrelationships, he had to take responsibility for negotiating the serious matters that affect the security of the community and protecting the interest of the collective or individuals that he represented.

Takoh Kabhuh (the patriarch) was a hereditary role transferred from a father to his oldest son. *Takoh Kabhuhs* were the assistants to village elders' council for managing all daily activities such as agricultural production, hunting, weddings and funerals, and resolving the conflicts occurred between individuals or *Dhung*s (families) of their *Kabhuhs* (the Clans). The patriarchs maintained their clan customs and traditions and worshiped their ancestors. They also practiced certain rituals before members of the clan commenced agricultural production, and selected the place for building a new house. For example, before a certain member of a clan started to slash

and burn, harvest, or hunt an animal, as well as build a new house the patriarch must hold ceremony to ask permission from their ancestors.

It can be said that in the traditional society of the Cotu the prestige of the village elders is the paragon on many aspects: managing “*Vêêl*” and communicating inside as well as outside of the community. All their manners and behaviors are originated in their clemency and sense of responsibilities with everyone in the community. They have to provide moral support for every villager and the head in all daily activities; they have to be the strict and equitable in judgment of people, and knowledgeable in terms of agricultural production. The basic characteristic in social relationship of the Cotu community is to respect each other.

The power of each village is normally shown through the scheme of *Guol* (the Community House). Here one can see a faithful reflection of the economic potentials, the labor force, the individuals or the collective who have many capabilities in the struggle for life. *Guol* is an important place of community. It is used to organize the meeting of the patriarch council, the traditional ceremonials of community and the experience exchange of the old villager to the young people.

Cotu society is recognized as a patriarchal society. Different gender and age clearly reveal differential power. This is the foundation of social position and labor distribution. Men are considered to play the main socio-economic and political roles in the community and the family as well. In the family sphere, men often have a key role in managing and deciding the important issues, communicating to *Yang*, *Abhurom*, and so on. In the social sphere, they hold the core position as head of village, landowner, for example. It can be said that activities related to the survival of the family and the community are decided by men.

Conversely, Cotu women do not keep any social position, except being a laborer, reproducing and maintaining daily activities in their family. They seldom participate in social activities related to community's security from the womb to the tomb; even they are not allowed to take part in some fields. The Cotu women were managed by their parents from the childhood to adulthood, but when they marriage they have to depend on their husbands. If their husbands die, they have to rely on their son.

3.4 Traditional Livelihood Activities of the Cotu People

In daily life, the Cotu's attitude towards the living environment, and their activities concerning the way of eating, dressing, dwelling and transporting are not too different from other ethnic groups living in Truong Son (the central mountain chain) Western Highlands. It can be summarized simply their livelihood activities as below.

In the traditional economic structure of the Cotu, swidden cultivation together with hunting and gathering forest products had spent an existence and development process for along time and created specific cultural nuances of the Cotu people maintained until now.

Swidden cultivation could be considered as the main economic activity of the Cotu household. All households in the community had many plots both inside and outside the community, undertaking shifting cultivation with planting cassava, dry rice or maize and taro. That activity was practiced continuously on all months of the year and spent many steps such as: selecting plots, clearing the trees and bushes, burning, planting, weeding and protecting and harvesting with simple tools (see in section 3.1.5).

Therefore, in the eyes of outsiders, the Cotu people as well as other ethnic groups who practice shifting cultivation are frequently perceived as under-developed, "backward," "deforestation." They are often blamed for environment damage, land degradation from poor agricultural practices and backward technique and limited knowledge, on the other hand. The tools for cultivation are so simple; including knife, axe, hoes and dibbles, and this cultivation system depends entirely on nature, on the other hand. They have often suffered serious malnutrition.

In reality, what these outsiders do not see is that, the Cotu have accumulated precious local knowledge for crop production, which takes the form of soil classification, rotational cultivation, and careful production planning based on the weather and topography of their area and so on. Manifestations of production skills, cultivation techniques, and rudimentary tools used to cultivate swidden in hillside now are not easy to find thoroughly. The domination of swidden economy and rituals in production cycle, the long and popular existence of indigenous knowledge system, the dependency on preferential nature and the bestowment of spirits had created the economic, cultural and social faces of the traditional village of the Cotu people.

Hunting was also one of the basic traditional economic activities. This activity played an important role for different fields of the Cotu, such as; ensuring foodstuff (economy), practicing bravery (military), providing offering to spirits (belief) and uniting relationships in the community through collective hunts for festival or celebration of the community and through sharing in community when any one hunted wild animals. Hunting supplied foodstuff not only for daily family meals and community's parties (wedding, funeral, *dam trau* (buffalo-killed) festival, harvest festival, etc.), but also for its reserve in the months of rain season. Hunting was also an activity where young men proved their maturity before the village elders and their talent before the village girls. Hunting was carried out by traps or hunting dogs or arbalests.

If hunting was an exclusive activity of the Cotu men, gathering and fishing were daily ones for all family's members, especially for women and children. The products from gathering and fishing were very diverse. This diversity relied on the available natural resources. Those products included mushroom, honey, fish, amphibian, shrimp, snake, snail, medicinal herbs, firewood, rattan, bamboo and other wild vegetables. The gathering of the Cotu contributed to supplementing large amounts of foodstuff for consumption in their families and for exchanging consumer goods (like salt, sugar, cloth and basic furniture) with the outsiders. At the same time it provided the material for building house and making daily instrument. The gathering was carried out all days of the year except festival or ceremony days of the community. The labor division, time and place of gathering activity as well as kind of products from the activity and its use are synthesized in table 3.1. below.

Gathering and fishing activities were also conducted every day by members of family. It provided protein sufficiency in their diets and was used to exchange for consumer goods with the outsiders. The fishing of the Cotu people could be carried out following individual, *Dhung* (family), *Kabhuh* (clan) or *Vêêl* (village). Individual fishing was a daily activity of women and children, meanwhile men only participated in collective finishing on the important ceremonies of the community, about one to two times per year. In some cases, certain individuals or families caught a lot of fish they had to share for everyone in the community.

Table 3.1 Some Main Products from Gathering of the Cotu People

Kind of product	Use	Labor	Place	Time
Bamboo shoots	Foodstuff for daily family meal, reserve food, and exchange goods	Women, children	Forest	August, September
Mushrooms	Foodstuff for daily family meal, and exchange goods	Women, children	Forest	Rain season
Wild vegetables	Foodstuff for daily family meal	Women, children	Forest, Swidden	All year
Honey	Exchange goods, drink and medicine	Men	Forest	May, June
Wild fruit trees	Eating fruit, making beverage and exchanging goods	Men, women, children	Forest	Depend on the fruit trees
Wild pepper	daily meal, and exchange goods	Men, women	Forest	April, May
Rattan	Foodstuff for daily family meal (top of tree), material for roofing house (leaf) and weaving, and exchange goods	Men, women	Forest	November December
<i>Dot</i> (reed)	Weaving and exchange	Women, children	Forest	January, February
<i>La nonT</i> ¹	Exchanging, roofing houses and making hats	Women, children	Forest	May, June
<i>Tavak, ta din</i> ²	Drinks, Food	Men	Forest	Summer

Source: Thong, 2004

Together with the traditional livelihood activities as mentioned above, the Cotu people also supplemented their daily foodstuff and reserve foods by raising livestock and poultry. Popular domestic animals are pigs, chickens, ducks and cows. Aside from this some poultry were bred under the house on stilts or simple sites surrounding their houses, almost livestock were left unbridled. Since some point of views asserted that reproduction of domestic animal is due to *Yang's* (God) decision, so this breeding activity was only implemented at small scale and strongly governed by belief and spirit of the community. The activity relied mainly on natural condition, the villagers did not care about the number of domestic animal and quality, they seldom noticed preventive and diet for the livestock, especially, and they only made ceremony offerings when

¹ Leaf of a shrub used for making a kind of hat in the Central of Vietnam

² A kind of palm-tree

epidemic diseases occurred to their domestic animal. The traditional breeding activity of the Cotu did not support for cultivation (fertilizer) and transportation, nor supply food for exchange with outsiders, but it proved the wealth of their families or their clans or the community, simultaneously, it provided offerings for their belief and the small amount of meat and egg for their diets. Logging timber and traditional handicrafts such as, weaving, knitting, and making smith and pottery were also a supporting source for daily life of the Cotu community. These activities were normally carried out individual or family units.

Although traditional livelihood activities of the Cotu people as mentioned have changed due to the intervention of the state through different development programs, the projects as well as policies for ethnic minority groups in remote areas, their specific and basic characteristics have been maintained by the Cotu people until present. Indigenous knowledge systems in terms of swidden cultivation, forest resource utilization and protection have been applied coordinately to scientific knowledge in current livelihood activities of the villagers.

3.5 Indigenous Knowledge of the Cotu People

As we know, human beings are closely related to the nature. They can survive thanks to nature, if the nature is destroyed, it will influence them. Conversely, in order to survive in the harsh conditions for a long time, they have to maintain and develop it through the application of their understanding that anything can be made from it. This can be seen clearly in case of the ethnic minority people living remote mountain areas. Their traditional livelihood activities relied entirely on natural resources. Through the process of practice, these practices are shaped by an indigenous knowledge system—worldviews, concepts, beliefs that have evolved from their ethnic traditions.

With Cotu people, the local knowledge system accumulated by their real experiences and their belief system in terms of forest resource utilization always exists together in their traditional livelihood activities. Their knowledge and spiritual beliefs that are expressed in local practices of seasonal calendar, soil classification, fire control, cultivation practice, and rudimentary tools create specific traditional cultural nuances of the Cotu people maintained until now.

3.5.1 Seasonal Calendar of the Cotu People

Almost all ethnic groups have managed to create their own seasonal calendar involving directly to their livelihood activities such as; cultivating, fishing, hunting, gathering or trading calendar. Each kind of the calendar often symbolizes awareness, discovery, and reasonable access to natural world to exist. When approaching agricultural cultivation's system of the Cotu people, it is difficult to ignore "*Nuong Lich*" (Seasonal calendar for swidden cultivation) because of its stability that manifest pragmatic significances in the application process to livelihood activities.

This "*Nuong Lich*" was established based on the cyclic changes of the natural world, especially the climate and the weather. The changes often have the forecast signs, such as; reproduction cycle of frogs, flowering cycle and the songs of the birds. For instance, from May to July according to lunar calendar, if the Cotu people see a lot of bamboo shoots grow more in the middle of bamboo hedge, they forecast that a storm will come; if there is a lot of bamboo hedges flower, the crops can be seriously damaged due to mice that destroy the harvest. Or if the bird "*keng ca lac*" (hawk) sounds it means that the weather will be warmer and people could grow corn early. By their real experiences, the Cotu people have synthesized to set up their own calendar ("*Nuong Lich*") following the changes of climate or weather conditions in a year. This is an important base for arranging appropriately daily activities with the calendar. For example, if it is rain the cotu people often gather bamboo shoots, or if it is shine they trap birds ("*boo lrot deehs abăng, bēl porăng lrot pan achim*"). Table 3.2 below describes activities' distribution of the Cotu people in a production's cycle that is tantamount to a year (*Nuong Lich* is early one month in comparison with the Kinh's calendar).

From Table 3.2 we can see that establishing the own calendar of the Cotu people is an important step for practicing their livelihood and spiritual activities. They can rely on climate or weather conditions in order to arrange their work appropriately.

Table 3.2 The Distribution of Activities of the Cotu People in a Year

Month (Kinh lag.)	Month (Cotu lag.)	Weather	Activities
January	<i>Cơ xee Mui</i>	Cold, light rain	Selecting plot, planting corn on old swidden, hunting, and wedding, etc.
February	<i>Cơ xee bor</i>	Cool	Clearing of trees on the plot for cultivation, continuing to plant crops on old swidden, hunting and wedding, etc.
March	<i>Cơ xee pee</i>	Sunshine, warm, bees fly from their nest	Continuing to clear of trees on the plot for cultivation, burning and planting early dry rice, weeding for corns, cassavas of old swidden, etc.
April	<i>Cơ xee puôn</i>	Sunshine, warm, <i>Vat vo</i> <i>Prico</i> birds sing	Firing, weeding for early dry rice, planting millet and corn, harvesting corn planted on January, gathering wood-fire, rattan, <i>Dot</i> (reed), etc.
May	<i>Cơ xee xong</i>	Sunshine, hot, rain-storm	Planting late dry rice or seasonal rice, continuing to harvest corn planted on January; gathering honey, etc.
June	<i>Cơ xee chopát</i>	Cicadas whistle; sunshine, hot, rain-storm	Weeding for seasonal dry rice, building house, hunting, fishing, gathering honey and firewood, rattan, etc.
July	<i>Cơ xee to pai</i>	Sunshine, very hot, termite push up earth	Caring for the dry rice's field, hunting, weaving, etc.
August	<i>Cơ xee to cool</i>	Rain and shine together	Harvesting early dry rice, repairing house, weaving, organizing hunt, etc.
September	<i>Cơ xee to ciah</i>	Heavy, continuous rain	Organizing collective hunt, gathering vegetable, etc.
October	<i>Cơ xee mui zêt</i>	Rain and begin to get cold	Harvesting seasonal and late dry rice, gathering mushrooms, bamboo shoots, organizing collective hunt, etc.
November	<i>Cơ xee muizêt mui</i>	Cold	Storing rice, selecting variety, gathering mushrooms, bamboo shoots, hunting, etc.
December	<i>Cơ xee mui zêt bor</i>	Cold	Clearing weeds on old swidden, preparing burning and planting corn, cassava, new year holiday, wedding, etc.

Source: Thong, 2004

In addition, the Cotu people rely on the phase of *Coxee* (the moon) to recognize the beginning, the middle and the end of a month, and distinguish good days or bad days. This is a basic of distributing work in the month of the Cotu people. According to the Cotu's viewpoint, the date 16, 17 and 18 in each month are normally good dates to implement planting crop, and the date 15 of the month is a worst date (*Abhuɔp*), they are always nervous of this date because they contend that the name of the date (*Abhuɔp*) coincides with the name of a tiger (Cotu language) which makes everyone very afraid, and that the date (*Abhuɔp*) means the date of Tiger, so they do not do any work and only stay at home on this day.

Especially, through the experiences accumulated from practicing swidden cultivation, the Cotu people determine cultivation calendars in the month for some main crops as shown in Table 3.3 below.

Table 3.3 Cultivated Calendar in the Month for Some Main Crops

Crop	Planted date	Note
Dry rice	18 th	This is the best time (The Cotu believe that if planting on round moon date the rice grow straight and well).
Cassava	From 28 th to 2 nd	If planting on other time, cassava often gives low productivity and bad quality: small manioc and bitter.
Sweet potato	From 16 th to 17 th monthly	It gives bigger and sweeter bulb which no have wormy inside.
Banana	From 14 th to 17 th	It gives long and big bunch
Sugar cane	18 th	It gives bigger stem and sweeter.

Source: Thong, 2004

3.5.2 The Belief and Ritual Practice Involving Cultivation Activity

According to the Cotu people's viewpoint, the spirits exist everywhere in the forest and natural landscape; they believe that all their daily activities have been managed by many *Yangs* (God, spirits), such as *Yang haroo* (rice spirit), *Yang krâng* (forest spirit), *Yang loong* (tree spirit), *Yang Katiec* (land spirit). Therefore, the most serious issue of the Cotu people is to resolve perfectly the relationship between them and *Yangs* before

starting any land and forest-related activities. So their activities are always intertwined with rituals.

The ritual is practiced at both household level and community level, and it plays an important role in livelihood activities of Cotu people. It helps them to be more confident in finding swidden land, slashing and burning, and harvesting practices, it also helps them out of the difficulties in practicing the livelihood activities and helps them to contact with *Yangs* (the spirits) to pray for their blessing.

The Cotu people practice rituals to worship their God and ancestral spirits before doing a certain thing or after finishing the things. For instance, before starting rice production, they perform a ritual to ask for protective support from *Yang haroo* (rice spirit). Another ritual for the *Yang haroo* (rice spirit) is performed before the villagers harvest dry rice. This ritual is called *bhuôih xôt haroo* (prayer rice spirit before harvesting). Another example, after the completion of the rice harvest, the villagers perform *bhuôih haroo têmeê* (New Rice Ritual). This ritual is normally celebrated in the house, not in the field like the ritual for the Rice spirit. The head of the family would perform the ritual after his family completes the rice harvest. The Cotu explain that the ritual for *Yang haroo* (rice spirit) relates to the God and nature; and that the *bhuôih haroo têmeê* (New Rice Ritual) relates to their ancestors. The purpose of New Rice Ritual is to offer new rice to their ancestors. The Cotu people believe that their present life is closely related to their ancestors past, and that their crop productivity is blessed and protected by their ancestral spirits. They must thus show their respect and gratitude to their ancestors by offering them new crops to consume.

Offerings for the rituals of the Cotu people often include forest products such as fish, banana flower, bamboo shoot, rattan shoot, and homemade food consisting of rice, chicken, pig and wine made from rice on their own shifting cultivation fields. The Cotu people are content that such products are compulsory. They feel uncomfortable if they did not have enough of such offerings.

Generally, the important nature of the rituals is manifested not only in material aspects but also on moral and belief aspects. This creates a premise for shaping a comfortable life and the security of the community. The rituals are considered as a concretization of aspirations of the local people protected by metaphysical actors which are formed by their thought, viewpoint as well as dreams.

3.5.3 The Cotu's Concept of Land and Land Use

The Cotu call land *Katiec*. They perceive land to be very meaningful because having it is everything. A person who has many plots of land and many heads of cattle are respected and his prestige is enhanced in the community. Besides, land also serves as the dowry that parents give their children when they get married.

The Cotu have certain beliefs regarding land. They believe that land is managed by *Yang Katiec* (land spirit), so all land related activities must ask permission of *Yang Katiec*. For example, before building a house, people look for a plot and choose some good seeds of rice (the number of rice seeds is equivalent to the number of people in the family) and put them in a bamboo pipe before it is buried in the ground. They pray to their God in heaven that they be allowed to build a house on that plot. After thirty or sixty minutes, they dig up the bamboo pipe. If the seeds of rice do not break and keep their original form they can build the house; if the seeds are broken or chipped, people take it to mean that they cannot build the house and have to move to another place.³

Another example, before building a house, the local people use two medium-sized edible snails (a snail represents *Yang*, God) and another one is a symbol of the house owner) dropped down a water hole dug at a plot that can be chosen for building house. They set a brick in the middle and the two snails at two opposite corners of the hole. After the owner prays to the God in heaven at the plot about thirty minutes in order to ask permission of the God for building the house. If the represented-God snail moves to the brick the house's owner can build the house, conversely, if the represented-owner snail crawls to the brick, the owner cannot build the house at the plot and has to move to another place.⁴

Especially, with the swidden cultivation that was a main traditional livelihood activity of Cotu people, swidden land was an essential production material. It played an important decision role for crop productivity that related to their prosperities during the year. Sometimes the swidden land affected the community's security, for example, the contiguous area between the Bhee people (Kontum Province) and the

³ Information from interviewing Mr. Tran Van Tieng, 60 year olds, on December 12th 2004

⁴ Mr. Quynh Dieng, 70 year olds, interviewed December 18th 2004.

Cotu people (Nam Giang, Quang Nam Province) often happen the struggle because of the disputes in terms of boundary of production land region. Therefore, identifying good or bad soil became more important with Cotu people who did not formerly use fertilizer and notice to crop care.

In fact, the Cotu people had significant experience of selecting soil based on soil classification. By the experiences, the Cotu have two ways to categorize land. Firstly, the soil is classified according to physical properties such as; the agglutinate level, the color, humidity level, and the sponginess of the soil. With this classification way, the Cotu divide land into five groups: *Katiec bloc*, *Katiec chua*, *Katiec tam*, *Katiec ruarua*, and *Katiec rang* (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 The Classification of Soil Based on the Physical Property

Group	Cotu names	Characteristics	Scientific names
1	<i>Katiec bloc</i>	Plastic, yellow or white color and humid soil.	Clay soil
2	<i>Katiec chua</i>	Loose texture, white or yellow color, water withdraws quickly.	Sandy soil
3	<i>Katiec tam</i>	Spongy, loose texture, humid, black or gray color.	Humus soil
4	<i>Katiec ruarua</i>	Mixed stone and pebble, brown or white, hard-dry soil.	Soil mixed stone
5	<i>Katiec rang</i>	Spongy, loose texture, reddish-brown, absorbent soil.	Bazan soil

Source: The result of household survey on November 2004

Secondly, based on the terrain situation, the growth of vegetation, plants, and some physical and chemical features of the soil, the Cotu categorize land into the following three main groups: (1) *Katiec liêm (colung)*, good soil; (2) *Katiec Kaxuoi liêm*, or average soil, and (3) *Katiec adua (bol)*, or poor soil (see Table 3.5).

Although soil classification among the Cotu is simple, when compared with modern science, they share many characteristics. In particular, by real experience, they both rely on the growth of vegetation, plants, and some physical and chemical features of the soil. They consider the growth of plants as the most important factor in categorizing

the soil because plants reflect the type of soil. The traditional soil classification of the Cotu plays a key role for selecting the good plots for their cultivation.

Table 3.5 Soil Classification Based on Fertility Levels

Group Characteristics	<i>Katiec liêm</i> (Good soil)	<i>Katiec Kaxroi liêm</i> (Average soil)	<i>Katiec adua</i> (Poor soil)
Soil color	Black soil	Black or brown soil	Reddish-brown soil
Slope	Relatively flat	Small slope	Large slope
Terrain's position	Valleys, primeval forest, and streams' side.	Hillside and foot of hill	High mountain, hillside and bare hill
Vegetation (natural tree)	Many big trees, perennially green	Few big trees	Very low trees, yellow leaves or alang grass, reeds
Properties of land	Spongy and loose texture, humid, no mixed stone and a lot of earthworm manure.	Soil with tree roots rising the surface, few mixed stone, few earthworm manure.	Hard, dry soil, many stones and pebbles, no earthworm manure.
Growth of trees	Trees grow well	Trees grow relatively well	Trees grow worse

Source: Thong, 2004

Aside from classifying the soil, the Cotu people also have many experiences in maintaining the fertility for soil and preventing erosion. In preserving the fertility of the soil, the Cotu often cultivate on a swidden field in the short time (about three to four crops) and after that they fallow it in long time. This creates favorable conditions for restoring soil fertility for next cultivation cycle on that field. They also plant trees of the fabaceae family with crop plants, such as maize, rice; or into hedgerows on the contour line. They collect weeds into heaps and dry in the sun, burn them into ash, then scatter it on the land. Most of the herbaceous plants are thrown around the plot after harvesting, not only to prevent erosion but also provide nutrition for the land. The Cotu also know how to cover the soil on the roots of the trees and cover the young trees with dry trees and herbs.

3.5.4 The Indigenous Knowledge in Traditional Swidden Cultivation Practice

The traditional cultivation practice like shifting cultivation is a cyclic and uninterrupted activity including a lot of different stages that is shaped by knowledge and belief system accumulated by real experiences of the local people. Normally, swidden cultivation of the Cotu people has been practiced follow seven steps; selecting a plot, slashing, burning, planting, weeding, harvesting, yields and processing, and fallow.

(i) Selecting a Plot for Swidden Cultivation

Plot selecting, among the Cotu, is an important step. A good plot must be relatively even and flat without any protruding stones. The verdant trees grow luxuriantly. Many dry branches and leaves fall on the ground. The soil is black, moist and contains a lot of earthworm manure. The site is along the direction of the rising sun, because a lot of sunshine is needed to make the cut vegetation dry quickly and easier to burn and produce a lot of ash. This will result in less work in clearing the land again and in increasing the harvest. A farmer always looks at topography necessary for the three-month rice crop because the period from March to July, the rice growing months is often a period of drought. The topography should incline a little, between two hills or mountains, forming a horse saddle, so the rice will not be affected so much by drought. Moreover, the soil has to be good enough to help the plants grow strong and endure drought.

Therefore, based on the ways of soil classification as mentioned above, the Cotu people selected appropriate plots to set up their swidden with a correlative crops' system. Observing swidden plots of the Cotu, Pichon observed:

Swidden is a temporary field, no have irrigation system and be formed through slashing and burning chaos vegetations. We see the swidden on any heights which is below 1800 meters.

(Pichon, 1938:362)

However, the selecting swidden plots of the Cotu people is also governed by their beliefs. They believe that people have right of selecting swidden plot; the decision right belongs to the *Yang Katiec*. The relationship between people and *Yang* in terms of selecting land is often considered through the rituals. After selecting a good plot of land,

the Cotu people have to wait the decision opinion of the Yang thought *prno/pom po* (dreams) of the *Takoh Vêêl* (the village head). Based on the content of the dream, the owner of swidden plot will know the Yang's decision. For example, if the dream talks about wild animals attacking people, land is eroded, trees is fallen, or seeing dirty water, the owner of the swidden plot has to move to another place although selected plot is good soil. Conversely, if the dream mentions to clean streams, river or sea, the owner of the swidden plot can cultivate on this plot with the agreement of Yang.

The Cotu villagers have never set up the swidden plots surrounding hilltops. They believe that this is the resident place of Yang and spirits, in which nobody can cultivate. Furthermore, cultivation activity in those areas had been very difficult because of its high slope. Besides, keeping a plot of forest on hilltop was a very effective utilization in terms of natural resource of the Cotu people because the forest kept on the hilltop was a place conserving considerable water resources through layers of rotten leaves, supplying irrigative water resource for crops' system on the swidden plots, and sheltering for wild animal and birds which is a essential supplemental foodstuff. At the same time, the forest limited soil erosion on the rain season, and preserved genetic resource for regenerating the forest.

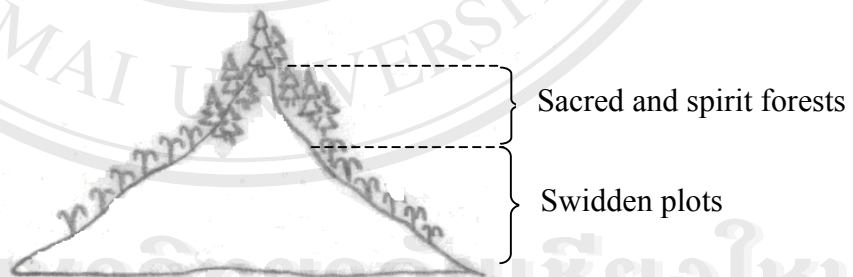


Figure 3.3 Location of Swidden Plots of the Cotu People

(ii) Slashing

After selecting the plot, the villagers clear the trees and bushes for burning. Slashing is done in two stages. First, is cutting the underbrush and second, is felling the large trees. The latter requires experience, skill and strength. This practice reveals that many people prefer to cultivate secondary rather than primary forests because it is

easier to fell trees. Slashing is started from lower to upper areas of the plot and carried out in February and March.

(iii) Burning

Burning requires a good deal of skill and a precise evaluation of the micro environmental and general climatic condition to ensure that a thorough and even fertilizer layer is achieved and that adjacent forest and dwellings are not damaged inadvertently. Aside requiring the security for the forest and the other swidden plots, burning ensures good combustion because “if swidden plots do not burn, plants will not grow” (*haree căh ro óh, chrónóh căh liêm*), according to the Cotu’s point of view.

Burning is often done before the rains come and usually begins after lunch when all dead trees are completely dry and the wind is not strong. Before burning, the Cotu people are extremely careful to construct firebreaks around the sides and tops of the cleared plots by clearing a 10 meter-wide firebreak and sweeping it clear of underbrush to prevent any unwanted fire expansion, and warn all villagers the burning time so that nobody ventures near the burning field. The experience of setting firebreaks around the plot, aside from ensuring security, creates a large amount of ash used to make the “clean fertilizer.” The Cotu people believe that *Yang Harro* (Rice spirit) will be satisfied with the process.

The Cotu people have different methods of burning depending on location. For example, if a swidden plot is flat, they often start burning from the outside moving into the inner plot; and if a plot is on a slope, they usually start burning from the top of the plot moving down toward the foot of the hill to prevent the spread of fire. In addition, they also have experience of knowing the wind current to apply appropriate burning methods. For instance, with any whirlwind, they have to set a fire around the plot. With normal wind, they set fire first at downwind end of the plot.

(iv) Rice Planting

Haroo (Dry rice) is seen as the main crop of the Cotu people so they always give priority to planting dry rice on new swidden plots (*Harê paruh*- the first crop swidden) where soil is the most fertile in comparison with the soil of the other plots. Moreover, they have considerable experience in terms of selecting local rice variety

appropriate to weather conditions, water sufficiency, type of soil, as well as proper maturation time. Depending on the grow cycle and the planting time of each variety the local people often divide local rice varieties into two main groups: *lua ba trang* (short-day rice or early rice) and *lua mua* (long-day rice or seasonal rice). The early rice is normally planted in March. Due to giving low yields, it is often planted on small plots and intercropped with indigenous corn. Meanwhile the late rice is often planted in May on the new plots, it gives high yields.

Besides the *Haroo* (dry rice), some other crops such as *aum* (corn), *alui* (gourd), *codóc* (pumpkin) and *aró/aroé* (taro), are intercropped on the *Harê paruh* (new swidden). *Harê halai* (the second crop's swiddens) and *Harê dua* (old swiddens) are mainly planted subsidiary crops such as *thần/bhuôr* (cassava), *aum* (corn), *trơ lang* (sweet potato), *tơ phóee* (peanut), *atuông* (bean), *adue* (millet), and *chứa* (pineapple).

Rice planning is an important stage in production cycle of the Cotu people. This work is often fulfilled quickly before the rainy season comes so that the plants can utilize the soil's nutrients created from ash and nutrients of the burnt vegetation before they are washed away by the rain. Rice planting season seem as "*Ngày hoi len nuong*", the dates when a lot of people go to swidden plots in order to plant rice, with the help of the other households and clans in the village, and the support of *Yang Haroo*, the Rice spirit, and *Akăn Haroo*, a woman holds rice soul. If the help of the villagers is voluntary, the owner of the swidden has to provide offerings to ask the support of *Yang Haroo*. Therefore, before planting rice, the Cotu people often organize a ritual to pray for an abundant crop from *Yang Haroo*.

Rice planting is done by both men and women. Men often go first, digging holes in the ground with a bamboo stick, women follow putting seeds in the holes before covering them. The implementation of planting starts from the foot to the upper area of the plots and follows the horizontal zigzags lines. This planting technique will create the vertical zigzags lines that contribute to the limitation of eroding soil and sweeping varieties away by the rainwater's flow.

(v) *Weeding*

The weeding season starts shortly after the first rains have come and ends only when the rice is about to ripen. Cotu swiddeners assert that the rice production increases according to the number of times a field is weeded during the growing season. Therefore, weeding is considered as an integral step in swidden cultivation's cycle of the Cotu this step is often carried out by women.

(vi) *Harvesting, Yields and Processing*

The harvest period of seed crops is less flexible than for root crops. The Cotu leave the root crops, such as cassava, sweet potato, and arrowroot in the field harvest as needed. Meanwhile, harvesting seed crops has to be fulfilled at a given time.

The rice harvest normally begins from August to October and performed seriously due to the ties of tradition and belief of the villagers. Before harvesting rice, the Cotu people often set a stake "*clă*", a cruciform stake made of wood or bamboo, on all roads in the village to forbid strangers enter their village and their swidden. The head of household performs "*Bhuôih xôt haroo*" ritual at his swidden with a pig alive to ask permission of *Yang Haroo* for the harvest time. After the "*Bhuôih xôt haroo*" ritual, the wife of the household head carries out some ritual with *Đoong Adéch*: she chooses four rice plants and pluck off them very slowly. This means that she aspires the rice laden with seeds.

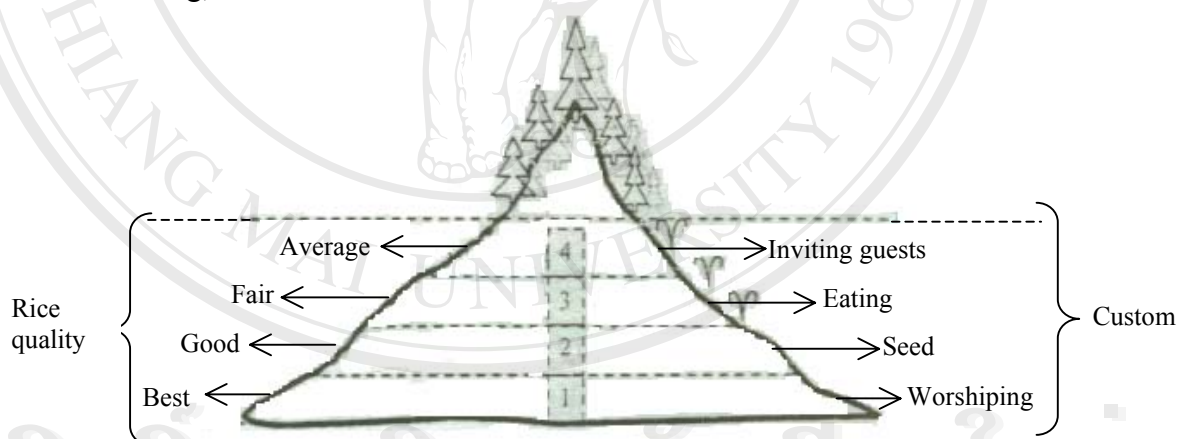
Based on yields and quality of rice seeds of each area of swidden plot, the Cotu people classify space of the swidden plot into four areas from lower to upper that is correlative with four different use purposes: (i) the area gives high yield and best quality rice used in ritual; (ii) the area gives high yield and good quality rice stored to plant in next year; (iii) the area gives fairly high yield and fairly good quality rice consumed daily in family, and (iv) the top of swidden plots gives fairly high yield and average quality rice used for inviting guests in the festival days (figure 3.4 and table 3.6).

The rice harvest is often performed following four times that is correlative with four areas of the field from lower to upper. The first and second harvest times are carried out by a woman of the household. When harvesting, she moves following the horizontal lines from lower area to upper area of the swidden and do not say anything. The rice seeds of the first harvest times are used in *bhuôih haroo têmeê* (New Rice Ritual), the rice seeds of the second harvest times are stored to plant in next year.

Table 3.6 Classification of Different Types of Hill Farms

Rice quality	Use	Topography	Indigenous knowledge
Best	To worship <i>Yangs</i>	Relatively flat	Cultivation space in the foot of hill are flat, good soil, high humanity. This is a good condition for rice growing.
<i>Haroo liêm</i> Good	Kept for seed purpose	Small slope	Rice can receive well sunlight. This is very good for keeping seeds
<i>Haroo Kaxuoi liêm</i> Fairly good	To consume in family	Slope	Rice can receive well sunlight but it is influenced strongly by wind.
<i>Haroo adua</i> Average	To invite guests in festival days.	Very slope	This is cultivation space on the top of swidden, it is influenced by disadvantageous factors: bad soil, strong wind, low humanity, etc. Rice often grows slower.

Source: Thong, 2004

**Figure 3.4 Custom of Rice Harvest of the Cotu People**

During the third harvest time, there is help of the villagers; rice seeds are stored in “*Poom*” (large bamboo basket) or “*crlăng*” (storehouse) to eat daily in the family. The fourth time harvest the rice plots planted on the top of swidden, this time is carried out by the wife and the daughters (or daughter-in-law) of the household head. These rice seeds are used for inviting guests in the festival days. Therefore, it

can be said that the rice harvest space is a connection between the indigenous knowledge and belief systems of Cotu people together. This is an original feature of cultivating dry rice on hillside.

(vii) *Fallow*

The Cotu people's viewpoint showed that if they wipe the forest out, it means they kill themselves. Therefore, although they use forest to survive, but they have to have a responsibility for maintaining and re-creating the forest where they are living and practicing cultivation. Therefore, practicing shifting cultivation often creates a fallow period aimed to restore the forest and forestland.

Generally, a swidden plot of the Cotu is practiced from two to three years when yields begin to decline on the swidden, and then it is fallowed from seven to ten years. The Cotu realizes the soil must be allowed to regenerate for a much longer period than the cropping period. After the fallow period they return that swidden plot to cultivate again, in some cases they do not want to return, but establish another swidden plot.

Because the time of cultivation on each swidden is short, and its fallow period is long, even a few swidden are abandoned. Each of the Cotu's households thus, establish many swidden plots to cultivate. With traditional cultivation method, one household has at least three swidden plots for a crop and those plots are planted following a cycle to ensure regeneration of the forest trees. Fallowing and intercropping between dry rice and the other crops such as; *aum* (corn), *trơ lang* (sweet potato), *tơ phóee* (peanut), *atuông* (bean), *adue* (millet), *chíra* (pineapple), etc. on the swidden plots made a considerable contribution to maintaining the fertility for soil and preventing erosion, recreating the forest.

3.5.5 Production Instruments in Cultivation Practice

The Cotu have a set of instruments suitable to their condition. They have *chun* (axes) to cut big trees, and *achitme* (cleavers) to chop down the small trees, creepers, and bushes. When sowing seeds, they use a *crouoch* (dibble stick) to dig a hole. When weeding, they use *aving* and *pai* (made from the old axes or cleaver by bending the

top of the axe or cleaver). They use *dels* (deep baskets) to transport products. There are two kinds of *Del*, the *Del* (knitted thickly) for carrying rice and the *dong* (knitted thinly) carrying used for cassava and maize. They use a *topoal* (rice-hulling mill) and a *pire* (pestle) to pound rice. To sift and winnow rice, the Cotu often use a *radieng* (broad flat drying basket). To clean the rice, they use a *horing* (small flat drying basket). It is oval with one narrow end where all the flat rice and dirt are pushed while rice is being cleared. To store the seeds for agricultural production namely, beans and maize the Cotu uses a *che* or *xduc* (big-bellied jar), and a *pom* (deep basket) to store rice. For land on a slope, the Cotu only dig holes in the ground when they plant rice or other crops to save labor and prevent soil erosion.

Thus, the Cotu in Giong village have adapted to the environment by utilizing a wide array of production tools, which are highly suitable to agricultural production in the area.

3.5.6 The Cotu's Beliefs and Practices Regarding Forest Resource Utilization and Protection

As mentioned above, the Cotu believe that *Yangs* (spirits) exist everywhere in the forest and natural landscape, and the spirits manage everything relating to the forest, including livelihood activities. Therefore, being traditional shifting cultivators whose life is entwined with the forest, the Cotu people have also accumulated precious knowledge and experience of how to use the forest resources and how to protect and regenerate the forest. Moreover, the Cotu people perceive the forest as community property that each member of the community has rights to use and duties to protect. Whoever went to the forest to hunt wild animals or log wood or find land for establishing swiddens they have to ask permission from the *Yang* through performing ritual, after that they carried out their activities following the conventions of the village. For instance, whoever caught wild animals they have to share it with the whole village. When somebody discovered any forest product, such as a beehive or wood, they mark the site and no one is allowed to log there because it was already taken. In the forestland, the first person who cultivates any plot becomes the owner of that property, even if it was a fallow period. Another example, the Cotu villagers have never set up the swidden

plots surrounding hilltop and never logged the ironwood because they believed the *Yang* (spirits) and ghosts live there. These conventions were implemented seriously and strictly followed in the community, whoever disobeyed them is punished by spirits and the community.

In the past, the Cotu people classified forest into three main types: (1) the sacred forest; (2) the spirit forest or graveyard and; (3) the production forest, and constructed the regulations for use and management of each type of forest in order to conserve forest resources effectively.

The sacred forest was normally primary forest and watershed area that every villager had to manage and protect. According to the belief of the Cotu people, it was the dwelling place of spirits where there are large and precious trees that anyone encroaching upon without proper permission from the whole village and spirit would be punished according to community rules. In the sacred forest, logging, slashing and burning, game hunting, cattle grazing are strictly forbidden. If anyone violated they would be fined by paying a buffalo, cow, pig or chicken depending on the severity of the violation assessed by the village head and the council of village elders in order to apologize to spirits and the community for their violation. However the community could use some resources from the scared forest for traditional and cultural activities of the community. For example, in the case of constructing *Guol* house (the Community House).

The spirit forest is where the dead are buried. It is normally managed by *Kabhuh* (clans) because different clans have selected different areas for burying their dead. Like in the scared forest, the spirit forest is often primary forest where there are large trees. Therefore, the spirit forest is also a place that hunting, slashing and burning and logging are prohibited. If anyone violated they would be punished by the clan.

Meanwhile, the production forest is used and managed by everybody in the community. All households of the village are allowed to fulfill traditional cultivation, hunting, and gathering in the area of the forest. However, whoever went to the forest to hunt wild animal or log wood or find land for setting up swidden, they had to ask permission of *Yang* through performing the rituals. After this they carry out their activities following the conventions of the village. For instance, whoever caught wild animal he had to share it with the whole village. When somebody discovered any

forest product, such as beehive or wood, he just marked the site and no one was allowed to log there because it was already taken. In the forestland, a person who first reclaims a plot is recognized as the owner that land, even when the plot is fallowed, the use rights still belong to that person.

Aside from the rights of using resources from the production forest everyone must have a sense of responsibility in protecting it. When cutting down the trees they have to examine the care not to damage other nearby trees by using a rope tied around the middle of the tree to make it fall in a particular way that will not damage other trees, or when burning their individual fields, they have to control the fire spread to other places by setting up fire prevented barriers surrounding their field and choosing the burning time appropriately. According to traditional regulations of the Cotu community, somebody who allows trees fall on or the fire spread into other fields have to compensate those field owner for any damage they caused. In such cases as allowing the fire to spread into the scared and spirit forests they would be punished by the community.

In sum, the Cotu people have an abundant treasure of indigenous knowledge related to practicing swidden cultivation which includes setting up seasonal calendars, identifying soil types, selecting swidden fields and varieties, practicing slashing, burning, planting, harvesting, and intercropping. Simultaneously, it also related to utilizing and protecting forest resource. This knowledge system is formed through accumulating real experiences and custom and belief in their daily activities.

3.6 Summary

In Vietnam, the Cotu is an ethnic group whose dwelling place spreads along an East - West line in Central Vietnam. Their dwelling place concentrates mainly in Tay Giang, Dong Giang and Nam Giang districts of Quang Nam province, and spreads out in western mountainous areas of Nam Dong districts and the southwest of A Luoi district in Thua Thien Hue province.

The Cotu people normally live along mountain slopes and valleys near the head of the rivers and the streams where is very perilous and isolated. Therefore, the Cotu people have been called “*the people living at the water - head, or watershed swellers.*”

The Cotu people have been known by many different name such as; *Teu, Kato, Cao, Attouat, Nguồn Ta, Kao, Khat, Thap, Phuang, Ta River - Van Kieu, Kaoto Kanto*. Among which “Cotu” is the name that has been popularly recognized by the Vietnamese government and themselves because this name implies their origin.

For the Cotu people of Giong village in Huong Nguyen commune, although they had experienced emigrations in many places due to the changes of situation condition of the historical period, they normally lived in small villages scattered along the river and stream banks in the upper stream of the Huong River where parted from the social life. At these places they also constructed their own identity, which is clearly expressed through social structure, their livelihood activities, their indigenous knowledge accumulated by the real experience of practicing the activities, their traditional belief as well as their ritual practice in the relationship with nature.

The Cotu people who are swidden cultivators have an abundant treasure of indigenous knowledge related to practicing swidden cultivation as well as to utilizing and protecting forest resource. Such indigenous knowledge system combined with the traditional belief and custom related to daily livelihood activities have created specific characteristics of the swidden cultivation's economy of the Cotu people.