

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF LAND SETTLEMENT

2.1 The Modern History of Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Mekong Delta

Archaeological findings have revealed that the Mekong Delta was partly occupied by Khmer people from the Chen La kingdom from the third to the sixth centuries (Le Coq et al. 2001). Deepwater rice or floating rice systems were the cultivation system during that period. After the decline of this kingdom, the Mekong Delta was still comprised of Khmer people belonging to the Angkor Empire (Groslier 1961 and Coedes 1962, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001).

From the end of the sixteenth century until the beginning of nineteenth century, the Mekong Delta was settled by mainly Vietnamese settler groups. Lord Nguyen was a leader in the process of exploiting and establishing sovereignty in the southern region (Giang et al. 2006:78).

2.2 History of Land Settlement

2.2.1 The Seventeenth Century to the Late Nineteenth Century

Land reclamation in the delta actually started in the seventeenth century, simultaneously conducted by the two ethnic groups (i.e. Vietnamese and Khmer) that coexisted in the region, in order to claim the land. During this period, the vast natural delta region seemed to be uncultivated and under-exploited swamp forestland. The first Vietnamese colonists came from the North and settled in the upper regions of Ba Ria, Bien Hoa and Dong Nai. After that, the colonists advanced southwards. About 40,000 households, with approximately 200,000 household members, existed in Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh in 1698 (Vien 1984:6). According to Brocheux (1995), at the beginning of the 17th century some Vietnamese migrated from the North and settled in

the hydrographic basin long occupied by the Khmers. This migration to the Mekong Delta is referred to as the “March to the South” or “Nam Tien.”

The French called the southern part of Vietnam “Cochinchina” but the Vietnamese named it “Nam Bo,” and it comprised eastern, central and western parts: “Mien Dong,” “Mien Trung” and “Mien Tay,” respectively. Mien Tay and Mien Trung combined to form the Mekong River Delta of Nam Bo. In 1757, when they reached Chau Doc, they were in the last stage of their Nam Tien. Thus, Mien Tay was settled as a new Vietnamese land in the 18th century. The character of the Nam Tien was a progressive advance rather than a brutal thrust, as is most evident, perhaps, in the west. Vietnamese kings conquered and pacified the delta by digging canals, such as Vinh Te and Long An Ha (both constructed in 1819) and founding “don dien” (plantations) (Brocheux 1995:11, Vien 1984:6).

In old Vietnam, the customs in matters of granting land to settlers were simple in 1780, according to Gia Dinh Thanh Thong-Chi:

“The new settlers were allowed freedom of travel and to work the land where it was most convenient for them. The people thus had complete freedom to clear what seemed good for them and set up their dwellings and new rice land, by founding their villages at the spot chosen by them... [Once] the plots of land were chosen, it was sufficient to express the desire of it to the mandarin to become a landowner. The land was not measured off when it was granted. One only took notice of whether it was of a good or bad sort.” (Aubaret 1883, cited in Brocheux 1995:29)

According to the historian Son Nam, the Khmer people of Tra Vinh revolted against Nguyen domination in 1780. The first don dien were founded to defend the Nguyen lords’ territories against the Khmers and Tay Son rebels in 1790. As the Nguyens’ policy toward the Khmers varied with changing circumstances, the response of the Khmer people differed as well (Brocheux 1995:12).

Additionally, according to Aubaret’s (1863) review, in the eighteenth century Vietnamese migrants from the northern and central regions reached the Mekong Delta. This population of migrants, mainly poor people, reclaimed the land lying next to the natural communication ways - the rivers. They settled on the natural levees of the Mekong and Bassac rivers as well as other rivers in the upper part of the alluvial plain. They cultivated the areas next to their houses, mostly rainfed shallow submergence-prone and rainfed medium-deep waterlogged ecosystems. They

practiced a kind of traditional transplanted local rice production system which permitted the reproduction of their labor force. In the gardens surrounding their houses, farmers produced a large range of non-rice crops, such as vegetables, root crops and fruits. In association with crop cultivation was rearing water buffaloes and cattle as draft animals, as well as swine and poultry. Concurrently, on the uncultivated areas, fishing and hunting complemented their diet. During this land reclamation, the administration of the Vietnamese empire expanded its control in this area. It promoted an expansion of the cultivated areas to secure control over new territories. This administration let farmers settle where they wanted (Aubaret 1863, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). It did not provide farmers with any direct help to settle and to reclaim land. It only granted land-use rights for cultivating the land (Schreiner 1900, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). Under such conditions, according to their initial endowment, migrants managed to become “owners” and to cultivate different amounts of land. Migrants possessing draft animals could rent them or give loans to poor farmers and get extra labor from those more disadvantaged families to expand their farms. In contrast, small farmers cultivated just what they could do with their own family labor force or mutual aid from the community, especially at the rice harvest. Following the establishment of the villages, the new migrants had to stay out of the village and could not have their own land to farm in the villages. They became hired labor on farms belonging to the village mandarins.

According to Vien:

“In the early nineteenth century, the immense expanse of waste land stretching southwards to Ca Mau tip could absorb the immigrants either from neighboring provinces or those in the North where demographic pressure was increasing. The Mekong Delta was really the land where most diverse creeds and religions coexisted, some coming from the North and the Center; others were from Khmer, Chinese, and Cham communities who had reclaimed land. This was the land of religious syncretism; there was a mixture of diverse creeds such as cult of ancestors, cult of natural forces, Buddhist creed, Brahmanic and fetishistic practices.” (Vien 1984:6-10)

In 1818, the mandarin Thoai Ngoc Hau had carved a headstone at the hill of Nui Sap with the words:

“At this epoch this was a ‘veritable Eden’; the woods were thick and bushy and the fields were covered with grasses and served as retreat for herds of doe and stag.” When he received an order to construct a canal from Long Xuyen to Rach Gia, he declared that “This sacred place, which had been hidden to the eyes, had not yet been trod by any human foot.” (Hau 1928, cited in Brocheux 1995:10)

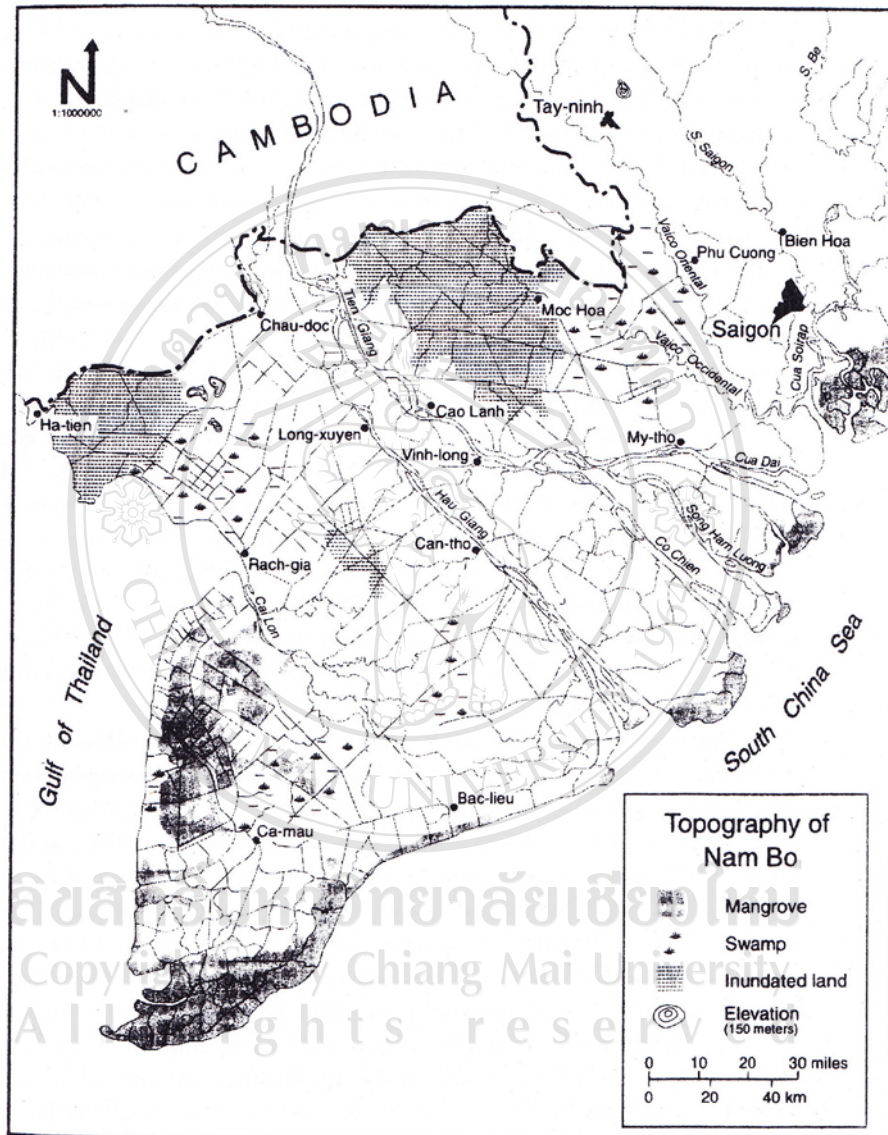


Figure 2.1 Topography of Nam Bo

In the reign of Minh Mang (1820-42), he promoted the belief that Vietnamese culture was superior to those of its neighbors (Woodside 1971, cited in Brocheux 1995:12). In 1836, Minh Mang sent a commission to Mien Tay to establish the “dia bo” (land registry). As a result, from 1838 onward the Vietnamese were confronted with Khmer uprisings. In 1854, the mandarin Nguyen Tri Phuong founded 21

plantations and 100 villages. These places were in areas with a high density of Khmers. In order to ensure peaceful coexistence between the two communities, he asked the newcomers to settle only on territory inhabited by Vietnamese so that they could not be accused of usurping Khmer land. The geopolitics of these migrations helps explain why in Chau Doc, Rach Gia and Ca Mau, the Vietnamese settlements remained temporary (Brocheux 1995:12-13). In the second half of the 19th century, the French found only 150,000 Khmers settled along rivers or at the edge of forests, making a living from agriculture, hunting and food gathering, while the vast marshy grounds which constituted the larger part of Delta were left waste (Vien 1984:5).

Table 2.1: Ethnic Composition of Western Cochinchina (Mien Tay)

Population	Years		
	1886	1908	1928
Kinh	307,052	655,135	1,131,456
Khmer	68,706	150,770	224,452
Chinese	12,675	17,802	43,778
Total	390,803	952,214	1,450,064

Source: L'Annuaire de Cochinchine and L'Annuaire General de L'Indochine for each year cited.

It was noticed that the size of the two principal population groups, the Vietnamese and the Khmers, increased at approximately the same rate. However, the Vietnamese reinforced their initial lead and remained in the majority (Table 2.1). The number of Khmers was nearly equal to that of the Vietnamese (i.e. 20,161 and 23,327, respectively) in Soc Trang in 1886, but as early as the end of the nineteenth century the Vietnamese had surpassed their neighbors (Brocheux 1995:24-25). The Vietnamese were established in the central part of the Delta, known as Mien Trung, while the displaced Khmers had migrated to the western part, Mien Tay. Chinese settlers and traders searching for new markets accompanied the Vietnamese, migrating further from their original homeland in the Red River Delta (Brocheux 1995: xv). Prior to the French colonization of the Mekong Delta, the process of land

reclamation by the Vietnamese under the Vietnamese empire did not reach its maximum expansion. Mien Tay was the least populated part of the Delta. Most of the land there was submerged under salt water, flooding and was covered with dense mangrove forests (Brocheux 1995: xvii). Only a small part of the Mekong Delta was cultivated (Deschaseaux 1889, cited in Brocheux 1995:11-12).

The delta region, Cuu Long, falls within the central and western parts of southern Vietnam, known to the Vietnamese as Mien Trung and Mien Tay. The Mien Tay includes both the Transbassac and the Cissbassac, or the land between the Hau Giang and the Tien Giang (Brocheux 1995:1). Mien Tay was divided into three provinces, Vinh Long, An Giang and Ha Tien, before the arrival of the French (Brocheux 1995:2).

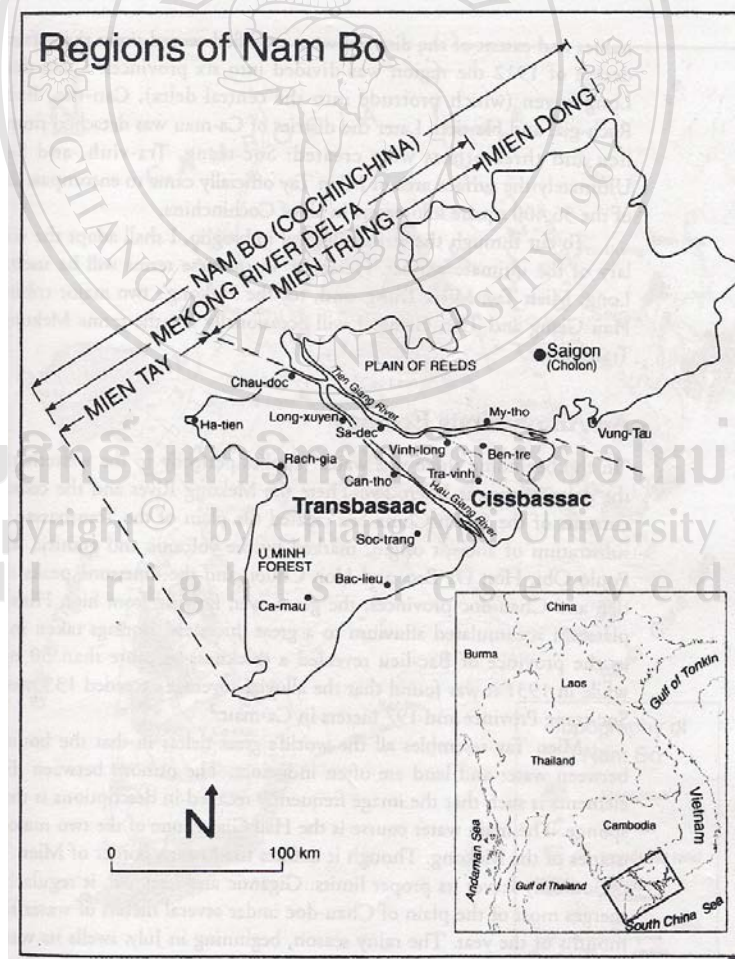


Figure 2.2 Regions of Southern Vietnam (Nam Bo)

2.2.2 Colonial Stage: The Late Nineteenth Century to Mid-Twentieth Century

The French began their political invasion of Saigon in southern Vietnam in 1869, when the Mekong Delta was only partly cultivated, and successfully colonized the region by the end of the 19th century. To take advantage of this new territory, the French colonialists wanted to develop rice production and expand the rice-growing area. They invested in infrastructure, particularly the digging of primary canals to allow drainage and transportation through the Mekong Delta (Robequain 1939, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). Mien Tay was divided into six provinces in 1912: Chau Doc, Long Xuyen, Can Tho, Bac Lieu, Rach Gia and Ha Tien. Later, the district of Ca Mau separated from Bac Lieu and three others were created: Soc Trang, Tra Vinh and Sa Dec. Ultimately, Mien Tay covered 26,300 of the 56,400 square kilometers in all of Cochichina (Brocheux 1995:2). The Vietnamese continued to lead in population size, with 87,749 Vietnamese and 48,689 Khmer in Soc Trang in 1901. This could indicate that the settlement of the west was mainly due to the demographic dominance of the Vietnamese. Uneven distribution is another feature of the demography of Mien Tay, in which Can Tho had the highest mean population density of 159 people per square kilometer, while Ha Tien had the lowest mean density of 11 people per square kilometer. Soc Trang was in the middle with a mean of 72 people per square kilometer (Brocheux 1995:24-25) (Table 2.2).

“It was always possible to resort to French law in order to gain ownership of land. Unfortunately, the requisite procedures and travel were difficult to rice growers including the loss of time. If they tried to work through an intermediary, they were easy to be swindled. French law served those who were knowledgeable. In the most remote areas, on the frontier of Rach Gia, Ca Mau and Bac Lieu provinces and in provinces in which the thrust of Vietnamese migration had more or less disorganized the Khmer communities, possession of land became the matter of fierce rivalries.” (Brocheux 1995: 37)

Table 2.2: Population Density of Mien Tay (the Western Part of Southern Vietnam [Nam Bo])

Unit: people per square kilometer

Province	Mean	Maximum	Minimum
Can Tho	159	325	59
Long Xuyen	75	278	27
Soc Trang	72	234	39
Chau Doc	71	168	23
Rach Gia	43	68	24
Bac Lieu	25	234	9
Ha Tien	11	60	5

Source: Henry and De Vismes, Documents de demographie, 1928

The Mekong Delta was comprised of different ethnic groups, including the Kinh, Khmer, Hoa and Cham. Each ethnic group lived in separate localities, spoke its own language and practiced its own religion. The integration of the different ethnic groups into Vietnamese communities was a slow process, marked by periods of joint struggle or more or less conflict. Inter-ethnic differences were exploited by the colonial administration (Vien 1984:12).

Until the years 1927-28, uprisings occurred over conflicts about land ownership at the village level in Bac Lieu and Rach Gia. The authorities interpreted the uprising as being caused by the Khmer people being opposed to the French (L'Appel 1927, cited in Brocheux 1995:40). According to Khmer monks, the uprising was not anti-French. Rather, they complained about "the Khmers' decline and the lack of guarantees of their land ownership." Lalaurette stated that, "The matter is critical because the delineation of lands in Rach Gia has not yet been achieved." Thus, the destruction of village archives, which was the primary action of the rebels, can be seen as a protest against the actual land repartition (Tribune Indochinoise 1927, cited in Brocheux 1995:40-41).

Anthropologist Dinh Van Lien writes on the ethnic diversity of Nam Bo (i.e. South of Vietnam) that:

“...one legend on origins of the Khmers tells us that Viets, Khmers, Chams, and central highlanders were born from the same mother.” (Lien 1988, cited in Brocheux 1995: xvii)

Brocheux concurs that the idea of a common ancestor may help sustain good relations among ethnic groups. (Brocheux 1995: xvii)

The continuous waves of Khmer, Vietnamese and French settlement in the Delta region of southern Vietnam created various names for the territory and the natural waterways that flow through it. The Khmers called the lower basin and the largest river branch “Bassac,” while the Vietnamese referred to the Delta as “Cuu Long” (Nine Dragons), the main tributary as “Song Hau,” and the smaller river branch to the northeast as “Tien Giang.” The French applied the Thai name Mekong to both the Delta and the river. Moreover, the French employed variations of the Khmer name for the river to describe two sub-regions of the Delta with respect to their relative distance from the French presence in Saigon: Cisbassac and Transbassac (Brocheux 1995:1).

French domination of Nam Bo helped force and consolidate the Nam Tien of the Vietnamese people. The colonial economy maintained the multi-ethnic structure of society. A new phenomenon was the emergence of a bourgeois class with wealth based on land ownership, such as the Vietnamese, or trade, such as the Chinese. Later on, bureaucrats and members of the liberal professions were connected with the members of the landlord class. The French constructed a form of social classes that created a division of labor and power attribution along ethnic-national lines. Then, the French used the ethnic and cultural differences to divide and rule, also claiming the role of protector of the weak. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese communists pointed out the common interests of Khmer and Vietnamese peasants and Vietnamese and Chinese workers in their struggle against the French colonists and their mandarins, then later against the America imperialists and their puppets. (Brocheux 1995:79-80)

Table 2.3: Timeline of Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Southern Region, Including the Mekong Delta

Periods	Events in the southern region including the Mekong Delta of Vietnam
End of 16 th century to 19 th century	<p>The settler groups, who were mainly Vietnamese under the protection of Lord Nguyen, contributed to the exploitation process and established sovereignty in the southern region.</p> <p>Lord Nguyen organized offices, chose mandarins to control settlers' land, set up taxes and built canals.</p> <p>The three countries of Vietnam, Thailand and Kampuchea signed an agreement in which six provinces of the southern region in Vietnam were acknowledged.</p> <p>French colonists attacked and occupied six provinces of the southern region.</p> <p>Nguyen commanded the army against French colonists. Vietnamese settlers in the southern region, including Kinh, Khmer, Hoa and Cham, consolidated against the invaders.</p> <p>Nguyen signed concession agreements for three provinces in the east and three provinces in the west to the French.</p> <p>French and Kampuchean assumed control over the southern region of Vietnam.</p>
Twentieth century	<p>Kinh, Khmer, Hoa and Cham patriots in the southern region opposed the French colonists and American empire to achieve peace, independence and the unification of the country, establishing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.</p> <p>International agreements certified the sovereignty of the southern region in Vietnam.</p>

Source: Giang et al., 2006

2.2.3 *The Post-Colonial Stage*

According to Giang et al. (2006), the southern region has included many ethnic communities and different settlers with various religions and beliefs. However, they have coexisted in the same administrative unit (i.e. hamlet, village) and they have undergone changes in order to communicate with one another by exchanging, adapting and absorbing their diverse cultures.

People of various ethnicities have lived basically in the agricultural production area of the Mekong Delta. The influence and interactions of various coexisting cultures have had a practical impact on the reclamation of land by improving rice production and the lives of the ethnic groups, in which the tools of agricultural production, house, dress, living, ceremony, etc. have reflected the inter-ethnic relations. Additionally, marriage between two ethnic groups has been popular in the ethnic communities, particularly couples of Kinh and Khmer, Kinh and Hoa, Khmer and Hoa, etc. Normally, the ethnic groups in the society have communicated in Vietnamese language.

In the process of socialist construction, the Communist Party and Government of Vietnam have implemented egalitarian policies with regards to the ethnic minority communities concerning their material and spiritual life. They have established several policies to develop the ethnic communities and remote areas. For instance, the Secretary Board of Vietnam Communist Party promulgated instruction no.68-CT-TW on April 18, 1991, which has aimed to develop the economic, cultural and social issues and political security in the provinces where Khmer people have lived.¹ The Prime Minister has also promulgated decision no.139/2003/QD-TTg which, in 2004, supported a national fund for the ethnic minority people and localities of the mountainous areas to provide poor Khmer households with medical report books to receive free checkups and treatment.² Many other policies have also been offered to the ethnic communities in the Mekong Delta in recent years (Giang et al. 2006:67-76).

¹ http://www.na.gov.vn/sach_qh/chinhsachpl/phan1/p1_iv_9.html

² <http://www.hspi.org.vn/vcl/vn/home/InfoDetail.jsp?area=1&cat=96&ID=1031>

My understanding is that Brocheux (1995) and Giang et al. (2006) hold some differing views on the inter-ethnic relations in the Mekong Delta, which reflect the facts in the different historical periods from the pre-colonial to postcolonial stage. Brocheux reviewed some conflicts over landownership resulting from the feudal policies of the Nguyen dynasty and the domination policies of the French colonists coexisting with the local mandarins in Southern Vietnam, particularly in the Mekong Delta. Giang et al., on the other hand, give an overview of the inter-ethnic relations towards the people's common interests and the multi-ethnic development policies of the Vietnam government in this region.

2.3 Ecological, Social, Economic and Demographic Setting of the Mekong Delta

Here I will provide a historical review of the necessary information on the related sites, in order to understand more about my research site.

From the 1880s to 1930s, about 1,800 km of canals were dug in the Mekong Delta (Le Coq et al. 2001). With the irrigation network and settlements, land reclamation of almost all fallow areas became possible. The French colonial authorities encouraged land reclamation in order to increase the annual revenue, and they therefore issued private property rights. The expansion of land reclamation relied on French colonists and Vietnamese mandarins, granting them large concessions of uncultivated land, especially in the floodplain. This process increased the polarization of the rural society. As a result, about 62 percent of the landowners possessed only nine percent of the fields in 1930. Approximately 72 percent of the total population of rural households possessed no land and two percent of the population owned more than 50 hectares, or 48 percent of the land (De Visme 1928 and Henry 1932, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). Consequently, rural society had a small group of large landowners who used their surplus rice for export, while a large group of small landowners, mainly tenants, could not accumulate any investment capacity from their rice production and lived in poor conditions.

However, the expansion of rice cultivation started from the Vietnamese administration and increased rapidly from the French colonial regime. The cultivated rice area of Cochinchina quadrupled from 520,000 in 1880 to 2,200,000 hectares in

1930 (Henry 1932, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). The production was estimated at about 2.5 million tons of paddy and production per capita reached 0.5–0.6 tons of paddy (Robequain 1939, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). Rice yields remained under 2.5 tons of paddies per hectare annually. At the end of the 1930s, the social polarization created by the colonial regime became explosive. Some farmer revolts broke out to demand reduction of land rents and taxes. During the first Indochina war after 1940, the countryside became insecure and people left their land and villages. Means of production were destroyed and the irrigation network and infrastructure deteriorated. The production declined because the cultivated area was diminished by low land productivity. Exports to the world market were limited to less than 200,000 tons of white rice in this period. The agricultural expansion in Mien Tay (the western part of the Mekong Delta) happened under French colonization, which created a massive ecological and economic transition. Mien Tay was opened to inter-ethnic settlement and agricultural cultivation. It became one of the largest rice production regions for export in the world (Brocheux 1995).

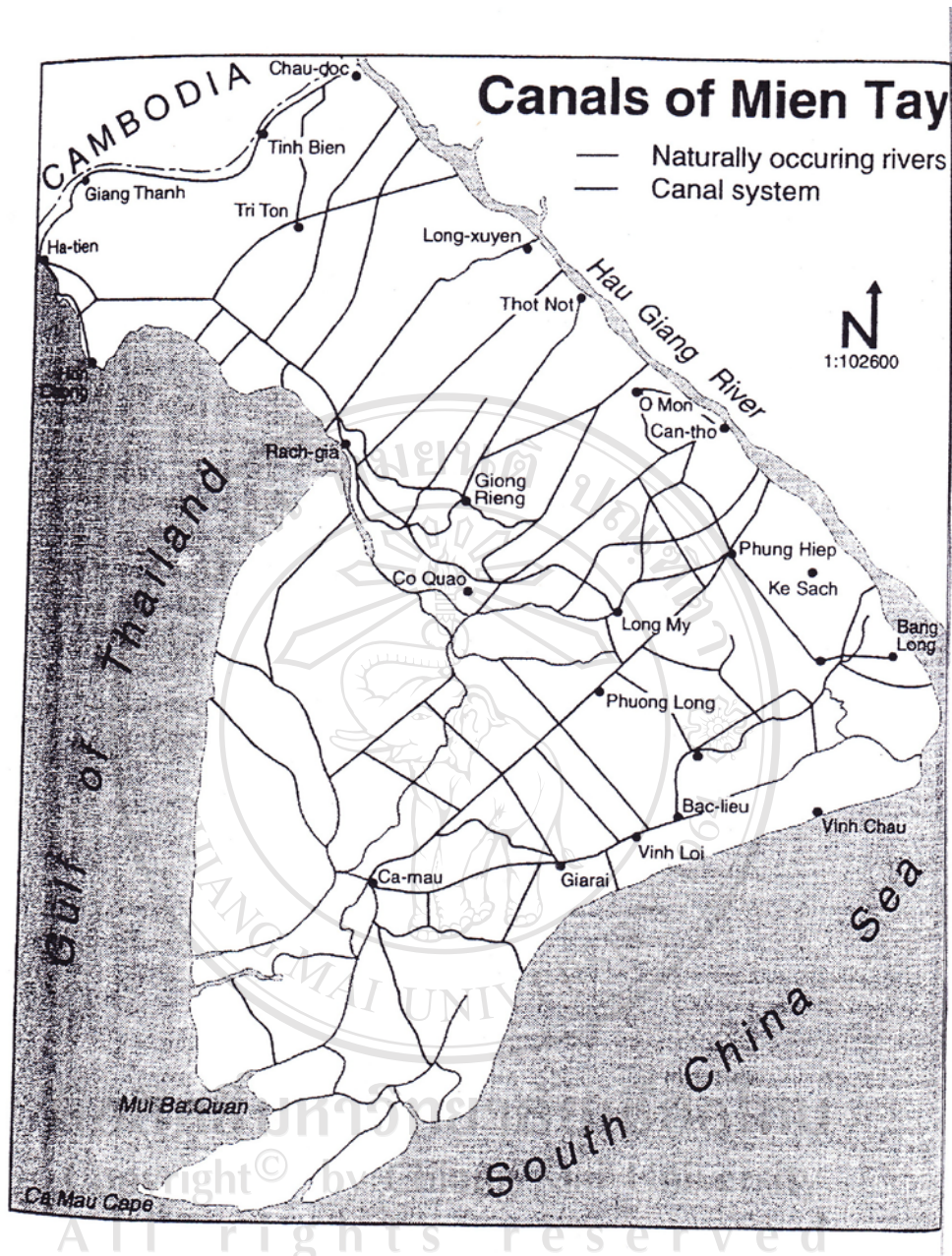


Figure 2.3 Map of Canals of Mien Tay (the Western Part of the Mekong Delta)

Since 1968, the first high-yielding, short duration rice varieties (HYV) were introduced in the Mekong Delta, including IR5, IR8, IR 28, IR 29 and IR 30 (Xuan 1975, Denning and Xuan 1995). To help farmers to adopt these new rice varieties and take advantage of them, the government started importing chemical inputs and motorized equipment, together with development of a rural credit system (Xuan 1975). Under these conditions, the farmers took advantage of the new HYV to increase their land productivity. With the traditional rice (TR) production system, the

land productivity did not exceed 3.5 tons of paddies per hectare in a year, but, with the new HYV, farmers could harvest about six tons of paddies per hectare for TR-HYV rice crops in a year and eight tons of paddies per hectare for two HYV rice crops in a year. In the Mekong Delta, the Green Revolution started mainly in the central plain and rice production increased quickly in the early 1970s (Fukui 1974).

Since the unification of the country in April 1975, many farmers returned from the towns to the countryside. The rural labor force increased, but the average farm size per person decreased. The farmers continued the more intensive irrigated rice production system in the Mekong Delta. However, with the prohibition of private trade and the state monopoly on trade, the farmers faced problems in getting agricultural inputs, thereby decreasing yields. In Can Tho province in 1980, the yield from HYV in the first and second rice crops were 3.0 and 2.4 tons of paddies per hectare, respectively. Although the intensive irrigated rice system expanded in the Mekong Delta, a food shortage still emerged in 1978 when brown plant hopper insects attacked the susceptible HYV crop in the Mekong Delta (Denning and Xuan 1995). At that point, the government decided to change its policy (Le Coq et al. 2001).

In the late 1980s, following the sixth plenum of the CPV (Communist Party of Vietnam), the SRV (Socialist Republic of Vietnam) government decided to implement a wide-ranging economic liberalization policy (Pingali and Xuan 1992, cited in Le Coq et al. 2001). Among other crucial decisions, it recognized free market exchanges and the key role of the family-based agricultural economy. Both Kinh and Khmer farmers could sell their product in the market at higher prices and could more easily accumulate means of production. On the other hand, following the liberalization of the domestic market for inputs, the private commercial network expanded rapidly. With the reorientation of paddy production for export, the importation of fertilizers and pesticides also increased dramatically. Under this new policy, the farmers easily obtained the inputs needed to invest in their rice crops. Thus, the average yield in the Mekong Delta increased from 3.0 tons to 4.0 tons per hectare from 1985 to 1995. The government then recognized the “ownership” of land and gave land back to the farmers. In the Mekong Delta, the production teams lasted for only a few years and the disintegration of the production teams led to a renewed differentiation among farmers in terms of land tenure. With the market economy, the

large landowners reached 15 tons of paddies per hectare for three rice crops in a year and were rapidly able to improve their livelihoods (Le Coq et al. 2001).

In recent years, the Mekong Delta has undergone considerable transformation. Portions of economic structures (i.e. agriculture, industry, commerce and service) have changed; for instance, there has been a gradual decrease in the portion of gross domestic production (GDP) from agriculture and a corresponding increase of the portion of GDP from industry, commerce and service. Quality of life is increasing among the Mekong Delta inhabitants. For instance, in 2004 the average income was \$424 USD per person; agriculture, industry and commerce/service comprised 48 percent, 22 percent and 30 percent of the GDP, respectively. In the same year, economic growth reached 11.4 percent, rice cultivation produced over 18.5 million tons, fruit production reached three million tons and fisheries produced 1.6 million tons, of which raised fish products comprised 450,000 tons and raised prawn/shrimp products made up 230,000 tons.³

In the last five years, the rice cultivation area averaged 3.85 million hectares annually in the Mekong Delta, which created jobs and income for more than 1.46 million farm households, who represent 73.5 percent of the total farm households in the region. In particular, the third rice crop annually covered about 400,000 - 450,000 hectares. This crop sparked debates among everyone from scientists to government officers, due to the fear of vulnerability to an insect pest epidemic. However, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development decided to grow the third rice crop as a main annual crop because this crop supplemented the rice seeds for the first rice crop. According to Dr. Du, Vice Director of the Cultivation Department, "Vietnam is an agricultural country; however, the agricultural land is small with only 4.2 million hectares of rice and 86.5 million people, averaging 485 m² per person in the whole country, while Thailand has 9.6 million hectares of rice and averages 1,500 m² per person. Therefore, the intensive and extensive crops are obviously necessary in order to ensure food for domestic consumption and export."⁴

³ Sources: Statistical Books of 12 provinces in the Mekong Delta, 2004, and Statistical Book of Vietnam, 2004.

⁴<http://www.baocan tho.com.vn/?mod=detnews&catid=72&p=0&id=47864>.

Rice production in the Mekong Delta accounts for over 53 percent of the country's total annual rice production and contributes 90 percent of the total national export rice. However, in the last two decades, rice land in the Mekong Delta has declined and been reoriented toward use for other crops and aquaculture.

2.4 Social, Economic and Demographic Setting of Can Tho City

The city that is presently known as Can Tho City was previously a part of the Can Tho City in Can Tho province, but separated in 2004. Since 2004, Can Tho City has been one of the 13 administrative units at the provincial and city level and is the only target city of the Mekong Delta which is under central government management.

Can Tho City is located midway downstream in a central area of the Mekong Delta, with a total area of 138,960 hectares as of 2005. It covers 3.5 percent of the area of this region and the agricultural area makes up 113,180 hectares, or 81 percent of Can Tho City's surface. The population of Can Tho City was 1,141,653 inhabitants in 2005, with a rate of increase of 1.1 percent per year in the last 5 years. The urban and rural populations were 27.6 and 72.4 percent respectively in 1995; in 2000, the rates were 32.6 and 67.4 percent, which illustrates the city's gradual urbanization. However, in 2005 the rates had changed to be 51.2 and 48.8 percent for urban and rural populations respectively, as rural inhabitants became urban inhabitants. This transition could affect the quality of life for city inhabitants. Rates of non-farm and farm inhabitants were 32.8 and 67.2 percent respectively in 1995, then 34.3 and 65.7 percent in 2000 and 53.6 and 46.4 percent in 2005. This shows a very fast rate of urbanization which has led to rapid changes in occupation from farm activities to non-farm work, such as industrial, commercial and service jobs, especially in the last two years. However, the agricultural and rural sector still plays a considerable role in supplying food for Can Tho City, the Mekong Delta, Ho Chi Minh City, as well as other regions and for export.

Central Can Tho City is 170 km away from Ho Chi Minh City in the Northeast along national road no.1A. It is between 60 and 120 km away from the other cities of the Mekong Delta. Can Tho City plays a very important role in the creation of an advantageous network for economical development with its surroundings, especially

the Southwest of Hau River and Long Xuyen quadrangle. Moreover, in some economic sectors, Can Tho City has the potential to develop its exports to places as widespread as Ho Chi Minh City and other economic targets of southern Vietnam. The city comprises four urban districts (Ninh Kieu, Cai Rang, Binh Thuy and O Mon) and four rural districts (Co Do, Phong Dien, Thot Not and Vinh Thanh). It has seen development in the following areas: urbanization, industrialization, commercialization, advanced agriculture, fresh agricultural production, culture and infrastructure such as the harbor, bridge and airport. These advancements have helped Can Tho City to become a central city and a target area for Mekong Delta development, as well as one of the national centers which plays an important role in the Southeast Asian region.⁵

2.4.1 Social, Economic and Demographic Setting of Co Do District

Co Do district was partly separated from O Mon district, Can Tho province, in 2004. Since 2004, Co Do district has been a part of Can Tho City, occupying 402.56 km², or 29 percent, of Can Tho City. As Can Tho City aims to establish a large scale special cropping area to meet the food demands of the urban area and to produce agricultural products for industrial processing, Co Do district is one of the most important agricultural targets for this production. This district, in the long term, is a focal point for building up a modern rural area which will decrease the environmental and population pressures that result from urbanization. With the incorporation and propagation of high-tech production models, this area is set to become an important transportation network for city development. Co Do district includes 12 villages and two small towns (Thoi Lai and Co Do town) with a total area of 40,183 hectares, in which the agricultural area covers 35,906 hectares, including 31,409 hectares of rice. The population includes about 37,328 households and 176,893 inhabitants (86,943 males and 89,950 females), of which 27,847 farm households comprise 75 percent of

⁵ Source: Master plan for socio-economical development of Can Tho city, 2005

the total number of households⁶ and 176,893 farm laborers comprise 77 percent of the total population.⁷

2.4.2 Social, Economic and Demographic Setting of Thoi Lai Town

The small town of Thoi Lai was established in 2000 when it was separated from Thoi Lai village in O Mon district, Can Tho province. Since 2004, Thoi Lai town has belonged to Can Tho City in Co Do district. It comprises 5 hamlets: Thoi Thuan A, Thoi Thuan B, Thoi Phong A, Thoi Hiep and Thoi Hoa A. Thoi Lai town, which is about 35 km away from central Can Tho to the east, then has been divided into seven hamlets since 2005. They are: Thoi Phuoc with 573 inhabitants, Thoi Thuan A with 2700 inhabitants, Thoi Thuan B with 2447 inhabitants, Thoi Quan with 618 inhabitants, Thoi Phong A with 1,556 inhabitants, Thoi Hiep A with 1,539 inhabitants and Thoi Hoa A with 1496 inhabitants. The total land area is 966 hectares. There are 797 hectares of agricultural land, which makes up about 83 percent of the total land, and there are 607 hectares of rice land. In terms of animal husbandry, the area has 1,673 pigs and 5,781 poultry birds. The population of Thoi Lai town is 12,194 people (5,976 males and 6,218 females) with a population density of 1,261 people/km² (compared to 440 people / km² in Co Do district).⁸

In 2007, nearly all farmers in Thoi Lai town were strong farmers using manual and seasonal laborers, comprised mostly of Kinh people (91 percent), with smaller numbers of Khmer (8.7 percent) and Chinese (0.3 percent). A portion of the farm households have one or two main laborers each, who work as laborers in the cities. Some members of poor landless households, which have manual laborers but do not have materials for production, go to the industrial areas in Can Tho City, Ho Chi Minh City, Bien Hoa or Vung Tau City for six to 12 months annually. The young laborers prefer working in the cities rather than in the rural area because the industrial jobs are normally more stable than farm activities, although they are also risky.

The work in rice farming is not continuous through the year here. Rice farming is laborious at the beginning and end of the rice crops. A labor shortage

⁶ Source: Report of Economical Department of Co Do district, 2006.

⁷ Source: Report of People's Committee of Co Do district, 2005.

⁸ Source: Statistical Office of Co Do district 2005.

appears at the peak of the rice harvesting times and the source of labor comes from the Khmer people of Soc Trang province, which is about 100 km from Thoi Lai town. The price of harvesting changes with different seasons; for example, it cost 50,000 – 60,000 dong per ‘cong lon’⁹ in the second rice crop from March to June, 2007, but 60,000 dong per cong lon in the first rice crop from November to February in 2007-2008 and 100,000 dong per cong lon in the third rice crop from July to October, 2008. These prices include bundling and may change according to different lodging conditions, even increasing by 50 to 100 percent higher than normal depending on the lodging. Farmers thresh rice in the fields in the dry and wet seasons, but bundle and transport rice to thresh at the dikes in the third rice crop, because there is more water in the field.

2.4.3 Social, Economic and Demographic Setting of Thoi Thuan B Hamlet and Settlement and Kinship¹⁰ of Kinh and Khmer

Kinh from northern Vietnam entered into southern Vietnam, particularly into the Mekong Delta, during the pre-colonial and colonial periods. This hamlet was called Dinh Thanh and belonged to Dinh Mon village before 1900. After that it was changed from Dinh Thanh to Thoi Thuan, with a total of 273 households including 191 farm households, in 1993.¹¹ Of these households, 136 were Kinh farm households, 55 were Khmer farm households and 82 were landless households, of which 55 were Kinh and 27 were Khmer. Until 2004, Thoi Thuan B hamlet was established due to changes in the administrative boundary; however, the land of Thoi Thuan B hamlet in Thoi Lai town became narrower even though the population was higher than those of the hamlets in the past.

Khmer people have stayed in Can Tho in general and in this hamlet in particular for a long time, since the pre-colonial period. Normally, the family names of the Khmers are given by their parents. However, there is a local story that was told by a Khmer farmer, passed down from his parents, that at beginning of the French

⁹ 1 ‘cong lon,’ a unit of measuring rice fields is equivalent to 1300 m² or 0.13 hectare, while ‘cong nho,’ a state unit of measuring rice fields, is equivalent to 1000 m² or 0.10 hectare.

¹⁰ Source: Key Informants Interview, May 2009

¹¹ Source: Key Informants Interview, March 2010

colonial period, the colonists gave the Khmer different family names and relocated them in order to easily control the local people. The names included Lieu, Dao, Mai, Ly (hybridized ethnicity of Khmer-Kinh-Chinese), Duong and Danh. These were the family names in Thoi Lai, Dinh Mon, Thoi Thanh village and O Mon town, near the Khmer temple in Co Do, Kien Giang province. Specifically, the three family names of Thach, Kim and Son were given in Tra Vinh province, where a high population of Khmers settled for a long time; the family name of Tran (hybridized ethnicity of Khmer-Kinh-Chinese) was common in Soc Trang province. Gradually, because the wars in the pre-colonial and colonial periods of the French and Saigon regimes forced the Khmers and even Kinhs to migrate elsewhere inside or outside the Mekong Delta in order to escape conflict, they often moved from remote areas to urban areas and then inter-married. Therefore, almost all of the Khmer family names are no longer fixed in their original place and the various generations of Khmers have now lived everywhere in the Mekong Delta. As a result, the Khmers and Kinhs have been coexisting together and nine Khmer families now live in Thoi Thuan B hamlet instead of only one like in the past.

In the past, the Khmers settled in clusters along small canals at the end of the larger canals, such as Tac Ca Di canal, because they preferred to stay in remote, isolated and quiet places. This seems to be a custom or culture of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta. They have seldom lived along the main road. The Kinh, on the other hand, have normally lived along the main roads and rivers, such as the Thoi Lai-O Mon River. Each Khmer family normally stays together in particular locations in the hamlet or village. During and after the war, the different Khmer families have gradually moved together in the community, as well as the different Kinh families that also stayed together with the Khmers in the same hamlet. Normally, the Khmer get married to other Khmers, but in some cases in recent years they have married Kinh. For instance, in the hamlet, Mr. Lieu Ty's Khmer daughter got married to a Catholic Kinh man from outside the village. However, they still maintain their own religions in their family.

Khmer Customs and Culture in the Hamlet

Normally, there is one temple for every 50 or more Khmer households in the area. According to the Khmer monk leader, Ly Hung, who is in charge of the Khmer temple in Can Tho City, the Khmer pagoda in O Mon district was established a long time ago, in about 1895, during the French colonial stage. This pagoda plays a very important role in the spiritual life of the Khmers. Currently, Dao Nhu is in charge of this large, important Khmer pagoda. The Khmer pagoda of Prummanivonsa was established in Thoi Lai town in 1950, during the French colonial stage, according to Dao Thang, the Khmer monk leader who is in charge of the Khmer pagoda of Thoi Lai. This Khmer pagoda has been improved gradually since that time by the contributions of Khmers from inside and outside the town and by support from the different local authorities. The Khmers organize worship for their family happiness, wealth, health, productivity, successful harvest and better life in the future; thus, they invite the Khmer monks, whom they regard as supernatural, from the pagoda to perform these religious ceremonies at their houses or community. The Khmers also go to the Khmer pagoda to worship. After someone passes away, the Khmers burn the body. Some Khmers put the ashes in the Khmer pagoda, but most of them now keep them at home for worship.

The Khmers have many traditional cultural festivals during the year; for instance, they have three main festivals, which are Chol Chnam Thmey (Khmer New Year), Dolta (worship of the ancestors) and Ok Ombok (worship of the moon), as well as several others (e.g. Nhap Ha, Ra Ha, Dang Y [Kathina], Dang Bong, and Phat Dan). The Kinh now also enjoy joining in some of the Khmer festivals during the year (e.g. Chol Chnam Thmey, Dolta, etc.). Some Kinh people, together with the Khmers, give money to help support the organization of the festivals and ceremonies of the Khmers and participate in Khmer music shows.

Social Relations between Kinh and Khmer in the Hamlet

Patron-client relations occurred in the hamlet during the French colonial stage. Due to the vast rice fields, the landlords had to use a labor force comprised of the

local tenants to look after the rice production annually, under the landlords' patronage. Depending on the landlords, some interacted fairly with the tenants - they hired the tenants to work for them year round, paid them favorably for their efforts and let the tenants' families stayed on their land. Sometimes, the landowners supported the tenants with gifts, rice, food, etc. for their festivals, New Year and ancestor ceremonies, and provided them with health care. The tenants could even borrow cash or rice without interest. In contrast, some other landlords abused the patron-client relationship, forced the tenants to work hard for them for little or no compensation and lent cash or rice with high interest rates. Thus, some tenants were deeply indebted. Beyond the political conflict, this tough relationship between the landlords and tenants might be one of the reasons why some landlords were killed in the French colonial period. During and after the Saigon regime, farm laborers were often hired for cash wages within an ethnic group and also between the Khmer and Kinh groups. However, exchange labor was applied in some cases (e.g. simple work like putting up the roofs of small houses, etc.) in the poor and medium income households in this period. In theory, the agricultural cooperatives in the Mekong Delta in the 1980s directly used the unpaid labor of cooperative members instead of hired labor for farming, but in reality this form of unpaid labor is almost impractical. In particular, the production teams in this hamlet have still remained hired laborers for farming activities. Since the Doi Moi policy in 1986, the patron-client relationship has been mediated with money, creating "hired" laborers.

Land, Ethnicity, Religion, Politics and Livelihoods of Kinhs and Khmers in the Hamlet

According to the story of a 90 year old farmer in Tran Ba Cang, when he was born in 1920 the Kinhs and Khmers were claiming land in the Mekong Delta in general and in this hamlet in particular. This occurred during the pre-colonial and the French colonial periods. In that period, the vast swampland had not been exploited and cultivated much. In O Mon¹² District, only four percent of the area was cultivated in 1836. Rice fields represented 78 percent of the cultivated area. The people who

¹² O Mon district in the past covered three districts, Co Do, Thoi Lai and O Mon, which now belong to Can Tho City.

arrived in this area first and the ones who were more powerful (e.g. literates, mandarins, colonists, etc.) could claim and exploit more land for traditional rice farming than the others. However, some conflicts over the claiming of the swampland occurred between Khmer and Kinh settlers in this hamlet in the pre-colonization period.

Under French colonization, the canal systems in the rural area were dug and excavated gradually to serve for rice cultivation, commercialization, transportation and settlement in the Mekong Delta. Mr. Trieu had a high political position in Thoi Lai village at this stage, at the end of the nineteenth century, as a ‘Phó Tổng,’ or a mandarin of the French colonists. With this position, he forced the villagers to make a canal which was named Muong Khai, known as Xeo Xao canal at present. After that, he asked French administrators to establish new villages in order to exploit the swampland and the land of Kinh and Khmer settlers. With his powerful position, he gradually held more land and became a Kinh landlord, while more people had little or no land for rice production. Later on, his nephew, Mr. Chinh, became the Chief of the Village Council and his niece, Mrs. Chau, possessed the most land in this village.

In another case, Mr. Chiếu was called by a local term, “Ông xã Chiếu,” which refers to a powerful leader of a village who officially holds a lot of land as a Kinh landlord. He had a big family, including three wives and 13 sons and daughters. Additionally, he lived and worked in the village for the three historical periods: the colonization of the French, the Saigon regime together with the Liberal Front of South Vietnam regime and the reunification of Vietnam. His daughter joined the National Liberal Front of South Vietnam. During the war, different members of the same family could join different political regimes depending on each family member’s own prerogatives.

The war occurred between French colonists, together with the mandarins, and the patriots of the Vietnamese revolution, i.e. Vietminh. These people included different classes, ethnic groups and religious members. In fact, both regimes aimed to hold land and control people. In this hamlet, the French colonists, mandarins and religious Kinh and Khmer troops fought against the Vietminh beginning in 1945. However, a portion of Hoa Hao members was opposed to both French colonists and the Vietminh. Normally, the Khmers more commonly joined the soldiers of the

French and Saigon regime, rather than the Vietminh and Liberal Front of Southern Vietnam.

The patriots, who included literates, farmers, workers, tenants, and landless people, fought against the French colonists and many landlords. Therefore, the landlords moved to the city for security and, in the meantime, some tenants came back to the landlords' fields to continue the reclamation of land. Due to the war, the colonists forced the Khmers to move from remote areas, like the Tac Ca Di canal, to the Xeo Xao canal area near the market where there was more security than other places in Thoi Lai village.

The livelihoods of the farmers in the rural area were very difficult for the poor. Most farmers temporarily left their rice fields to escape from fighting in the war in the rural area and migrated to the urban area to do non-farm activities. Normally, older male and female farmers could continue farming to keep their land, but their lives were very dangerous. Some Kinh and Khmer farmers became landless because they had to leave their farmland for a long time due to the political and security problems, although they let their relatives use their land temporarily when they moved to the city. In practice, the farmers were taxed by both the colonists or Saigon regime and the Liberal Front of South Vietnam. However, the Liberal Front of South Vietnam did not tax the poor farmers.

The farmers in this hamlet had plentiful farmland during the French colonial period, due to the fact that there were large areas of land and a small population. Under the Saigon regime, the land of the farmers in South Vietnam gradually shrunk, through the introduction of many land policy changes (for example, during the Presidencies of Ngo Dinh Diem, then Nguyen Van Thieu), including the program entitled 'Land to the Tiller,' together with an increasing population. The land reform of Ngo Dinh Diem allowed each landlord household to allocate a maximum of 130 hectares of land for farming; any excess land was then bought by the state to sell to tenants. Under the land reform of Nguyen Van Thieu, each landlord household was allowed to have only 15 hectares of land for farming, while the rest of the land was bought by the state under a sponsor's fund from the USA. This land was offered to the tenant households with a maximum of four hectares per household and land use rights were certificated by the state. In response to the Land to the Tiller program, some

landlords had their large areas of land split between many households, not always within their family.

Mr. Chieu, a Kinh village official, is an example of someone who witnessed the land policy changes of President Nguyen Van Thieu. Prior to the dispossession of his land under the Land to the Tiller program, he possessed a large area of farmland of about 26 hectares. He offered up only 6.4 hectares of his land to his sons and daughters and retained 2.6 hectares for his own rice production. Therefore, about seventeen hectares of his farmland was claimed (Truất hữu) by the Saigon government and was distributed to 13 landless tenants living along Tac Ca Di canal in Thoi Thuan hamlet. After 1974, the amount of land he owned was smaller than before the land policy change (Si, June 2008).

In the case of Mr. Tran Van Di, a Kinh landlord, he had left home permanently for the security of the city during the war between Saigon and the National Liberal Front of South Vietnam; therefore, tenants cultivated rice on his land. Under the Land to the Tiller program, between 1970 and 1974 his land was dispossessed, with a total of 70 hectares including 39 hectares along the Xeo Xao canal, five hectares along the Thoi lai canal, and 26 hectares in O Mon district being offered to tenants, and with his daughter receiving compensation when he passed away. Similarly, Mr. Tran Van Thanh, a Kinh landlord, had his land of 34 hectares in Thoi Lai village taken by the government. A Kinh teacher named Mr. Hien had six hectares of his land dispossessed in Tac Ca Di in the same hamlet. Some landlords lived in other places, yet had land in this hamlet. (Cang, May 2009).

As a result, both the Kinh and the Khmer farmers in this hamlet had less land, although the land they were left with was still enough for one farm household to operate; one farm household was able to retain from one to five hectares of rice field prior to 1975. According to the oldest person in the hamlet, although both Kinh and Khmer farmers had the same conditions and difficulties during the war, particularly under the Nguyen Van Thieu regime, the Khmers' livelihoods were more vulnerable than those of the Kinh due to the limitations of their manpower resources (less education, poor management of households, and farming based). Thus, the land-ownership of the Khmers reduced faster than that of the Kinhs. The household land

here became fragmented after 1974. Land had to be at least 10 hectares per household, a scale favorable for profitable rice production (Cang, June 2009).

After the reunification of the country under the socialist regime, the landownership of the Kinh and Khmer in the Mekong Delta, particularly in the hamlet, came under a land policy the aim of which was egalitarian landowning for every farm household member. To achieve this, the production teams (the lower levels of the Agricultural Cooperative) cut the excess land from the large landowning households and offered it to the landless households or the small landowning households, in which the family laborers (main laborers, additional laborers, elderly people and children) were each given a different amount of land.

The limitations of this land reform caused some landownership conflicts among the farmers, because the state emphasized its key role in the arrangement of the agricultural sector under the new socialist orientation. The state played a very important role in the creation of 'transformation' and acted as a development agency. It simplified everything in the planning process in advance and took a top-down approach to the management of natural resources (farmland) and people (farmers). Each family member held a very small piece of land, from 0.05 to 0.2 hectares. Through the use of power relations, some local authorities made biased land offerings to their landless relatives who had just immigrated into the hamlet, even though they had no farming experience, while the other landless households were given no land. Moreover, some production team authority members made agreements with their relatives in advance about who would receive the land. In these cases, the receiving relatives implicitly borrowed the land, but did not return it later on. These decisions created conflicts among the farmers and made their living situations unsatisfactory, but the centralized power of the state at that time was very strict. However, the activities of the production teams in the hamlet were just as formal and the farmers understood that the farmland did not belong to them and that the agricultural materials were not enough for appropriate levels of production; therefore, production team members worked less hard and took little responsibility. This was the reason why rice production in the Mekong Delta became very low, leading to a lack of available rice for consumption throughout the whole country and also leading to the importing of food from overseas countries. The lives of the Kinh and Khmer farmers in the

production teams were tough during this period because their already small landholdings (under one hectare for a farm household) were further reduced due to the change in land policy, together with the return of the population to the rural areas from the cities and urban areas after the war.

Although the state tried to adjust the unreasonable distribution of land by restructuring landowning patterns, and also tried to solve the unsatisfactory situation of the majority of the farmers in the hamlet by allowing farmers to retain some land, the process under the amended land policies after 1988 allowed the negotiation of land to take place among the farmers, but with the local authorities acting as referees. As a result, those farmers (the receivers of land due to the land reforms) who were powerless became landless during this negotiation process. Gradually, the receivers of the land returned the land to the landowners. For instance, Mr. Cang (of household A) owned land before the establishment of the production teams, and Mr. Tay (of household B) possessed Mr. Cang's land during the production team period. Both are Kinh people. The production team took 0.6 hectares of Mr. Cang's land and offered it to Mr. Tay in 1985. Then, Mr. Tay cultivated rice on this land until 1988. Under the 1988 land policy, and under pressure from the original landowner (household A), the receiver (household B) of the land had to return the land after negotiating with the owner. Mr. Cang told his story as follows:

“I heard that a farmer (household A) negotiated with (household B) to receive his own land in Dinh Mon village during 1988-89; therefore, I went to see the leader of the production team and Mr. Tay, and told them that I would take back my land to cultivate rice. After that, I sowed his land with rice; he was angry and argued with me about that and gave his report to the village headmen to solve the problem. I had to attend many meetings to negotiate with him about this matter. Finally, I did succeed in my expectations and have continued to use this 0.6 hectares of land for rice production, but without compensation.” (May 2009)

According to Mr. Cang's observations, since returning the land some old landless people have been living on it with their sons and daughters, while some have moved to other places in order to survive; some are still there as hired laborers (doing non-farm or off-farm jobs), earning a subsistence living (May 2009).

2.5 Conclusion

From the third to the sixth century, the Mekong Delta was partially occupied by Khmer people. Land reclamation in the Mekong Delta actually began in the 17th century by Vietnamese and Khmers, because this delta consisted of swamp forestland which was uncultivated and underexploited. The Vietnamese empire expanded its control in this area and promoted an expansion of the cultivated areas to secure control over new territories. This administration let farmers settle where they wanted.

The Khmer people revolted against Nguyen domination from the second half of the 18th century until the first half of the 19th century, due to “the Khmers’ decline and the lack of guarantees of their land ownership” (Brocheux 1995:40). As Nguyen’s policy toward the Khmers varied with changing circumstances, the response of the Khmer people differed as well (Brocheux 1995:12).

Following the establishment of the villages, new migrants had to live outside of the village and could not have their own land to farm in the villages. They became hired laborers on farms belonging to the village mandarins.

“In the early nineteenth century, the Mekong Delta was really the land where most diverse creeds and religions coexisted, some coming from the North and the Center; others were from Khmer, Chinese, and Cham communities who had reclaimed land. This was the land of religious syncretism; there was a mixture of diverse creeds such as cult of ancestors, cult of natural forces, Buddhist creed, Brahmanic and fetishistic practices.” (Vien 1984:6-10)

The integration of the different ethnic groups into Vietnamese communities was a slow process, marked by periods of joint struggle and more or less conflict. Inter-ethnic differences were exploited by the colonial administration.

The Mekong Delta has included many ethnic communities and different settlers with various religions and beliefs. However, they have coexisted in the same administrative unit (e.g. hamlet, village, etc.) and they have undergone changes in order to communicate with one another and to exchange, absorb and adapt their diverse cultures.

In the process of socialist construction, egalitarian policies regarding the ethnic communities and their material and spiritual lives were implemented. Several ethnicity policies were offered to develop the ethnic minority communities and the

remote areas. However, the Khmers' material lives are often poorer than those of the Kinh, due to the limitations in resources and social capital that Khmer people face compared with the Kinh.

Khmer people have stayed in Can Tho in general, and in this hamlet in particular, for a long time, since the pre-colonial period. Because of the wars during the French colonial period and the Saigon regime, the Khmer and even the Kinh people were forced to migrate to other places around the Mekong Delta in order to escape the conflict. Therefore, almost all of the Khmer family names are no longer fixed in their original place. As a result, the Khmers and Kinh have lived together and married one another and there are currently nine Khmer families living in Thoi Thuan B hamlet, instead of only one family as there was in the past.

Under the Saigon regime, most landlords were Kinh and the Khmers' livelihoods were more vulnerable than those of the Kinh, due to their resource limitations (e.g. less education, limited social network, poor management of households and farm-based lives). Thus, the numbers of landowning Khmers declined faster than those of the Kinh. However, household land has become fragmented since 1975 due to land distribution resulting from land policies.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the history of land settlement and provided some information on landownership and land distribution in the Mekong Delta and in the village of my study up to the present time. In the next chapter, I will provide more discussion and some statistical information on the change in landownership status.