

COMMUNITY NATURE IN FISHING ACTIVITIES OF FISHERMEN IN NGHI SON ISLAND COMMUNE, TINH GIA DISTRICT, THANH HOA PROVINCE

Vu Van Tuyen

Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism

Email: vuvantuyen@dvttdt.edu.vn

Received: 04/11/2021

Reviewed: 09/11/2021

Revised: 12/11/2021

Accepted: 15/11/2021

Released: 20/11/2021

Fishermen often join in hard work and face a harsh environment that contains many unexpected and dangerous factors (storms, tornadoes, etc.) and other risks of motorboats. Therefore, the fishermen must rely on collective strength. This is the premise for the arising of friendship relationships, which are linked by blood relations and villages. The paper analyzes the community nature in fishing activities of fishermen in Nghi Son island commune, Tinh Gia district (Nghi Son town nowadays) in order to point out the social and cultural characteristics of the community in this area. At the same time, the author provides more documents and scientific arguments for promoting the positive side, overcoming some inadequacies in fishing activities, so that fishermen continue to go to the sea contributing to protecting the national sovereignty.

Key words: Nghi Son island commune; Fishing activities; Community

1. Introduction

Nghi Son is a commune located entirely on an island in the southeast sea of Tinh Gia district. The commune is bordered to the North, South and East by the East Sea, to the West by Hai Ha and Hai Thuong communes in Tinh Gia district.

Nghi Son Island, according to folklore, is also known as Nha Hai (the tooth of the sea), later changed to Cu Lao Bien. During the Ly - Tran dynasties, it was called Bien Loan Island; In the Nguyen Dynasty, it was changed into Bien Son. In the book *Dai-Nam-Nhat-Thong-Chi* of the National History of the Nguyen Dynasty mentioned that "Bien Son island is 7 miles outside Bang estuary, in Ngoc Son district, rising up in the middle of the sea. In the middle of

the mountain to the southwest, there is the well Tay Ngoc; on the top of the mountain to the north, there is a temple to worship God; to the south, there is a temple to worship Buddha; to the west there is a temple to worship Princess Mi Nuong with Vung Ngoc temple lying under. The flat slopes are inhabited. One mile to the south is Hon Me where sea swallows often flock to nest and boats often anchor to avoid storms" [4, p. 308].

According to statistics of Nghi Son Commune People's Committee in recent years, most of the commune's income comes from fishing activities. Fishing and seafood exploitation activities of fishermen in Nghi Son island commune have been formed for a long time. In the past, the inhabitants of the island mainly used labor tools such as boats, rafts, nets, reels, fishing rods, etc. Over time, traditional fishing methods which were heavily manual, with low catching efficiency, gradually disappeared. Instead, with advances in science and technology, through exchanging and learning from other localities, fishermen have gradually absorbed many new, high-yielding forms of fishing that are suitable for offshore fishing and the State's regulations on fishing.

2. Research overview

Community nature in general, community in economic activities in particular is one of the outstanding features of Vietnamese people. This issue has been discussed in many ethnographic, historical and cultural studies so far. The studies have confirmed that the community nature of the Vietnamese comes from the element "village" - the most basic and complete population unit. Community nature is different in each resident community, depending on the history of residents, livelihood methods based on the characteristics of natural geographical conditions...

Regarding the community nature of coastal fishing groups, up to now, there have been some authors discussed this issue such as Thieu, Nguyen Duy (2002), Lien, Tran Hong (2004), Tuyet, Phan Thi Yen (2014), Dinh, Bui Xuan (2004),... However, the authors mainly discuss the community of residents in large geographical areas, or the community of offshore fishing groups in some coastal areas of the South Central Coast.

The author's article mentions a smaller aspect: the community nature in fishing activities with the research subjects being mainly groups of fishermen in Nghi Son island commune, Tinh Gia district. The research aims to point out the social and cultural characteristics of fishing communities, provide additional documents and scientific arguments for promoting the positive aspects, and dealing some challenges in fishing activities, so that fishermen can continue to rely on the sea, develop their family economy, and contribute to protecting the country's sovereignty over seas and islands.

3. Research methods

To complete this article, the author used many different research methods simultaneously. Besides the methods of researching secondary documents, ethnographic fieldwork was applied. Accordingly, the author conducted many different field trips to learn about the study area; retrospective investigation of seniors about the history of the island's inhabitants, the institution of village organization, traditional forms of fishing as well as related taboos and rituals... The author also participated in some fisherman's activities, such as going fishing; interviewing nearshore and offshore fishermen to better understand their profession and the community nature in their fishing activities.

4. Research content

4.1. Factors affecting community nature in fishing activities

4.1.1. Professional characteristics

Most forms of fishing include many stages with heavy work; therefore, they must rely on collective strength with a large requirement for human resources. Forms of near-shore fishing require at least 5-7 workers, sometimes can be less than 2-3 people (such as fishing in the river, bagua nets...); Offshore fishing requires more manpower. For example, with longline fishing, to effectively go out to sea and catch fish, there must be from 10 to 12 people in each sea trip, including a captain, a chief engineer who is in charge of operating the ship, and a chief (cook). Fishing nets are released sequentially while each person is responsible for specific work.

The value of the ship is also a factor affecting the community nature of the fishermen. For effective nearshore fishing, a ship with fishing devices worth billions of dong is required; And for offshore fishing, the ship and the fishing devices are up to tens of billions of dong. For fishermen, not everyone can easily get the above money; therefore, they need to "call" for the capital contribution from others to build ship and buy fishing devices. Besides, in order to prepare for offshore fishing, it is necessary to have expenses for each trip (food, drinks, engine oil, ice and many other items, estimated at hundreds of millions of dong). Some people, after going fishing for a long time, luckily save some money or thanks to the support of support of their parents and siblings, they can afford to buy their own boats and nets. However, in order to have more financial resources for fishing trips and reduce risks from the impacts of natural disasters, many people still call for the captial contribution from other people (usually siblings and relatives) and ask more friends to fish together.

Fishermen's fishing methods depend a lot on natural factors (weather, wave regime, tides, clouds, bright moon, especially wind and storm). Fishermen often face many unexpected and dangerous factors, such as storms, waves... with great intensity. Many storms and waves caused heavy loss of life and property to fishermen. Many fishermen lost their loved ones, the breadwinner of the family, and lost all their property (ship, fishing devices) after hurricanes. Unusual factors of nature require fishermen to have a very high sense of community nature in

order to cope with natural disasters while fishing, and to overcome consequences after natural disasters both at sea and inland.

4.1.2. Social factors

According to preserved documents, Nghi Son island commune was formed in association with the land reclamation process under the reign of King Le Dai Hanh. To carry out the reclamation, King Le Dai Hanh sent General Le Phuc to inspect a number of northern coastal areas and the central region for the purpose of economic development and national defense. During that period, the coastal area of Ngoc Son district had a negligible population. By the 12th century, the population became more and more crowded and permanent settlements were formed. According to genealogical records, many residents in the coastal areas from Nghi Son to Hai Thanh have different families entering the Nguyen family, Le family... and a number of families migrated from Dang Trong such as the Tran family, Pham family [1, p.16].

According to *Complete Annals of Dai Viet*, in December of the year of the Rat, year of Thuan Thien (about the beginning of January, 1013), King Ly Thai To went to quell the rebellion in Dien Chau, on his way back at the gate of Bien Loan, it turned dark with fierce wind and thunder, the King prayed that "Just because the people of Dien Chau did not follow the teachings, lived violently, brutalized other people, their crimes piled up; therefore, they cannot be tolerated or beaten ... " After his praying, everything became normal. This is an event that proves the existence of Bien Son thousands of years ago.

In the seventeenth century, the country was divided into two regions: the Inner region (Dang Trong) and the Outer region (Dang Ngoai), a few traders and fishermen originally from Bo Lo and Cha Va in Dang Trong and people from the mainland came to the island to live, forming Bien Son ward. From the time of Quang Trung (1788 - 1792) onward, the island was named Thuy Bien village.

At the end of the Le dynasties, at the beginning of the Nguyen dynasties, according to the book *Names of Vietnamese villages and communes in the early 19th century*, Nghi Son island, due to its population from many places, was not stable in terms of organizational structure, so it was organized into Tu ward, Bien Son belonging to Duyen La, Ngoc Son district, Tinh Gia district, Thanh Hoa town.

Also in the Nguyen Dynasty, in the 9th year of Minh Menh (Mau Ty, 1828), due to the important military position of Bien Son, the court built here one seaport checkpoint and one military unit with the same name of Bien Son. On the island, there is a fortress of Tinh Hai with a flag tower, a military house and 4 cannons [4, p. 320]. Nowadays, there are traces about the citadel and fortress, even the barrel of a cannon.

The elderly said that during this time, there were many families from Cua Hoi (Nghe An) emigrating to Nghi Son such as the Le family, the Dau family. These families were influenced

by King Minh Menh's policy of banning Christianity. During the migration process, these fishermen found that Bien Son beach has a favorable position, surrounded by mountains. In the beginning, these families lived on boats, going fishing. After a period of settlement, at the beginning of the twentieth century, they began to move ashore to settle into villages and develop their traditional craft. It can be said that the village is a very communal institution, which is shown in blood relations, neighbors, customs (marriages, funerals), forms of worship, festivals during the year. The village community in Nghi Son seems to be strengthened and consolidated when the fishermen faced with the harsh sea and island environment to live by different livelihoods. Accordingly, the sense of bloodline and village values in the fishermen of Nghi Son island commune is very bold and profound.

Customary factors also have a great impact on social relations and community nature in fishing activities of fishermen. When men go fishing for a long time at sea, their wives, children, and parents at home always pray for their safety and are looking forward to their return. The fact that people in the same village and their relatives go fishing together is a great psychological and spiritual support for them; meanwhile, their wives and children, their parents at home can also care, encourage, share, and help each other in difficult situation.

In summary, livelihood activities at sea, especially offshore, require fishermen to have forms of association to maintain production and related activities. The basis for ensuring the durability of the association is the trust between boat owners and people in the commune. Blood relations and neighborhood are the factors that ensure the most solid connection.

4.2. Some expressions of the community nature of fishermen in fishing

4.2.1. Bloodline in fishing

This aspect of community nature is evident in all forms, in which the ownership relationship with the ship and the fishing devices - working tools - the biggest and most important asset of the fisherman is shown in two relationships and forms of ownership are: Shared boat - shared net, Boat owner - boat mate.

*** Shared boat – shared net relationship**

Shared boat – shared net relationship is a type of relationship where fishermen contribute capital to jointly own a means (boat and fishing devices), together catch and share products. This form of business cooperation is in line with the aspirations of the fishermen in the commune, because a family cannot afford to buy fishing nets, boats and equipment, so they cooperate and contribute capital. However, depending on the economic conditions of each family, they have different ways of contributing capital, they can partly contribute or more. The more they contribute, the more income they earn, in the spirit of equality for mutual benefits.

People who contribute capital to the same boat (the same ship) is called a boat association. They appoint a person with prestige, seafaring experience or favorable family background as

captain. Today, when the ships are upgraded and modernized, it is necessary to have a certificate of completion of the training course for captains and chief engineers to steer the ship. The captain is the person who decides the direction, fishing locations, and form of fishing; assigns work to members; settles the internal relations of the boat association; even cooperates and exchanges with other ships. The captain is also the person who deals with the government on related issues (registration, taxes paying, insurance purchase, contribution to the rituals of the village community according to local customs...). Although the captain is responsible for a lot of things mentioned above, he enjoys the same benefits as the crew members, according to his contributed shares. Normally, if the ship is doing well, the captain is trusted to continue; However, in case of not doing well for several consecutive trips, another captain must be elected.

There is a first-mate to support the captain to manage the work of the crew in case the captain is sick or absent.

Boat associations all have conventions on capital contribution, labor contribution and product division, recruitment, fund using, and regulations on wage (and visiting) for members, on the valuation of assets for division when a member requests to be separated from the association...

“Hun” or “shared boat – shared net” is prominently shown in blood and inter-blood relationships. Among those who need the support of capital contribution, family members are the top concern, followed by paternal and maternal brothers, brother-in-law, then friends and neighbors. Statistics at the survey sites show that most of the ships have the capital contribution from their siblings, their descendants, and other people in the family.

Currently, this form of business appears mainly in the squid fishing. This is a profession that can be exploited in both inland and offshore areas. During the survey, we learned that there are only 2 people contributing capital in squid fishing, but sometimes it can be 3 or 4 people. This depends on how much capital they need to invest. The more investments there are, the bigger money and human resource they have. Sometimes, in the boat association, the amount of money contributed by the members is not the same, which depends on their financial capacity. If there are only 2-3 people (mainly in Nghi Son) contributing capital, while squid fishing needs from 5 to 7 workers, the ship owners have to "call for more friends" (the employed). In these cases, there are specific ways of distributing products to ensure the interests of capital contributors as well as the working days of those who go fishing with them.

In principle of capital contribution, most of the people who buy the ship together are siblings or sworn friends, sometimes are the mother-in-law and the son-in-law. The amount of capital contribution is not necessarily equal but depends on the circumstances of each family. For example, in the case of Mr. Huan, Duong Cong in Trung Son village, the 125CV ship was

worth 700 million VND nominally owned by the two brothers, but in reality, most of the investment money was spent by him.

In the past, the shared boat – shared net relationship was a very popular form of business in Nghi Son. According to statistics, at present, there are 12 fishing boats in Nghi Son in the form of the shared boat – shared net relationship, focusing on the squid fishing and longline fishing (Table 1).

Table 1: Statistics on the form of the shared boat – shared net with blood relationship in Nghi Son island commune

No.	Boat's owner	Village	Forms of fishing	Capital contributors
1	Dau Van Thuong	Bac Son	Longline fishing	Three siblings
2	Dau Van Hong	Bac Son	Longline fishing	Wife's brother
3	Dau Van Chung	Bac Son	Longline fishing	Two siblings
4	Le Van Hung	Bac Son	Longline fishing	Three siblings
5	Duong Cong Huan	Trung Son	Squid fishing	Sworn brothers
6	Nguyen Van Tuan	Trung Son	Squid fishing	Mother-in-law; wife's brother
7	Nguyen Van Tuan	Thanh Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings
8	Luu Van Chinh	Thanh Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings
9	Nguyen Van Cau	Thanh Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings
10	Nguyen Van Thanh	Thanh Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings
11	Tran Van Tho	Nam Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings
12	Nguyen Van Thang	Nam Son	Squid fishing	Two siblings

Source: Actual survey in Nghi Son island commune

It can be shown in the table that the individuals who contribute capital are those who are related by blood, wife's brothers, and sworn brothers. The advantage of this form of contribution is that disagreements and conflicts rarely occur and if they do, it is easy to resolve, not leading to the separation of ships. Even when it comes to the separation, it is easy to handle on the basis of negotiation without the government's intervention.

*** Boat owner - boat mate**

This is a form of relationship between boat owners and employees (called boatmates). Boat owners are those who have economic conditions, buy or build new ships, buy fishing nets; may or may not participate directly in fishing. In Nghi Son, most boat owners are directly involved in fishing. They call boatmates to fish with and divide the catch by agreement, normally according to common local fishing practices and local customs.

In fact, the "boatmates" fishing on ships in this form of ownership are those who do not have capital. They work for the ship owners to receive the agreed wage and in accordance with the results of each fishing trip. Each ship as well as each form of fishing has its own regulations on how to calculate the wages for different "classes" of boatmates (due to the framework of the article, we cannot give detailed information).

On investigating at Nghi Son, we found that most of the boat owners and boatmates are related by blood. Many boat owners gather boatmates who are children and brothers in the family; for example, in Bac Son village, there are 6 sons and 2 grandchildren on the boat of Mr. Hoa, Le Van going fishing together or there are 7 sons on the boat of Mr. So, Nguyen Van going fishing together. In addition, there are many boat owners and boatmates who are father-in-law and son-in-law, sworn brothers going fishing together. If there are no brothers to go fishing with, the neighbors are employed.

The admission of brothers, descendants in the family to go fishing together in the same ship also has the following reasons and benefits:

- Newly married people, who cannot afford to buy their own boats or ships for fishing, can rely on relatives to avoid being "exploited".

- Young people, who are lacking of fishing experiences for the first time, need to follow their fathers and uncles to be carefully and meticulously taught the techniques and fishing experience.

- Providing jobs for family members, in the spirit of "Blood is thicker than water", which is also a means and a form to bind blood relations.

- Provide stable source of labor on a ship for fishing trips.

- Brothers and relatives can support each other in fishing; even in some dangerous cases, they may be willing to sacrifice for each other.

- The consensus in fishing among brothers and relatives [According to Mr. Tri, Le Van (born in 1958), in Bac Son village, Nghi Son commune].

Many ship owners as well as crew members, when being interviewed, shared that it is an advantage for a ship owner with many relatives to go fishing together.

It can be said that the boat owner - boatmate relationship is a popular form of business in Nghi Son. Out of the total 124 boats of the whole commune, 112 boats apply this form, mainly in the forms of squid fishing, longline fishing, bagua balls,...; in which, in Bac Son village, up to 80% of boat owners catch by longline fishing. This is a traditional fishing of the residents in the commune¹.

4.2.2. The community nature in the village

¹ Field survey data in 2017

In capital cooperation, in addition to the strong blood relation and inter-blood relationship, it is also reflected in the relationship between the community of the village and the relationship of friends: people in the same village (in which the neighbor relationship is prominent), people who are villagers but of the same age contribute capital to buy boats (together with fishing nets).

In Nghi Son island commune, out of 124 boats, 38 boats are funded by neighbors and friends, concentrated in two villages of Thanh Son and Nam Son, because fishermen in these two villages mainly catch by rods and nets. Their fishing often lasts for 2-3 days; therefore, it is necessary to have stable labor, both in quantity and in quality.

The capital contributors in these ships said that they did not cooperate with brothers and relatives, and they work with friends and neighbors instead for many reasons:

- Siblings and relatives do not have the same capital, even do not have enough capital to contribute.

- Siblings and relatives sometimes don't get along with each other.

- People in the same village have lived together since childhood, even living together for generations, understanding each other from the "roots of hair" about each other's background, family background, personality, etc.; therefore, it is easier to choose a partner. Friends are often at the same age, play together for many years, understand each other's personality. In the capital contribution with these relationships, the partners are equal in both work and behavior. In case of disputes or conflicts, it is also easy to "talk" to each other in the direction of resolution. If the conflict cannot be reconciled and forced to separate the ship, it is also easy to "fairly share" with each other.

In addition to capital contribution, the relationship between neighbors and friends is also shown when they go fishing. The boat owners (individually owned or co-owned) not only ask their boat mates who can be their relatives or neighbors and villagers for help, especially with longline fishing which requires a lot of manpower. Some ship owners believe that, except in the case of siblings, uncles and aunts, etc., who have to take care of each other, they do not ask for help from their relatives because in many cases, relatives often rely on each other and do not trying their best. In other cases, some boat owners who went fishing for mackerel in the Gulf of Tonkin said that they did not call any of their relatives out for fear of being known as taking advantage and exploiting them.

5. Discussion

Fishermen's fishing activities include different stages with heavy work; therefore, it is necessary for them to rely on collective strength. This is the premise for the arising of friendship, which are mainly linked by blood relations, or the relationship of villagers.

In addition, risky fishing activities are the premise for the birth of religious elements such as worshipping the Four Saints, the King Tran Quy Phi and the Sea God. These issues will be further discussed by the author in future studies.

It can be said that the above social and cultural factors have helped fishermen overcome dangerous challenges every time they go fishing.

6. Conclusion

Residents of Nghi Son island commune have a tradition of near-shore and offshore fishing. In which, there are forms of fishing implemented in the waters of Me Island and the Gulf of Tonkin, notably longline fishing, net fishing, and bagua cages.

The forms of fishing in the sea, especially the forms of offshore fishing, have dominated the relationship of family and village of the fishing community, reflected in the ownership of the ship (boat). Those who are siblings, brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces, family members, etc. occupy the leading position in boating in the same net. Besides, the relationship between neighbors and village community still exists quite strongly.

The above-mentioned relationships have united and supported fishermen in generating capital to buy ships (boats), fishing tools and raw materials to go fishing; supported each other in offshore fishing; created the main source of income for the family, contributing to affirming the sovereignty of the country's sea and islands. In these relations, the positive aspects are basic and outstanding, which should be maintained and promoted in the current fishing activities and socio-economic development.

References

- [1]. Nghi Son Commune Party Committee (2013), *History of Nghi Son Commune Party Committee 1945 - 2013*, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [2]. Lien, Ngo Si et al., *Complete Annals of Dai Viet*, Culture Publishing House, Hanoi, volume 1, p. 263.

[3]. Lien, Tran Hong (editor) (2004), *Vietnamese fishing community in the South*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.

[4]. National History of the Nguyen Dynasty (2006), *Dai-Nam-nhat-thong-chi* (translation), Thuan Hoa Publishing House, Hue, p.320.

[5]. Thieu, Nguyen Duy (2004), *Fishing community in Vietnam*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.

[6]. Tuyet, Phan Thi Yen (2014), *Social - economic - cultural life of fishermen and residents of the Southern seas*, National University Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City.

[7]. Tuyen, Vu Van (2017), *Living methods of residents in Nghi Son commune, Tinh Gia district, Thanh Hoa province*, PhD's thesis in Anthropology.