

915.977 5

ĐC

A100B

COMMISSION FOR PROPAGANDA AND IDEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
DONG NAI PARTY COMMITTEE

**A 300 - YEAR HISTORY
OF
BIEN HOA - DONG NAI**

1998

GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF DONG NAI PROVINCE

I. The Nam of Dong Nai

Studies by archaeologists show that man began to settle down along the Dong Nai River during the Old Stone Age about five hundred thousand years ago.

The once famous people like Le Quy Don, Trinh Hoai Duc, Nguyen Sieu and history researchers, archaeologists have had discussions on the origin of the geographical name of Dong Nai.

According to *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* (a famous history book), "*Loc Da Market of Phuoc Chanh District in the south of Phuoc Long downstream (Dong Nai River) used to be a deerfield long long ago. That is why it is called Dang Nai (deerfield), or Loc Dong.*"

In Do Quyen and Le Trung Hoa's opinion, "*Geographically, there have been at least 4 names closely related to the area which are Hang Nai (deercave), Nha Nai (deer house), Ho Nai (deer valley) and Dong Nai (deerfield).*" The name Dong Nai appeared for the first time in a report by the Catholic Church on information about parishioners in 1747. And later in 1772 the name Dong Nai also appeared in the Annamese-Latin Dictionary by Pigneau de Bihaine both in Vietnamese and in Vietnamese Hieroglyph.

II. Administrative Units of Dong Nai Since 1698

In 1698 King Nguyen Phuc Chu sent Nguyen Huu Canh to the South. He called this newly-found land Gia Dinh Province. This province had 2 districts, which are Phuoc Long (Bien Hoa nowadays) and Tan Binh (Sai Gon-Gia Dinh).

After several changes, Bien Hoa Region came into being in 1808. Later it was changed to Bien Hoa Province which included Phuoc Long and 4 districts.

Here is a brief description of Bien Hoa Province in *The Geography of Dong Nai* (1820) by Trinh Hoai Duc.

"It is 542 miles from East to West, 587 miles from North to South. Bien Hoa is west of Than Mau Mountain and the Ocean, south of Phien An Region, east of a primitive ethnic tribe, Son Man and north of a long river."

The then Bien Hoa consisted of Phuoc Long, 4 districts and 307 hamlets. The 4 districts were Phuoc Long, Binh An, Long Thanh and Phuoc An.

On December 18, 1861, France and Spain took control of Bien Hoa and the name of Bien Hoa remained until 1945.

Since the French Colonialists began their exploitation of the colony during the early 20th century, the number of hamlets had increased from 151 to 172. The number increased by 21% during a quarter of the century.

After the August Revolution in 1945, the Administrative Committee of Bien Hoa Province was established. Basically, there was no change in the administrative units of Bien Hoa, except that there were no regions.

In 1959 Sai Gon Government divided the province into 3 new provinces: Bien Hoa, Long Khanh and Phuoc Thanh.

During the war against the U.S. imperialism, the province together with Thu Dau Mot, Ba Ria, etc. was divided and combined several times into Ba Bien, Thu Bien, Sub-Region 4, Thu Bien Sub-Region, U1, etc.

After 1975, Bien Hoa, Ba Ria, Long Khanh and Tan Phu were combined into Dong Nai (in January, 1976). In 1976 Dong Nai Province had 1 city, 1 town, 9 districts and 1 island. (154 wards altogether)

In 1979, Dong Nai Province had 1 city, 8 districts and 1 island. (141 wards)

In 1985, the province had 1 city, 1 town and 7 districts. (147 wards)

In 1990, Dong Nai had 1 city, 1 town and 7 districts. (155 wards)

In 1992, the province had 1 city, 1 town and 6 districts. (119 wards)

In 1995, Dong Nai had 1 city and 8 districts. (163 wards)

Following are the changes in district borders since 1978:

- December 29, 1978: Duyen Hai District became annex to HCMC.
- May 30, 1979: Vung Tau-Con Dao Special Zone formed.
- December 9, 1982: new district Truong Sa cut off from part of Long Dat District to become annex to Phu Khanh Province.
- December 23, 1985: Vinh An Town formed.
- April 10, 1991: Xuan Loc District divided into Long Khanh District and Xuan Loc District; Tan Phu District divided into Tan Phu District and Dinh Quan District.
- August 12, 1991: Chau Thanh District, Long Dat District and Xuyen Moc District cut off and a new province, Ba Ria-Vung Tau, formed from these 3 districts and Vung Tau-Con Dao Special Zone.
- March 26, 1994: Long Thanh District divided into Long Thanh District and Nhon Trach District.
- August 29, 1994: Vinh Cùu District formed from the old Vinh An Town.

ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS IN DONG NAI

I. PRE-HISTORY AND EARLY HISTORY

The archeological sites and findings in Dong Nai were soon discovered and studied through many phases. The first phase involved the random discoveries from the late 19th century. Due to the emergence of some discovered stone stools, some archeological sites are marked on the Archeological World map. The second phase lasted in the decade of the late 1960 and the early 1970 in the 20th century. This is the phase of systematic and scientific research work. With the great contribution made by such French scholars as E.S. Saurin, H. Fontaine, L Malleret, preliminary information about the civilization of the ancient peoples in Dong Nai was realizable. The third phase was the time from 1975 till now.

Many tools made by ancient people in the Palaeolithic were discovered in a variety of places in Dong Nai: Dau Giay, An Loc, Hang Gon, Cam Tiem, Binh Loc, Nui Dat, Phu Quy. Such tools as stone hoes, axes, knives and even pottery in the archeological sites Cau Sat, Binh Da, Go Me .. showed the early agricultural development made in Dong Nai . At the archeological sites - Cai Van, Binh Da, Phuoc Tan, Ben Do, Go Mit, Doi Xoai, Trang Bom, Song Ray , Rua Island, Mount Gom, through investigation and analysis, it was proved that the ancient people in Dong Nai lived in settlements - villages along the riverbanks, the coast and on the hillsides.

Like the other inhabitants in Vietnam, the ancient people in Dong Nai existed in the Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Culture Metal (Bronze and Iron) Age. The iron tools and weapons enabled the ancient people to conquer Nature, to maintain generations and to flourish the land. The artefacts like Binh Da Lithophone, Long Giao shield, Hang Gon Stone tombs showed that the ancient people in Dong Nai made great development in culture, art and technology like the one made by the Southern Asia people and the Vietnamese.

According to Chinese historical records in the early centuries A.D., there were many primitive states like Kingdom Phu Nam, Champa, Chan Lap with their cultures influenced by the Indian one. Through archeology, scientists discovered such cultural vestiges as temples, settlements, tombs, god statues, stellas and ornaments which were the same style as the ones in the Mekong Delta, in the North of Malaysia Peninsula and in the South of Thailand dated from the first century to the 7th century A.D. These cultures were found in the West of the Hau River and mostly in Oc Eo, Ba The (An Giang province) and scientists named this culture "Oc Eo," which was discovered at 23 different places in Dong Nai.

Archeology showed that Dong Nai was the land where the primitive people existed and developed from the prehistoric period to the time when the first Vietnamese people set foot on. In more than 10 centuries A.D..., the people in Dong Nai mixed Oc Eo culture with the other cultures to get a native one for their own.

Thanks to the studies of anthropology, it is the ethnic minorities (now Xtieng, Chau Ro, Chau Ma, Ko Ho) that are the offspring of the ancient people in Dong Nai, who formerly

possessed Dong Nai. Society was organized into tribes, each of which was led by a tribal leader. They practiced matriarchy, which is now still found in rituals.

In the late 15th century, Dong Nai entered the period when Dai Viet culture expanded to the South. In the regions around the middle sector of the Dong Nai River, a new culture based on the tradition of "the native culture "or "Dai Lang culture" spread quickly to the lower part. The culture in Dong Nai 3 centuries ago was the combination of the southern Tay Nguyen culture and Dai Viet culture.

II. LAND CLEARING BY THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE FROM THE LATE 16TH CENTURY AND THE 17TH CENTURY.

1. The Socio-Economic Background In Dong Nai In the Late 16th Century

The land in Southern Viet Nam in common and in Dong nai in particular was basically uncleared and isolated in the late 16th century. This assumption made sense because Le Qui Don also stated: *"In the mid 18th century , in Gia Dinh district (Dong Nai), thick forests stretched thousands of miles far away from Can Gio Estuary, Loi (Soai) Rap, Cua Dai, Cua Tieu."*

According to the remaining historical records , in this immense land then existed such peoples as Xtieng, Ma, Chau Ro, Ko Ho, M' Nong (mostly Xtieng, Ma). However, in the late 16th century, the population was thin; the production methods were simple and the standard of living was very low. In addition, Khemer people settled scatterly in several remote hamlets on the high strips of land.

2. Land Clearing By The Viet Nameese People In The Late 16th Century And the 17th Century.

In the 16th century, Dong Nai was almost deserted but crowded with the new Viet Nameese settlers, most of whom immigrated from Thuan Quang in the late 16 century and the early century. This immigration resulted from the bloody war between the two feudal families - Trinh Royal family in Dang Trong and Nguyen Royal family in Dang Ngoai - in the late 16th century.

Suffering from exploitation and war, poor peasants had to leave their homes, gardens and villages for a better life. It was the southern land that used to belong to Kingdom Cham Pa and later Dong Nai - Gia Dinh. It was an unpossessed but fertile land which greatly attracted the Vietnamese's immgration.

The former Vietnamese migrated to the new land of Dong Nai - Gia Dinh before the Separation of Trinh and Nguyen but the latter, in a great number in the late 16th and in the early 17th.

The number of immigrants to Dong Nai increased more and more especially when Lord Nguyen laid an administrative foundation in Dong Nai.

Towards the late 17th century, Lord Nguyen encouraged waves of immigrants to this new land. They first settled in Mo Xoai (also Moi Xuy or Ba Ria now) from which they moved freely to Dong Nai by different means of transport chiefly by boats, sampans or walking upward the river to Dong Nai. The earliest settlements included Nhon Trach, Long Thanh, An Hoa, Ben Go, Ban Lan, Pho Island, Ngo island, Kinh island, Tan Chanh island, Kinh island, Tan Trieu island ...

The period of non-stop immigration to Dong Nai lasted in nearly one century. In 1698, following Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu's instruction, Nguyen Huu Canh came to Dong Nai, established the administrative system, managed the land clearing and stabilized the social security. The population increased to more than 40,000 families with 200,000 people (each family had 5 members on average.)

3. Land Clearing By the Vietnamese Settlers

The book *"The History of Geography of Gia Dinh"* by Trinh Hoa Duc says that the strips of land on both sides of the Phuoc Long River in Nhon Trach district, Long Thanh, Vinh Cuu, Bien Hoa city and the islands Pho Rua - Kinh - Tan Chanh, Tan Trieu supplied with fresh water for daily services and cultivation and they, therefore, attracted the Vietnamese to settle first.

From the early 17th century to the mid-18th century, the areas along the Phuoc Long River (Dong Nai) from Nhon Trach to Vinh Cuu were successively cleared for gardens and fields by the Vietnamese immigrants.

Especially, in favourable places like Pho island, the settlers came in a great number in the decades of the early 17th century.

The Vietnamese settlers in Dong Nai from the late 17th century originated from the poor peasants who immigrated here for a better life. They earned their living by practising small-scale business, fishing, hunting, ore exploitation, cotton- weaving, mat- making, pottery-making, but most of them worked mainly on agriculture. The cleared land was used for planting rice and building gardens.

The achievements in land clearing made by the Vietnamese migrants in nearly one century gradually changed the socio-economic chart of Dong Nai. and turned the former isolated area with unexploited forests in the 16th century to a prosperous area with an abundant granary of rice so the cargo transport to the districts in the central of Vietnam became fast and convenient.

The achievements in land clearing and agriculture as well as handicraft in the first stage laid a strong foundation for the development of land clearing and commercial economy in Dong Nai - Gia Dinh in the successive stages, especially in the following period after 1698 when large waves of immigrants were sponsored by the Nguyen Feudal authorities.

III. THE BIRTH OF THE PORT BY PHO ISLAND.

In 1679, the two generals Duong Ngan Dich and Tran Thuong Xuyen of Ming Dynasty in China brought his 3,000 relatives and guards to take refuge in Vietnam and Lord Nguyen allowed them to settle in Bien Hoa, chiefly in Pho Island (Those relating to Tran Thuong Xuyen). Pho Island is a place surrounded by the river convenient for travelling from the North to the South, to Cambodia and to the West of Nam Bo. It was also rich in clay available for making pottery. These favourable natural conditions stimulated the development of agriculture, industry and trade. Pho Island was also named "Dai Pho, Dong Pho or Gian Pho".

By 1698, Pho Island or Gian Pho had 3 inhabited hamlets (Cho Chieu, Rach Lo Gom and Xom Chua) where the Vietnamese first settled, Pho Island was cleared in 3 periods:

- The first period from the early 17th to 1679 was the one during which the Vietnamese cleared fresh land and settled in 3 hamlets.
- The second period from 1679 to 1698 was the one during which a group of mandarins in Ming dynasty led by Tran Thuong Xuyen settled and built houses and roads.
- The period after 1698 was the one when Vietnamese immigrants were permitted to come there by Lord Nguyen. Tran Thuong Xuyen accompanied by his men built the streets for the trade development.

Pho Island was the place where the following handicraft work developed early: mat-making, silk-weaving, pottery-making, bronze-moulding, sugarcane producing, cake-making, lumbering, flying fire cracker-making It showed the economic development which was the basis for the later establishment of the biggest center of trade and transport in Nam Bo. Pho Island also called "Nong Nai Dai Pho" in the 18th century was described as the place where *"Business men gathered in a great number; ships and boats densely anchored; great trade businesses flourished in a crowded and busy commercial place."*

The Chinese and the Vietnamese founded Nong Nai Dai Pho. Business here was a kind of import and export with a variety of storages.

On Pho Island, the Chinese businessmen played an important part in the commercial development because they dealt with most of imported goods and exported goods. Exported cargo was chiefly rice and imported goods included Chinese pottery, silk, cotton, traditional Chinese medicine and pharmaceutical products.

The commercial economy on Pho Island flourished from the late 17th century (after 1698) and reached to the highest in the period of 1738 and 1775.

Nong Nai Dai Pho was formed as a port in the deep interior (100 km away from the sea) thanks to its favourable natural features and due to the requirement of establishing a trade center in the cleared area. However, land clearing spread so quickly that a new trade center was founded in Ben Nghe – Sai Gon. The struggle for political power among the group of businessmen and the fight between Tay Son and Nguyen Anh ruined Pho Island in the event of 1776.

"Since then, this place turned into an isolated island; even after being restored previous residents returned but in a small number not less than one percent compared to the former."

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I. Economic Development under the Reign of Nguyen

From the seventeenth century, fresh land in the South of Viet Nam, including Dong Nai, was increasingly cleared by the emigrants on a large scale.

On the basis of emigration forces and the South reclamation, Nguyen Phuc Chu appointed Nguyen Huu Canh to governor of the South. Nguyen Huu Canh carried out a very important task, namely, to establish and stabilize the system of the state machinery in the newly-cleared land. He established "... *the land of Dong Nai as Phuoc Long District, building Tran Bien Palace and established the land of Sai Gon as Tan Binh District building Phien Tran Palace ...*"

In Nguyen Huu Canh viceroy, territory including Gia Dinh Canton was expanded 1,000 miles, with 4,000 households. He founded villages and communes, set boundary, determined land taxes, tax rules and formed citizen register books.

Besides these, Nguyen Huu Canh implemented "national unique" policy, making full use of potential of Chinese community, and stabilized the social order to help them develop the land of Dong Nai.

Thanks to the reclaiming ways and "easy" ruling policy such as free land holding, free-slave trade, etc. to strengthen labour force, to encourage commerce Nguyen Government pushed land clearing, and set up hamlets in Dong Nai-Gia Dinh area. This place became a big granary and rice could be sold in every part of the country: "*Gao Nai, Ria, Ca Ri, Rang*" (*Rice in Dong Nai, Ba Ria; eggplants in Phan Ri, Phan Rang*).

Nguyen Dynasties from Gia Long, Minh Mang to Thieu Tri, Tu Duc always pushed land clearing. From 1802 to 1855, four Nguyen Court "*issued 25 instructions on forest-clearing throughout the country. Colonists were provided with farming implements and rice seed. The government granted lands and loaned rice seeds to those who didn't have land. These wouldn't be returned after the crop.*"

In 1836, Bien Hoa had 14,129 hectares to be reclaimed, made up 2.35% of the total cleared-land in the South.

The reclamation land policy of Nguyen Dynasty and the great efforts of emigrants contributed greatly to the economics development of Bien Hoa.

II. Traditional Careers

Thanks to different ways of forest-clearing, agriculture has been developed in Bien Hoa as well as in other places in the South. Bien Hoa contributed to making "*a big granary in the South*".

Handicraft-making was considered an important economic activity and the forte of a group of Chinese emigrants living in Pho Island. Despite its thin population, Bien Hoa was one of the 2 provinces that had the most markets (it had 18 markets out of 93 markets in the six provinces in the southern part).

Other careers were also developed in Bien Hoa such as iron mining, iron forging, carving , pottery, stone carving, etc. to meet the needs of life. Especially stone carving, handed down from generation to generation, is a job that has produced many talented craftsmen in Dong Nai.

III. Dong Nai Economy from 1861 to 1975

1. From 1861 to 1945

a. Agriculture

After having occupied Gia Dinh (February, 1859), French colonists immediately implemented a scheme of “making wars to support wars” with the purpose of exploiting the new colony to make up for war expenditure and to expand their colonies.

On February 22nd, 1860, the South Governor promulgated a decision, permitting merchant ships of all countries to load and unload in Sai Gon Port. The exports of 1860 consisted of 53,939 tons of rice, sugar and some other local forest resources. The imports, which was worth over 1 million francs, consisted of industrial product and opium. Opening Sai Gon port, French expeditionary troops made a lot of profit which could cover most of the expenditure for the war of aggression in South Viet Nam.

□ Native Agriculture

According to the Almanac of the South in 1871, Bien Hoa County had 3,369 hectares of rice and 150 hectares of orange. Two years later, tilled land increased to 7,180 hectares. Here is the 1924 local records: 36,000 hectares of rice, 2,000 hectares of sugar-cane and 100 hectares of tobacco. In 1930, Bien Hoa province had 44,200 hectares of rice with the output of 39,000 tons, 1,116 hectares of maize, and 2,287 hectares of sugar-cane.

By the August Revolution in 1945, Bien Hoa’s native agriculture and made certain, developments; however, it was still traditional agriculture.

□ Agriculture pf French Capitalists

In order to create the Colons (French land owners) to support colonial system, the French Authorities resold cultivated land to colons at a low price (10 francs/ hectare). The French land owners mainly planted sugar-canes, rice, coffee and pepper. European colons followed the tropical agriculture cultivation on a large scale to produce goods which were exported to their mother country.

Since the early 20th century, some French capitalists set up plantations growing industrial trees. Suzannah was the first plantation which was founded in 1906. In 1910, Indo-Chinese Governor granted BIF Group an area of 28,000 hectares which later became 3 plantations. Trang Bom, Cay Gao and Tuc Trung.

Up to the August Revolution in 1945, there were 57 rubber plantations in Bien Hoa. There were less than 10 Vietnamese and Chinese owners. French colonists made a good profit out of their rubber plantations. Xuan Loc Rubber Company, with the initial investment of 3,600,000 francs, made a profit of 4,193,000 francs in 1937 (equal to 116.4% of the initial capital). French land-owners got rich quickly thanks to local workers’ sweat and blood.

b. Industry

In the late 90's of the nineteenth century, Indo-Chinese General Governor, Paul Doumer planned to exploit colonies in Indochina on a large scale. For industry, he laid down as a policy to accelerate the development of mining and processing raw material to support mother country industry.

In 1920's, the French Colonists built Bien Hoa military airport. There were factories processing latex in rubber plantations.

In general, under the French domination up to the August Revolution in 1945, Bien Hoa industry did not make a lot of progress. There were a few factories the instruments and tools of which were second-hand from the metropolis.

c. Transportation and Communication

Under Lord Nguyen's time, the main means of transportation was by sea. In 1808, Hue Court opened Thien Ly Highway from Quang Nam to Bien Hoa. Later, the National road was widened by French colonialists for horse carts carrying mails and parcels of post-offices.

In 1901, National Route 1 and Sai Gon-Nha Trang Railroad running through Bien Hoa began to be built. Bien Hoa-Sai Gon Railroad was inaugurated in 1904.

In 1862, a telegraph line connecting Sai Gon and Vung Tau was set up. There were telegraph stations in Bien Hoa and areas around Bien Hoa, serving the French expeditionary troops.

During the French domination from 1861 to the August Revolution of 1945, transportation and communication in Bien Hoa were at the early stage of development.

2. From 1945 to 1954

People in Bien Hoa enjoyed their independence for less than 2 months after the August Revolution succeeded. The French army, allying with the British, returned and to reoccupy Bien Hoa.

There were not many economic changes in Bien Hoa. Agriculture still had its traditional characteristics as before the August Revolution.

3. From 1954 to 1975

After the 1954 Geneva Cease-fire Agreement, the war came to its end and peace in Indochina was restored. Our country was temporarily divided into 2 parts - the South and the North. The South was governed by Sai Gon Regime. There were a lot of economic changes in the South as well as in Bien Hoa.

Sai Gon Regime implemented an agrarian reform policy from 1955 to 1957. This reform was nothing other than to give landlords the right to reclaim lands that had been given to people by revolutionary government and to force tenant farmers to their employers with higher rates of land taxes and remained the landlord class.

In the period from 1955 to 1961, the two provinces Bien Hoa and Long Khanh had the largest rice area of 34,850 hectares. In 1957, the rice output was rapidly increasing due to the

expansion of cultivated areas. If the output of 1956 was considered 100%; that of 1957 was 107.1%; 1958, 166.1%; 1959, 257.05% and 1961, 237.8%. Despite the manual agriculture and the old kind of rice seed, the output and productivity were better thanks to the ample fertilizers aided by America.

Since 1962, the area under crop and the output were considerably reducing in Bien Hoa and Long Khanh. It was the consequence of the "national policy" of "strategic hamlet" by the Sai Gon Regime.

From 1965 onwards for the war was spreading more and more violently, areas of tilled land were considerably reducing.

In 1970, Sai Gon Administration implemented land reforming policy (the "tillers-have-fields" laws issued on March 26, 1970) with the purpose of retaking lands that farmers had been granted by revolutionary government.

Although machinery, gasoline, fertilizer, insecticide, new kinds of rice seeds, banking, credit were brought to the country, the agricultural output was not increasing.

Animal husbandry in Bien Hoa and Long Khanh was improved. Since 1965, industrial life stock raising was carried out and widely spread.

The area of rubber plantations and the output of latex were reduced by the war.

□ Industry

After the Geneva Agreement, little progress in industry was made in Bien Hoa and Long Khanh. In the early 1960's Bien Hoa industry came into operation when the 2 paper companies COGIDO and COGIVINA were built.

On May 21st, 1963, Bien Hoa Industrial Park planned by the National Company for Promotion Industrial Zones SONADEZI was founded. Bien Hoa Industrial Park had 42 companies including:

- Group of chemical cosmetics, paper and sugar: 18 enterprises with the area of 681,954 m², employed 2,537 employees.
- Group of mechanical industry and hardware: 17 enterprises with the area of 306,237 m², employed 1,630 employees.
- Group of construction materials: 10 enterprises, with the area of 233,455 m², employed 1,872 employees.
- Miscellaneous Group: 7 enterprises with the area of 78,769 m².

Compared with the year 1954, Bien Hoa and Long Khanh Industry made a lot of progress. An industrial zone with various branches on a large scale came into being for the first time in South Viet Nam. That was one of the terms to change the economic structure the province and create job opportunities for people.

□ Transportation

In 1957, Sai Gon-Bien Hoa Highway was opened (inaugurated in 1961). All the roads and streets in the province were widened and covered with asphalt to serve the American invading

war. All the bridges in the provincial routes as well as Bien Hoa Airport were also renewed and modernized, too. Bien Hoa Airport was widened and modernized to serve the war.

However, the economy, especially the agriculture of South Vietnam in general and of Bien Hoa and Long Khanh in particular under Sai Gon Regime was backward, especially in agriculture.

CULTURE AND ARTS

II. The material Life

1. The Community Style of Life

The early population of Dong Nai was formed through many tides of immigration, chiefly by sea, so the island and river-side topography is the most popular inhabitant site of the early day.

The Vietnamese type of villages (or hamlets) came into being very early. Even in the old days, people could already travel upstream to exploit the resources from land and forests. As a result, the commercial areas along the river mushroomed in great number. Many ancient villages were traditionally commercial, for example Cu Lao Pho, Ben Do Tram (Bien Hoa), Ben Go (Long Thanh), Ben Ca (Vinh Cuu). The appearance of these commercial villages almost parallels that of the pure farming villages.

The villages in Dong Nai first came into being spontaneously, but later developed under the regulation of the Nguyen 's dynasty. According to old records, there were 282 villages in 1836.

2. Food and Clothes

Food

Because of the special weather (with the dry and rainy seasons) and the richness of the sea and the forest, the Vietnamese food in Dong Nai reflects both the Vietnamese culture and the unmixed characteristics of the South.

Food can be raw or dried or well-cooked, serving different purposes: for nutrition, for treating guests, for illness-treatment, and is prepared in different ways depending on each purpose. Green bean porridge served with fish cooked in pepper, gout soup with fish, pork cooked in Chinese style, fish cooked with pineapple, etc.

Dong Nai abounds in fruits. Besides oranges, guavas, tangerines, rambutans, durians, jackfruits, Dong Nai has a special kind of fruit, grapefruit, which is famous throughout the country.

Clothes

The history of fashion in Dong Nai was strongly influenced by the history of the South's formation. Fashion was repeatedly changed to be suitable to the weather, the cultural environment of the newly-founded land.

III. Literature and Arts

Where there is man, there are cultural activities. Literature and arts in Dong Nai is the fruit of the creative labour of Vietnamese coming from the North, the Central and the Chinese emigrants combined. It has been developed and changed itself to reflect the local socio-economic development.

The Temple of Literature, built in Binh Thanh-Tan Lai in 1715 is a proof that Confucian Literature was held in veneration and had a very high position in early Dong Nai. However, wars and times of chaos have destroyed lots of works of literature in Chinese. Not until early 19th century did the famous works appear again, written in Chinese by Trinh Hoai Duc, the famous mandarin-writer, and not until after the August Revolution did literature in Dong Nai flower fully with excellent revolutionary writers such as Huynh Van Nghe, Ly Van Sam, Hoang Van Bon, etc.

1 Folklore

The orally circulated folklore in Dong Nai through many generations has taken many forms: tales, verses, songs, etc.

a. Tales

For the minority groups, tales are important intellectual properties because they are not only "history and civil codes" but also models of life-styles, and a way of relaxation. Chau Ma, Chau Ro, Stieng (minority groups) tell their tales in form of poems in family's important days or at village's festivals.

Worshiping many deities and gods, and lack of know-how, the Stieng, Chau Ro, Chau Ma are still using legends and myths to explain the natural phenomena.

However, there are many interesting tales about names of places: Tri An Waterfall, Dong Truong, Ong Chon Temple, etc. There are also tales explaining why certain animals have their names: the white hen, the spotted squirrel, cat the fairy, etc. In these tales, the physically weak people, whatever hardship they may face with, always win the victory over the wicked people at the end of the struggle between the good and the evil.

Nevertheless, the number of Vietnamese tales is not great. Based on their perception of the world and experience accumulated through hundreds of years in the places where they had come from, the few tales they possess do not have the true characteristics of legends and myth; therefore are not superstitious in their nature.

Tales often focus on the explanation of names of places, mountains and rivers. They also try to describe, in their way, natural phenomena which have not been scientifically explained: the story of Mr Chau Thoi and Mrs Ba Ria, the story of Mr Trinh, the story of Vong Phu Waterfall.

While describing natural and social phenomena and explaining names of places, ancient tales in Dong Nai aim at highlighting the good virtues of the Dong Nai people who "work for love and righteousness, not for a bowl full of delicious meat". Some typical tales of this theme are The Pineapple, The Durian, etc.

Adding to the list, there are humorous stories which the people in Dong Nai are very fond of and collected from other parts of the country.

b. Proverbs and Folksongs

The minority groups have a very good taste for poetry. The languages of the Stieng, Chau Ma, Chau Ro are very poetical. Words of the songs exchanged between men and women when working and words of ceremonial songs manifest their lyricalness in daily life. For example, the Chau Ma ancient custom, ancient way of life and ancient viewpoint on marriage altogether can be seen through the Love Story of Koong and K'Yai.

Young K'Yai expressed his love and desire:

Pipe wine, if not drunk for long, will go sour
Barrels, if not used to take fresh water, will go mouldy
Copper gongs, if not struck for long, will go rusty
You and I share the same fate
We cannot embrace as tight
That your full breast clings to my chest
Like the sarong that holds your hips
Like the comb that holds your hair
Like the twisted string tied to a kite

The Vietnamese popular songs and poetry enjoy a high degree of diversity. Richest is the one that followed the footsteps of Vietnamese on the journey to Dong Nai to settle from other parts of the country.

If you love, never let that love die
If you don't, now we can say goodbye
Don't be a hare on a mountain pass
Playing with itself when happy
Fooling with the moon when sad
I try the bell to know if it is sonorous
I try him to know if he is generous

Many popular songs from the North and the Central were modified, just a little, to adapt themselves to the new geographic environment and the feelings of the people in the newly-founded land.

*How can you count the feet of the centipede
Or the people in Dinh Market?
How can you measure the spans, I say
Of the bridge across the Milky Way?
Oh Mother, do you know*

*Your daughter is no longer a virgin?
Would you sell her away for a cent
Or throw her away for nothing?
Please keep my hat, my Dove
As the very symbol of our love
If Mom ever asks, I will say
Wind on the bridge has blown it away!*

A number of popular songs in Dong Nai speak about Dong Nai itself, describing the beauty of the nature and the richness of the place, inviting people from other parts to come and settle:

*Dong Nai rice as white as the heron
Leaving father, leaving mother
I left to elope with you on your sampan
No more rice. Dong Nai is there
No more wood. Tan Sai is there
So don't care*

c. Proverbs

The proverbs of Chau Ma, Chau Ro are almost orally transferred. That is easy to understand, as the minority groups in Dong Nai still don't have any writing scripts.

*The dagger must have a handle
As the sleeper must have a blanket
As dowry and earrings always lead to a wedding
As hot pepper and lemon grass can burn one's throat
So sleeping with another man's wife
One will surely get into trouble!*

The Vietnamese in Bien Hoa-Dong Nai inherit the same intellectual property and language from their common ancestor; therefore their popular songs and proverbs share the same ideas, rules of behaviour and working experience with those in the North and the Central.

2. Literature and Education

a. From the early days until 1864

Education and Examinations in Dong Nai and in the whole South of Viet Nam until 1864 was basically governed by the feudal system of education and examination.

The education in Bien Hoa fully developed after 1698, during the Nguyen's time.

The Nguyen dynasty (established in 1802) paid special attention to the education in the South, particularly in Bien Hoa. They not only carried out a reshuffle in examination rules, but

also organized the first Huong examination in the South in 1813. According to Trinh Hoai Duc, *"The land of Duong Chau, near the sun, is in Almighty's favour, so the people are enlightened and civilized. Keen on the Four Books - Great Learning, Analects, the Mean in Action and Mencius - and the Five Classics - the Book of Mutations, the annals, the Book of Songs, the Book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Book, they respect humanity and righteousness and are intelligent people. Since the King nominated officials for education and reshuffled examination regulations, academic learning has been developed and literature has been flowering."*

In *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi*, the writer observed people in Dong Nai as *"diligent students, hard working weavers."*

From the time of King Minh Mang (1820-1840) on, the educational system in Bien Hoa became better-organized. The two examinations, one in 1813, the other in 1864, produced 24 bachelors in Bien Hoa.

b. From 1864 to 1875

After occupying Bien Hoa, then the whole South of Viet Nam, the French began an enslaving education for their need of loyal henchmen who were French articulate. Their purpose was to limit and gradually to erase the Vietnamese Confucian study and culture.

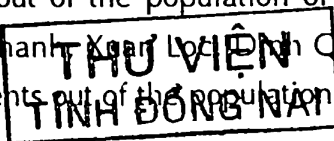
The first French school, opening in 1867, was not welcomed by people, so up to 1878, there were only 33 students in Bien Hoa. Up to 1901, there was only one primary school with 182 students (the provincial primary school in Nguyen Du elementary school now), four pre-primary schools with 196 pupils in Binh Truoc (Bien Hoa), Binh My (Thanh Phu), Tan Uyen and Ben Go.

During that time, education in Bien Hoa witnessed no important changes. In 1923, Bien Hoa had only one provincial primary school (500 students), 11 district schools (21 districts, 979 students), and 16 village schools (162 villages, 2,000 students).

Immediately after the successful August Revolution, Bien Hoa people had to cope with another long arduous war, but the revolutionary government tried its best for a new educational system.

The provincial department of education, then the district department of education was established to take the responsibility of "eradicating illiteracy" under the order of President Ho Chi Minh. Thai Hoa (Tan Uyen District) in Dong Nai Province was one of the 2 villages in the whole South that was recognized as completing the task. Meanwhile, in many war-zones, the task of illiteracy eradication was, to some extent, fulfilled.

From 1954 to 1975, in areas dominated by the Saigon troops, there was a new type of colonization-education. The first high school (Ngo Quyen High School, opened 1956) introduced the first high school education system in Bien Hoa (including Bien Hoa City, Long Khanh and Phuoc Tuy). In 1973, Bien Hoa (under Sai Gon regime) had about 130,000 students of different systems (public, semi-public, private) out of the population of 540,000. In 1968, Long Khanh Province (including the present Long Khanh, Loc Binh, Loc Binh Quan, Tan Phu, and parts of Vinh Cuu and Thong Nhat) had 23,919 students out of the population of 142,782.



3. Tran Bien Temple of Literature

Tran Bien Temple of Literature in the South came into being very early (1715, in the time of Nguyen Phuc Chu). For Nguyen Warlords, the Temple of Literature was a significant symbol of cultural values and political sovereignty in the newly-founded land. The Tran Bien Temple of Literature was then located in the village of Tan Lai (now Buu Long ward, Bien Hoa).

Worshiping Confucius, the father of Confucianism and Confucian study, Tran Bien Temple of Literature was the veneration of the Confucian educational values.

Not only the mandarins and the people from the upper social classes adored these values, the masses also venerated this temple and called it "House of Literature Gods". It is easy to understand why the French destroyed this temple when they first invaded Bien Hoa in 1861.

On the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Dong Nai's Foundation, the Dong Nai people committee has made plans for the Temple's reconstruction.

4. The Written Literature in Dong Nai until 1930

Not until the 17th century, when the Confucian intellectuals appeared, and when Dong Nai had its name on the map of Viet Nam, did the written literature in Dong Nai begin to shape.

In the 70s and 80s of the 18th century, in the literature history of Viet Nam appeared the names of famous writers: Vo Truong Toan, Dang Duc Thuat, Trinh Hoai Duc, Le Quang Dinh, Ngo Nhon Tinh, among which Trinh Hoai Duc was the greatest cultural activist of Dong Nai and the whole South of Viet Nam.

When the French began to invade Viet Nam in 1858, the written literature began to reflect the struggling spirit and the deep humanity with outstanding writers like Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Nguyen Thong, Bui Huu Nghia, etc.

5. The Written Literature in Dong Nai from 1930 till Now

Our people had to suffer the French and feudal domination, while Cochichina (South of Viet Nam) was directly dominated by the French Government. The Birth of the Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930 brought lights to writers (of course, not all writers) who discovered their careers in the struggle for the Independence and Liberty of the country. The prominent writers of this period are Huynh Van Nghe, Hoang Van Bon, Ly Van Sam. Ly Van Sam is the most outstanding writer in the literature of the South in the period of 1945-1954. Hoang Van Bon had many novels and works reflecting every aspect of life and every aspect of the resistance of the people in Dong Nai.

For twenty years after the Liberation Day in 1975, the writing force in Dong Nai has increasingly developed. Apart from well-known writers like Ly Van Sam and Hoang Van Bon, the young generation of writers appeared and received the membership of the National Writer's Association, among those are Khoi Vu, Nguyen Duc Tho, Cao Xuan Son and Truong Nam Huong.

6. Traditional Arts

Because the population of Dong Nai has been formed through many sources in 3 centuries, the land has no particular fold songs of itself, but it has nearly every folksongs from the North, the Central and from Hue.

In the everyday life of the ancient Dong Nai people, there were many kinds of arts activities: *ho, ly, ve, tuong, dong dao tai tu, (names of kinds of folksongs), etc.*

Most popular in Dong Nai are Songs of Rice Planting, Songs of Rice Threshing, Songs of Boat-Paddling, etc. some of which are nationally known like Song of Hero Lia, Song of Cakes, etc.

Ancient poems for reciting in Dong Nai were written in Sino-Vietnamese like Luc Van Tien, Lam Sanh Xuan Nuong, Pham Cong Cuc Hoa, etc.

Traditional theatre focussed on Chinese events or the events in the life of the masses.

On ritual occasions, 2 forms of traditional arts are often seen: Xay Chau and Dai Boi for the Ky Yen Ceremony and Dia Nang and Bong Roi in temples and shrines on special occasions.

IV. The Customs and Beliefs of the Masses

1. Rites and Custom in a Circle of Life

a. Giving Birth

Foods are strictly chosen. Crabs are believed to make birth uneasy; shrimps to deliver a bent newly born, shells and nails to produce the child's nose fluid, ingredients to make the child evil and hot-tempered. Bananas are also considered a symbol of obscenity. Pregnant women are encouraged to consume as much salt as possible, for salt is believed to make the newly born child "salty with love". They shouldn't eat durians or rambutans, the fruits that have thorny skin, for fear that the birth giving cannot happen smoothly.

The pregnant women's movements are also strictly observed. They shouldn't shout or speak or laugh loud. They shouldn't go to the worship places. They shouldn't oversleep, nor should they stand at the crossroads. On the contrary, the pregnant women should always do something and be careful with their movements so that the birth is going on easy.

When getting in touch with people, pregnant women should avoid the hot-tempered or the obstinate or other women who have undergone many unsuccessful birth-givings.

Birth giving is an important event in one's life. Giving birth for the first time, the woman stays with her mother, and for the second time she stays with her mother-in-law. Birth is delivered by a mid-wife. The time after birth is called "confinement" when the woman is kept in a wind-tight chamber.

According to Trinh Hoai Duc, *"Women in birth stay in bed under which there is a bowl of red-hot cinder. They have to rub their bellies with hot pans twice a day. The food is dried and salty. Drink is often prepared with herbs in hot water. A month after giving birth, they can go out, but have to apply their body with saffron to prevent the harmful effects of wind."*

When the infant is one month old, their parents give a "one month" ceremony in which it is given a name. The first and the twelfth birthday ceremonies are compulsory.

b. Marriage

People in Dong Nai have an open-minded viewpoint on marriage. Only the very rich are sometimes choosy in term of wealth and properties. Marriage is often based on the criterion of “fair couple” who don’t belong to the direct family lineage.

Datings are free and know no bounds or limits. The structure of Vietnamese villages in Dong Nai is open. The village has many families of different lineages so boys and girls have a lot of opportunities of dating out of the control of the family.

During the courtship, if they can seek mutual love, they will report to their parents and the boy’s family will take the next step. Marriage customs in ancient Dong Nai followed Chinese patterns, including six phases: *nap thai*, *van danh*, *nap kiet*, *nap le*, *think ky than nghinh*. These procedures have been simplified a lot, but the common people still preserve five ceremonies in their marriage which are *engaging*, *giving the dowry*, *going to the husband's home*, *welcoming the bride*, *meeting the bride's people after the wedding*.

c. Funerals

Death is considered a matter-of-course and the dead are well cared by the community, so the Vietnamese attitude towards death is an optimistic one. Sometimes the “RIP” place is chosen beforehand. The ready-built tomb is called “kim tinh” (Golden Quietness), and the ready-made coffin is called “co su” (Carriage for future use). Except for sudden death, no matter where and why, the expected death is the death at home.

When a member of the family is dying, their relatives will “call for his spirits” until there is no longer any hope for revival before bathing and dressing the dead.

After announcing the bad news, the head of the family asks the astrologist (there is always one in the village) to choose the time suitable for the age of the dead to begin the funeral ceremony. Domestic animals are then well-caged. Strict observation is made so that no dogs or cats can pass the coffin. Any mirrors and pictures of Buddha must be covered with red paper or cloth.

The relatives of all ages must gather around the coffin before it is closed. The mouners must ask a monk to arrange the funeral ceremony, and the funeral clothing is made of white materials, not necessarily of cotton.

The oldest son wear “tram thoi” shirt with the seam turning outwards and an additional piece of cloth attached to the back, meaning an additional burden of sorrow. The belt is made of straw or banana tree. The hat and shoes are also made of these materials. The other sons wear loose white shirts with additional pieces of cloths on the shoulders. The other daughters wear white cloth on their heads that cover the nape and the daughters wear white cloth on their head that cover the face.

After the coffin-closing rite comes the ritual visits of neighbours. When the chosen time comes, the coffin-raising rite begins. As soon as the coffin is raised, the people in the family break some earthen pots or kettles to get rid of the evil spirits. The third morning after the burial is the “tomb-opening” ceremony. Ritual things are 3 bamboo pipes containing water, rice and salt - the food for the dead. These pipes are tightly covered with white satin and laid in front of

the tomb. A ladder made of banana tree (with 9 steps if the dead is a woman and 7 steps if the dead is a man) is put in front of the tomb so that the spirit of the dead can climb up to the Nirvana.

In addition, there are ceremonies on the 49th and 100th day after the funeral. After a year, there is *tieu tuong* (a little funeral anniversary), and the second anniversary is called *dai tuong* (Great funeral anniversary) when the mourners can take their mourning cloth off their heads.

It is not customary in Dong Nai to re-bury the dead.

In a circle of life, there are also other important ceremonies such as the longevity ceremony for the very old, the party given to friends when getting promoted.

2. Ancestor Worship

In the house, however small it is, the most important place is for worshipping one's ancestors. Previously the local people worshiped up to their great-great grandparents (3 to 4 generations). The parents of the fourth generation are worshiped normally in the chief altar or the altar house. The altar has 2 parts: the inner part is for ritual offers; the outer part is a worshipping cupboard in which there are candle holders, incense holders, a betel nut tray and a flower vase. To worship ancestors, besides the altar the people also have the vertical and horizontal parallels in their home. The horizontal and vertical parallels in the Vietnamese houses are not for decorating purposes, but are reminders of the ancestors' volition, will and tradition transferred to the offspring.

Funeral anniversary is an unalienate part of worshipping. The better the worshipping is observed, the more carefully the funeral anniversary is held. People can hold funeral anniversaries for their ancestors up to 6 or 7 generations if they still remember the date of death.

The Vietnamese worship *the Protection God or Goddess* in hope of being well-protected. The popular God for men is Hwan Kung (a Chinese God), and for women is Mothers (*Mau*), namely Giving Birth Mother (*Mau sinh*) and Protection Mother (*Mau do*).

Hwan Kung, in Vietnam, is not a manifestation of individual adoration, but is a "*symbol of humanity and righteousness, of loyalty in people who are not spoiled by richness, reduced by poverty and never betray friends in any cases*".

In addition, many other gods and goddesses also have their places in the home: The Incarnation Mother, the Mother of Sacred Mountain, the God of Luck, the Kitchen Gods, etc.

The festivals and holidays of the year are: Lunar New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival, the 5th of May Festival. There are also ceremonies when the moon is half full every month, especially in January and July.

3. Custom and Beliefs in Accordance with Community and Society

Temples and Temple Festivals

Temples in Dong Nai have a short history owing to the special history of the population formation and are not rich in legends and historical anecdotes as those in the North and Central Viet Nam. But if compared with the temples in the Southern Delta, those in Dong Nai came into being rather early. It is noted that the structure of temples in Dong Nai is not the stereotype of