

THE
DELTA
VILLAGE
OF

my thuan

SOME
ADMINISTRATIVE
AND
FINANCIAL
ASPECTS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20523

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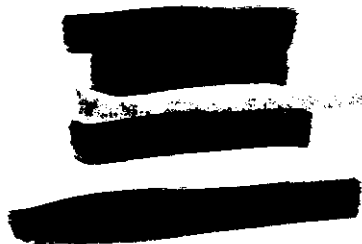
SOME
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Truong-Ngoc-Giau.

and

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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY VIETNAM ADVISORY GROUP
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
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Preface to the
Vietnam Studies Publications

In 1955 Michigan State University began a program of technical assistance to the Government of South Vietnam, supported by a contract with the predecessor agency of the United States Agency for International Development. Through this program Michigan State University provided technical advisors in the broad field of public administration, including police administration. In recent years, most of this advisory service has been devoted to strengthening the teaching, in-service training, and research programs of the National Institute of Administration, an agency in Saigon created by the Vietnamese Government to strengthen the public service generally.

Members of the Michigan State University group have included specialists in the field of public administration, police administration, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and other special fields. In the course of over seven years of technical cooperation in Vietnam, members of the Michigan State University group have contributed a large number of surveys and studies of various types, training documents, and reports containing recommendations on various administrative problems.

This document is one of many prepared in Vietnam as a part of the work of the Michigan State University group. It was written for a specific purpose and under particular circumstances and should be read with these qualifications in mind. It is being reproduced and made available at this time for the use of the Agency for International Development, and is not intended for general circulation. We suggest that this study be used with the understanding that additional materials are available from the earlier MSUG studies which appeared in mimeographed form, and that it fits into the broad context of a technical assistance program as part of the U. S. foreign aid program in Vietnam.



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Foreword

This publication contains two separate studies. The first centers on the theme of the "village chief at work." It was prepared by my colleague, Professor Truong Ngoc Giau of the National Institute of Administration, South Vietnam. The second, which I prepared, examines the finances of the same village. Both were based on only a week in the village; as a result they aim largely at describing or portraying rather than analyzing and evaluating.

These two studies were originally planned as part of an over-all study of provincial and local administration undertaken jointly by several Vietnamese and American professors working together in South Vietnam. The major focus was to be the "executive at work" at the provincial, district, and village levels within one province during one week. There were two major objectives: to obtain more empirical data about administration in South Vietnam and to encourage the growth of interest among Vietnamese professors in the need for empirical research. Because of the concern with research procedure, we have included a brief description of our method for obtaining the necessary data while in the field.

Although the various provincial village studies have not been consolidated or employed as a basis for developing an over-all view of local administration, the separate "reports" are available. Professors Tran Van Dinh and Jason Finkle concentrated their efforts on the provincial level; Professors Nguyen Khac Nhan and Joseph Zasloff, on the district; and Miss Vo-Hong Phuc and Professor John D. Donoghue on the socio-economic as well as administrative life of the village in which Professors Giau and I were also working. Complete references to their revised reports are presented in the Selected References.

This joint undertaking was the most satisfying "technical assistance" experience I had during my four years in South Vietnam. I am certain that Professor Giau, as well as I, gained considerably from the observations of this village chief and the resulting exchanges of news, ideas, and questions that occurred each evening following our day in the village office. I feel that Professor Giau's systematic and detailed reporting of the activities of the village chief during most of this one week provide an exceptionally valuable record on village administrative practices. While not sufficient to justify any generalizations, they should suggest directions for later research.

LLOYD W. WOODRUFF
St. Paul, Minnesota
September 26, 1962

1 | *The Village Chief at Work*

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INTRODUCTION

THE VILLAGE IN VIETNAM: A BRIEF SKETCH

The village is the administrative cell of Vietnam. At the time of the royal dynasties (the end of the 15th century) the administration of the commune already had a large amount of autonomy. The present regime has not completely renounced this principle. Nevertheless, under the present regime, there is a marked tendency toward increased centralization, due to the necessity for the Central Government to have energetic and direct means of action in order to assure internal security and to promote rapid economic development. Therefore, village administration is rather complex in nature. It serves as an executive echelon for the central administration while maintaining some trace of autonomy in the administration of its own interests.

This distinguishing feature is found in its organization, as well as in its operation.

Organization

Ordinance No. 57-a of October 24-1956 concerning the reorganization of the local administration of Vietnam has recognized that the commune

has a juridical personality, has a budget, and can own property, and that its administration is placed under the control of the province chief; it refers to a forthcoming decree to regulate the organization.¹

While waiting for the publication of this decree, the communal administration is administered by presidential circulars, ministerial arretes, and texts which, though old, are still considered effective where they do not contradict Ordinance 57-a.²

The present organization is characterized by the fact that the village is placed under the authority and responsibility of a single organization, the communal council having both the role of deliberative organization and that of executive organization.³

The communal council has three principal members:

—The *Dai-Dien Xa*, the commune representative, president of the council (village chief).

—The *Hoi-Vien Tai-Chanh*, the finance councilor.

—The *Hoi-Vien Canh Sat*, the police councilor, who is at the same time chief of the self-defense force of the village.

In important villages, the council can have two more members. Each member can perform several functions. The representative of the commune, in addition to his own functions, usually assumes also those of vital statistics officer, and the finance councilor is also in charge of economic affairs.

Especially for the provinces of the West and South of Vietnam, a recent decision of the President of the Republic strengthens the communal council with three new members, charged respectively with politics, information, and youth.

¹Presidential Circular No. 115-a/TTP/VP of October 24-1956 interpreting this Ordinance gave few details on the communal administration.

²Namely the following texts:

—Circular No. 802-BPTT/VP of June 28, 1956 of the Secretary of State at the Presidency, fixing the number of the communal council members and the conditions of their recruitment.

—Circulars No. 74-BNV/HC of January 11, 1957, No. 1642-BNV/HC of April 2, 1957, No. 2941-BNV/HC of May 27, 1957 of the Department of Interior concerning the renewal of the members of communal council, the role of certain members, the function of the copyist and the training of council members.

—Circular No. 1834-BPTT/VP of November 16, 1956 of the Secretary of State at the Presidency in regard to the designation and the composition of the communal council.

—Arrete No. 184 BNV/HC/ND of May 3, 1958 of the Department of Interior fixing the scale of allowances to be granted to members of the communal council in the provinces of Central Vietnam.

—Arrete No. 436-BNV/HC/ND of August 8, 1959 of the Department of Interior fixing the scale of allowances to be granted to the members of the communal council in the provinces of South Vietnam.

—Decree No. 34-NV of March 19, 1953 concerning the organization of the communal administration.

³In the villages of Thua Thien Province (Central Vietnam) for experimentation and on the initiative of the provincial authority, the communal council is combined with a consultative council whose members are elected by the villagers from a list of notables presented by the district chief.

The tendency toward centralization is illustrated by the pattern of recruitment of members of the village council, who are named directly by the chief of province instead of being elected by the people as before. Nevertheless, the local character of this key agency is not completely eliminated, for all of these members have to be chosen from among the inhabitants of the village.

To help them with the office work, the communal council can employ clerks. Each council member is responsible for the accomplishment of his own functions. However, the decisions on important questions are taken in deliberation by the council. In this case, collective responsibility results. The annual vote of the communal budget, for instance, must follow this procedure.

The communal council members are not the only persons to work for the communal administration. Also at its disposal are the contributions of other categories of people, including:

1. Hamlet chiefs, chiefs of groups of interfamilies organization (*khom*), and chiefs of interfamilies organization. They are the organizations which serve as the real connecting links between public authority and the people.

2. The employees and agents of the Central Administration or provincial administration sent for permanent or temporary service in the village, such as agents of Civil Guard, Surete, Civic Action, Public Health, etc.

3. The inhabitants of the village, who collaborate with the communal council by taking part in various communal committees, such as committees on social action, on agricultural affairs, on community development etc. Moreover, the communal council has the custom of consulting with the notables of the village of important communal affairs.

Concerning the relations of the council with other administrative echelons, they are, in principle, made according to a hierarchical order: commune, canton, district, province, Interior Department or Presidency. These echelons also serve as compulsory intermediaries between the communal council and the technical services. Of course, this rule does not prevent relations of an unofficial nature, which occur frequently.

Operation

The communal council serves two functions, that of a Central Governmental organization and that of a local community.

The communal council as the executive organization of Central Government. In the administrative structure of the state, the village occupies the lowest echelon and is charged with carrying out laws, regulations and instructions; in short, the governmental policies. It contributes to the implementation of those policies by supplying to the Central Government documents and statistical data, and by being the *porte-parole* of the aspirations of the people. With these functions, it plays an important role in all domains.

Thus, for instance, in political and security matters, the village council is assigned the work of disseminating and explaining the point of view of the government, fighting against adverse propaganda, and defeating the subversive maneuvers of the Viet Cong. On the economic and financial level, it takes a very active part in the collection of national and provincial taxes, in controlling and taking the census of commercial and industrial activities of the inhabitants, and in the implementation of agrarian reform.

The communal council as an organization to administer village affairs. The council has its own power only in regard to purely internal affairs. The council deliberates over the communal budget, the regulations of the collection of communal revenues, the purchases, conveyance and exchanges of communal properties, the conditions of long leases or house leases, the acceptance of donations and bequests to the village, and the projects of building communal roads.

It is the duty of the communal administration to maintain itself with its own resources.⁴

These resources generally consist of:

- revenues from the public lands of the village
- a percentage of certain national and provincial taxes
- various village taxes
- fines from police violations.

However, this principle of self-financing has some important modifications:

- each commune must contribute to the expenses of the districts and cantons which have no budget of their own.
- the village budget must set apart a mutual-aid fund to help the poor villages of the province.

⁴Decree No. 34 VN of March 19, 1953 already mentioned.

—it may happen that certain agents, by working for the benefit of the village, are paid by the provincial budget or the national budget (for instance the case of the village self-defense agents).

Control by the Central Government

This control affects not only activities of the village council operating as an execution organization of the Central Administration, but extends also to the duties of the council in its capacity as an organization of the local community.

According to their importance, the deliberations of the council are, in fact, executed only after the approval of either the Presidency, or the province.

For instance, if the amount of the communal budget is over 500,000 piasters, the approval of the Presidency is necessary. For a budget of minor importance, the vote must be submitted to the ratification of the province chief. It is to be noted that the power of control on the part of the Central Administration often allows it direct intervention in purely communal matters. Thus, for instance, all expenses made by the communal council, unless they are of minor importance, require preliminary agreement of the district chief.

In summary, it is permissible to conclude that the present village administration appears more clearly as an execution echelon of the Central Government than as an autonomous organization of the local community. Nevertheless, the local community continues to exist as such, apparently because of two principal underlying factors. First, it is unquestionable that the village still conserves some prerogatives of autonomy, such as its juridical personality. Second, the desire of the inhabitants to belong to a community remains deep-rooted, due largely to the existence of a *dinh*, the hearth of the cult of the village spirit.

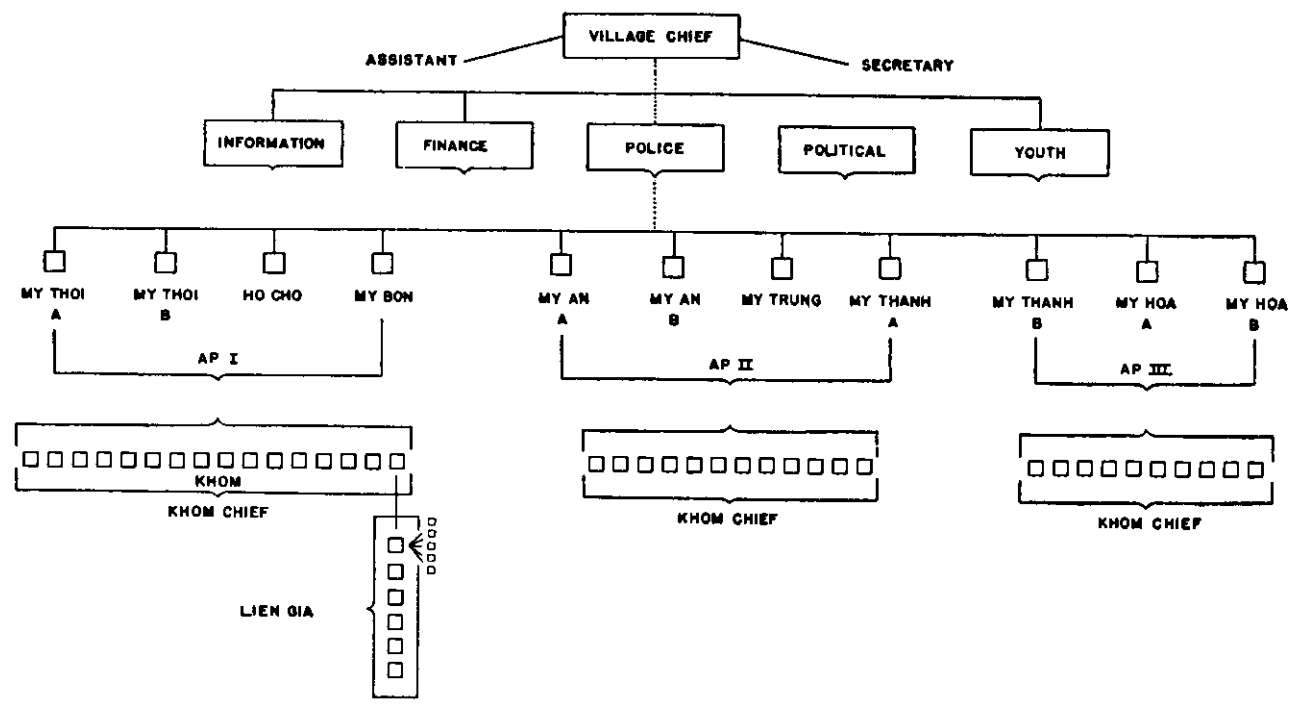
THE VILLAGE OF MY THUAN⁵

The Village

My Thuan is located 28 kilometers south of Vinh Long City and 3 kilometers from the ferry crossing which separates Vinh Long and Phong Dinh (Cantho) provinces. My Thuan is the largest village in area and population in Binh Minh District. It occupies an area of 5,196 hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) and has a population of between 15,000 and

⁵This was prepared by John Donoghue and Miss Vo Hong Phuc.

FIGURE 1—MY THUAN VILLAGE ORGANIZATION



17,000 people. It is one of the most populous in the Province of Vinh Long, which contains 81 villages. My Thuan, one of three villages in An Truong Canton, is divided into ten hamlets and one *ho* or market center (See Figure 1).

The market center (*Ho Cho*) differs from the other hamlets of My Thuan in that its 5,000 people, crowded into a tightly agglomerated settlement, are engaged not in agriculture, but in various crafts and marketing activities. *Ho Cho* is situated just off the busy Vinh Long-Can Tho highway, which is bustling with military, bus, and auto traffic. The center contains the district and village offices, the market buildings, the theater, jewelry and clothing stores, and restaurants, all of which are in contrast to the quiet, sleepy hamlets located along the streams and canals. The footpaths through the hamlets are shaded by banana and coconut trees growing in gardens surrounding the widely separated thatch-roofed huts. Most of the people are rice producers, although garden fruits and vegetables, as well as fish from the numerous waterways provide an important source of food and income.

The ten hamlets were officially amalgamated into three hamlets in December 1959; however they remained functionally unaffected by this change.

District headquarters are located in the market center across the road from the village office. The relationship between district and village administration is thus closer than in the other eight villages of the district. Because of its comparative wealth and location, My Thuan is required to carry a considerable proportion of the financial burden of the district, and in certain areas, notably police functions and information services, there are apparently overlapping activities.

The village is also the canton seat. The canton chief, a Vietnamese having French citizenship, lives in My Thuan, but his role as an administrator is negligible. The canton exists in name only, and the canton chief participates primarily as a respected elder in ceremonial affairs. In addition to district officials and the canton chief, the chiefs of the villages My Hoa and Thanh Loi also live in My Thuan because of the serious security situation in the area.

The village council is composed of the chief of the village, the police officer, the finance officer, and three special commissioners for political affairs, youth and information.⁸ The village chief is aided by a clerk and an assistant. The members of the village council are paid by funds from the village budget, with monthly allowances as follows:

⁸Added to many villages in the Delta region in 1960 to strengthen the anti-Viet Cong program.

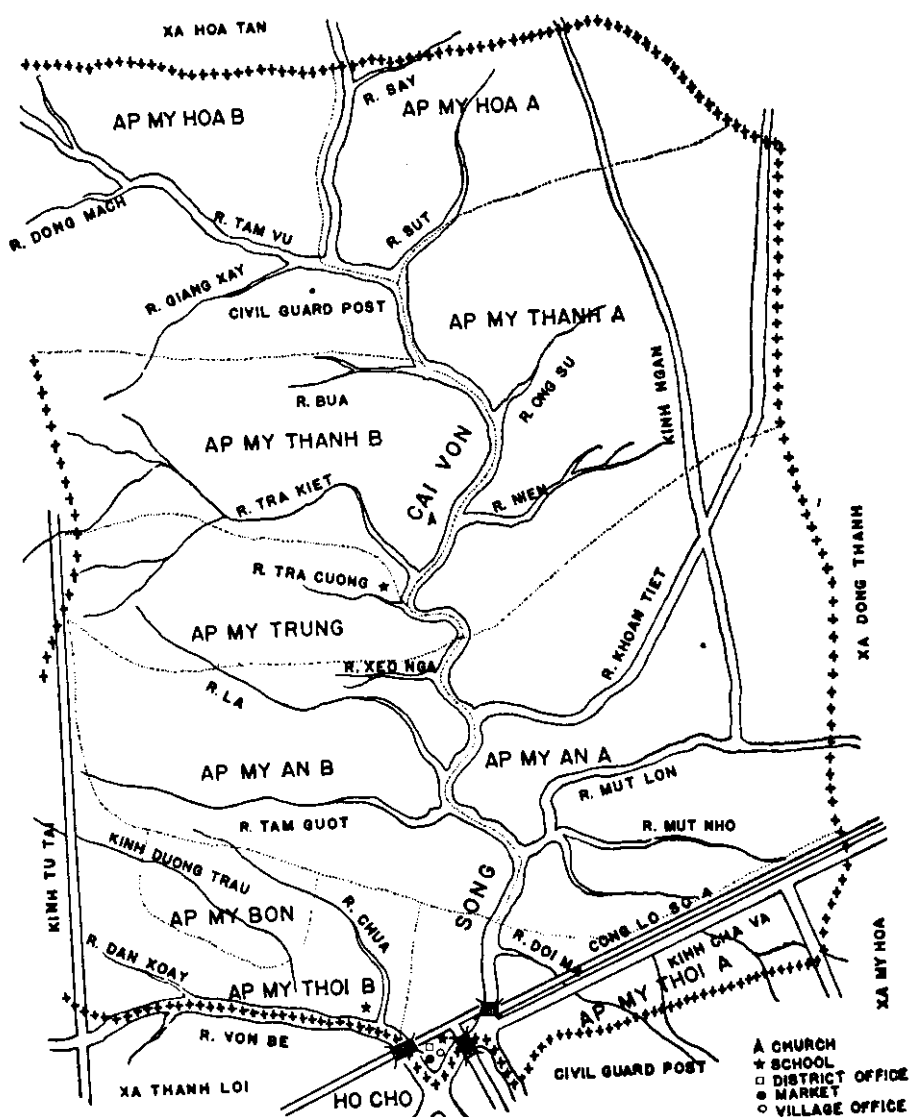


FIGURE 2—MY THUAN VILLAGE

Village Chief	1,900\$ ⁷
Police Officer	1,800\$
Finance Officer	1,800\$
Information Agent	200
Youth Agent	200
Political Officer	500

The clerk receives 900\$ per month, and the chief's assistant 1,400\$. The salary differences more or less reflect the importance of the various members of the council in the village administration. The chief, police officer, and finance officer carry the burden of the administrative duties; the others are part-time employees whose major sources of income are from other occupations. The political agent is the head of the village National Revolutionary Movement, which thus far has relatively few members (162). He also receives applications from villagers for permission to leave the village and advises on such matters as land reform contracts.

The formal organization of My Thuan is charted on Figure 2. The village chief, assisted by the council members, communicates instructions, decrees and arretes, and other information directly to the eleven hamlet chiefs. He sends a messenger (by bicycle and boat) into the hamlets asking them to come into the village office. Since some of the hamlets are located quite far from the office, the hamlet chiefs arrive at different times. Therefore, the chief never talks to the hamlet chiefs as a group, but on an individual basis. The instructions are usually conveyed verbally to the hamlet chiefs, who are then responsible for passing on the information to the individual members of the hamlets.

All of the positions on the village council are appointive. Ordinarily the district chief submits a list of names for vacancies on the council to the province chief, who makes the selections. Some sources reported that the province chief sends the names selected to the Department of Interior in Saigon, which gives final approval.

According to one well-informed observer, the 69-year old village chief of My Thuan was suggested for his position by his nephew, the chief of Binh Duong Province. He was active on the village council from 1955 to May of 1960. During this period he apparently learned much in the art of settling disputes. His office was crowded throughout the day with people who had a wide variety of problems. He complained often of this tiring work and mentioned on several occasions his desire to retire. However, he gave the impression of one who enjoyed working

⁷The unofficial exchange rate is 72\$VN to \$1.00 US.

with people, most of whom seemed to respect him. By Western conceptions of office management, the chief was not very efficient. He kept notes, for example, on scraps of paper that he stuffed under his desk blotter. Often he would be trying to handle the problems of several different villagers at the same time. At other times he would forget where he had placed certain documents, and villagers would help in the search by going through his desk drawers. Very often he would discuss disputes with the members of the research team and seek their advice. Most of the time the office appeared to be in a state of chaos. However, in spite of these shortcomings, the chief had a way of bringing to bear a mixture of legal concepts and traditional Confucian standards to solve problems ultimately in a manner that seemed to satisfy all the parties concerned. It can be assumed that the chief rarely resorted to the higher authority of the district for the settlement of local disputes.

A new district chief had been assigned to Binh Minh District ten days before the week of intensive research. The village chief had some apprehension about the new district chief because he was an aggressive young army officer whom the chief believed demanded efficiency and immediate action on all directives. The village chief was concerned about the maintenance of social harmony. In all his moralizing to the villagers, he expressed this concern; in arriving at decisions, this seemed his primary concern.

The village chief's house is located about one kilometer from the village office, but since the first of the year he had not returned to his house at night because of the security situation. Instead he lodged with a relative who owned a jewelry store in the vicinity of the village office. Although the chief had not personally received any threatening letters from the Viet Cong, he felt that it was hazardous at night outside the market center.

When the research group returned to My Thuan in June, it was learned that the village chief had been relieved of his duties because one of his sons was discovered to be an officer in the Viet Cong guerrilla army. The police officer had temporarily succeeded him as the chief of the village council.

The Hamlet

There are now three official hamlets in the village, each of which is supposed to have a hamlet chief who receives a monthly salary of 300\$. The former ten hamlets and the market center were consolidated into these three larger units of about 5,000 people each, in order to afford

a salary for the three hamlet chiefs. Until recently hamlet chiefs received no allowance. However, the new units have never been recognized by either the village chief or the hamlet chiefs. The 900\$ is presently evenly divided among the eleven hamlet chiefs, and they still function as previously in village administration.

The hamlets are rather natural geographic units formed by the Song Cai River and its tributaries which dissect the village (See Figure 1). With the exception of the several hamlets bordering the market center, the hamlets of My Thuan are not easily accessible by road, and in traveling to the more remote areas, it is necessary to go by boat. Because of the security problem, the researchers were not permitted to venture further than 1,800-2,500 meters from the market center. They therefore visited only three of the hamlets.

The majority of the houses are small, one- and two-room straw huts with several wooden beds, and an altar on which there is a picture of the Hoa Hao Pope⁸ in the center of the main room. In front of each hut is a small stand or altar holding a container of joss sticks. A plaque of wood on each house indicates the number of people in the household, and their relationship to the household head. This is accomplished by a series of circles, red indicating male adults of the household; yellow, female adults; and green, the children. If the circle is only half colored, it indicates the person is illiterate. The primary reason for the plaques is the security problem. If military or police officers find people residing in a household who are not shown on the plaque, there is cause for suspicion. According to some, the plaque was also useful during the now-defunct illiteracy campaign as a kind of social pressure on the members of each household to learn to read and write as rapidly as possible.

The hamlet chiefs hold key positions in the administrative hierarchy of the village. They have the task of carrying out governmental policies in the remote areas, usually without the benefit of any type of military protection. Communication between the government and the peasant is dependent upon the hamlet chiefs. The chiefs are the link between the government and the majority of the Vietnamese population. Because of their strategic importance, they have borne the brunt of Viet Cong terrorism and propaganda.

An incident occurred in My Thuan which illustrates this point. The hamlet chief had recently been killed by the Viet Cong. Shortly after the village chief had appointed an acting hamlet chief to take over for the victim, the new appointee received a threatening letter from the

⁸The Hoa Hao is a Buddhist religious sect prevalent in this region. It was estimated that 85-90 percent of the population of My Thuan are members of the Hoa Hao group.

terrorists, instructing him not to take over the duties or they "could not guarantee his life." He fled to the village office, along with another local appointee who had been threatened, to attempt to resign his new position. The village chief begged him not to resign, stating that if the hamlet officials left their hamlets or refused to participate in the administration, there would be no hope for carrying out village affairs.

Hamlet chiefs are appointed by the district chief upon recommendation of the village chief. The selection is based primarily upon loyalty to the government and prestige in the community, as are most administrative appointments at the local level. However, in recent times, the village chief has had difficulty in recruiting officials to work in the hamlets, and the hamlet chiefs interviewed, as well as the village chief himself, all stated that they wanted to resign, but that their superiors refused to grant them permission. There is a great personal risk in undertaking these positions. As one hamlet chief said, "If you don't do wrong things, you won't receive bad consequences, but at night I lock the door and open it up for no one."

Each hamlet chief appoints, with the consent of the village council, a number of *khom* chiefs; a *khom* consists of from 25 to 35 households. The *khom* is then further sub-divided into 5 or 6 interfamily groups, (*lien gia*) each with its appointed chief. One of the major functions of this administrative hierarchy is to facilitate communications from the village council to the individual family heads. Usually, for example, written documents do not pass down below the village level. Rather, the village chief sends a messenger by bicycle to the hamlets, requesting the hamlet chiefs to come to the village hall. The village chief gives the information to each hamlet chief verbally, the latter then returns and instructs the *khom* chiefs. The *khom* chief notifies the head of each *lien gia*, whose responsibility it is to inform the family head. In practice, however, we found that the methods employed by the hamlet chiefs in the communication process deviated somewhat from the ideal system. One hamlet chief, for example, stated that he did not utilize the *khom* chiefs or the interfamily chiefs because they are not paid officials. He said he does not want to impose upon them, so he passes communications informally through friends, although several of these are *khom* chiefs.

The interfamily groups are the smallest official units in the village. The function of the interfamily chief is to report to the agglomeration chief the number of visitors in his group. He records the name and length of stay in the hamlet of any outsiders. He also distributes incoming mail. Ideally, information is passed verbally from *khom* chief to the heads of the interfamily groups. The primary function of the interfamily groups,

however, is security. The heads of these groups are supposed to watch the movements not only of nonresidents, but also those of the group members. Any irregularities are to be reported to the *khom* chief, who reports to the village security officers. (See Figure 2.)

In principle, disputes between villages ascend the hierarchy from interfamily chief through the *khom* and hamlet chief to the village chief. If the dispute is not settled at one of these levels, it may ultimately go through the district chief to the province chief.

In fact, however, most disputes are brought directly to the hamlet chief. One hamlet chief estimated that he spent 3 or 4 hours a day handling land and rent disputes, debts, and fights. Land and rent problems are usually referred to the village chief because these are generally legal grievances. Arguments over debts were concerned with two subjects, rice and cash. The latter generally amounted to a few hundred piasters. Fights occurred most generally after drinking parties.

Within the hamlets there appeared to be a high degree of geographical mobility, and during the observation period it was noted that many household heads were absent from the village. This may account for the lack of "hamlet solidarity" or "hamlet identification" which most informants reported. Since there is no double-cropping in My Thuan, farmers work on their own land only six months of the year. During the other half of the year they move over to another village or province to work on the fields, or they are employed as menial laborers, carpenters, or construction assistants. Ordinarily a man leaves his wife and children in the village while he is engaged in outside employment. However, poor farmers who own little or no land and who live in shabby, poorly constructed dwellings often move the entire family to a new place of employment. The roof and family valuables are placed on a cart and moved to a more favorable area, where a new house is built. The wealthier people, with large land holdings and solidly constructed homes, are more adverse to moving than the poor.

In order for a person to leave the village he must obtain an exit visa. Ordinarily the hamlet chief must approve the visa, but it was noted that villagers often went directly to the village chief for this permit. Although the purpose of the visa system is to restrict travel for security reasons, it also gives the hamlet chief a strong instrument of control. Individuals who do not conform to certain directives may be refused permission to travel to other villages or provinces for outside employment. Since this directly influences family income, villagers are sensitive to the impact non-conformity might have on them. A hamlet chief ex-

plained to the researchers, for example, in connection with recruitment for work on the agroville.⁹

There was some griping about the work, of course, within a family or a group of friends, but there was no open dissent. The people think they must do this kind of work because it is their duty as citizens. If a person is not a good citizen, it can cause him all kinds of trouble. For example, if a person refuses to work on the agroville, he may be considered antigovernment and when he applies for an exit permit to work in another village, he may be refused. Therefore, villagers were eager to work on the agrovilles in order to earn their certificates so that they could return to their own work.

There are about 50 Cambodian families in My Thuan who form a special hamlet (Ap My Bon) located about two kilometers from the village hall. This hamlet has its own hamlet chief, and is divided into *khom* and interfamily groups like any other hamlet in the village. It was reported by the village chief that there was little, if any, conflict between the Cambodians and the other villagers, since the majority of them are long-time residents who speak Vietnamese, send their children to the schools, cultivate rice according to local practices, and live in Vietnamese-style houses. The Cambodians have taken Vietnamese names, but only two instead of the usual three (Vietnamese have three names—Nguyen Van Ba, for example, whereas the Cambodians have two—Thach Oi). Despite this apparent acculturation, the members of this hamlet continue to observe certain Cambodian religious practices. The New Year, for example, is celebrated in the manner and at the time (April of the lunar calendar) traditional to Cambodia.

THE FIELD RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The following account of the village chief is the first of its kind to be prepared in Vietnam.

The research method for observing and recording the activities of the village chief was simple in nature.

The researcher remained at the side of the village chief during the work-day, making notes on the subjects discussed, the persons who conferred with the chief, the papers signed by him, and any other actions, such as visits to other offices in the village and district. After visitors had departed, additional information was obtained about the conversations that had occurred or about related matters. Thus, during most of the week the researcher listened in on conversations, observed the paper work coming into and going out of the chief's office, and accompanied the chief on his official business trips around the village area. He also

⁹"Agroville" is a governmentally planned rural settlement built with corvee-type labor problems involving adjoining villages.

maintained, as it will be noted, an almost minute-by-minute log of activities. Although all notes and conversations were in Vietnamese, they were reviewed and reported in English on tapes in the evenings. During the recording, some efforts were made to develop generalizations about the patterns of administrative behavior of the village chief, thereby to sharpen the focus of observations for the following days.

Monday morning was spent in locating another village, after it became evident the village chosen during the visit some weeks before was out of the question, since its village chief and many of the villagers were required to spend most of the week at the site of the agrovillage being constructed by the villagers under the direction of the district chief. Although the researcher was absent Wednesday morning on a visit to the agrovillage, notes were taken by an assistant. The research was terminated Friday evening rather than at the close of the village work-week at Saturday noon in order to permit an earlier return to Saigon.

The presence of a stranger in the office of the village chief did not greatly alter the customary routine of the village chief or of other village officials. Although the researcher was introduced by a high ranking official of the provincial administration, he was viewed by the village chief as a "teacher from Saigon," interested merely in learning about village life.

A WEEK WITH THE VILLAGE CHIEF

The following text presents the actual sequence of events as they occurred in the office of the village chief. Each new item is numbered and the time is given in 2400 hours. Later some "comments" of the writer were added. Various civil disputes that reappeared were given an identification such as "First civil dispute" each time the subject was brought before the chief. A synopsis of the appearances for each civil dispute is shown at the close of the activities of the week. The report begins with Monday afternoon since the morning had been lost in determining which village could be used for the survey.

Monday Afternoon

1. 1500-1530. The village chief answered various questions about the village of My Thuan and himself. The data are recorded in Chapter I.
2. 1530: *First civil dispute*. A tenant who had not paid his rent had been summoned once by a written message from the village chief. The message advised him to come in and explain why he had not paid

the rent to the landlord. Upon receipt of a second notification, he came to the village hall. The tenant stated he could not pay at present but that would pay later.

Comment: The chief talked to the tenant in a very friendly, familiar way. He was obviously well-acquainted with him and the tenant was at ease with the chief because of the manner in which he was addressed. Normally the chief would invite the landlord to attend a meeting of this type and then attempt to settle the dispute with both present. However, the chief explained, since he knew the landlord very well, as he did the tenant, he felt free to talk to the tenant without calling the other party. Later he would inform the landlord of the action taken.

3. 1535: The chief signed a document that would substitute for a birth certificate. His signature certified the authenticity of the signatures of three other persons who had served as witnesses.

Comment: In signing the document the village chief was functioning in his capacity as the civil status officer for the village, a duty that could be assigned to another councilor. A minor violation occurred in the process—the witnesses did not sign in the sight of the village chief; instead they signed in the outer room where the village clerk works. A fee of 20 piasters was charged for this document.

4. 1540: A poor farmer asked the village chief for his signature on a permit to leave the village for three days. The farmer wanted to get some fish outside the village. The village chief indicated the farmer should have asked the hamlet chief first and obtained the permit from the hamlet chief. Since the farmer was illiterate, he had written an "X" for his signature. After the village chief asked why he had not used his fingerprint, the farmer replied the "X" was easier. Not accepting this, the village chief placed the farmer's finger on the ink pad on his desk and made the print. "Anybody could make an 'X,'" the village chief said.

Comment: In such circumstance, usually a village chief would designate someone else, such as the village clerk, to do the fingerprinting. In the discussion the chief conversed cordially, as did the farmer himself. It gave the appearance of an exchange between friends.

5. 1550: The janitor from the primary school asked the village chief if he knew who owned the sand that had been dumped in front of the village hall. It belonged to the primary school next door to the village hall.

6. 1555: *Second civil dispute.* A tenant submitted an application form to the village chief; in effect, the application form was a com-

plaint signed by the hamlet chief as part of the procedure for filing the complaint. This was an appeal from the decision of the hamlet chief.

The tenant customarily rented the use of his land for duck feeding to a duck owner. The rental rate was established each year. This year when the duck owner wanted to use the land the tenant was absent; hence, the chief of the *khom* (sub-unit of the hamlet) agreed to set the rate of 30 *gia*,¹ but the duck owner thought this was too high. He, therefore, appealed to the hamlet chief. The decision of the hamlet chief was to settle the issue at the rate of 15 *gia* rather than 30 *gia*.

At this point in the explanation, the duck owner came into the office and began explaining his side of the story.

The duck owner said that when he started to bring his ducks into the field, the landowner stopped him, for the tenant had returned the land to the owner.

A retired hamlet chief sitting nearby entered the discussion, for he was familiar with the case. He suggested that the tenant should be satisfied with the 15 *gia*.

The village chief decided to send the complaint back to the hamlet chief for more information, to be presented the next afternoon. He addressed a message to this effect on the back of the complaint form.

During the time of this case, several other persons interrupted the hearing in order to conduct their business with the village chief. (The case itself lasted until about 1630.)

7. 1605: A villager (apparently from the District Information Service) came in to ask if he should put up flags in the village for the National Memorial Day celebration to be held on Tuesday. The chief agreed.

8. 1606: *Third civil dispute*: An application form regarding another complaint was placed on the chief's desk. After reading it, the chief apparently decided it was too complex to settle at this time; he placed it on his desk. He then conversed briefly with the complainant, a young woman about 20 years of age.

The young woman had been abandoned by her husband, who upon returning from military service, stayed with his parents. Shortly thereafter they gave him another wife. Already this second wife had given birth to one child. The first wife was childless; she had had one miscarriage. All of the wedding jewelry had been taken back by the husband. His family had completely rejected her. She was living in another village.

¹1 *gia* = 40 liters = about 1¾ bushels.

As a result of this explanation, the village chief read the complaint. He appeared very embarrassed as he was reading. Afterwards, without expecting an answer, he asked why she had not sought aid first from the hamlet chief. He then called the village permanent worker and instructed him to escort the young woman to the police chief of the police post² in the village.

Comment: The researcher asked the village chief why he himself had not made the decision. The chief explained that the police chief at the post could exercise more influence, for he wore a uniform. In addition, since the village chief knew these villagers very well, his decision in this matter would not be respected.

The researcher then asked if the village chief sometimes delegated authority to the village police councilor in regard to cases of this nature. The chief indicated that he could ask him, but that at present he could see the village police chief was occupied with other matters. In general, the chief does not assign cases to the village police chief, for the latter is usually burdened with many other duties.

9. 1610: The permanent worker entered the office and whispered in the ear of the village chief, who nodded affirmatively. Shortly, the worker reappeared with cold drinks for the guests.

Comment: This suggests the extent to which the village chief exercises control over some minor details.

10. 1623: *Fourth civil dispute.* A villager entered the office to complain that a debtor had refused to pay back a loan made by his wife. Following him into the office was the village political commissioner, bearing the application form that had to be signed for submission of the complaint, and ordering the debtor to appear before the village chief the following day.

11. 1645: Two letters were brought in for the village chief. One was private; the other which came from the deputy province chief concerned some matter that the village chief did not offer to discuss.

12. 1700: The village chief excused himself stating he was going to visit the Information Service to discuss plans for the ceremony of the next day.

²A special unit in the village, separate from the village council, a fairly normal organizational pattern in district seats.

Tuesday

13. 0800: The village chief attended the special memorial ceremony at the village *dinh* (communal temple). The village chief had only a minor role, apart from assisting the district information officer with general arrangements. He introduced the researcher to the hamlet chief of the *ho*, or market center, and to a former canton chief of the canton in which My Thuan is located.

14. 0955: A man entered the village office and asked the village chief for his signature on a certificate of moral character. The chief signed without comment.

15. 0957: *Fifth civil dispute*. A woman came into the office and complained that a debt of 5,000\$ had not been paid, although she had already asked the chief for assistance. The chief explained that he had talked to the debtor; he had advised him to make arrangements with her or her husband. The chief thought the debtor would appear within the next few days. She was instructed to wait that long for him to appear.

16. 1000: A man handed the village chief an agreement signed by a landowner allowing the holder to till certain specified lands. According to the complainant, the land was unproductive. Only by having it plowed with a tractor could the land be used. The complainant, therefore, wanted to be exempted from paying taxes.

The chief advised the complainant that a different form was needed, one certifying the unproductiveness of the land. The complainant departed, returning in the afternoon.

17. 1005: *Second civil dispute* (continued). The tenant came in and reminded the chief of the case. Since the other parties were not present, the chief told him he would have to wait until a later time.

18. 1006: The man who had presented a certificate of moral character earlier in the morning returned, for, as he explained, the police chief after making a wrong entry on the form, had destroyed it. The chief signed the second form.

Comment: The researcher asked the chief if the applicant might not have kept the other form. The chief felt certain that the first had been destroyed by the police chief.

19. 1007: A man entered and asked for the chief's signature on a form allowing him to change his residence from My Thuan to Thanh Loi Village in the same district. He had already obtained the signature of the hamlet chief. The chief signed it without comment.

Comment: By this time it had become apparent that the chief was an extremely slow reader and writer.

20. 1015: *Comment:* Since there were no more callers, the village chief left his office to talk with the assistant finance councilor in the adjoining office.

21. 1030: *Comment:* The chief excused himself, explaining the day was an official holiday. However, he returned shortly followed by two highly agitated men. It was not possible to follow the discussion.

It was decided to quit the village hall at this time and return in the afternoon.

22. 1500: *Comment:* Although a holiday, the chief police councilor and assistant finance councilor were in their offices.

23. 1500: A stranger came in with eight or more certificates of conduct for the chief's signature. These certificates were for civil guard recruits. The district chief had advised the stranger who was there to pick up these recruits to come to the village chief. Although the chief signed the certificates, he expressed his concern, since there were no signatures from the hamlet chiefs, and some of the men did not possess birth certificates. The chief was, in fact, doubtful about some of the recruits.

24. 1515: The clrk placed a letter addressed to the district chief on the desk. The letter contained the application of the first-aid agent to resign. The resignation was opposed by the village chief. Instead of signing it, the chief set the letter aside.

Comment: It also was becoming apparent that the Chief had no particular system for handling his affairs; he seemed to lack "method and order."

25. 1517: The political commissioner showed the village chief a list of villagers to be trained as hamlet and village councilors. Three or four persons on the list were rejected because of advanced age. Two of the rejects were 46 and 59 years of age. The chief told the political commissioner that more time should be allowed for choosing candidates to replace those rejected.

26. 1519: A tenant who rented some abandoned land from the village entered and asked for a reduction in rent, contending the land was not productive and that the rice stalks were eaten by crabs. He acknowledged that the village council had complete control over the rental rate, but he hoped they would take the poor quality of the land into consideration.

The village chief proposed a rate of 8 *gia*, which was countered by an offer of 7. The chief accepted. (He was familiar with the land.) When the tenant expressed a desire to pay the rent at once, the chief attempted to prepare a receipt, but gave up and asked the clerk to prepare a temporary receipt. He then discovered he could not make change for the bills given him. It was necessary for the tenant to obtain change from finance councilor in the next office.

Comment: While the legal provisions directed the village chief to hold the payment for the absentee landowner (a Frenchman who had not been heard from for several years), the village chief viewed the payment as a tax that could then become revenue for the village.

27. 1525: The political commissioner brought in an application authorizing a villager to go out of the village to work in a designated area. The village chief signed without comment.

28. 1526: The village clerk requested the chief's signature on a letter addressed to a hamlet chief. The contents were not made known to the observer.

29. 1527: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). Two women, one a debtor and the other a creditor, entered the office.

Comment: The chief appeared disturbed. He picked up the letter of resignation submitted by the first-aid agent, reread it quickly, and signed it. Then he turned to the two women and asked them to explain their problem.

The debtor, addressed as *Chi Bay* (sister seven), explained her problem. She admitted having borrowed 2,000\$ from *Chi Ba* (sister three—not of the same family). She had borrowed the money in order to go into the business of buying meat to resell in Saigon. The business would have been very profitable, since one kilo cost 35\$ in the village and sold for 45\$ in Saigon. The profit was great because the meat was not legally purchased (a procedure involving control by the slaughterhouse and some tax payments). She knew the risk she was taking. (The village chief indicated the practice was fairly common, and that those in the practice usually expected an even greater profit.) She was arrested. Since the police officer involved in the arrest was a friend of hers, she was fined only 20\$, but the meat was seized. Without funds, she had to borrow 50\$ from the same police officer to return home.

When *Chi Bay* borrowed the money, she promised to make the repayment in 3 or 4 days. Because of her loss, she was unable to meet the agreed deadline. Later she gave birth to a baby, but since she was

in poor health, the baby died. She offered to pay back a small portion every day, but this offer was rejected.

Chi Bay's husband refused to accept responsibility for the debt. He, in fact, argued that *Chi Bay* was not his legal wife and that when she did anything dishonorable, he would not consider it as of interest to him. Now, the creditor wanted to force the husband to accept full responsibility for the debt, since he is able to pay. In defense of keeping her affairs secret, *Chi Bay* explained she did not want to tell her husband, since she had started an illegal business.

Comment: During this explanation the village chief had been interrupted several times.

30. 1535: The police councilor requested the chief to sign an authorization for transporting rice. He signed without comment.

31. 1535: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The chief advised the debtor to make a satisfactory arrangement with the creditor. He said, "Speak to her in a way that would be indicative of your honest willingness to repay." He stressed the fact that the role of a creditor is like that of a benefactor; the debtor must recognize the kindness that has been bestowed; she is wrong if she does not acknowledge this.

Comment: In pointing to the benefactor role of the creditor, the village chief had been very astute, since this set the mood for accepting another proposition from the debtor.

The creditor then commented that she herself had given her jewels as security for a recent loan, and that she had to pay interest. She needed the money. She added that she was not angry at the woman, but at the woman's husband.

32. 1545: The village chief was asked to sign an application for change of residence. He signed without comment.

33. 1550: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The chief asked if the husband were in the hall. He was indeed waiting outside the office and the chief invited him to come in.

The husband explained that the creditor had not informed him of the loan; she did not have any consideration for him. Furthermore, he insisted his wife was not his legal wife; he could make her responsible for her own affairs. He was, in fact, angry with the creditor, for she had not asked his permission in the first place, whereas now she wanted him to repay the loan. Since he was ignored at first, he wanted to be ignored now.

The village chief told the husband he had a moral obligation to assume responsibility for his wife, even though she was not his legal wife. He also said the husband should not let his name be compromised by this situation. However, the husband remained firm. He contended he had no money, and that all of his rice was gone.

The village chief pointed out to the creditor that she was unwise to loan money to the woman without notifying the husband. The husband could now deny the debt. This could be done legally, although morally it should not be done.

34. 1555: A soldier brought in an application for the chief's signature. He signed this and another paper presented without comment.

35. 1600: Another villager came in. He was introduced to the researcher as a member of the National Revolutionary Movement. The villager asked for the chief's signature on a paper substituting for a birth certificate. The chief signed without comment.

36. 1601: The tenant concerned with the duck-feeding dispute came in and reminded the chief of his case. The chief told him to wait, since he was busy with another case.

37. 1603: The civil guard recruiter returned with another batch of papers for signatures. The chief signed without comment.

38. 1605: The tenant who had submitted the wrong form in the morning in an effort to obtain exemption from taxation returned with another statement prepared and signed by himself stating the poor quality of the land. However, the village Chief rejected the statement, saying it should come from the landowner. Somewhat unhappy about the affair, the tenant replied, "You said a simple report was enough. Now I will ask the landowner to come."

39. 1618. *Second civil dispute* (continued). The tenant and the duck owner came in and began discussing their case despite the fact that the two women and the husband were still in the room.

The duck owner declared that the tenant had agreed to rent the land to him for the purpose of feeding his ducks; however, he had not brought the rental paper with him today. Both the tenant and his wife contended the agreement was not made by them but was made by the chief of the *khom*.

At this moment the *ho truong* (chief of the market center hamlet) entered and sat down to listen to the case.

Although the duck owner could not produce the rental paper, he possessed a document showing that the tenants returned the land to the owner on February 18, while the date of the rental paper for duck feeding was signed January 25. The intervening period was too short for fattening the ducks, yet the tenant thought the period was long enough for consuming all of the rice in the field. Therefore, the tenant argued, the duck owner should pay 20 *gia* rather than 15.

The village chief viewed the rental rate of 15 *gia* as being the right rate, but he asked the duckowner to try to pay an additional 5 *gia* because the tenant was very, very poor. That this additional payment would not work a hardship was stressed by the tenant. Still refusing, the duckowner argued that the tenant should have asked for the additional 5 *gia* before the hamlet chief; if he now decided to give the extra 5, he would be losing a judicial case, since the tenant had filed a complaint with the village chief. (In other words, bringing the case up to the village level had given it a more formal character; the duck owner would be losing face if he accepted this proposal.)

At this point the village chief tried to stress the sentimental side of the case: "Let us suppose the tenant some day knocks on your door and begs for help. Would you be able to close your eyes?" The duckowner remained firm.

Several times during the case, the chief stressed his advisory role he was playing in the case.

40. 1635: The finance councilor submitted a cash deposit slip to the chief for his signature. He signed without comment. The slip was for deposits in the provincial treasury.

Comment: Still in the room were the two women in the debtor-creditor case, but the husband had left. Occasionally the village chief spoke to the persons in this case while the other case was being heard.

41. 1636: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The creditor suggested that the debtor go out and try to persuade her husband to assume the debt. The debtor did not move; she showed fear of her husband. Then the women asked the village chief for permission to depart; in addition, they offered to try to settle the case by themselves. With his approval, they departed.

Comment: It became apparent that the creditor was quite sympathetic because the debtor had had a series of personal problems. Formerly, she had been the wife of first rank of a resident of Saigon but when she became too jealous of the second rank wife, she moved from Saigon with her young baby to My Thuan village, where she met her

present husband. As a means of repaying the debt, it became apparent that she would propose some arrangement delaying the time until her daughter completed the primary school, for then the daughter could then help augment her income sufficiently to start the payments.

42. 1640: *Second civil dispute* (continued). Still holding his ground, the duck owner argued he not only had he agreed to pay 15 *gia* to the tenant, but also he had paid another 15 *gia* to the landowner. Finally accepting the duck owner's stand, the tenant closed the case by asking when he could get the payment. The duck owner suggested the following day.

Comment: During both cases the village chief attempted to play the role of a conciliator rather than an arbitrator, and also to keep the discussions on an informal, friendly basis. There was no display of authority in the case. At one time in the creditor-debtor case, in an effort to persuade the creditor to be more sympathetic, the village chief quoted a Chinese axiom: "When a husband borrows money, the wife is ready to pay back. But when the wife borrows money, the child, not the husband, is ready to pay back."

43. 1655: The *ho truong* entered and visited with the observer.

44. 1705: A farmer entered to pay his rent on land rented from the village. Receiving the payment of 416\$, the village chief entered the payment in a notebook kept on his desk and gave the man a temporary receipt written on a piece of paper lying on his desk. Later the village clerk would issue a permanent, that is, a prenumbered receipt in exchange for the temporary receipt. The payment would be turned over to the village finance councilor for safekeeping.

45. 1708: The village clerk asked the chief to sign some letters addressed to the hamlet chiefs asking them to urge the farmers to repay their agricultural loans.

46. 1715: A villager entered the office and was introduced as a friend of the village chief. He immediately went before the small altar, lighted an incense stick, and placed it in a small holder.

Comment: Placing the incense stick before the altar was a gesture of respect. The altar is for the *Ton Su*, a protector of village council personnel. Each profession has its own *Ton Su*; theatrical personnel, for example, have their own *Ton Su*. It was mentioned that the occupation of this villager involved the renting of chairs for theaters.

47. 1720: Another villager presented the village chief with a bill amounting to 278\$. Several items, including a cover for a tea service and another for a small stove used in heating tea, had been purchased for the village council.

Wednesday

46.³ 0807: A man, dressed in Western clothes, came in and handed the chief two printed application forms as substitutes for birth certificates. Before signing them, the chief asked, "Are you certain they are accurate?" A nod was sufficient to convince the chief.

47. 0810: The village political commissioner brought in two requests for authorization to leave the village. One was a printed form, the other, a note written by the applicant. The chief signed the printed form.

48. 0814: Since there were no villagers in his office, the chief went out and stood in the entrance of the village hall.

Comment: While waiting for the village chief to return, the observer overheard the following conversation taking place in the outer room where the desk of the village clerk was located. The political commissioner sitting on a stool beside the desk read aloud a travel request submitted by an elderly farmer. He then asked, "Why didn't you get the signature of your hamlet chief first?"

The farmer replied, "It's hard to get it from my hamlet chief." He then begged the political commissioner to approve the request before taking it back to the hamlet chief for his signature.

"That's not feasible," the political commissioner replied. "You must go from the bottom upwards."

The farmer departed.

49. 0819: *Sixth civil dispute.* Shortly after the chief returned to his office, a well-dressed woman came in with written complaint against 13 tenants cultivating her fields in the Tam Duoc area.⁴ According to her, none of the tenants were paying rent.

The landowner's main concern was to sell the land, not collect the past due rent. To an outsider (not one of her tenants) she could sell

³Since the research group was interested in visiting the agrovillage being constructed under the supervision of the district chief, the Wednesday morning observations of the village chief were made by Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Yen, interpreter, MSUC staff. Mr. Yen was introduced to the village chief and the plan for the morning was explained.

⁴"Well-dressed" meant a white Vietnamese-styled dress rather than the white shirt blouse and black trousers customarily worn by women in the rural areas.

the land for 10,000\$ per hectare (2.47 acres), but the tenants refused to give up control. As a compromise, she offered to sell to the tenants at a rate of 9,000\$ per hectare, plus free cultivation for one year. As yet, none had replied to her.

After reading the list of names, the Chief told the landowner, "Today is Wednesday, then Thursday, then Friday. Come back Friday. I will write a letter immediately to the hamlet chief." A few minutes later he repeated his promise.

She departed after saying, "Thank you very, very much, uncle."

True to his word, the chief began drafting the letter. He wrote slowly.

Comment: All during the discussion the landowner addressed the chief with the form, "Uncle." This familiar form of address is used only by persons of long-standing acquaintance.

50. 0823: An elderly farmer came in and presented a request, which apparently was poorly written, to travel outside the village. The chief read it slowly and carefully. It was a request to travel to another province in search of his brother's son, a wood dealer, who had planned on being away one month, but already three months had passed. The farmer added, "He has been away three times, but never before has he stayed this long."

Again and again the chief read the request in order to understand it. There was some confusion as to whose son the individual really was. The chief asked, "Is he your son or the son of your older brother?"

"My brother's," the farmer replied.

"Why did you tell me he was your son, while the request said your brother's?"

No explanation was offered; the farmer remained silent.

Finally, the chief signed the request without any outward sign of dissatisfaction. He then told the farmer to take the request to the village political commissioner.

51. 0829: The political commissioner brought in another travel request. The chief signed without comment.

52. 0830: A young man brought in a travel request for a period of two days. The chief signed without comment.

53. 0831: An elderly farmer brought in a handwritten statement, two pages in length.

"What bad wording," the chief remarked after reading it. Apparently this was an agreement signed by a tenant transferring the right to cultivate a portion of a rice field to the son of the farmer. The farmer wanted the village chief to add his signature as a means for legalizing or at least authenticating the agreement since, he explained, it was not signed before the village council. The chief refused.

"I will not do that," he said more than once. The chief argued he could not sign because one party was absent.

Not willing to be refused, the farmer quietly remained on the bench in front of the chief's desk.

0840: *Sixth civil dispute* (continued). The chief continued to draft the letter to the hamlet chief inviting the 13 tenants to come in Friday. Since he was having considerable difficulty reading the names of the tenants, the elderly farmer would lean over the desk to help the chief. (Like almost all other villagers who came to the office, he apparently knew the chief very well. The chief did not seem to object to the behavior of the farmer.)

The letter read as follows: "To the *Ap Chu* hamlet chief) . . . please invite those listed below to come to the village hall at 8:00 a.m., Friday, April 8, 1960, for a 'necessary affair.' They should not be excused for any reason." At the bottom of the letter were the names of the 13 tenants.

The chief handed the letter to the political commissioner for delivery.

54. 0854: Again the elderly farmer asked the chief for his signature. The chief, no longer refusing, signed the agreement, and when the farmer asked if the agreement would be stamped with the village seal, he agreed.

55. 0857: *First civil dispute* (continued). A young woman came in and bowed or nodded her head to the chief, who reported, "He (meaning the tenant) came in and asked for an extension of the payment date."

In a light, laughing manner she asked, "Did he? Did he beg you for an extension?" (She called him "*Ong Dai Dien*," which is "*Mr. Chief*.")

He, too, in a mood of light laughter, claimed "I am not the creditor," to which she replied,

"Yes, but I consider myself as your younger sister (that is, of lower rank)."

The chief went on to say, "He told me he had not paid rent even for the rice field?"

"Nothing," the woman replied in a more bitter tone.

The chief said, "Later, in the presence of the professor, he begged me to allow him to pay later. Then he left in a hurry, claiming he was too busy to stay any longer."

At this point the chief turned to the observer and explained that he had told the professor about the tenant. "The tenant seemed uneasy so he left." The woman was still standing.

The chief asked her, "But you won't have any use for the money when you get it back?"

Laughingly, she said, "I do need it."

The chief continued, "You are a landowner. If I were a landowner, I would be more generous."

As the woman was leaving, the chief said, "Tell him the chief of My Thuan Village wants to build a house on that land!"

"You are joking," she replied.

The chief continued, "I gave him 20 or 30 days as a deadline for the payment. It is really an error on my part to do that, but I could not do otherwise, for I know him quite well."

The woman did not like his generosity. "I know he owns some 100 *gia* of paddy, many pigs, and personal belongings. He stubbornly refuses to pay. He is too stubborn!"

In defense of his action, the chief contended, "Perhaps he thinks you are not in need."

She attempted to convince the chief that she was the only source of support for her large family, she was like a hen feeding ten chickens.

"But," he argued, "you are a landowner who does not have to worry about chickens being a burden."

In rebuttal she pointed out, "I am the only member of my family to care for the children and nephews, while you have only your wife to take care of, so you're happier." (She had referred to the wife as *Ba Sau* which designates her family rank.) The woman bowed as she departed.

Walking to the door, the chief jokingly said, "I will give him even more time, two or three months because it is not a crime to be in debt."

Rather than return to the office, the chief went over to the finance councilor to deposit a tax payment of 60\$ given him enroute to the village hall.

(The village clerk had finished typing a list of young men selected for the training course for hamlet and village council positions. He began to register three birth certificates.)

56. 0930: Shortly after the chief returned, the political commissioner brought in two papers. One was a complaint of a woman against her grandson. On recognizing it, the chief cried, "I never want to settle this. She has complained more than once to me about her grandson. It is a family affair." He handed the paper back.

The second was submitted by an elderly villager who had come in behind the political commissioner. After reading it, the chief invited the villager to sit down. The villager, a farmer, complained that because a dam located near his mother's grave was being seriously damaged by the rising water, soon the grave and the surrounding field would be flooded. According to the chief, the dam had been constructed by a contractor. (Presumably, this was said to "save face" for the governmental authorities for apparently the dam had not been properly constructed.)

57. 0935: The discussion was interrupted by a young man who came in to tell the chief that during the summer vacation his younger brother would be working for the school director, according to an agreement made with the director. The chief insisted that he should be told this by the school director himself.

Comment: The reason for this exchange probably was an understanding that the village would pay the salary of the summer worker.

58. 0936: (Back to the elderly farmer and the flooding of the grave). The farmer described the present condition of the dam. The chief then reread the complaint entitled, "Request for Reconstructing the Dam to Protect the Graves from Floods."

In a few minutes the chief called in the political commissioner to "certify" the complaint. The farmer remained in the office.

59. 0944: A middle-aged man, dressed in Western clothes, brought in a statement which the village chief slowly read.

The ensuing conversation indicated that his sister who had been living in Saigon had moved to the village. While in Saigon she had failed to obtain a voter's card. He, therefore, wanted her name to be registered in the "special record book," issued sometime previously by the district office, in which the names of those who had not obtained the voter's cards were to be placed.

It was impossible to comply with the request, the chief explained, since the book had been returned to the district. (Persons registered in the book were required to pay a fee of 20\$.) The chief added, "... do not worry."

Feeling reassured, the man departed with his statement.

60. 0945: (Back to the elderly farmer and the flooding of the graves). The political commissioner returned with the statement of the farmer, who then asked if it was necessary to stamp the letter with the village seal. Agreeing, the chief advised the farmer to take the complaint to the office of the finance councilor.

61. 0950: A young man entered and told the chief he was certain that a cloth banner would be needed for the public meeting the next day. He quickly departed.

Comment: Alone in the office, the village chief turned to the observer to give vent to his private views on banners and economy, how money was wasted in making painted banners.

Speaking far more emphatically than customarily, the chief said, "I suggested to the district information chief that it's more economical to use colored paper than paint for the letters. Just cut out the paper letters and paste them on the cloth banner. That will save a lot of money! After every ceremony, just take off the paper and preserve the cloth for later use. Painted banners are thrown away after every occasion. It's a pure waste of money, isn't it?"

The chief went on, "That does not mean it would save my money but the government's. Do you know that some 700\$ or 1,000\$ are spent on banners for ceremonies? The village collects its money in 5's and 10's, but they (the higher authorities) see only the total, the thousand, and not the small payments!"

The chief went out to the clerk's desk to look for a circular about the organization of tomorrow's ceremony. Both he and the political commissioner read it. Still concerned about the costs of banners, the village chief complained to the political commissioner, "Yes, it's the government's money, but it's a pure waste. I'll use colored paper for the letters. If it is rejected by the information chief, I'll be responsible."

The chief returned to his desk chair. He then said to the observer, "I don't think Mr. Diem will condemn me for using paper letters to save money."

62. 1013: An elderly villager brought in six copies of a birth certificate for the chief's signature. These were to be used in submitting claims for family allowances. The chief signed them without comment. The villager departed.

63. 1045: The political commissioner brought in two invitations for the ceremony. After signing them, the chief left his office. He returned in 20 minutes. The office and hall were quiet.

64. 1120: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The debtor and creditor came in. The husband of the debtor still refused to recognize the debt. The creditor said, "I am sorry I did not have any paper on the debt (that is, have the husband sign an authorization. Chi Bay's husband changes wives so easily. I swear I feel sorry for Chi Bay, but . . ."

The Chief interrupted, "You don't have a legal marriage certificate. You are his wife, in fact, but you are not legally."

Chi Ba, the creditor, talked to the debtor in a friendly way, attempting to persuade her to ask her husband to come in and sign the paper. She showed how generous she had been in loaning the money by producing the receipt for her jewels given to the pawnbroker.

"I pawned my personal possessions to lend Chi Bay the money." She went on, "I am, if I may say, her benefactor. She borrowed the money, promising to return it in three days. When I saw her husband at the market with her, I asked for the money. He immediately said she was no longer his wife."

The chief asked the debtor, "Now, what do you think?"

She replied, "He keeps insisting he is too poor to pay for me. I asked Chi Ba to let me repay a small sum each month."

"Chi Ba?" the chief said.

Chi Ba asked, "You promised to pay, but if you continue to live with your husband, how can I get the money? It's up to you to tell the chief how you want to repay."

65. 1130: A middle-aged man in Western clothes came in and handed the chief a statement containing the names of tenants refusing to pay their rent. He wanted the assistance of the security service of the district. The chief took the request to the police councilor.

While the chief was out of the office, the visitor introduced himself as an owner of some rice fields and buses. He also stated that ten days ago his younger brother, en route to Khanh An Village to collect rents, was arrested by the Viet Cong.

About two weeks ago, the story goes, the younger brother rode his bicycle to Khanh An Village. He arrived at noon. Immediately he was stopped and arrested by a band of Viet Cong who, after placing a blindfold on him, led him away. His bicycle was left at the house of the hamlet chief. Detained for 24 hours, he was forced to write a statement pledging (1) not to sell rice fields to the government; (2) not to pay field taxes; (3) not to collect rent from the tenants working in his fields, and (4) not to denounce the acts of the Viet Cong or he would be killed. He then had to sign the statement. (It was signing the statement that bothered his brother.) Later that same day the hamlet chief, believing his brother had been killed, reported the act to the district military authorities. A group of militiamen (called "soldiers" by the landowner) rushed to the location, arriving about dark. After being told by the villagers that the Viet Cong were numerous, the militiamen encircled the area in order to avoid falling into a trap. About midnight, the brother was released. Now an investigation is under way.

The landowner also mentioned another incident. Another landowner was arrested in the same place almost at the same time, perhaps a day or two earlier, but his presence of mind saved him from the hands of the Viet Cong. He claimed he was a Hoa Hao, as he pretended to search for papers in his pockets. Then, noticing that the Viet Cong relaxed their attention, he escaped. However, according to the Viet Cong's version as given to his arrested brother, he would have been killed if their leader had given the order, for all members were armed with carbines and the leader with a revolver.

66. 1135: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). Meanwhile, the two women were trying to reach a compromise. The debtor was proposing a 200\$ per month payment. The creditor kept insisting the husband should

make a pledge to the village chief allowing his wife to repay the debt. "Otherwise," she argued, "you should come and live with me."

(A young man entered and sat on the bench. Later he was identified as a *khom* chief.)

The chief indicated his agreement with this. "In that case, your husband should pledge before the village council to allow you either to repay or to live with Chi Ba. Did he spend any of the borrowed money?"

"No," the debtor replied. "He was not aware of my debt."

Again the debtor offered to sign a statement promising to repay the debt, and the creditor rejected it, insisting that her signature was not sufficient.

Comment: It was difficult to understand some of the ensuing conversation. It appeared to deal with the feasibility of the debtor's living with the creditor. If she did, the Chief thought, her husband might complain to the village council that she had been "seduced." Again, the idea of the husband's making a pledge before the village chief was proposed by the creditor.

67. The chief turned to the young man still sitting on the bench. Speaking loudly, the young man complained that many *khom* have no hamlet chief to certify papers submitted by the villagers. He was concerned about his position as *khom* chief since the government had arrested the hamlet chief. "It is like a snake without a head," said the village chief. Apparently contemplating aloud, the chief philosophized, "What does love for the people amount to, if not to food, clothing, the provision of every support and facility?"

To the *khom* chief he commented "Over one hundred persons were brought to the village hall the other day (for security screening). If you recognize good residents in your *khom*, don't hesitate to save them." The young man departed.

68. 1150: The elderly permanent worker came in to say, as he nodded to the chief, "It is time, *Ong Dai Dien* (Mr. Chief)."

69. 1151: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The chief concluded, "The crucial point is that the creditor is married. She might someday be charged with helping her own husband seduce Chi Bay. That is a deplorable thing that must be avoided. If it would occur, Chi Ba would not only lose the money but also any further claim."

Before departing, the debtor promised to try again to persuade her husband. The women left together.

The chief then left, but the clerk remained until 1215.

70. 1520: The village chief was interviewed by other members of the research team.

71. 1535: A woman came in and submitted a complaint concerning ownership of some land. After reading the complaint, the chief asked why it had been brought to him rather than taken to a court. She replied she thought all affairs had to go through the village chief. The chief thought he did not have the right nor the time at present to settle this case. He suggested she return some other time. When asked for a specific date, he suggested next Monday (apparently forgetting his commitment to go to the site for the new agrovillage with the workers from his village).

When alone, the chief explained his objection to handling the complaint. The case was extremely complicated, involving legal questions of ownership relating to father, son, grandson, etc. Cases of this kind are usually aggravated by the lack of satisfactory legal documents about birth and family relationships.

72. 1545: An employee from the district office entered and presented a receipt for 300\$. The village chief reimbursed the employee from some money, a sort of petty cash fund, in the desk. The chief assumed the expenditure had been made for the agrovillage.

(The discussion with other members of the research team continued.)

73. 1615: A Cambodian resident of the village entered to ask the chief about demolishing a certain house on order of the district chief.

74. 1620: A villager entered to obtain the chief's signature on a permit authorizing the transport of paddy.

Comment: Asked why this authorization was needed, the chief thought it was a regulation imposed by the province to insure the collection of the property tax. It was a relatively new regulation. An absentee landowner wanting to collect his rent in paddy (unmilled rice) was required to contact the hamlet chief for the authorization.

75. 1624: Another villager brought in a handful of papers for signatures. Among them were birth registrations, a substitute for a birth certificate, and declarations of moral character. Most of the papers were for civil guard members, since considerable recruitment activity was

going on in the village. Being a slow writer, the chief asked the clerk to put in the dates.

76. 1625: A villager entered and asked the chief to sign an application. The chief signed without comment.

77. 1630: The police councilor came in to remind the village chief to visit the chief of the police post. The chief immediately departed.

The purpose of the visit was to explain the order of the district chief demanding the elimination of a wall in the police post. The chief was interested in explaining, in order to prevent the police chief from being unhappy with him, as well as to help him understand the reasons for the order. The police post chief did not want to abolish the wall, since it also was part of the adjoining house. Yet, in explaining the reasons, all the village chief did was to state that it was the desire of the district chief to have it abolished. Once this was understood, the police post chief no longer objected. The village chief departed.

78. 1640: *Third civil dispute* (continued).

Comment. While visiting the police post, the researcher made some inquiries about the jurisdiction of this special unit. He used as an example the case of the wife whose husband had abandoned her and taken up another wife chosen by his family. According to the police post chief, that was a civil case, therefore, not within his jurisdiction. He would be able to accept the case only if authorized by the court. In general, his duties were to execute court orders and to assist in maintenance of security throughout the district. He reports to the chief of police for the province.

79. 1645: At the entrance of the village hall the village chief was informed that the order to demolish the wall had been revoked. (Apparently the informant was an assistant to the village police chief.)

The village chief chatted with five Cambodians. The exchange was very friendly. Finally, they asked him for money. The chief handed one a 10\$ note.

80. 1655: An employee from the district information service asked the chief if everything were ready for the celebration. The chief replied he had an order to prepare a banner.

(The chief and members of the research team went to an adjoining restaurant for a cool drink.)

81. 1715: The village clerk brought in letters to various hamlet chiefs for the chief's signature. They concerned the collection of communal field rents. He also signed some birth certificates.

82. 1725: A villager entered to ask the chief about the rental rate for land in category "C," which is abandoned land. He handed the chief a contract, which the chief carefully read. He then set the rate at 15 *gia* (600\$) and made a note in the register kept in his desk that the rent was not paid at this time.

Thursday

83. 0820: The village chief attended a political meeting held in the primary school yard and attended by representatives, mostly youths dressed in the blue and white uniforms, of the four villages that make up the canton in which My Thuan is located. The meeting was sponsored by the National Revolutionary Movement, whose local unit president is the district information officer. Another village chief read a petition supporting the President and asking for the adoption of measures that would assure the destruction of the Viet Cong. The My Thuan Village Chief had no duties to perform during the ceremony. After the ceremony, he returned to his office.

84. 0945: A villager, introduced as a former important member of the Hoa Hao, came in and talked with the chief.

85. 0947: The village political commissioner brought in several civil status papers for signatures. The chief signed them perfunctorily.

Comment: Apparently, the political commissioner assisted in the performance of many tasks normally done by the village clerk. Whenever the clerk was absent or otherwise occupied, the commissioner would help out. This gave us the impression that the intended tasks of a political commissioner were not receiving his complete attention.

Shortly thereafter, two other villagers came in with requests. One wanted an authorization to leave the village and the other to call in a tenant in order to make the arrangements needed for selling his land.

86. 0950: Another villager entered with a form in his hand regarding the holding of a family ceremony. He needed the authorization of the village chief, who continued talking while signing.

87. 1000: The village chief went across the center room to the office of the police chief to tell him to send someone to a hamlet chief with instructions to accelerate the collection of communal land rents.

88. 1003: A villager submitted a request for travel in order to purchase some wood. The chief signed it without comment. Shortly, the political commissioner brought in another form for signature. He was soon followed by a farmer who wanted authorization to transport paddy.

89. 1010: An assistant to the police chief entered to ask when he should go to the hamlet chiefs for rent collection. The chief said at once. He should go to the post of the *Tam Vu* (a post of provincial civil guards and village self-defense corps) and ask the post to arrange a meeting of the communal land tenants. He should advise the tenants that rent should be paid at the village hall on Saturday.

90. 1015: *Fourth civil dispute* (continued). The two women returned. The debtor told the chief that the creditor had accepted the proposal to pay 200\$ each month for 12 months (which provided an interest payment of 400\$ on a 2,000\$ loan). The husband still refused to acknowledge the debt. Agreeing to the settlement, the village chief told them to have someone write up the arrangement and he would sign it (They did not reappear during the remainder of the time we observed the chief.)

91. 1020: A villager asked the chief of certify a statement listing the living members of his household.

After signing, the chief complained to the visitor that it was difficult to understand some correspondence since often Chinese words, rather than common words, would be used. Especially when he first became chief, he spent considerable time in trying to read the correspondence. The chief then went on to talk about many things. At one time he discussed reincarnation. Since Hoa Hao is a branch of Buddhism, it embraces reincarnation. Likewise, the chief explained, if a man leads a bad life, he will pay for it in the next.

92. 1040: A villager asked the chief to sign a form substituting for a birth certificate. The chief obligingly signed.

93. 1100: An employee of the Rural Credit Service of the district came in. The Village of My Thuan had not as yet collected any of the loans, whereas other villages had. Some villages had collected a large proportion of their outstanding loans.

The chief asked him not to report this, but the district employee said it would be difficult not to, since he would be asked by the province. He left shortly.

Comment: This conversation was partly serious and partly not. Like many others who visited the village chief, the employee treated him

in a very friendly and familiar way. The form of address, "uncle," that the employee used indicated a close relationship.

94. 1104: The political commissioner asked the chief to sign a marriage certificate.

95. 1110: A villager entered and showed the chief a rental agreement. He claimed the rentor had not paid any rent on a house for three months. Also, the rentor had moved out all of the furniture. He wanted the village chief to certify these facts so that he could repossess the house. The chief asked him to have the village clerk prepare a statement on the rental agreement.

96. 1115: The District Rural Credit employee asked the chief to sign a certificate enabling him to obtain the extra allowances due for his children.

Comment.: The general discussion with the observer continued. They talked for some time about the period when the religious sect, the Hoa Hao, was active. Did the village chief accept his position at that time? Apparently he did, for he replied, "By working, I made myself useful to the people. Had I been killed, it would have been all right."

97. 1125: The houseowner returned with a statement just prepared by the clerk. The chief signed without comment.

98. 1130: A villager asked for a signature on a certificate of good behavior. This was signed without comment.

99. 1425: Since the village chief had not yet arrived, the observer visited with the police chief.

100. 1540: A villager asked the village chief for permission to travel to the province town for the purpose of studying oriental medicine. Approval was given by signing the request. The political commissioner asked for the chief's signature on some papers.

101. 1600: The village chief and political commissioner answered many questions about village council administration and village organization. (Reported by Professor Donoghue.) During the discussion, the chief criticized the theater performance of the previous night saying that it was not good since every actor died which contrasts with the customarily happy endings of traditional theater.

102. 1606: The political commissioner brought in a letter from the district, which apparently criticized the village chief for not sending in a reply on time regarding the list of young men for the Republican

Youth Group. The village chief viewed the letter as sent by a clerk of the district chief rather than by the chief himself. Although the political commissioner thought the reply had been sent, the village chief advised him to check with the police chief. The check showed that the reply had not been sent, since the police chief was still waiting for the hamlet chief to reply to his letters. The village chief advised the political commissioner to tell the police chief to speed up the reply.

103. 1612: A village clerk brought in a letter from another district announcing a change in residence of a named person. After reading the letter, the chief handed it back without comment. Shortly, the clerk returned with another letter, a report of transfer of land from a private party to the government, sent by the Provincial Cadastral Service. There were about two hectares involved in the transfer.

104. 1625: A tenant came in and paid his rent on the public land he was using. Later the chief went out to hand the money to the finance councilor.

The chief asked the political commissioner to prepare a letter calling in the nearest hamlet chief to meet two members of the research team, as they had just requested.

105. 1635. The clerk brought in a report that the chief signed without reading. When asked what it contained, he said he did not know. The clerk was asked to bring it back. The report concerned an auto accident which occurred the day before in front of the village hall. The vehicle had hit the low wall. Since the statement was a report, rather than a letter, it was signed by all three members of the council.

106. 1640: The political commissioner brought in a letter to the hamlet chiefs regarding the interviews requested by the research team. The chief signed without comment.

At this time the chief registered in his notebook the payment made earlier to the employee from the district office. Earlier he had merely inserted a note in the book.

107. 1645: A close friend of the village chief, the theater chair rentor, entered and lighted incense sticks as he had done previously. He then asked the chief to sign a diploma, thereby, in effect, making a certified copy. The diploma had been issued by a garage in Cholon for the training of mechanics. The village chief commented that the certification should be made at the district, but apparently the district clerk had thought the village chief could do it. He did not sign the paper.

The chief then complained about the location of his seat at the theater last night, for he had received the invitation from this man. The chief had been seated in a corner of the theater. Since he had worn only ordinary dress, the staff apparently had not recognized him as village chief, the visitor explained in an apologetic tone.

Comment: This was a serious error, since status is attached to the matter of seat locations; the chief suffered a loss of face among the villagers.

108. 1700: The rentor returned with the paper still unsigned. From the clerk in the district office he had received the instruction to obtain the village chief's signature and then the district chief would certify to that signature (the common practice). Not only the village chief, but also the other councilors, signed.

109. 1705: The village chief signed a letter asking two villagers to come in to discuss a question of lineage.

110. 1707: The finance councilor came in to inform the chief of the death of a villager whom both knew.

Friday

111. 0810: (The chief was in his office when the researcher arrived at 0800.) A villager came in and requested an exemption from the agrovillage labor group because of poor health. He stated he was ill. He was about 50 years old. The village chief wrote a note asking the hamlet chief to make the decision.

Comment: The observer later asked the village chief why he did not make the decision himself. The chief offered three reasons: first, he could not verify the claim of illness without a medical statement; second, the hamlet chief would be able to check on the claim because he lives nearer the villager; and third, the hamlet chief would have to look for a replacement.

112. 0813: The village clerk brought in a letter for the chief's signature; he signed without comment.

113. 0815: The assistant district chief came in and told the village chief that a Catholic priest had asked the district chief to postpone the time for the labor contribution of 17 villagers who were helping him rebuild a church. In anticipation of the approval of the district chief presently absent from the district, the suggestion was that the village chief should ask the hamlet chief at once to exempt the men. The formal authorization would come later.

Comment: The researcher asked if this exemption were permissible. It would be difficult to refuse the priest, since the men were working on the reconstruction of a church. The priest did not live in the village, but he maintained a church here. He lived in Sadeç. The church had been destroyed by the Viet Minh. It was first rebuilt with palm leaves; now bricks would be used.

The assistant district chief was very talkative. Many disputes were brought to him for settlement, he claimed. Some were humorous, such as the case of the grandfather who wanted to get back the land seized by his grandson. When in the same family, why should they come to the district office? Another complaint was from a man who finally complained that his wife had left him. Why did he wait two years before submitting the complaint?

According to this district official, the reason for complaining at this time was that the people were free from work until the rains come.

114. 0825: *Sixth civil dispute* (continued). A well-dressed woman entered as the assistant district chief left. She addressed the village chief with the greeting of "Uncle Six," denoting considerable familiarity. In turn she was addressed as "Mrs. assistant district chief," since, as it was explained later, her husband had held that position. After asking the village chief about her case, she was told that some tenants were still absent. She decided to wait in the chief's office.

115. 0830: A woman came in with a baby in her arms. She asked for the chief's signature on a birth certificate, but since the chief did not sign it at once, she also sat down to wait. Shortly, the political commissioner brought in a travel permit for the chief's signature, which was given without comment.

116. 0840: *Sixth civil dispute* (continued). Two of the tenants, both women, arrived. One stated the landowner had asked her to buy the land but she had no money; however, she was ready to sign a rental contract for another year. To this the landowner said she had proposed selling the land three years ago. Now she wanted the tenants to decide between buying or vacating the land by signing a release. (Land reform legislation required a release under the circumstances in this case.) To those who released her land, she would give 1,000\$ per hectare. As for rental rates, up to now she had been very generous, she argued, since she asked for only two *gia* per *cong* (1/10 hectare), while other landowners got two and one-half *gia*.

(Interruption: a villager came in to obtain the chief's signature on a birth certificate.)

The landowner, who had stepped out of the room, brought in a villager who she said was interested in buying land. According to the village chief, if he were willing to buy, his name should be added to the list already prepared by the landowner. Countering the chief, the landowner said his name already was on a list that the chief had in his desk drawer. Both she and the chief began searching the drawer; the list was found by the landowner. (Village chief did not seem perturbed at her action.)

Interruption: the political commissioner came in with a travel authorization for a farmer who wanted to buy a buffalo. The chief signed without comment.

Three other women, tenants of the landowner present, entered. Immediately the chief asked if their contracts were in their names or their husbands' names and was told the latter. In that case, the chief said, the husband could refuse to recognize any agreement.

117. 0850: Still waiting for the other tenants to appear, the chief went to the waiting room and chatted with several people there. With the two hamlet chiefs invited to visit with members of the research team he discussed recruitment of agrovillage workers. He explained that the policy as set forth by the district chief stated that the health, rather than the age, of the individual was the most important criterion.

Seeing a chair with a broken leg, the chief mended it with a small piece of iron found nearby.

118. 0854: *Sixth civil dispute* (continued). Returning to his office, the chief saw the room was almost overflowing with the tenants. In their midst was the well-dressed landowner attempting to persuade them to decide whether to buy or sign the release.

119. 0858: *The threatening letters*. The acting chief of a hamlet brought in a threatening letter received the night before from the Viet Cong. The chief read it. The major points were:

1. That the government had performed "savage and inhuman acts of repression,"
2. That the hamlet chief was guilty of bribery and that the acting hamlet chief had accepted bribes from villagers wanting to avoid working in the agrovilles,

3. That the hamlet chief had forced young men to buy insignia at 5\$ each and that they had to purchase uniforms in spite of their deplorable living conditions,
4. That the agrovilla was a "concentration camp of patriotic citizens" and a "hell on earth," and
5. That the acting hamlet chief must immediately resign from his position as "servant of the government" or his life and property would not be guaranteed. The letter also appealed to the conscience of the hamlet chief.

120. 0900: *The threatening letters* (continued). A second threatening letter was brought in by its recipient, a youth leader who was a brother of the acting hamlet chief. Shorter and less threatening (but still sufficiently so to cause the young man to be completely upset), the letter as read by the chief stated:

1. That the youth leader forced young men to work on the agrovilla under burning heat,
2. That the "bright prospect" was the coming "revolution of the people to topple the present regime," and
3. That the youth leader should cease "serving the government," or he would bear all consequences.

Comment. Both letters, written the same day in an exceptionally neat and business-like style, were stamped with a red-inked inscription, "Allied Forces of Religious Sects against the Americans and Diem," and signed by the same person, "For the Commanding Staff," of a numbered battalion. According to the acting hamlet chief, he found the letters in a can in his front yard.

121. 0903: A young man, introduced to the observer as a son of the chief, brought in a request to travel to the provincial town for medical treatment. The chief signed without comment.

122. 0909: A soldier came in and asked for the chief's signature on a birth certificate.

123. 0911: *The threatening letters* (continued). The chief discussed the letters with the two villagers. He looked embarrassed. He didn't know how to act. Both men appeared extremely worried and asked to resign. Recently the previous hamlet chief had received a similar letter and was subsequently killed. Opposing their request, the chief argued if everyone resigned, there would be no one to work in the