

2. Traditional Tug-of-War Festival in Chap Village (Hoa Long Commune, Yen Phong District, and Bac Ninh City)

The Chap Festival (Huu Chap Village) in Bac Ninh Province is held annually on 4 January according to the lunar calendar (Lunar New Year or *Tet* in Vietnamese). This festival has been widely known in the Kinh Bac area for many years. According to locals, legend says the Huu Chap villagers used to pull large logs of timber to the river bank. The Chap villagers became famous for their strength and timber-pulling skills, and soon neighbouring villages began hiring Chap villagers. Later, Chap villagers created the tug-of-war game to symbolise the way they made a living, and that game became a collective cultural activity practiced during Lunar New Year celebration. However, further analysis of Chap Tug-of-War Festival shows that the tug-of-war practiced in Chap village actually originates as part of traditional agricultural beliefs, symbolically attached to the practice of praying for good weather and crops.

Annually, the village sends people to find good bamboo that can be used to make a rope for the tug-of-war festival. They have to prepare one month before the festival formally takes place. To have a qualified rope, villagers have to locate two big and firm bamboo stalks, especially ones without any signs of insect infestations. After finding the bamboo, they hand the materials over to the individuals charged making the rope. First the two bamboo stalks are smoothed out to get rid of all rough parts. Next, the roots are connected by joints and the whole assembly is firmly covered by *lạt* (long, thin bamboo strings). Three spiders are then painted on the rope. One big spider marks the centre of the string, and the two small spiders are at two other opposite sides of the central point. After being completed, the rope is hung and stored inside the communal house (*Đình* in Vietnamese) until the fourth day of Tet, the day the tug-of-war festival is held. Before taking the bamboo rope out of the communal house, villagers perform a small ceremony to ask the village deities for permission to use the rope for the festival.

All the tug-of-war participants are young men, divided into two teams called the east team and the west team. They are all bare-chested, wearing just white silk pants, a red cloth belt, and a red or blue silk turban. Four men, called *Mr. Hóá*, preside over the tug-of-war competition. They start and direct all the matches by drumbeats. The two teams compete in a match consisting of three rounds. The team that wins two of the three rounds is the winner. In this tug-of-war, spectators are not allowed to cheer either team during the first and second rounds. However, during the third round, the east team receives thunderous support from spectators from *Đầu Hàn* and *Cô Mễ* villages. If the east team easily wins the match, the villagers believe that it will be a good year. This way of thinking comes from the traditional belief of the east symbolising spring, maternity, and prosperity.

The Huu Chap Tug-of-War Festival used to end with a firecracker contest. However, due to national legislation banning firecrackers, this activity is no longer a part of the festival. In the past, a huge firecracker was hung high in the centre of communal house's front yard, and young men would try to set it off by throwing many small firecrackers at it. The person who lit the firecracker would receive good fortune throughout the new year. The firecracker competition was also considered a traditional cultural practice related to prayers for good weather and crops. Local people, especially rice farmers believed that the sound of exploding firecrackers symbolised thunder, which is a sign for rain and good crops.



Picture 1. Tug-of-War in Chap (Huu Chap) Festival, Bac Ninh Province²

Tug-of-war in Chap's traditional festival is considered a normal cultural practice or folk game that is often included in Vietnamese festivals as a way of creating a cheerful atmosphere for local communities. At the same time, as a cultural activity it is infused with profound meaning and value.

3. Tug-of-War in the Tich Son Festival (Vinh Phuc Province)

Tich Son is a village in Vinh Yen City, Vinh Phuc Province. Annually, from 3 to 5 January on the lunar calendar, the village holds a festival in its communal house to commemorate

²http://baobacninh.com.vn/news_detail/73595/dac-sac-keo-co-lang-huu-chap.html