

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 Province<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>2</sup>[http://baobacninh.com.vn/news\\_detail/73595/dac-sac-keo-co-lang-huu-chap.html](http://baobacninh.com.vn/news_detail/73595/dac-sac-keo-co-lang-huu-chap.html)

and praise the seven Lỗ brothers. These men made great contributions while fighting against the Yuan invaders from China during the Tran dynasty (thirteenth century CE). Locals consider this annual festival a simulation of the feast that was given to Tran soldiers before going into battle. Therefore, the festival includes historical practices, such as catching and beheading pigs, holding a rice-cooking contest, slaughtering chickens, and competing in a tug-of-war.

The tug-of-war competition, called *sỏ giải* in Vietnamese, is an integral part of the festival. The participants are all adult men, and they compete bare-chested and wearing a turban. They are divided into two teams: the older team and younger team. They position themselves along the rope in an east-west direction, mimicking the trajectory of the sun. The older team stands to the east while younger team stand to the west. The competition includes three rounds. The team that can pull the other team forward three steps is the winner of the round. After each round, the players of both teams go to the communal house to pray to village tutelary deities. According to tradition, if the older team (east team) wins the competition, the village will have a year of good weather with an abundant harvest. In practice, the tug-of-war competition in Tich Son is a symbolic ritual to pray for good weather and crops for the local community. While the younger team is normally stronger, they always let the older team win because of the connection with harvests and good weather.

Tich Son Festival has its origin from traditional agricultural beliefs of rice farmers in Vietnam. Today, the festival is also interpreted as a cultural event to simulate and commemorate the legendary event (Tran dynasty's victory over Yuan invaders in 1257 CE). The festival's cultural components—pigs, chickens, rice cooking, and the east-west orientation in the tug-of-war as well as the traditional underlying principle of east beating west—are linked to agriculture.

#### ***4. Tug-of-War in Lồng Tồng (Going to the Rice Field) Festivals in Northern Areas of Vietnam***

Roóng Pọc Festival<sup>3</sup> (also called *Lồng Tồng*) of the Giay people in Sa Pa, Lao Cai Province, is held on Dragon Day of the first month of the lunar year. This event, according to Giay's traditional belief, is the end of a joyful month (called *Tet*) and the beginning of a new working year. In the festival, Giay people hold a ritual to pray to local guardian deities for protection and prosperity. Tug-of-war, an important part of this festival, is for praying for a fruitful harvest. The rope used in this tug-of-war practice must be a big and firm one. Bamboo is used to make the rope, but selecting the right bamboo stalk involves

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<sup>3</sup><http://laocai.gov.vn/timhieulaocai/dulich/phongtuclehoi/Trang/634046196981554190.aspx>