

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 Festival³ (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

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

finding a plant with its roots in the east and the top to the west. The game normally starts with a ritual round with the male team, which made up of older men, standing to the east and holding the root of the bamboo rope while female team of older women stands to the west holding the top. After the referee's signal, the ritual match starts, accompanied by encouraging and inspiring drumbeats and spectators' cheers. Both teams pretended to tug the cord, moving the cord back and forth to both sides and then, finally, male team wins the match. According to local beliefs, the male team represents the sun, which is the yang force, while female team represents for the yin force. Yang must win over yin to bring fruitfulness to the people and crops. The ritual match is to express villagers' wish for a new year with an abundant harvest and good health for all. When the ritual match is done, the real game begins. Players are again divided into two teams by gender, but this time the males and females participating are all healthy and young. Two teams tug the rope as hard as they can, yet try to not to break it, as a broken rope is a sign of bad luck. When the match finishes, the winning team will take the rope into head villager's house. A village shaman will burn three incense sticks and he will take the incense and three pieces of yellow paper to the grounds where the tug-of-war took place. He will stick the incense sticks into the ground where lies a stake that marks the border line between the two tug-of-war teams. After praying, he will take that stake down, and the villagers will prepare two strong buffaloes to draw some ploughs to symbolise the start of a new crop season—this ends the Róng Pòc Festival.

In addition to the Giay people (Sa Pa, Lao Cai), several ethnic people in the mountain areas in northern Vietnam also have a tug-of-war practice included in their traditional festivals, most notably the Lồng Tồng (Going to the Rice Field) Festival:

- Tug-of-war of the Tay people (Lao Cai Province) is usually played by two teams that represent for two different family groups: one group from the upper part and the other from the lower part of a water source. The upper team always wins as a symbolic signal for a good harvest.
- Tug-of-war of the Tay and Nung people (northern areas of Vietnam) also organise Lồng Tồng Festivals for January on the lunar calendar. Players are divided into four teams according to four different direction of the village—south, east, west, and north. Before getting into the real competition, the east and west teams perform a three rounds in ritual match in which the east team, symbolising the rising sun, always wins. In this way, the villagers express their wish for the sun to always come and that its light will help the crops grow.

The diversity in the nuance, distribution, and meaning of the tug-of-war reflects the long traditional agricultural culture of Vietnamese people. These practices have played an important role in the socio-cultural life of many communities, so the tug-of-war should be considered a valuable cultural practice and in need of careful safeguarding and promotion.