

Traditional Corporate Group Economics in Southeast Asia: An Ethnographic Study with Archaeological Implications



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INTRODUCTION

CORPORATE GROUPS HAVE ATTRACTED great attention in anthropology and archaeology since the time of Lewis Henry Morgan (1881), who tended to characterize all of North American traditional societies as corporate in nature. While more recent anthropological studies have often maintained that corporate groups are usually based on the control of some important resource (e.g., land, fishing sites, weirs, irrigation wells), much less attention has been devoted to the internal dynamics and economics of corporate groups. One of the more intriguing aspects of such groups has been the overt hostility of industrial economic leaders and ideologues toward indigenous corporate groups. In a number of cases (notably in British Columbia, Indonesia, and Vietnam), this has even expressed itself in legal prohibitions against corporate residences and/or the prohibition of the most important corporate economic activities such as potlatches and similar feasts. Some anthropologists have referred to these policies as “cultural genocide” because many ritual and social practices that typify these ethnic groups are intimately bound to corporate group existence, including the feasts, ceremonies, titles, and forms of deference. Today, residential corporate groups such as longhouses have almost entirely been dismantled, or the economic basis of their existence has effectively been undermined by national programs or by the effects of world economics. Therefore, observations on the internal dynamics of corporate groups is largely a matter of rescue ethnography, ethnohistory, or recording oral history or memory culture.

Having carried out archaeological and ethnoarchaeological research among several corporate group societies (Hayden 1979, 2000, 2001), I have often wondered what internal dynamics held these multiple-family households together and what features in corporate group economics were so antithetical to industrialist economics (whether socialist or capitalist) to warrant extreme legal measures. This article presents an

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exploration of corporate group economic dynamics based largely on work that I carried out among Southeast Asian ethnic groups. The key question to be addressed is: What does it mean in social and economic terms when archaeologists recover remains of corporate group residences?

Definitions

Maine (1861) appears to have been the first to use the term, “corporate group,” emphasizing that “corporations *never die*” (his emphasis) and that they could have administrators. Since that time, anthropologists have adapted the term according to their particular interests. Thus, some definitions emphasize the durational aspects of groups, and other definitions emphasize the social aspects, the hereditary aspects, the legal aspects, or the ownership of material resources. For instance, Weber (1947:145ff) focused on the “social relationship which is either closed or limits the admission of outsiders by rules” as implemented by an administrative staff. Honigman (1959:360) described corporate groups as enduring, selective, and stable in membership, conferring specific rights and duties, owning wealth as a group, administering discipline, having goals, being clearly identifiable as a group, and having clear leaders. Cochrane (1971) argued that the only social groups that should be termed “corporate groups” are those that meet the legal definition of corporate groups in Western societies. Nadel (1951) on the other hand viewed corporate groups as equivalent to multi-purpose groups whose shared rights and duties become activated in diverse situations under the guidance of administrators. Similarly, Belshaw (1967:33) defined corporate groups as “a continuous association of roles organized to achieve common purposes,” with those purposes often being vague, changing, and even contradictory. For him, the authority of administrators might extend to joint property. Finally, Goodenough (1951:30–31) viewed corporate groups as “groups that function as individuals in relation to property,” also stressing the presence of an administrative authority. It should be apparent that there is no single definition of “corporate group”; however, this last definition probably comes closest to a useful definition for archaeologists and economists. This definition would eliminate many other kinds of social associations which Befu and Plotnicov (1962:314) suggest could otherwise inappropriately be considered as corporate groups.

As an archaeologist, I focus on a specific kind of archaeologically visible corporate group: the kind that lives together under the same roof. This usage is similar to the general orientation of Morgan (1881) and Engels (1884) in their analysis of residential groups. I call these “residential corporate groups” (Hayden and Cannon 1982), but will often simply refer to them as “corporate groups” in the following analysis. Identifying such groups archaeologically on the basis of posthole patterns, hearths, storage features, or floor outlines is relatively easy. Understanding why they emerged and what socioeconomic dynamics held them together is more difficult, but can be aided by examining ethnographic cases. Some well-known examples include Iroquoian longhouses, Iban longhouses, Northwest Coast longhouses, and the large multifamily pithouses of the Northwest Interior. I explicitly exclude from this definition groups of people who join together for political, religious, or monetary reasons and who do not reside together. It makes most sense to deal with such groups as a separate analytical unit that might be referred to as an “institution.”

Issues

There are a number of important issues concerning residential corporate groups. These include:

- (1) why groups vary in size, wealth, and power;
- (2) the roles, or functions, of corporate groups;
- (3) the degree of control of administrators;
- (4) whether the formation of corporate groups is fundamentally driven by communitarian interests or by the self-interests of the aggrandizer(s);
- (5) the means by which contributions to corporate group activities are obtained from members; and
- (6) the compatibility of corporate groups with Industrial economic systems.

These issues will be addressed in the following discussions. The underlying question of why residential corporate groups develop in some societies and not others is an intriguing one that has rarely been addressed by archaeologists or ethnologists. I will return to this question after examining some of the internal dynamics of corporate groups in relation to the other issues. However, in order to place the following discussions in some context, it is worth noting at this point that the major suggestions for causal formation factors are ownership of key resources, risk reduction strategies, and exploitative control over reproduction.

CORPORATE GROUP DYNAMICS: DEGREE OF CENTRALIZED CONTROL
BY ADMINISTRATORS

In all cases, variations between corporate groups in power and strength appear to be primarily related to the size and wealth of the group, with the number and strength of allies within a community also playing a secondary role, together, possibly, with the past performance (status) of the group. When we turn to administrative control over corporate resources, we find that at one extreme, constituent families may operate relatively independently of each other, and the principal head of the corporate house seems to have relatively little control over constituent family affairs. I suspect that this may correspond to the development of residential corporate groups as a response to military threats, or similar conditions that do not necessarily create strong means of economic control. At the other extreme, there are corporate residences where administrators dominate the productive activities of constituent families and determine how surpluses of all families are to be used. These two extremes of administrative control can be examined in more detail with the following case studies from Southeast Asia.

Independent Constituent Families (Decentralized Corporate Groups)

In many respects, the ethnographic work of George Condominas (1977) among the Monong Gar of the central Vietnamese Highlands (Fig. 1) is the most detailed account that exists of the traditional lives of people living in Southeast Asian longhouses. Unfortunately, despite all of the graphic detail that he provides, there is little discussion of economic production or relative allocation or control over surpluses within the

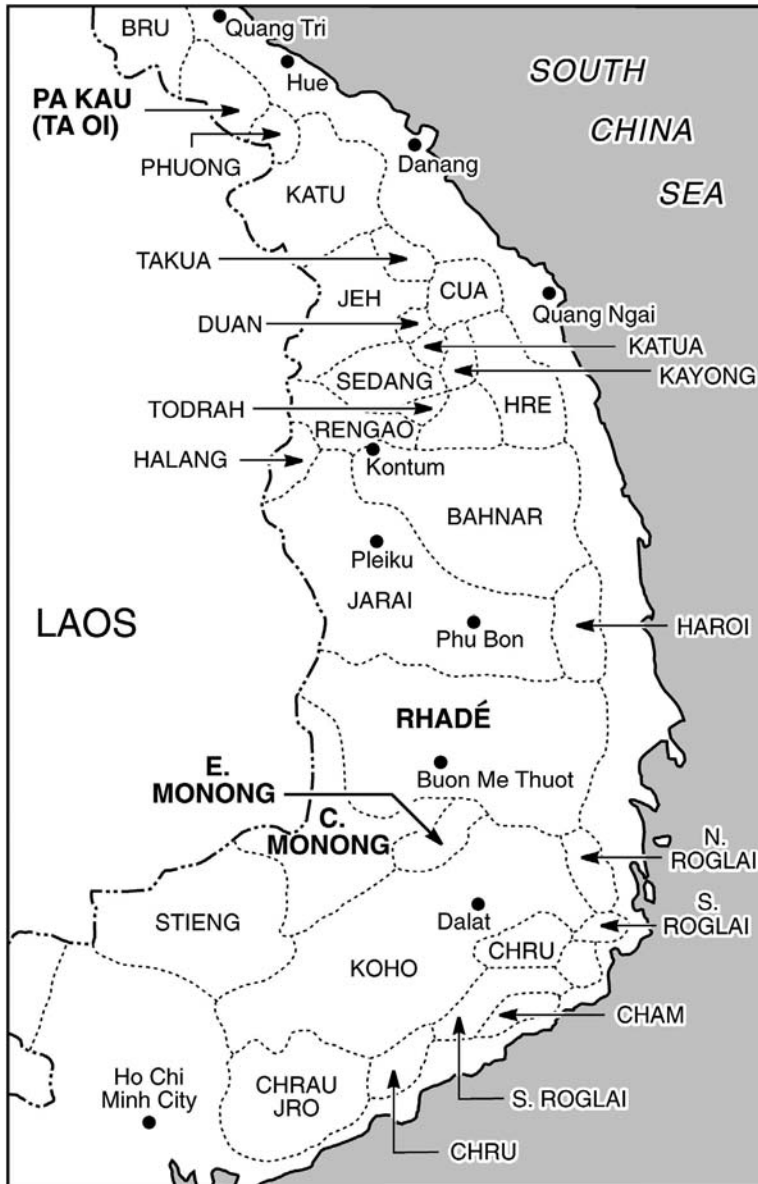


Fig. 1. Map of Vietnam showing locations of groups mentioned in this article.

longhouses. Who contributes to feasts and why, for instance, is not systematically dealt with. However, Condominas does at least provide enough description to establish the fact that each family in a Monong Gar longhouse owned its own granary (built above its hearth area inside the longhouse) and that adjoining families in longhouses shared a common space between them (Figs. 2 and 3). Among the Monong Gar, there was no single common room for the use of the entire longhouse group. In Condominas' descriptions, it further appears that each nuclear family within a longhouse (rather

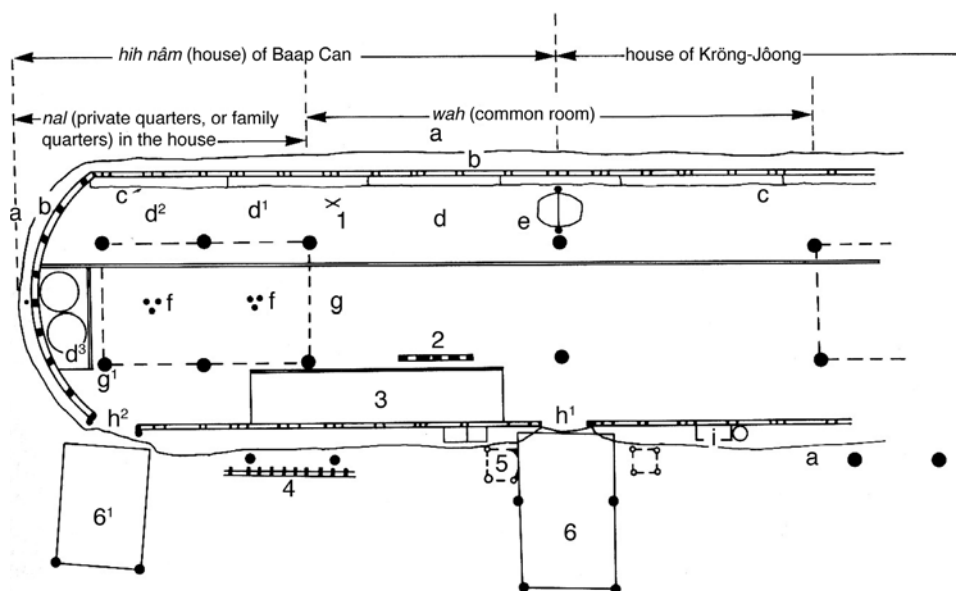


Fig. 2. Longhouse floor plan among the Monong Gar as recorded by Condominas (1977), illustrating the "common" area between two family residential areas with their associated granaries in the rafters (represented by dashed-line rectangles). *c* = place for large jars; *d* = individual sleeping areas; *d*³ = platform for grain silos; *e* = drum; *f* = hearths; *g* = granery; *h* = entrances; 6 = ritual veranda.

than the longhouse as a whole) sponsored their own feasts, for which the common space between family areas served as the ritual center. Most families in longhouses (up to 40 m long with four resident families) were related, with the eldest lineage member serving as titular head of the longhouse. However, it is not clear what his responsibilities were nor what leverage he might use to obtain material contributions or compliance with his priorities from other member families. As in most other Southeast Asian groups, a large block of forest was cleared for the use of the entire village, and the village holy man allocated each family a section within the block for their own use. Poorer families complained that holy men (not, apparently, the longhouse administrative heads) put pressure on them, or coerced them to contribute to feasts (Condominas 1977: 327, 333). Wealth items such as gongs were described as belonging to individuals rather than corporate groups (Condominas 1977: 52). Condominas' portrayal of corporate group dynamics seems so individualistic that one wonders what the motivation of living communally under one roof may have been for families, or whether they even conformed technically to the definition of a corporate group. They thus appear to represent the very weak end of the corporate spectrum. Consistent with this view were the observations that I made when I visited several Monong Gar villages in 1995 with Professor Tran Quoc Vuong. These were among the poorest corporate groups that I observed (with dirt house floors and few wealth items), and they seemed to have little surplus with which to erect social networks or engage in much socioeconomic rivalry (Fig. 3).

I recorded a somewhat similar situation in 1996 when conducting an ethnographic survey with Professor Tran Quoc Vuong in the Vietnamese Highlands of Quang Tri Province. The group that we visited were the Ta Oi (usually referred to as Pa Kau)



Fig. 3. The interior of a Monong Gar longhouse showing the resident family, their eating and sleeping area, the elevated granary above the hearth, and the family-owned rice wine jar. Note the dirt floor compared to elevated floors elsewhere. (Photograph by B. Hayden)



Fig. 4. The exterior of a Ta Oi longhouse. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

near Ta Rut, which had some of the longest corporate houses in Vietnam (up to 70 m long with 17–36 member families; Figs. 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8). Not all Ta Oi communities built longhouses, indicating that local environmental or economic factors probably played more important roles in the occurrence of longhouses than ethnic traditions. Unfortunately, six months before our visit, the District administration had decided that longhouses were a hindrance to regional economic development and had ordered that all longhouses be dismantled. However, due to the recentness of this change there



Fig. 5. An abandoned Ta Oi village and surroundings. The village was abandoned following local government decrees banning longhouses. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

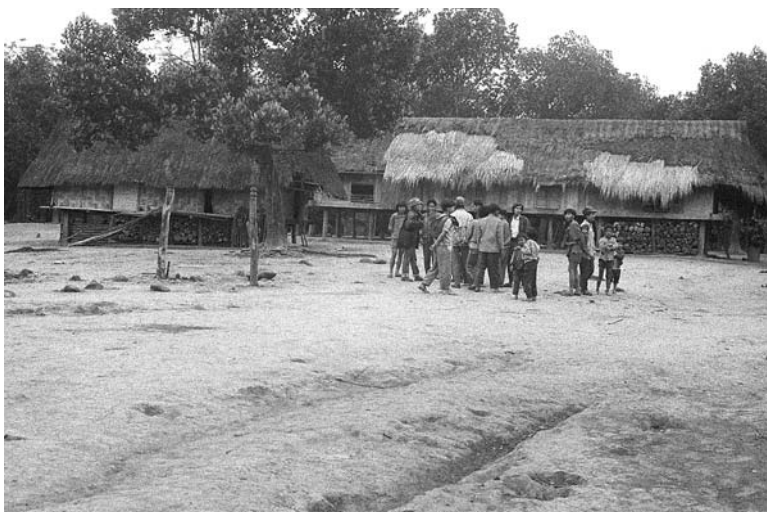


Fig. 6. The central plaza of a Ta Oi village near Ta Rut with its ceremonial sacrificial poles and one of the longhouses. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

were a number of villages that had yet to comply with administrative policies and it was still possible to obtain considerable information on traditional longhouse dynamics.

Thus, we were told that the Ta Oi near Ta Rut did not use wet-rice cultivation and that the yields of swidden rice and maize were poor, although manioc and taro produced more. As with the Monong Gar, each family seems to have formed a relatively independent productive unit that prepared their own meals, cultivated their own plot (within the cleared village block), and owned their own field granary. However, in contrast to the Monong Gar, the administrative head of the corporate longhouse (*dung*)

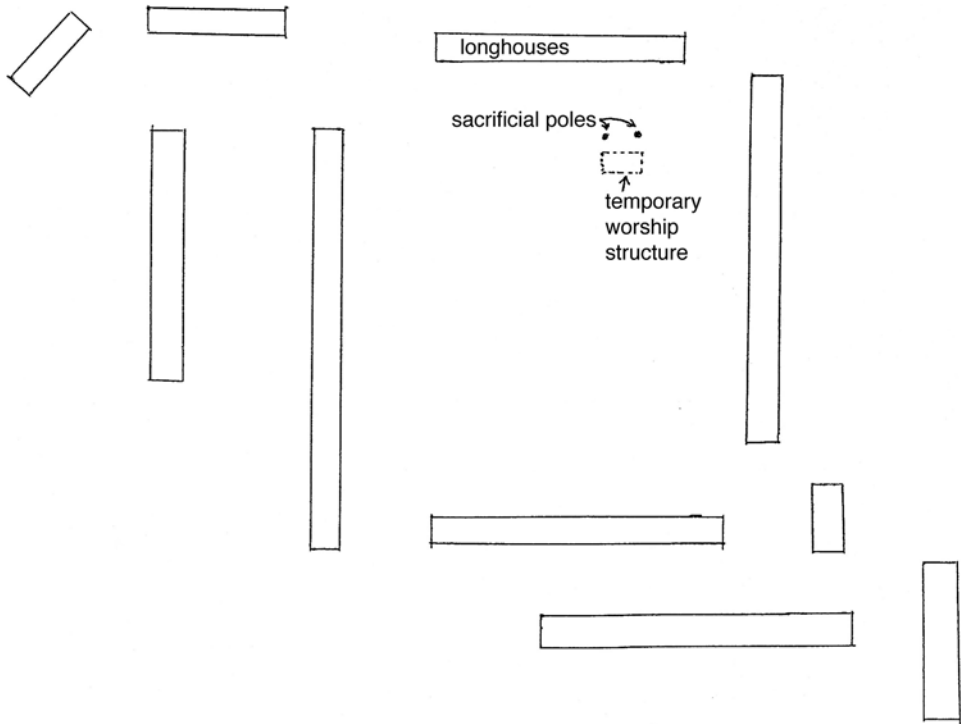


Fig. 7. The village plan of a Ta Oi longhouse community illustrating the variation in longhouse lengths and the central plaza.

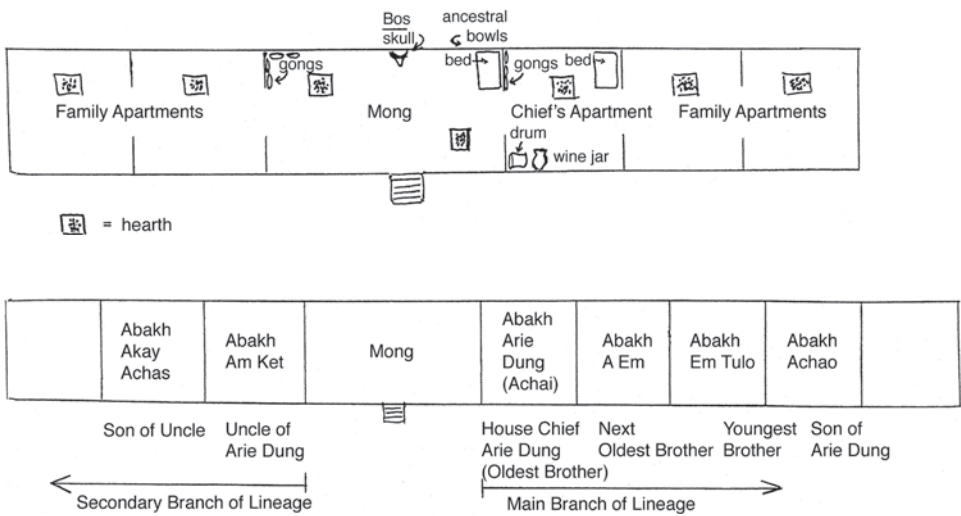


Fig. 8. Two Ta Oi house plans showing the central feasting and ritual area in each house and the division into family apartments.



Fig. 9. A Ta Oi marriage feast during a daytime lull. Note the outside food preparation area in the background at right. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

stored all corporate wealth in his apartment. This consisted primarily of gongs, bronze cauldrons, drums, wine jars, and wooden dressers.

The corporate group's main functions were: (1) to hold feasts (see Figs. 9 and 10); (2) to pay bride prices and reciprocal wealth exchanges between members of different corporate groups, especially those of high rank; (3) to cover funeral expenses for members; (4) to protect members involved in disputes; (5) to assure subsistence for members; (6) to provide for the defense of members; (7) to provide curing for members; (8) to worship lineage ancestors; and (9) to act as an intermediary with other corporate groups. Feasting, meetings, and the reception of important guests took place in a central "common room" (*mong*) within the longhouse (Figs. 8, 10, and 11).

Marriage was a particularly important function since marriages were used as occasions for the greatest wealth exchanges in Ta Oi communities, and few if any young Ta Oi men could afford to underwrite marriage payments on their own (Figs. 9 and 10). One village head told us that a normal bride price included 6 silver bracelets, 4 pairs of earrings, 6 water buffaloes and 6 cows, 8 silver ingots, and 20–30 gongs. This may have been only normal for the highest ranking corporate members in recent times, because other accounts of marriages payments 40–50 years previous to our interviews recorded only one water buffalo (or a few pigs), a few gongs, one cauldron, and one silver ingot. Nevertheless, even these lesser amounts would have been beyond a young man's means. The corporate administrator obtained marriage payment contributions from all member families within the longhouse, and such demands would have been difficult to refuse because every member family at some time would need to marry their children. Similarly, funerals would have been compelling occasions for demanding that surpluses from longhouse member families be surrendered for corporate use.



Fig. 10. A Ta Oi marriage feast during intensive nighttime feasting with several hundred people crowded around the central ritual area of the longhouse. (Photograph by B. Hayden)



Fig. 11. The common room of a Ta Oi longhouse at A Lieng being used for a meeting with the village headman. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

Disputes both within the community and with people in other communities were also very common, as Condominas (1977) amply documents. As a result, defense against both internal and external attacks would have been of paramount importance in the past. The most common causes of disputes that we recorded were adultery, wife

stealing, unreciprocated feasts or feast debts, theft (especially of animals), bets, slander (a serious crime in some communities), crop damage from animals, inheritances, moral transgressions, and sorcery. When one member of a corporate group had to pay for damages or fines, the entire corporate group was liable.

It is significant that both this policy of corporate liability for members' actions and the policy of arranging for marriage and funeral payments could be easily manipulated to ensure, or augment, the power and leverage of corporate administrators. Thus, it would be in the administrators' interests to increase all such payments to the maximum possible in order to effectively pressure corporate member families to produce and surrender ever greater quantities of surpluses that could be used by corporate administrators to increase the corporate wealth and power that they controlled. On the other hand, given the wealth requirements for marriage and the high probability of individual families being involved in disputes, it would have been in the self-interests of families to affiliate with as powerful and wealthy a corporate group as possible. Ancestor feasts would have served to enshrine administrators' authority, while other feasts would have been critical in forming political alliances within and between communities, as well as for attracting marriage arrangements with other powerful families and enhancing corporate wealth. We were told that there were both rich and poor families within the same longhouses, which may reflect the relative economic autonomy of member families, and/or may simply reflect the various ranks within the corporate group—from administrators who held the corporate wealth, to other high-ranking families, to client families, to slaves. I could obtain no indication that these corporate groups were land-owning descent groups.

The Ta Oi case thus provides a less extreme example than the Monong Gar of relatively economically independent families who joined together to form corporate groups with administrative heads able to exert compelling leverage on families to produce and surrender substantial amounts of surpluses in order to carry out corporate functions, which all member families appear to have acknowledged as being beneficial or important (especially marriage, funerals, dispute resolutions, and, in the past, defense against external attack). Ta Oi corporate administrators appear to have had significantly more control over longhouse affairs and resources than Monong Gar administrators and this seems reflected by the central ritual/feasting rooms and the substantial corporate wealth in prestige items held in those rooms.

Dependent Constituent Families: Centralized Corporate Groups

Residential corporate groups sometimes exhibit even stronger and more centralized degrees of control than exhibited by the Monong Gar or Ta Oi cases. The case of the Rhadé provides one example of corporate groups (*sang*) with considerable centralized power. Professor Tran Quoc Vuong and I visited several Rhadé communities near Buon Me Thuot on the central plateau of Dak Lak Province in 1995. Although there are a few remnant longhouse physical structures (Fig. 12), there are no functioning socioeconomic corporate longhouse groups left in Dak Lak Province that we know of, so that our information was based on memory culture and oral history. This area is characterized by swidden horticulture that often does not produce enough to meet subsistence requirements. According to informants, there was no wet-rice cultivation until the time of emperor Bo Dai (c. 1931–1945). Fertile, well-watered land would have been at a premium, and although one large block of forest was cleared for



Fig. 12. A remnant of the longhouse founded by Me Thuot in Buon Me Thuot. Note the addition of modern stairs to the traditional stairs with a pair of sculpted breasts representing the matron founder of the longhouse. (Photograph by B. Hayden)

cultivation by the entire village, there must have been significant variations within the clearing. Using iron cutting tools, one man was reported to have been able to clear a maximum of one half to one hectare, and this appears to have been the major constraint on food production. Using stone cutting tools, this constraint must have been greater and productivity of domesticated plant crops significantly less. Traditionally, we were told that all Rhadé villages were palisaded for defense and consisted of a number of longhouses. In contrast to the decentralized organization within Monong Gar longhouses, we were told that cattle and pigs (the main constituents of wealth) were considered the common property of the Rhadé longhouses and that these animals were typically left to forage for themselves. Chickens and small pigs could be raised by individual families within the *sang*, but only with the permission of the administrative head of the longhouse.

We were also told that all produce of member families in corporate groups was combined and stored communally, thereby averaging individual family contributions to subsistence and surplus production. It is not clear from our information whether individual families retained any of the food that they produced, or whether a certain proportion of their harvests was turned over to corporate administrators, or what the details of any such arrangements might have been. In any case, whereas individual nuclear family production and surpluses might fluctuate dramatically from one year to another, it seems clear that the averaged production of all families in a corporate group would have been much more stable. Moreover, the aggregate production of surpluses would have been much more substantial than any individual family could have produced. We were also told that all meals were prepared at one communal hearth in the *ok* (living) section of the longhouse. Each living apartment would occupy about three to four meters of the length of the longhouse (Fig. 13). Feasting and rituals took place in one spacious common area of the longhouse (the *gâh*) reserved for those purposes, an area generally about 20–30 m long (Figs. 13 and 14). Most of the large corporate



Fig. 13. A Ta Oi family apartment at A Lieng. Note the paucity of material items and the presence of a family hearth. (Photograph by B. Hayden)



Fig. 14. The common/ritual room of a longhouse at Buon Me Thuot (Fig. 12). Note the remaining major items of corporate wealth; the single-piece benches, chairs, tables, thrones, and a large drum (in the background at left). (Photograph by B. Hayden)

wealth items were kept in the *gáh*, such as ceremonial benches (carved from one piece of wood), table-like thrones (of one piece of wood), elephant-like chairs (of one piece of wood), large drums, large rice wine jars, and large bronze cauldrons, gongs, and cymbals. Each major item of wealth required a special installation feast to validate its acquisition and use, and each item typically cost five or more water buffaloes to make

and install. For instance, we were told that bronze gongs and cymbals cost up to six water buffaloes (c. US\$1,200–2,400 per buffalo in 1995); bronze drums cost 600–700 oxen in the sixth century A.D., large rice wine jars from China (similar to kraters) historically cost 50 oxen, while wood drums cost about US\$250. Some of these may be exaggerated prices, but they emphasize the point that these items were very highly valued.

Wealth was primarily used and displayed in feasting contexts, but was also necessary for settling disputes, arranging marriages, and hosting funerals or other feasts. Feasts operated in the same fashion as the Ta Oi to create alliances, broker marriages and alliances, and promote corporate interests. The magnitude of large feasts represented the productive capacity and power of the corporate group. The corporate administrators appear to have controlled the use of surpluses and used the need for feasts, marriages, and funerals to pressure member families to produce surpluses and surrender produce (or at least surplus production) for the use of the administrators. Ownership of the longhouse together with these wealth items remained with the administrative title holder when individual families left the longhouse under governmental and economic pressures. In the case of the relict longhouses that we visited, the ceremonial *gáh* area with its wealth items was still intact, although largely used for storing a variety of agricultural materials, whereas the *ok* living quarters had been reduced to a nominal apartment used by the administrative head of the *sang* (Fig. 14). Traditionally, we were told that if a family left the longhouse, they could expect no help from the *sang*. This is a feature that was confirmed in discussions with ethnologists in Hanoi as also important among Xo dong groups where families who left longhouses would also be held responsible for any misfortunes that might occur within a year, once again emphasizing the high degree of control that administrators could exert over member families.

The benefits of belonging to longhouse corporate groups and the functions of these groups were essentially the same as those enumerated for the Ta Oi, although care of the elderly was also mentioned. The *sang* ensured subsistence and defended member interests. If an unaffiliated poor family received help from a corporate group, the family would become indentured to the *sang*. As Condominas (1977) repeatedly documents, poor families without the backing of powerful corporate groups often became targets for exploitation and were frequently enslaved by unscrupulous kin or community members. We recorded a number of similar instances, including a case where a poor person could not pay compensation to an offended family. Thus, a wealthy *sang* paid the fine for him and he became an indentured servant of the *sang*. In general, we were told that the powerful *sang* only paid about half of what a poor person would have to pay in compensations or fine, and that the rich and “honored” families could dominate others. Thus, according to a Rhadé aphorism, if one was affiliated with a strong *sang*, “One will always have an ‘uncle’ (powerful defender) in disputes.” Corporate groups could also more easily arrange to borrow food if required by a series of bad harvest years.

Thus, the Rhadé case provides a good example of much stronger centralized control over nuclear family economics as expressed in administrative control over surpluses and wealth, communal meal preparations, claims on family obligations even after leaving the longhouses, corporate ownership or control of domestic animals, and the ability of administrators to indenture poor families to the corporate group. The corporate kinship compounds around Jenné (Mali), in Africa exemplify the same cen-

tralized dynamics with member families contributing labor and cash to the lineage head and preparing the large evening meal for all members (Cunningham 2009:279, 285). Cash is passed to senior women who hold it cooperatively and redistribute it according to need. Why control appears to have been stronger and more centralized among the Rhadé compared to the Ta Oi or Monong Gar is difficult to determine especially because the basic subsistence economy seems so similar as well as funeral and marriage customs. Historical differences, especially involving state interference in *sang* dynamics, may have been important in weakening the centralized control of corporate groups in some regions, districts, or provinces. The impacts of governmental legislation, governmental aid programs, governmental legal systems, the suppression of conflicts and slavery, legal restrictions on the land allowed to be farmed by people living under one roof, and the introduction of cash crops may all have been factors that differentially affected communities in different regions. Different effects of the French and American wars in Vietnam may have also played important roles.

It is interesting that Coupland et al. (2009) posit similar variations to the centralized versus decentralized corporate organization described here in their “communally” versus “centralized” or hierarchical classification of corporate groups in the Northwest coastal communities in North America during the contact period with Europeans. On the basis of relatively limited ethnohistoric information, Coupland et al. contend that northern corporate groups on the Northwest Coast operated on communitarian principles with relatively independent constituent families, whereas they consider the more southern groups as more hierarchical with centralized control within residential corporate groups. I am skeptical of their extreme communitarian interpretations for some of these corporate groups, especially those in the North, where there seems to have been only one centralized food preparation and consumption area per structure that Coupland et al. interpret as evidence for communal values. Instead, on the basis of the Rhadé information and examples such as the groups around Jenné (Mali), I would argue that centralized meal preparation and consumption is more characteristic of centralized control over food stores and their use. The interpretation of northern Northwest Coast groups as highly centralized corporate groups is also consistent with other characterizations of these communities as more highly ranked and more hierarchical than southern coastal groups due to the more seasonal and time-constricted availability of resources in the north (Schalk 1981; Matson 1985).

Instead of viewing residential corporate groups as fundamentally egalitarian or communitarian organizations, I think that corporate living generally is symptomatic of relatively strong socioeconomic forces implying the ability of corporate heads to control much if not all of the surplus wealth of the corporate group, or at least mandate contributions from members for corporate activities (feasts, constructing buildings, arranging marriages, settling disputes, acquiring allies, financing raids). Without such strong forces, the centrifugal conflicts of interests between individuals or families would soon disperse members and dissolve corporate socioeconomic organizations. As one Rhadé man expressed it, he did not want to live in a longhouse because of the many disputes among members. In my ethnoarchaeological research dealing with corporate descent groups in Tana Toraja (Sulawesi), if members did not contribute to corporate (nonresidential) kindred events according to their perceived ability, they were deleted from corporate membership. I suspect that the same was probably even more true of the residential corporate longhouse groups in mainland Southeast Asia.

ORIGINS AND DYNAMICS OF CORPORATE GROUPS

In discussions with Vietnamese ethnographers, the predominant, if not exclusive, explanation for the occurrence of longhouses among some ethnic groups but not others was expressed in terms of cultural traditions. It was suggested that groups originating from or influenced by Malayo-Polynesian traditions (especially Rhadé and Girai speakers) lived corporately. Mon Khmer groups with longhouses such as Banar, Xo dong, and Halang speakers were viewed in a similar fashion, as were some Thai speakers. However, this is a weak explanation from an ecological or functional perspective, and it does not account for the existence of longhouses in some Ta Oi communities and their lack in others. Moreover, such accounts leave unanswered the questions of why such longhouse traditions initially emerged in these ethnic groups and why they should be abandoned under modern conditions, sometimes even without government legislative interventions. On the basis of informants' statements about the benefits and functions of corporate longhouses, I would like to suggest for proximate causes that corporate groups developed in Southeast Asia primarily either: (1) to reduce risks of highly variable food production; (2) to defend members from attack (either external physical attacks or internal political-economic attacks); or (3) to provide the necessary wealth to marry.

While corporate groups in areas like the Northwest of North America may have developed to control heritable resources such as ownership of prime fishing locations, boats, or large drying and storage facilities (Hayden 1992:555, 2000:264), these factors do not seem to have played any important role in Southeast Asia. Land was relatively abundant and the use of specific plots constantly shifted as part of the swidden cycle. Junker (2001:267), Rousseau (1979*a*, 1979*b*), and Hakansson (1994, 1995) have similarly commented on the lack of importance of land as a factor in the creation of social complexity in tribal or chiefdom communities in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In addition, according to all the interview information that I was able to obtain in Southeast Asia, real starvation seems to have been quite a rare occurrence due to the productivity of manioc and taro in the region, and due to the availability of backup forest foods (Hayden 2003, 2011:79–80). Thus, by itself, the need to reduce subsistence risks does not seem to be a sufficiently compelling reason for the formation of longhouse corporate groups in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, marriage and defense do constitute plausible forces that could drive people to abandon some degree of their independence and subsume their immediate nutritional self-interests under the broader interests of a corporate organization and its administrators. Given these postulates, the ultimate causes for the emergence of corporate longhouses in Southeast Asia can be viewed either as a communitarian pooling of interests or as a more exploitative strategy on the part of aggrandizing individuals to promote their own self-interests and their acquisition of power.

Anecdotally, it is interesting that the Akha, among whom I also worked, had very little in the way of bride prices or arranged marriages, and they also lacked corporate longhouses. In contrast, the Ta Oi and Rhadé had exorbitant bride prices as well as constant litigations between families. I suggest that these conditions and traditions could easily be introduced and promoted by manipulative individuals under appropriate surplus producing conditions. As the most expensive events in a family's history, bride prices or funeral costs may provide a proxy measure of the levels of surpluses that could be produced by families in specific communities—although this leads to some-

what circular inferences. High bride prices were certainly not to the advantage of the average individual seeking to be married, nor were arranged marriages to their advantage either. Thus one may ask: Who promoted these high bride prices and arranged marriages? They do not seem to have developed from communitarian concerns. Meillassoux (1981) has argued that the only people in Africa that high bride prices benefit are the wealthy and those people seeking power over junior members of their communities. The need to pay high prices for marriages certainly creates a compelling reason for producing and surrendering surpluses. Defense from external attack and the need for allies may have been an equally compelling reason for corporate group formation in the past, and it could also have been easily manipulated by aggrandizers to their advantage or to force people into joining corporate groups dominated by ambitious administrators (e.g., Sillitoe 1978).

It seems that the most favorable ecological conditions for establishing cultural practices that can be used to manipulate others (like high marriage prices or feasting debts) are in situations where it is possible to at least intermittently produce enough surpluses to sustain high prices for marriages or litigations, but not conditions where large surpluses can be reliably produced by nuclear families (as is often the case with wet-rice agriculture or cash cropping). Where nuclear families can control their own means of production and reliably produce surpluses, they can be expected to govern their own affairs and operate as relatively independent economic and political units (barring external threats). This is typically what happens today when nuclear families can obtain better and more reliable incomes from salaried positions or farming cash crops. These families usually rapidly sever their ties with social groups trying to access and use their incomes. Further support for this model is provided by Lemmonier's (1990:23fn) observation that the "fringe Highlands" of New Guinea were characterized by low population densities (hence low agricultural productivity) and long-houses, in contrast to the individual nuclear family houses and extraordinary population densities for many swidden agriculturalists in the Highlands proper. Thus, it would seem that the intermediate and highly variable levels of surplus production are those most favorable for the development of high marriage prices and consequently make it possible for manipulative individuals to engineer the creation of corporate groups. To this proximate core function of corporate groups, many other reinforcing strategies might be added, such as dispute protection, reduction of subsistence risks, provision for funeral expenses (which could also be artificially inflated), and various "needs" to honor or appease the corporate ancestors.

Once ambitious individuals obtained a toehold in promoting their values and corporate types of organization, corporate heads could exert more influence to invest surpluses according to their own interests and, to the extent necessary, the interests of their support group. They could prevail upon corporate members to make contributions for the "necessary" costs of obtaining and installing corporate wealth, holding funerals, securing allies, hosting promotional feasts to attract desirable marriage partners, preparing feasts to placate ancestors, and so on. As a result, there could be constant pressure on many corporate members from high-ranking members to produce ever more and to contribute greater and greater quantities of resources to corporate coffers. This socioeconomic badgering by big men and chiefs is graphically illustrated in the ethnographic films *Ongka's Big Moka* and *The Kirghiz of Afghanistan*. However, typically, lower ranking members in corporate groups do not directly (and then only paternalistically) benefit from increased production, or they benefit less than

high-ranking members who have titles and ownership status. Unless they are ambitious or anxious about their security, lower ranking members should generally exhibit considerable reluctance to increase production beyond basic subsistence needs, as postulated by Sahlins (1959). In most administratively centralized corporate groups, I suggest that the surplus production efforts of the rank and file largely benefit other higher ranking individuals or the corporate group as a whole. It is incumbent on high-ranking administrators to find ways to convince low-ranking families to produce and surrender surpluses and that it is in the members' ultimate interest to do so.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES

This situation is perhaps not conceptually very different from the relationship between Industrial workers and corporate owners. However, in the Industrial context, if a worker spends more time working, he or she will earn more money, thereby increasing their spending ability. Their productive efforts can directly benefit themselves. This is not necessarily the case in traditional subsistence-based corporate groups, where most, if not all, prestige items are limited to the corporate leaders or the group as a whole and any benefits from increased production of individuals are delayed and channeled through the administrative gatekeepers of the corporate groups.

Thus, as Sahlins (1959) argues for subsistence domestic economies in general, in traditional corporate groups, there is little direct or immediate-return individual incentive to increase production, and individuals have little purchasing power (or the equivalent in non-monetary systems). In order to maximize production and consumption, industrialism's underlying goal is to promote individual incentives by ensuring that individuals can benefit directly, and with minimal delays, from their



Fig. 15. A similar, more actively used, common/ritual room among the Monong Ralam with corporate wealth in the form of massive wood benches, tables, thrones, ceramic rice wine jars, a bronze cauldron (in the left foreground), and a central hearth. (Photograph by B. Hayden)



Fig. 16. An example of the large surpluses that can be obtained from corporate members for corporate events such as this funeral among the Torajans in Sulawesi. Such events can involve dozens or scores of water buffaloes, pigs, and other animals. (Photograph by Michael Clarke)

productive efforts. The extreme expression of this strategy is today's highly individualized urban Industrial societies. The underlying ideological premise is that increased work will increase self-benefits. Therefore large proportions of populations willingly support such systems and willingly work far more than might be required for simple subsistence needs.

In contrast, traditional economies—whether organized corporately or by nuclear family households—demand substantial contributions of surpluses from families in order to underwrite feasts, rituals, and displays calculated to create political and economic networks that only become critical for survival or reproduction episodically and frequently for the benefit of other corporate or community members rather than for individual contributors. For the average person in an average year, membership in traditional corporate and feasting groups probably entailed the production and surrender of significant amounts of surplus. The motivation for contributing to traditional, especially corporate, systems is the relatively indirect and delayed ability to access personal security, subsistence security, and reproductive security, or, for the ambitious, the potential to occupy positions of increased power. Despite these constraints, the magnitude of surpluses marshaled for corporate events could be impressive (Fig. 16), indicating the influence of strong pressures or motivations on corporate or community memberships. However, the details of how pressures are marshaled to leverage surpluses and labor from memberships in traditional systems are typically implicit or covert due to the manipulative psychological tactics often employed by aggrandizers to achieve their goals. Thus, information about such dynamics is often lacking from ethnographies (although see Reay 1959 and Sillitoe 1978).

By breaking up corporate groups, Industrialists force families to become much more economically independent, thus providing much greater incentives for large proportions of the population to increase production and to increase their purchasing

potential and self-benefits. In addition to the apparent economic “waste” of feasts (diverting potential capital away from banks, business ventures, or investments), I suggest that the low productive incentives for families in residential corporate groups are one of the main ideological reasons why traditional corporate groups have almost universally come under attack or been prohibited by Industrial nation-states (whether capitalist, socialist, or communist) as economically retrogressive and detrimental to national economic progress.

In addition to these factors there is another consideration. Ultimately, the amount of surplus that can be extracted from individual families in subsistence economies is finite, and therefore there must be competition between various administrative levels to appropriate as much of that surplus as possible for themselves. Corporate groups essentially constitute a level of administration that must compete for surpluses with local, regional, and national levels of administration. In traditional tribal villages, corporate groups monopolized almost *all* surplus production above nuclear family needs, and constituted the most important administrative level besides the relatively loosely organized village administrations. In Industrial nation contexts, regional and national administrations require very large surplus inputs that are simply not possible to sustain where corporate groups divert almost all surpluses for their own local uses. Thus, wherever environments have been rich enough to support national governments, corporate groups have eventually been driven out of existence. It is possible that early state forms may have incorporated local corporate groups into their administrative framework to act as local administrative agents and tribute collectors. However, more advanced state organizations such as those that extended their control throughout much Southeast Asia in the first millennium A.D. probably sought to eliminate and replace local corporate groups with their own national versions of administration that were easier to influence and control. Prior to that time, residential corporate groups may have been much more widespread in Southeast Asia, notably in the Neolithic and Metal Ages.

Thus, corporate groups have been largely driven out of existence today due to ideological incompatibilities with Industrial economies, due to direct competition with regional and national administrations for uses of surpluses, and due to the usurpation by regional and national governments of many corporate functions such as defense, dispute resolution, health, and subsistence security. Today, traditional corporate groups only appear to exist in the most remote parts of the most underdeveloped nations such as Laos and Indonesia. As these nations become increasingly involved in world economies, corporate groups there are certain to disappear. While I have concentrated on corporate groups in transegalitarian societies, it is also interesting to note that they probably also existed in some traditional state-level organizations such as the corporate craft organizations of Teotihuacan and some of the elite corporate kinship of the Maya (probably controlling trade and intensive agriculture—Schele and Friedel 1990: 84–87, 93–94). These may exhibit some different dynamics and organizational characteristics from transegalitarian subsistence-based societies. But this is a topic for future exploration.

Whether a form of traditional corporate group organization (and the traditional culture associated with corporate groups) can be retained within an Industrial context is an open question. I would suggest that to satisfy all interests, any such traditional corporate group would have to be regulated in such a way that some portion of corporate surpluses was returned to individual families for their own discretionary use,

while some portion of the surplus was also retained for corporate use in the form of an internal tax. Whether this would be operationally practical is another question since many families would undoubtedly view this as an unnecessary level of additional taxation (beyond local and state taxes). If some such accommodation cannot be achieved, the future of subsistence-based corporate group organizations appears bleak indeed.

SUMMARY

Residential corporate groups are archaeologically visible social groups that provide a number of possibilities for understanding the socioeconomic dynamics and characteristics of past societies. On the basis of ethnographic examples, it can be expected that prehistoric corporate groups probably varied in their degree of internal centralized control. The degree of centralized control may be reflected archaeologically in terms of the distribution of hearths (central vs. one for each family), storage areas, centralized ritual/feasting areas, and levels of corporate wealth (frequency and size of domestic animals, wealth items, size of pots). Given inevitable disputes in any large groups of people and desires of most families to live independently, it can be assumed that special conditions led to the formation of residential corporate groups, particularly the larger examples. I suggest that defense against physical and socioeconomic attacks constituted one condition, while the manipulation of these matters as well as of marriage prices by self-serving aggrandizers pressured other community members to agree to corporate group life under the aegis of aggrandizer individuals. Under moderate and variable surplus producing environments, members produced and surrendered surpluses in order to be assured of enough resources to be married, properly buried, and protected in litigations. Land ownership does not appear to have been a basis for corporate group formation in Southeast Asia, although, it may have been elsewhere. Due to competition for the control of surpluses, corporate group dynamics in Southeast Asia appear to be fundamentally incompatible with state organizations except as administrative means of controlling remote areas. This explains why industrial nations have generally tried to undermine or even outlaw residential corporate groups and their major feasting activities.

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ABSTRACT

From the late nineteenth century to the present, social scientists and archaeologists have been intrigued by village-level corporate groups living under a single roof. Yet remarkably little is known ethnographically about the internal economic and social dynamics of these groups or why such groups emerge at certain time periods or places. My research focuses on some of the last indigenous corporate groups in mainland Southeast Asia. I document the advantages corporate organizations provide for members (mainly risk reduction), the high costs often involved for members, the range of status and wealth within such groups, and the probable motivations of individuals for organizing corporate groups. I contrast the communitarian models with aggrandizer models for the creation of corporate groups, but note considerable variability within the corporate residential phenomenon. I postulate that residential corporate groups were probably much more widespread in the Neolithic and Metal Ages of Southeast Asia than historically was the case. **KEYWORDS:** corporate groups, longhouses, Southeast Asia, archaeology, ethnography, economics, social evolution.