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Southeast Viet Nam - Overview of administrative boundaries in the past and present

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ABSTRACT

The Southeast region, in prehistory and protohistory, established the space of Dong Nai archeological culture. Since the 16th to 17th centuries, the Southeast had been discovered by the Vietnamese people, in which they established sovereignty and administrative structure. Over three centuries of formation and development, the Southeast region has created many changes in geographic names and administrative structures as required by the historical context of each period. This article presents the overview of the administrative restructuring process in the Southeast region in some important historical milestones during the development process hereof. With the presentation of administrative structures in the Southeast region, the article contributes to systemizing the historical periods of formation and development of the region. It also opens further dialogues for the study of historical and cultural characteristics of the Southeast region.

Keywords: *administrative structure, Gia Dinh Department, prehistory and protohistory, Southeast region*

1. Introduction

The Southeast region of Vietnam is not only an administrative unit but also a historical and cultural area. The region is known among the Vietnamese as the East (Miền Đông) while the rest of the South is named as the West (Miền Tây). The origin of such naming, however, remains undocumented. During the period of Nguyen Dynasty's discovery and sovereignty establishment in the Southern region, the place was called the

Eastern area of the Cochinchina (Miền Đông Nam Kỳ), including three provinces of Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh and Dinh Tuong (all of which now are of the Southern key economic zone). During the domination period of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (1954-1975), it was called the Southeastern Zone (Miền Đông Nam Phần), (including Southeast provinces at present time, Ho Chi Minh City and Long An Province). Since the Day of Southern Liberation, the names “the East” and “the Southeast” have been widely used. According to the current economic and social zoning of Vietnam, the Southeast region consisted of Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Ba Ria - Vung Tau provinces.

Today, the Southeast region of Vietnam, with many urban areas, is located between the provinces of South Central and South Central Highlands. Its West and West - South borders the Mekong Delta with the great potential for agriculture, which become the largest granary of Vietnam; its east and southeast, bordering the South China Sea, is rich in seafood, oil and gas resources, and facilitates the construction of seaports to create the trade and economic linkage with other countries in both the region and the world; its Northwest borders with Cambodia and has Tay Ninh border gate to create wide exchanges with Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. With this position, the region represents a major landmark of intersection both nationally and internationally.

2. Overview of the study

The space of Southeast region has attracted scholarly attention in most of research works on the history and culture of the Southern region in general and Southeast region in particular. Its prehistoric and protohistoric significance deserves a place in research publications on Dong Nai culture as an archaeological culture of prehistory and protohistory. Most archeological research works on prehistory and protohistory more or less refers to the distribution space of Dong Nai culture. Authors Trần Văn Giàu and Trần Bạch Đằng (Editor, 1998), identified the main features of the space and development history of Dong Nai culture. Authors Phạm Đức Mạnh (1996, 2007), Đào Linh Côn, Nguyễn Duy Tỳ (1993), Nguyễn Kim Dung (1998) referred to the space for some specific places of Dong Nai culture, such as those in Binh Phuoc, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Ho Chi Minh City, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Binh Thuan, Long An... Recently, the studies on the history of the Southern region (Giang, 2014), Trần Đức Cường (2015), Phan Huy Lê (2016, 2017) have made clearer the geographical and cultural space of Southeast region of Vietnam during prehistory and protohistory. Since the Vietnamese people’s discovery and development of the Southern region, the Southeast region’s space had been more clearly defined through the geographically cultural and historical publications compiled by feudal Vietnamese authors. Trịnh Hoài Đức (1998), National historiographers’ office of the Nguyen Dynasty (2006) recorded quite plainly

about the Southeast region space in terms of both administrative boundary and social and cultural features. In the context of the socio-economic transformation in the modern age, the Southeast region space is demarcated in many forms of academic publications. The works on history of the Southern region written by authors Vũ Minh Giang (Editor, 2014), Trần Đức Cường (Editor, 2015), Phan Huy Lê (Editor, 2017), Hồ Sơn Đài (Editor, 2018) all described the spatial boundaries of the Southern region, and Southeast region. Specifically, the geographic publications of Long An (1989), Ho Chi Minh City (1998), Dong Nai (2001), Tien Giang (2005) and Ba Ria Vung Tau (2005), Binh Duong (2010), Binh Phuoc (2015), among others, all detailed the localities' space. The Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam also regulated the Southeast region in Vietnam's socio-economic zoning. Succeeding the existing literature, this article systematizes and generalizes the characteristics of the Southeast region space through administrative boundaries of periods to positively contribute to the study on Southeast region history.

3. Major documentations

3.1. Southeast region space in prehistory and protohistory

The Southeast region space, which in prehistory and protohistory was identified as the space of Dong Nai archeological culture, was established and developed about 4,000 years ago. Together with Dong Son and Sa Huynh, Dong Nai archeological culture was one of three metal ware civilization centers of Vietnam. Dong Nai culture refers to archaeological relics in Vietnam distributed on the midland and delta region of Southeast region, along the banks of Dong Nai, Sai Gon and Vam Co Rivers, showing the cultural evolution process from the early Bronze Age to the early Iron Age. So far, hundreds of relics have been discovered in most of the Southeast region's Military provinces, including typical relics such as Sat Bridge, Suoi Chon, Binh Da, Cai Van, Cu Lao Rua, Hung Thinh, and Doi Xoai, Doi Mit, Go Me, Doi Phong Khong, Cai Lang, Long Buu, Ben Do, Phuoc Tan, Go Da, Doc Chua, Bu Dop, Go Thap, Go Canh Nong, Go Cao Su, An Son, Rach Nui (Mạnh, 1997).

Dong Nai archeological culture has a long boundary stretching from Bao Loc - Di Linh plateau to Mekong Delta, which nowadays belongs to Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc and Binh Duong Military provinces, Dong Nai, Ho Chi Minh City, Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Long An. It was a high-level area, belonging to the basins of Dong Nai, Be, Sai Gon and Vam Co (East-West) Rivers. In such large area, the archeological relics of Dong Nai culture now are concentrated in three topographical areas: (1) the area of red-colored basalt soil hill and ancient alluvium-based Acrisol plateau, in which the relics are distributed widely and culturally accumulated with extremely diverse artifacts mainly including pottery and stone tools, typically the Xuan Loc - Dong Nai relic cluster, Loc Ninh - Binh Phuoc round palace relic; (2) the ancient alluvium area at downstream Dong Nai river with densely-

distributed relics such as residences, manufacture places of tools and household items, burial sites with various methods of burials ..., including famous relics such as Cu Lao Rua, Chua Slope, Bung Sinh (Binh Duong), Binh Da, Linh Stream, Phong Khong Hill, Me Mount ... (Dong Nai), An Son, Rach Nui, Loc Giang, among others (Long An); (3) and the southeast coastal area, a salted low-lying area and influenced by semi-diurnal tide, the majority of which is covered by mangrove forest, and in which the relics of residences and burial sites are scattered on mounds, on high buttes or along marshlands; the relics here are diverse and unique, showing extensive cultural exchange. The most unique is the relic system in Can Gio District - Ho Chi Minh City, including the tombs of Giong Phet and Giong Ca Vo, relics on marshlands of Ba Ria - Vung Tau such as Bung Bac, Bung Thom, Cai Van, Cai Lang, Giong Noi, Go Me, and Giong Lon etc.

3.2. Southeast region in the administrative structure of Gia Dinh Department (1698 - 1808)

At the late 16th century and the early 17th century, Vietnamese residents in the North and the Central region, belonging to many different social backgrounds, could not tolerate the misery in their homelands; therefore, they immigrated to the Southeast region to seek the promising life. The places such as Mo Xoai (Ba Ria), Cu Lao Pho (Dong Nai), Ben Nghe (Ho Chi Minh City), Ba Giong, Vung Gu (Long An), among others, were the earliest resettlement places of such Vietnamese immigrants (Thach Phuong - Luu Quang Tuyen, chief authors, 1989). Since the 17th century, the number of residents in the Southeast had increased sharply. Together with the Vietnamese, the Chinese community also immigrated to resettle in Dong Nai, Ben Nghe, Thu Dau Mot, and so on. At the late 17th century when the residents in villages became more and more crowded; the Nguyen Dynasty's royal court began to establish its own administration. In the spring of the Year of the Tiger (1698), Le Hy Tong (Minh Lord), dispatched general Nguyen Huu Canh to the South for circuit (Cu, Hùng, 2001). Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh selected Nong Nai to establish Gia Dinh Department, construct Tran Bien Premises in Phuoc Long District (name of Dong Nai at that time, and Phien Tran Premises in Tan Binh District (name of Sai Gon at that time), each of which were governed by Defense Command Governor (Luu thủ), Administration Commissioner (Cai Bạ) and Clerk (Ký lục); and divided into divisions (nha) including Xá Sai service (ty) (in charge of documents and proceedings) and Tướng Thần service (in charge of collecting paddy fees and paying wages); and had the army of elite soldiers and waterway infantry, including divisions, clusters and ships for "reclaiming land to thousands of miles, increasing to more than 40,000 households, gathering the evacuated people from Bo Chinh special District for resettlement, setting up villages, dividing territories, confiscating land, and setting tax rates, preparing and registering household and land books". Chinese descendants in Tran Bien and Phien Tran,

forming Thanh Ha and Minh Huong communes, respectively, were recorded in the household registration books (Đức, 1998).

According to the above territorial division, Gia Dinh Department spreads throughout the Southeast region, and was divided into 2 Districts. Tan Binh District stretched from the right bank of the Sai Gon River to the left bank of the Tien River (including Ho Chi Minh City and Long An and Tien Giang Military provinces today), and was divided into two cantons, of which Tan Long canton extended from Cho Lon area (District 5, Ho Chi Minh City) to the Tien River, and the Binh Duong canton extended from Can Gio through Tay Ninh to the Cambodian border (including most of Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh Military Province and a part of Binh Duong Military Province (Dau Tieng District) today). Phuoc Long District consisted of 4 cantons of Phuoc Chinh, Binh An, Long Thanh and Phuoc An, and covered the whole of Dong Nai, Ba Ria Vung Tau and Binh Phuoc Military provinces and most of the current Binh Duong Military Province.

In 1714, Mạc Cửu proposed to Nguyen Lord the idea of integrating Ha Tien Military Province to Vietnam's map and was accepted by Nguyen Dynasty and conferred the title of Military Governor of Ha Tien Military Province. In 1732, Lord Nguyen ordered to set up "Dinh Vien special District and Long Ho Premises". Dinh Vien special District covered the whole Ha Tien and Dong Khau (Sa Dec), Tan Chau, Chau Doc (Hau Giang), Kien Giang (Rach Gia), Long Xuyen (Ca Mau) (Đức, 1998). Since then, Gia Dinh Department had covered the whole Southern region.

3.3. Southeast region in the Gia Dinh administrative structure (1808 - 1832)

In 1808, King Gia Long changed Gia Dinh Department into Gia Dinh Citadel (Đức, 1998). Gia Dinh Citadel was the largest administrative level in the South. The Premises was changed to Districts. The whole Southern region was divided into 6 Military provinces of Phien An, Dinh Tuong, Bien Hoa, Ha Tien, Vinh Thanh and Binh Thuan. Southeast region consisted of 3 Military provinces of Phien An, Dinh Tuong and Bien Hoa. Gia Dinh Citadel monography written by Trịnh Hoài Đức concretely described the administrative structure of the Districts (Đức, 1998).

Phien An Military Province –Tan Binh Department was a vast land area, bordering on Bien Hoa Military Province at the north and spreading to the East Sea, bordering on Cambodia at the west, bordering on Dinh Tuong at the south (including the urban and suburban Ho Chi Minh City, Tay Ninh Military Province and Dau Tieng District of Binh Duong Military Province today). Phien An Military Province –Tan Binh Department had 4 Districts, 8 cantons and 460 villages. Binh Duong District had 2 cantons, of which Binh Tri and Duong Hoa cantons had 76 and 74 villages, respectively. Tan Long District had 2 cantons, of which Tan Phong and Long Hung cantons had 76 and 74 villages, respectively. Phuoc Loc District had 2 cantons, of which Phuoc Dien and Loc Thanh had 48 and 47 villages, respectively. Thuan An

District had 2 cantons, of which Thuan Dao and Binh Cach had 32 and 33 villages, respectively.

Bien Hoa Military Province – Phuoc Long Department covered the entire eastern and northeaster land area of Southeast region. Trinh Hoai Duc described the Bien Hoa Military Province as follows: “with mountain behind, river in front”, “borders on Than Mau mountain at the east, where Thuan Bien post is located, extends to the north with caves of mountainous Man race, borders on Phien An Military Province, stretches from Bang Bot stream through Duc Giang river to Binh Giang river, turns to Nha Be junction, spreads to Can Gio and Vung Tau to Ghenh Rai mountain, and is limited by a long river bank, of which the north is at Bien Hoa Military Province’s boundary, the east borders ocean and the west is at the land of mountainous Man race. The distance from east to west, from south to north and from south to the Department is 542 and a half miles, 287 and a half miles, and 55 and a half miles, respectively” (Đức, 1998). As described by Trịnh Hoài Đức, the territory of Bien Hoa Military Province corresponds to the provinces of Dong Nai, Ba Ria Vung Tau, Binh Phuoc and Binh Duong (except Dau Tieng District, Phien An) and Can Gio District (Ho Chi Minh City) today. Bien Hoa Military Province – Phuoc Long Department include 4 Districts, 8 cantons and 310 communes. Phuoc Chinh District had 2 cantons and 85 villages, of which Phuoc Vinh canton, and Chanh My canton had 46 villages, and 39 villages, respectively. Binh An District had 2 cantons and 119 villages, of which Binh Chanh canton had villages and An Thuy canton had 69 villages. Long Thanh District had 2 cantons and 63 villages, of which Long Vinh and Thanh Tuy cantons had 34 and 29 villages, respectively. Phuoc An District had 2 cantons and 43 villages, of which An Phu and Phuc Hung cantons had 21 and 22 villages, respectively.

Dinh Tuong Military Province – Kien An Department is the belt of land connecting the Southeast to the Mekong Delta. Trịnh Hoài Đức described Dinh Tuong Military Province that “this area features fertile soil and contiguous roadways and waterways. Around this area, the east is adjacent to the sea, the west is adjacent to Cao Mien (former name of Cambodia). After that, the contour turns to the north through Hung Hoa river to Tra Giang river, and follows the east to Soi Rap sea estuary. Dinh Tuong Military Province’ territory is located along the long strip of river on the south side of the river. At the south, the contour is from Hung Ngu post of Tan Chau road, along Tien Giang river, to the north, then to the east, across Ham Luong river, to Ba Lai sea estuary. The territory of the Military Province is located on the north bank of the river” (Trinh Hoai Duc, 1998). Based on the description, the territory of the Dinh Tuong Military Province was situated in Tien Giang today. Dinh Tuong Military Province – Kien An Department consisted of 3 Districts, 6 cantons, and villages. Kien Dang District consisted of 2 cantons, 87 villages, of which Kien Che and Kien Phong cantons had 44 and 43 villages, respectively. Kien

Hung District had 2 cantons and 76 villages, of which Kien Thuan and Hung Xuong cantons had 39 villages and 37 villages, respectively. Kien Hoa District had 2 cantons and 151 villages, of which Kien Thinh and Hoa Binh cantons had 65 and 86 villages, respectively.

3.4. Southeast region in the administrative structure of Six provinces of Southern Vietnam (1832 - 1859)

In 1832, Emperor Minh Mang dissolved the Gia Dinh Department administrative level, of which Military Province administrative level was changed into Province. Cochinchina or Nam Kỳ (name of the South of Vietnam at that time) was divided into 6 provinces including Phien An, Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong on the east and Vinh Long, An Giang and Ha Tien on the west. In 1836, Phien An Province changed its name to Gia Dinh Province. Since then, in term of administrative structure of Six provinces of Southern Vietnam, Southeast region had included 3 provinces of Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh and Dinh Tuong. This administrative structure remained unchanged until the French colonialists invaded Vietnam. *Geography of Unified Dai Nam (Đại Nam nhất thống chí)* written by National historiographer's office of Nguyen Dynasty concretely described the territory of each Province.

Bien Hoa Province “borders on sea at the east, stretches to mountainous Man race's land at the west, borders on Gia Dinh Province at the south and Binh Thuan Province at the north” (National historiographer's office of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006). The administrative structure of Bien Hoa Province included 2 Departments, 4 Districts and 3 sub-Districts (“tinh nhiếp”). Phuoc Long Department included 4 Districts of Phuoc Chanh, Binh An, Phuoc Binh, Nghia An, of which Phuoc Chanh District had 5 cantons, 89 villages and 2 areas of Chinese people, Binh An District had 6 cantons and 56 villages, 2 areas of Chinese people and 2 sub-Districts, Phuoc Binh District included 5 cantons and 60 villages, and Nghia An District had 5 cantons and 51 villages. Phuoc Tuy Departments included 3 Districts of Phuoc An, Long Thanh and Long Khanh, of which Phuoc An had 4 cantons and 42 villages, Long Thanh had 4 cantons and 61 villages, and Long Khanh had 6 cantons and 47 villages.

Gia Dinh Province “stretches to Nguu Chu river (Ben Nghe) at the south, is about 2 miles far from Bien Hoa Province's boundary, stretches to Cu Ao river (Vung Gu) at the west, borders on Dinh Tuong Province, is approximately 99 miles from Dinh Tuong Province's boundary and 182 miles from Bien Hoa Province at the north, stretches to sea at the southeast, is 85 miles far from Dinh Tuong Province's boundary at the southeast and 89 miles far from Bien Hoa Province's boundary at the northwest”, “with mountain behind, large rivers around three sides, large puddles and the other side with road to Man race's land” (National historiographer's office of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006). Gia Dinh Province was divided into 3 Departments and 9 Districts. Tan Binh

Department had 3 Districts, 16 cantons and, 288 communes and hamlets. Tan Binh Department had 3 Districts of Binh Duong, Tan Long, Binh Long, of which Binh Duong had 6 cantons, and 105 communes and hamlets, Tan Long had 6 cantons and 109 communes and hamlets, and Binh Long had 4 cantons and 74 communes and hamlets. Tan An Department had 4 Districts of Cuu An, Phuc Loc, Tan Hoa and Tan Thinh, of which Cuu An had 4 cantons and 53 communes and hamlets, Phuoc Loc had 6 cantons and 94 communes and hamlets, Tan Hoa had 4 canton and 35 communes and hamlets, and Tan Thinh had 4 cantons and 32 communes and hamlets. Tay Ninh Department had 2 Districts of Tan Ninh and Quang Hoa, of which Tan Ninh had 2 cantons and 24 communes, and Quang Hoa had 4 cantons and 32 communes.

Dinh Tuong Province bordered on Gia Dinh Province at the north and northeast, on Vinh Long Province at the south, on An Giang and Cao Mien (Cambodia) at the west and southwest, on Vinh Long and An Giang provinces at the south and southeast, “with all four sides of plains and rivers” (National historiographer’s office of Nguyen Dynasty, 2006). In the period of Six provinces of Southern Vietnam, Dinh Tuong Province had 2 Departments and 4 Districts. Kien An Department had 2 Districts, 10 cantons, and 157 hamlets, of which Kien Hung District had 5 cantons and 75 hamlets, and Kien Hoa District had 5 cantons and 82 hamlets. Kien Tuong Department had 2 Districts, 9 cantons and 89 hamlets, of which Kien Phong District had 4 cantons and 36 hamlets, and Kien Dang District had 5 cantons and 51 hamlets.

3.5. Southeast region in the administrative structure during the French colonialism period (1859 - 1945)

In February 1859, French colonialists conquered Gia Dinh Department. On June 05, 1862, the Nguyen Dynasty and the French signed the Treaty of the year of Dog (Nhâm Tuất) to cede the three eastern provinces of the South, namely Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh and Dinh Tuong to the French. Based on the Treaty, the French colonialists arranged their ruling of French style and rules. On July 01, 1863, the French issued a decree on governing and spending; on June 29, 1864, the French decided to master their administration and the local ruling. Since then, the administrative structure of the Southeast region’s provinces had changed. Initially, the French colonialists established Sai Gon with the expected scale of 2,500ha and expected population of 500-600 thousand people. After many changes, in 1865, France promulgated a decree on setting up the regulations of Sai Gon Chief Town and setting the Chief Town’s boundary within the territory of Thi Nghe canal, Sai Gon river, Ben Nghe canal, among others, with the area of about 440ha, belonging to Binh Duong District, Tan Binh Department and Gia Dinh Province (corresponding to District 1, Ho Chi Minh City today). During the 1862 – 1867 period, together with the establishment of Sai Gon Chief Town, the French colonialists established Cho Lon urban area (name of Districts 5, 6 and 11 of Ho Chi Minh City

today). In addition to the two urban areas of Sai Gon and Cho Lon, the administrative structure of the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina remained the same as those of the Nguyen Dynasty. Gia Dinh Province consisted of three Departments of Tan Binh, Tay Ninh and Tan An. Bien Hoa Province had 2 Departments of Phuoc Long and Phuoc Tuy. Dinh Tuong Province had 2 Departments of Kien An and Kien Tuong. In 1867, after occupying three western provinces and establishing their ruling system in the whole of Cochinchina, on June 05, 1867, the French issued a decree which divided administratively 6 Cochinchina provinces into 24 Boroughs. According to this decree, the three eastern provinces of the Cochinchina were divided into 16 Boroughs.

Gia Dinh Province was divided into 7 Boroughs. Sai Gon Borough included Sai Gon (Capital) Chief Town, and 2 Districts of Binh Duong and Binh Long. Cho Lon Borough had Cho Lon Chief Town and Tan Long District. Tan Hoa Boroughs included Go Cong Chief Town and Tan Hoa District. Phuoc Loc Borough had Can Giuoc Chief Town and Phuoc Loc District. Tan An Boroughs had Binh Lap Chief Town, Tan Thanh District and Cuu An District. Tay Ninh Borough had Tay Ninh Chief Town and Tay Ninh District. Quang Hoa Borough had Trang Bang Chief Town and two Districts of Quang Hoa and Tan Ninh.

Gia Dinh Province was divided into 5 Boroughs. Bien Hoa Borough had Bien Hoa Chief Town and Phuoc Chanh District. Ba Ria Borough had Ba Ria Chief Town and Phuoc An District. Long Thanh Borough had Long Thanh Chief Town and Long Thành District. Binh An Borough had Thu Dau Mot Chief Town and Binh An District. Nghia An Borough had Thu Duc Chief Town and Nghia An District.

Dinh Tuong Province was divided into 4 Boroughs, consisting of Kien An (or Kien Hung) Borough including Kien An Department and Kien Hung District, Kien Hoa Borough (Kien Hoa District), Kien Dang Boroughs (currently known as Cai Lay), and Kien Tuong Borough including Kien Tuong Department and Kien Phong District.

From 1867 to 1900, the French colonialists created a series of administration modifications, which involved adding, reducing, splitting up or merging the Boroughs. In Gia Dinh, Sai Gon Borough was changed into Gia Dinh Borough, Phuoc Loc Borough was dissolved and merged into Cho Lon Borough. In Dinh Tuong, Kien An Borough was moved to My Tho and changed into My Tho Borough. Kien Hoa Borough was moved to Cho Gao and changed into Cho Gao Borough. Go Cong Borough was newly established.⁽¹⁴⁾

In 1899, Governor-General of French Indochina issued a decree which re-structured Boroughs into provinces. This adjustment resulted in the formation of 21 provinces throughout Cochinchina. Accordingly, the Southeast region included the provinces of Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Ba Ria, Thu Dau Mot, Tay Ninh, Cho Lon, Tan An, My Tho and Go Cong, and the two cities of Sai Gon and Cho Lon. In 1931, the two cities of Sai Gon

and Cho Lon were merged into the Sai Gon Cho Lon area. This administrative structure had remained unchanged until 1945.

3.6. Southeast region in the administrative structure during the period of Resistance War against France and America (1945 - 1975)

Immediately after the successful August Revolution, the French colonialists returned to invade Vietnam for the second time. The administrative management in the period was featured with two parallel governments. One was the colonial government, State of Vietnam, established by the French, which mainly controlled cities and areas located on main traffic routes. Other was the revolutionary government (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), namely the Resistance Administrative Committees of the Southern provinces and the resistance committees from the provinces to districts and communes, responsible for organizing people's resistance and social management. In the South, militarily, the French colonialists established a number of military zones, but administratively, they still maintained the existing structure of 22 provinces. Southeast region included the provinces of Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Thu Dau Mot, Tay Ninh, Cho Lon, Tan An, My Tho, Go Cong and Sai Gon - Cho Lon City with the four-level administrative system of provinces, Districts, cantons and villages.

Under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's government in the post-August Revolution, the provinces in the Southeast region remained their same names and boundaries. Particularly, Sai Gon - Cho Lon City was officially identified as Sai Gon - Cho Lon distinctive zone. In 1948, the Resistance Administrative Committees of the Southern provinces set up Dong Thanh zone (in 1948, dissolved), including 4 communes of Duc Hoa (Cho Lon Province). In 1951, to meet the demands of resistance war, the Resistance Administrative Committees of the Southern provinces adjusted the administrative structure of the provinces in the Southeast region. Accordingly, some communes of Tan An Province was merged with Go Cong and My Tho provinces into a new Tan My Go Province. A part of Tan An Province was merged with Sa Dec Province into Dong Thap Province (different from Dong Thap Province today). A part of Tan An and Cho Lon was merged with Ba Ria Province into Ba Cho Province. A part of Cho Lon land was merged with Gia Dinh and Tay Ninh provinces into Gia Dinh Ninh Province. The two provinces of Thu Dau Mot and Bien Hoa were merged into Thu Bien Province. At the end of the resistance war against France, Southeast region's administrative boundary included the provinces of Thu Bien, Gia Dinh Ninh, Ba Cho, My Tan Go, Dong Thap and Sai Gon Cho Lon distinctive zone.

After the Geneva Agreement, the Republic of Vietnam's government maintained the administrative boundaries of the Southeast region's provinces. In 1955 and 1956, Sai Gon - Cho Lon zone was changed into Sai Gon - Cho Lon prefecture, and into Sai Gon

prefecture, respectively. In the meanwhile during 1956, the Republic of Vietnam's government established a number of new provinces. Decree 21 (February 17, 1956) was issued to separate Moc Hoa District of Tan An Province to form Moc Hoa Province (which, in October 1956, was changed into Kien Tuong Province). The remaining part of Tan An Province was merged with a part of the former Cho Lon Province into Long An Province. In October 1956, the Republic of Vietnam's government dissolved Thu Dau Mot Province to merge with a part of Bien Hoa Province to form the provinces of Binh Duong, Binh Long and Phuoc Long (Decree 143-NV dated October 22, 1956). At the same time, a part of Bien Hoa Province was separated to form Long Khanh Province. A part of Bien Hoa Province was merged with a part of Binh Thuan Province to form Binh Tuy Province. Ba Ria and Vung Tau provinces were merged into Phuoc Tuy Province (Truong Island was administratively attached to the province during this period of time).

Since 1957, in the period of the First Republic, the Republic of Vietnam's government defined the Southeast as an administrative zone, called Southeastern Zone, represented by Office of the South Vietnamese Regional Delegate for provinces and cities: Sai Gon prefecture, Gia Dinh, Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy and Long An.

In 1959, a part of two provinces of Bien Hoa and Phuoc Long was separated to form Phuoc Thanh Province (existed until 1965 when it was dissolved). In 1963, the Republic of Vietnam's government split a part of Long An, Gia Dinh and Tay Ninh provinces to form Hau Nghia Province (under Decree No. 124-NV dated October 15, 1963). In November 1963, the First Republic was overthrown, after which the Southeastern Zone was abolished, although its name was widely used to designate a geographical area. In the 1966-1975 period of the Second Republic, the Southeast zone consisted of 12 provinces and cities: Sai Gon prefecture, Gia Dinh, Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Hau Nghia, Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy and Long An.

From a revolutionary perspective, during the 1954-1969 period of governmental absence, the leadership of the political and armed forces, as well as the launching and organization of combats was undertaken by the Party Committees. In order to facilitate the direction and timely response to the guidelines and conspiracies of the Republic of Vietnam's government, the revolutionary government maintained the administrative structure of provinces and cities, and at the same time, established zones and Divisions to direct the revolution from time to time. In 1961, in the Southeast region, two zones, Sai Gon Gia Dinh Zone and Zone 7 (including the provinces of Ba Ria, Long Khanh, Bien Hoa, Binh Duong, Phuoc Thanh, Phuoc Long, Tay Ninh) were established. Particularly, Kien Tuong and Long An were moved to Zone 8. In December 1962, Zone 10, including the provinces of Phuoc Long, Binh Long, Quang Duc and Lam Dong, was established. Zone 10 was dissolved at the end of 1963, but re-established in 1966, including Phuoc Long,

Binh Long and Quang Duc provinces. In 1967, the zones were dissolved to establish 6 Divisions, namely, Sai Gon inner-City Division, Division 1 including the Districts of Cu Chi, Hoc Mon and Go Vap (Gia Dinh Province), Ben Cat, Dau Tieng (Binh Duong Province) and Trang Bang (Tay Ninh Province), Division 2 including the Districts of Tan Binh, Bac Binh Chanh, Districts 3, 5 and 6 of Sai Gon, Districts of Duc Hoa, Duc Hue and Ben Thu (Long An Province), Division 3 including Districts of Nha Be and Nam Binh Chanh, Districts 2, 4, 7 and 8 (Sai Gon) and Districts of Chau Thanh, Can Duoc and Can Giuoc (Long An), Division 4 including Districts 1, 9 and 10 (Sai Gon), Thu Duc, Can Gio (Gia Dinh), Long Thanh, Nhon Trach and Binh Son (Bien Hoa) Districts, Division 5 including Phu Nhuan, Bac Thu Duc (Sai Gon), Tan Uyen and Doc Lap Districts (Bien Hoa), Phu Giao, Lai Thieu, Chau Thanh and Di An Districts, Thu Dau Mot town (Binh Duong). In addition to the six Divisions above, the provinces of Ba Ria, Bien Hoa and Tay Ninh and Zone 10 remained unchanged. In March 1968, Zone 7 was re-established, including Division 4, Ba Ria, Long Khanh and Bien Hoa provinces.

In 1969, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam was established. The National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam transferred its State function to the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Since then, the revolutionary government system featuring the revolutionary People's Committee system at all levels had been formed. In the Southeast region, Revolutionary People's Committees consisted of different levels of Division, province, district and commune according to the battle organization as described above. In 1970, 23 Long An Divisions (including Divisions 2 and 3) was established. In 1971, Zone 10 was dissolved, and Binh Phuoc Division including 2 provinces of Binh Phuoc and Phuoc Long was established. In 1971, Zone 10 was dissolved, and two new Divisions, namely Ba Bien (including Ba Ria, Long Khanh and Division 4) and Thu Bien (including Bien Hoa and Division 5) was established. In 1972, the Divisions was dissolved and Zone 7 (Eastern region) and Sai Gon area was re-established. In 1974, the Eastern region was named Zone 7. In early 1975, Tay Ninh and Binh Phuoc provinces were separated from Zone 7 directly under the Central Office for South Vietnam and the Region Headquarter. This administrative organization existed until the Day of Southern Liberation (April 30, 1975).

3.7. Southeast region in the administrative structure from the Day of Southern Liberation to now (1975 - 2016)

After the Great Victory of 1975 Spring, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam decided to dissolve the zones and Divisions and unite some provinces and cities. In Southeast region, Sai Gon prefecture, Gia Dinh Province and a part of Hau Nghia Province, a part of Binh Duong Province (Phu Hoa District), a part of Bien Hoa Province (Quang Xuyen and Can Gio) were unified into Ho Chi Minh City. The provinces of Binh Duong, Binh Long and Phuoc Long were merged into Song

Be Province. A part of Hau Nghia Province was merged with Long An and Kien Tuong to form a new Long An Province. Bien Hoa was merged with Ba Ria (including Vung Tau) (i.e. Phuoc Tuy Province of the Republic of Vietnam) and Long Khanh into Dong Nai Province. A part of Hau Nghia Province was merged into Tay Ninh Province (Trang Bang District). Two provinces were merged into Go Cong and My Tho into Tien Giang Province. In 1979, Vung Tau Con Dao Special Zone was established. In 1991, Ba Ria Vung Tau Province, including Vung Tau Con Dao Special Zone and 3 Districts of Dong Nai Province, which originally belonged to former Ba Ria Province (Chau Thanh, Long Dat and Xuyen Moc), was established. In 1997, Song Be was divided into two provinces of Binh Duong and Binh Phuoc.

In 1998, the Government approved the Socio-Economic Master Planning of the Southern key economic zones for the 1999 - 2010 period, including four provinces and cities (Ba Ria - Vung Tau, Dong Nai, Binh Duong and Ho Chi Minh City), and targeting to reach the higher growth rate of economic zones than that of others in the country, lead in some important sectors, create a driving force for the development of the Southern region and contribute to promoting the national economy. Following this, in 2003, the Prime Minister decided to expand the boundary of the region to include 3 provinces of Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc and Long An. In 2005, the Government decided to include Tien Giang into the Southern key economic zone, forming an economic inter-zone of eight provinces and cities (Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, Ba Ria-Vung Tau and Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Long An and Tien Giang. Accordingly, the Southern key economic zone belonged entirely to the administrative boundary of the former Southeast region. Table 1 shows some information on the administrative structure of the Southeast provinces as the Southern key economic zone today.

TABLE 1. Area and population of provinces and cities in Southern key economic zone

No.	Province / City	City	Urban District	Town	District	Area (km ²)	Population (2018)
1.	Ho Chi Minh City		19		5	2,095.0	8,598.7
2.	Binh Duong	1		4	4	2,695.5	2,163.6
3.	Dong Nai	1		1	9	5,907.2	3,086.1
4.	Ba Ria Vung Tau	2		1	5	1,982.2	1,112.9
5.	Binh Phuoc			2	8	6,857.3	979.6
6.	Tay Ninh	1			8	4,029.6	1,133.4
7.	Long An	1		1	13	4,491.9	1,503.1
8.	Tien Giang	1		2	8	2,508.6	1,762.3
	Total					30,567.3	20,339.7

4. Conclusion

The Southeast region space has been structured and re-structured by the different boundaries in different historical periods. In prehistory and protohistory, the Southeast

region constituted the space of Dong Nai archeological culture, with the boundary stretching from Binh Thuan to Long An today, which is a transitional area between the South Truong Son plateau and the Mekong Delta. During the Nguyen Dynasty's reclamation and development of the Southern region, the Southeast region included three eastern provinces of Cochinchina, corresponding to the Southern key economic zone today (including eight provinces and cities - Table 1). Under the Republic of Vietnam regime, the Southeast region was defined as an administrative region called the Southeastern Zone, represented by Office of the South Vietnamese Regional Delegate for provinces and cities (including 13 provinces and cities: Sai Gon prefecture, Gia Dinh, Tay Ninh, Binh Duong, Binh Long, Phuoc Long, Phuoc Thanh, Hau Nghia, Bien Hoa, Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy and Long An provinces). Since 1975, the Southeast region's boundary has been used in the General Statistics Office of Vietnam's Statistical yearbooks, including the provinces of Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai and Ba Ria - Vung Tau. In recent years, the General Statistics Office of Vietnam has added Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces to the Southeast region. However, such addition is only for economic zoning, not changing the "Southeast region" concept in studies of history, culture, social structure, population and other socio-economic issues. The identification of Southeast region space over time is to serve a comprehensive study of the Southeast region, regarding not only the historical, economic and cultural aspects but only environmental and urbanization issues. The empirical documentation conducted on issues related to the Southeast region is not necessarily limited within a specific administrative scope, but, depending on the requirements of each field, would need to expand to a relevant wider space such as topography, geomorphology, prehistoric and protohistoric cultural relations, traditional cultural values of residential communities and regional and inter-regional cultural and economic exchange relations.

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