

# Land grabbing, conflict and agrarian-environmental transformations: perspectives from East and Southeast Asia

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### Compulsory land acquisition for urban expansion: A study of farmer's protest in peri-urban Hue, Central Vietnam

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## Abstract

The compulsory land acquisition instead of market mechanism is acknowledged as an essential cause of disputes among affected farmers, investors, and governments. Similar to other parts of Vietnam, people affected by land loss in Hue's peri-urban zones have reacted to defend their interests through different forms of protest. However, the existed protest is considered a weakness and lower frequency of production. While the collective protest is a very rare practice, the acceptance and adaptation to land acquisition (hidden protest) is a common feature of the rural population. Beside the socio-economic factors, the difference in cultural values among regions and cities has significantly contributed to the shape of forms and extents of protest. This study suggests that although the impacts of hidden protest is less impressive, its existence in daily life is a suspicious sign of social tension. The governments therefore may not underestimate its impacts. In order to create an equity for people affected by compulsory land acquisition, rural social movements which actively supported from civil society organizations are actually necessary. The aim of this paper is to briefly analyze large-scale land acquisition in Vietnam and Hue city; and investigate the main reasons for farmer's protest to land loss. Furthermore, we describe several examples of protest to understand what forms of protest the affected farmers use in response to compulsory land acquisition as well as their consequences.

**Key words:** Vietnam, Hue, urbanization, compulsory land acquisition, compensation, protest

## Introduction

Since the introduction of economic reforms in 1986, Vietnam has made significant progress in all aspects. The growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaged 7.2 percent per year in the periods of 2001-2010 (GSO, 2005; 2011). The average income per capita increased from US\$ 700 in 2005 to US\$ 1749 in 2012 (GSO, 2013). Economic transformation was also accompanied by rapid urbanization with urban areas increasing by at least one million people per year (GSO, 2013). The urbanization rate is expected to increase from 33 per cent in 2010 to 45 per cent by 2020 (Wit, 2011). As a result, there is an increased demand for quality housing, as well as for infrastructure and facilities to allow for both economic growth and sustainable urban development. This has created numerous pressures on land use, especially on areas in peri-urban zones where land, traditionally used for agriculture, is still available and is cheaper than urban land. In order to satisfy the rising land demand for socio-economic development, the government has implemented various measures, including compulsory land acquisition.

Under the current laws and regulations in Vietnam, the compulsory land acquisition by the State is the only way to acquire land for projects which related to purposes of national defense, security, public interest, and economic development. The current users are compensated according to a pricing framework set annually by the provincial authority. This framework is always priced lower than the market values. It was estimated that nearly 1 million hectares of agricultural land was transformed for non-agricultural activities between 2001 and 2010 (World Bank, 2011). Consequently, land under rice production decreased from 6.7 million hectares in 1995 to 4.1 million hectares in 2009 (GSO, 1996; 2010). Nearly 630,000 households and 2.5 million people were seriously impacted by these processes (Mai Thanh, 2009). The change in land use led or sponsored by government rather than by the decisions made by current land users has also created social tensions in many parts of country.

Compulsory land acquisition for urbanization and industrialization along with its impacts have aroused the attention of the scientific community, media and policy makers. Much of recent researches have attempted to answer the question of how land loss has affected livelihoods of rural population (Phong, 2007; Suu, 2009; Tuyen *et al.*, 2014; Phuc *et al.*, 2014b). Little attention concentrates on the protest of people affected by land loss for urban development and economic growth. This gap in the current literature has promoted us to conduct an empirical study in order to answer two key research questions: whether or not – after being forced to leave part or all their land for urban expansion and move in new patterns of livelihood – affected farmers protest to protect their rights? If so, what forms of protest do the affected farmers use in reaction to compulsory land acquisition? Our study focuses on Hue's peri-urban zones, Central Vietnam where compulsory land acquisition have become a contested topic in recent years.

The article proceeds as follows: After a short review of the literature of farmer's resistance, we will outline the research setting and methodology, followed by an analysis of the main reasons of protest, and the forms of protest in reaction to land loss. The last section covers the discussion and offers conclusions.

## Farmer's resistance: A literature review

The term resistance refers to power relation, inequity and social change. It describes “a wide variety of actions and behaviors at all levels of human social life (e.g. individual, collective, and institutional) and in a number of different settings, including political systems, entertainment, and literature” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004: 534). In this sense, everything from everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 1985) includes behaviors as dramatic as violence, as subtle as working slowly, hidden transcript, or a refusal to cooperate with officials to social movements (Flint and Taylor, 2007) all fall

into such acts of resistance.

Our literature review shows that resistance normally refers to organized, large-scale movements that pose a threat to the state. However, Scott's study of a village in Malaysia argued that the subordinate classes have few opportunities to undertake the forms of organized and open resistance, because they risk violent or otherwise debilitating reprisals from their oppressors. Rather than open rebellion, they used everyday methods of resistance, such as spreading malicious rumours, pilfering, arson and exaggerated claims to counter the actions of the elites. These methods are characterized by the little planning that they require, less direct and confrontational, but they still qualify as other forms of resistance. These are recognized as "weapons of the weak", and their intent are more important than their outcomes (Scott, 1985).

The theory of Scott, *i.e.* everyday resistance has been applied afterwards in the study political economy of peasants in many parts of the world. Peluso (1992) used the concept of everyday forms of resistance in the case of Java in Indonesia to illustrate how the Samin movement took place. According to her, the Saminists personalized the issue with the official representatives of the Forest Service. They "refused" to speak to the foresters, or to any officials. They saw the forest officials as an obstruction of their inherent right to forest wood and forest land. Some villagers "lay down" on their land and cried out "Kanggo" or "I own it". Another case by Kerkvliet (1990) found that villagers of San Ricardo in Philippines pulsate with discussions, debates, complaints and other activity about the control, allocation, and use of resources (land). These took place in everyday village life between the early 1970s and mid-1980s. In a similar vein, Kerkvliet (2005) pointed out that Vietnamese farmers often "cut corners" doing things that did not comply with what authorities expected of them in order to express their disaffection to the collective farming cooperatives during the 1960s-1980s. According to him, unless a work team assigned to fertilize planted fields was closely supervised, farmers sometimes did the work sloppily to complete the task quickly and easily, rather than spreading it evenly. Whether they did the job diligently or not, people reasoned, they received the same number of work points, so they took the easy way. Consequently, properties that were normally considered collectives – such as land, work animals and tools – were not well cared for, and yields rose to less than what the country needed in the context of war requirements and rapid population growth. He concluded that everyday resistance without violence, even without organized significant opposition, contributed to authorities' rethinking cooperative programs and policies. Then, a new agrarian reform proposed by the Communist Party, namely decollectivization<sup>1</sup> that promulgated in the 1980s and 1990s (Kerkvliet, 2005).

Despite the characteristics such as quiet and the acts rarely organized or direct, Scott (1985) argues that everyday resistance is the foundation for large-scale change by constantly foiling policies. They are important precursors of open, confrontational, advocacy forms of resistance (Kerkvliet, 2009). In this sense, farmer's resistance can move from covert to more overt, direct and concerted forms of resistance. Accordingly, farmer's disaffection may be written down or expressed through open protests and organized petitioning. Open defiance by some villagers may encourage others within a village to take action (Schneider, 2011). However, this trend actually needs transformation conditions which, firstly, is the change in political circumstances which allows farmers and disfavor individuals to have opportunities to raise their opinions. The second condition is the emergence of individual leaders and groups (social organizations) who are able to band villagers together to raise their actions and behaviors into powerful entities (Kerkvliet, 2009).

The arguments of Scott and Kerkvliet have verified by the development of rural social movements in recent years. In other words, farmer's resistance that is supported by social

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<sup>1</sup> Land was allocated to farm households based on the size of their adult workforce. The agricultural cooperatives continued to supply inputs for agricultural production, while crop management was related to farm households.

organizations are more likely to move from hidden to open resistance (Schneider, 2011). For instance, people affected by land loss for urbanization in China have expressed their discontent through open forms of protest. These include letters of complaints sent to authorities, face-to-face meetings with officials, protest in front of local government offices, occupation government buildings, and taking officials hostage (Walker, 2008). A similar reality has taken place in Vietnam in recent years (Han and Vu, 2008; Le Kien, 2012; Doan Trang, 2012). Nearly 700,000 petitions and letters were sent to the appropriate authorities between 2008 and 2011 (Thanh tra Chinh phu, 2012; Le Kien, 2012). Hundreds of people who come from provinces of the Mekong Delta joined together in front of the key government building in Ho Chi Minh city to demonstrate against unfair in compensation rates (Phuong, 2009). On the outskirts of Hanoi, Tho Da villagers resorted to violence to press for higher compensation, and a few was jailed for opposing the police (Han and Vu, 2008). In Hung Yen, another province in the Red Delta, three hundred people in Van Giang district who lost their land for the Eco-Park<sup>2</sup> new urban project, against the District People Committee. They pitched tents on the rice field to defend their farm land, and used shovels, knife, and sticks to against the officials (Doan Trang, 2012).

Rural social movements have emerged in many parts of the world as a consequence of large-scale land acquisition for the production of food and biofuel for export. A case study by Visser and Mamonova (2011) show that social movements that took place in the mid-2000s in Ukraine and Russia were clearly grassroots movements defending the land rights of peasants, often related to inequity in large-scale land acquisitions. Although the roles of civil society organizations have appeared in social movements, collective forms of protest occur less often and weak due to the Soviet legacy (Visser and Mamonova, 2011; and Mamonova, 2012). This finding was also found in the case of Cambodia by Schneider (2011). She stated that although the open resistance to land loss is emerging, the everyday forms of resistance (e.g. hidden resistance) is the most common in rural societies. The integration of local social movements into transnational agrarian movements seems relatively difficult to establish in Cambodia due to the oppression of state and powerful actors.

The literature on farmer's resistance in different parts of the world indicates that the control, allocation, and use of natural resources – particularly land – is vital to the daily concerns of peasants and other villagers. To protect land rights, peasants have used different forms of resistance, from everyday forms of resistance to demonstration and negative violence. However, the difference in political systems, socio-economic structure, and driving forces of land acquisition between countries in which peasants stayed has led to difference in the forms and scales of resistance. This raises a question concerning whether or not this conclusion is true for other contexts – local levels i.e. difference between localities/cities within country. Bearing these core issues in mind, we examine Hue, a festival city of Vietnam as an example with objective of answering how farmers affected by compulsory land acquisition for urban expansion develop kinds of protest in reaction to land loss. We turn now to describe the research site where compulsory land acquisition process taken place, as well as data collection.

## **Research site and data collection**

This study was conducted in Hue, a medium-sized city with 400,000 inhabitants in Central Vietnam. It was the imperial capital of Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) and is now the capital of Thua Thien Hue Province. Over the past few years, there have been dramatic changes in the socio-

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<sup>2</sup> Eco-park is a new urban project invested by Vihajico in 2009 in Hung Yen province. The total area of project is proximately 500 hectares (100 per cent is farmland). There are 4,876 households affected by losing land. In Xuan Quang commune, 166 affected households refuse to get compensation. On 24 April 2012, they are coerced to taking land by the Van Giang district government (Doan Trang, 2012).

economic structure of Hue city. The total population increased from 304,000 in 2002 to 346,000 in 2012 (HSO, 2005, 2013). Annual economic growth has averaged 9.5% (1996-2005) and 14.2% (2006-2010), and it is predicted at 14% for the period 2011-2015 (Quyét dinh 564/QĐ-UBND, 2007). Services and tourism sectors contributed 72.7% to the local economy in 2012, with industry at 26.8% and agriculture 0.5%. Tourism has created a large number of direct jobs with 14,310 employees in 2011 compared with 11,245 employees in 2008 (HSO, 2013). Yet the development of a textile industry created stable jobs for more than 12,000 persons.

The stage for rapidly increased urban expansion was set on 25 May 2009, at the 10<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress as the Politburo drew up Conclusion No. 48-KL/TW calling for Thua Thien Hue to become a centrally-governed city by 2020 (Ket luan so 48 – KL/TW, 2009). In this sense, it replicates the example of the main, larger cities in Vietnam (e.g., Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Hai Phong, Can Tho and Da Nang) where the use of state funding was concentrated within their own boundaries.

The timescale for the shift of status in Thua Thien Hue has since moved rather optimistically to 2015. Structurally, the aim is for the province to rearrange itself as a centrally-governed city, with Hue a nuclear city surrounded by a specified collection of satellite towns, including Tu Ha, Huong Thuy, and Thuan An. As approved by the Prime Minister, the size of Hue is expected to increase from 70.99 km<sup>2</sup> in 2012 to 348 km<sup>2</sup> in 2020 (Quyét dinh 649/ QĐ-TTg, 2014). At the present, Thua Thien Hue province and Hue City are attempting to attract new foreign and domestic investments.

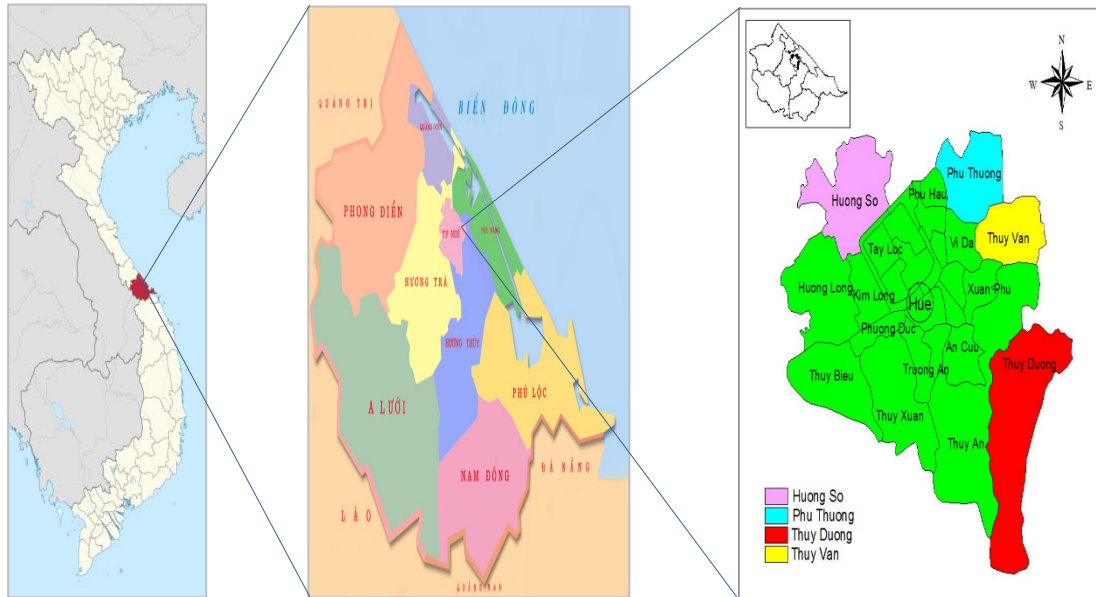
To implement the approved urban development strategies, compulsory land acquisition has taken place in peri-urban zones. Simon et al. (2006) define peri-urban areas not only as zones experiencing the direct transformations of urban growth but also in wider terms of market influence affecting the flows of agricultural and natural resource products. Accordingly, peri-urban zone in this study is defined as the zones where traditional farming activities come into conflict with alternative economic; it is the area of daily commuting from village to city central and where transformations between urban and rural landscapes are determined by the conversion of land from agricultural to other uses, such as urban housing, commercial centers, and infrastructure development. Land loss is mainly characterized by agricultural land loss (or losing rice crops mainly grown for subsistence and self-consumption)—the vast majority of households remained in their homes and received compensation money for lost land; a limited number of households who also lost housing land were displaced and resettled within the same or other villages. It is estimated that nearly 400 hectares of land (of which over 80% was agricultural land) were converted for modernization projects between 2000 and 2012. More than 2,700 households have been seriously impacted by these processes (Table 1).

*Table 1. Compulsory land acquisition by the state in Hue's peri-urban zones (2000-12).*

Locality	Area (ha)	Affected households (#)
An Dong	17.8	124
An Tay	23.9	154
Xuan Phu	26.8	157
Vy Da	24.1	159
An Hoa	9.2	225
Huong So	9.5	296
Phu Thuong	70.3	542
Thuy Van	99.5	651
Thuy Duong	111.9	462
Total	393.6	2,770

*Source:* (calculated by authors from the reports of local authorities)

Figure 1. Map of Vietnam, Thua Thien Hue province, Hue City and the four study villages.



Source: HPI, 2013; and <https://maps.google.com.au/> (accessed on December 2013).

According to the 2003 Land Law, the process of land acquisition is conducted only by the state. Accordingly, to implement all stages of land acquisition, a Site of Clearance and Compensation Council<sup>3</sup> (SCCC) is set up at the level of the district/city where the land to be acquired is located. The SCCC is charged with formulating and appraising the compensation plan, as well as organizing the site clearance and the compensation process according to the approved plan. Compensation rates are directly determined by the provincial government pricing framework. Despite being revised yearly, the framework is significantly below the prevailing market rate. In the land acquisition process, there are three main stakeholders involved: governments, developers, and current land users. However, the local government usually plays a dominant role in the decision-making process (Phuc, et al., 2014a).

Certain peri-urban localities of Hue were selected as study villages based on the extent and consequences of land loss. In Thuy Duong and Phu Thuan, agricultural land was acquired for quality housing projects - new urban areas. In Huong So and Thuy Van, agricultural land was acquired to build resettlement areas for local people who displaced by land acquisition projects; or for people who lived on the boats on the Huong River<sup>4</sup> and households displaced for the Ngu Ha River improvement project. Field research was carried out between October 2012 and August 2014, collecting data by using a variety of methods. Information on the nature and extent of land loss in Vietnam and Hue was gathered through secondary data. Based on the household surveys (170 households), in-depth interviews that were led by the interview guideline were conducted with representatives of land loss groups to explore useful information related to the research questions. In addition, key informant interviews were also conducted with 10 people who are responsible for the land loss to support data analyses and collect views.

In a previous paper, we stated that almost all households surveyed in four studied villages in

<sup>3</sup> The SCCC is headed by the president of the district/city People's Committee, as well as representatives from the Departments of Finance, Environment and Resources, local authorities, investors, and affected households.

<sup>4</sup> In Huong So, 8.35 hectares of agricultural land was acquired in 2009 to build a resettlement area for "dân vạm vỡ" (Boat people) and households displaced for the Ngu Ha River improvement project. It was explained by local authorities that Boat people are also seen as a main agent of water pollution of the Huong River, which may create negative impacts on the tourism industry.



Hue's peri-urban zones did not satisfy with compulsory land acquisition processes (Phuc *et al.*, 2014a). This suggests that a full understanding about reasons of dissatisfaction may significantly contribute to exploring the forms of protest which affected farmers use to respond to land loss, as well as giving policy implications.

## Protest to compulsory land acquisition: What are the reasons?

Our research data found four fundamental reasons that explain why affected people in studied villages protest against the process of compulsory land acquisition. These include: 1) inequalities in compensation; 2) lack of participation; 3) justifying the taking of land action; and 4) failure in livelihood reconstruction and food insecurity. The following paragraphs present the main points of each cause in turn.

*Inequalities in the compensation rates.* Nearly 93 per cent of households surveyed contend that the compensation paid did not reflect the land's actual market value, as well as not accounting for the increase in land prices following project completion. They argued that when the construction of new urban infrastructure projects is completed, the land price is speedily increased. In these cases, the investors have embraced a huge profit from a massive margin between the acquisition cost of (rural) land and the prices paid by (urban) users, while affected households did not get sufficiently paid.

Table 2. Increase in land prices following the completion of projects

Projects	Localities	Compensation price (VND/m <sup>2</sup> )	Years	Market price (VND million /m <sup>2</sup> )	Increase Level (%)
An Van Duong Resettlement Area	Thuy Van	19,000	2005	2 – 2.2	105-115
Dong Nam Thuy An	Huong So	38,000	2009	3 – 3.6	79-95
My Thuong	Thuy Duong	1,250	2004	7.5 – 8.3	6000-6640
	Phu Thuong	21,000	2007	5.5 – 7.4	262-353

Source: Thua Thien Hue – People Committee, 2012; Phuc *et al.*, 2014a.

There were also differences in the compensation rates across administrative boundaries, different times and across projects. For example, one square meter of agricultural land in Xuan Phu Ward was compensated 41,000 dong in 2010, while Thuy Van Commune – a neighboring locality of Xuan Phu, the rate was only 19,000 dong per square meter. Moreover, projects were located in the same locality but the compensation prices might vary at different times. In Thuy Duong Ward, for instance, one square meter of farmland was only compensated 1,250 dong in 2004, but ten years later 11 million dong per square meter was paid.

*Lack of participation of affected people in land acquisition process.* Most of land acquisition procedures were directly conducted by the SCCC, covering both compensation plan and resettlement arrangement for land loss people. A coalition between the provincial government and land investors was discernible in the villages studied, often associated with low compensation rates. This is explained by the fact that investors needed land clearance as soon as possible, while local governments need infrastructure improvement and taxes from land use rights. Conversely, participation of land loss people was relatively passive. Although people were allowed to attend all formal meetings organized by the SCCC, their roles in practice were limited: listening to announcements and identifying land loss areas (Phuc *et al.*, 2014a). They did not have rights to negotiate with the SCCC about the compensation rates or additional supports for training or job change. For those who are elderly, widowed or disabled, their participation in the land acquisition process was more limited.

*The use of “public interest” concept for justifying the taking land.* The public interest and economic development purpose are defined as construction of public infrastructure, commercial

centers, new urban areas, and resettlement (Land Law, 2003). According to this definition, all projects implemented in Hue's peri-urban zones relate to public interests. These include supplying residential spaces, creating a modern urban image, infrastructure improvement, and promoting local development. However, it is questionable whether or not taking land can be justified as serving public interests. The majority of respondents argued that taking land does not serve public interests, but serves investors and businesses. The reason is that the investors have obtained a massive profit from the increase in land prices, while the compensation paid to affected households was not enough to offset a loss in future farm income (the compensation for land loss is only paid at one moment, whereas farm income is annually generated).

*The failure in livelihood reconstruction and food insecurity.* In a previous paper, we stated that most of households affected by land loss overall can successfully reconstruct their livelihoods (Phuc *et al.*, 2014b). Unfortunately, not all farmers succeeded in finding suitable livelihoods. Those without strong adaptation mechanisms to urban growth, the impacts of land loss are more serious. Nearly 80 per cent of the elderly, widowed, and physically challenged people indicated that their income decreased considerably after land loss – either because of the decrease in rice cultivation land, or because of they were not able to access new employment opportunities derived from urban growth. They are the victims of the urban expansion process with little land to farm and no special skills to compete in labour market. Furthermore, although farming is continued on the remaining land area after land loss by the majority of affected households, but only 46.2 per cent of households (compared to 87.7 per cent before land loss) can produce enough food for household consumption for one year. It seems that being forced to leave farmland for urban expansion together with the increase in food prices have threatened household's food security.

## **Forms of protest in reaction to compulsory land acquisition**

In the literature on the peasants' resistance to protect land rights, various modes of resistance, from hidden to open protests, have taken place. Looking at the forms which people in the studied villages reacted to land acquisition process, we observed three basic forms: (1) hidden protest; (2) open individual protest; (3) open collective protest. These forms are illuminated upon below.

*The first form of reaction is hidden protest.* This form is often pursued by people who accepted/adapted to land acquisition decisions. Overall, there are two types of hidden protest found in the studied villages. *Firstly*, adapting to land loss but complaining is a common trend used by almost all affected farmers to express their viewpoint. "The topic of land loss and compensation appeared in our daily life. We complained to our friends, neighbors, or relatives about whatever dissatisfied us. The complaining took place at spontaneous meetings, parties within their families, hamlets, or commune. Although the complaints might not bring any benefit to us, but it satisfies our discontentment." (interview with a key informant in Huong So – Mr. Tu, November 2012). When asked who paid much attention on land loss and its consequences, Tu stated that the old people generally complain a lot about inequalities in the compensation rates, lack of participation, and their challenges after land loss, while the young people have less interest in farmland conversion for urban expansion. This was because, Tu explained that "they [the young] were no longer attach to farming activities for many years. Most worked in textile factories, industrial zones, and other non-farm activities. Their life might be not much changed due to the loss of farmland. Yet, they were seemingly welcoming urban lifestyle shaping in villages. We [the elderly] might be faced with numerous difficulties after land loss, if there is no sufficient social security and supports from children."

**Box 1. Lack of information and participation – the complaint of a widow in Thuy Duong.**

Quyên was seventy-nine years old and lived alone. She was not strong enough to go to the communal people’s committee to get land acquisition information. Quyên knew short information provided from Mr. B – one of her neighbors – that her family lost 1,000 square meters of farmland for a new urban area to be built – Dong Nam Thuy An Town. However, she did not know any information about compensation rates, how it was set up and how to get it. The local authorities also did not invite her to attend the meetings (field interview; November 2013).

*Secondly*, acceptance of land loss but try to exploit extra benefit from compensation packages through the so called “hidden actions” that include: “wrong declaration” and “delay for receiving compensation money.” Wrong declaration (in Vietnamese, it is called *khai báo sai*) which takes place as affected households fill in survey questionnaires to declare information related to land loss area and assets on land<sup>5</sup>. It was found that a limited number of people intentionally do it in a wrong way. Consequently, there was a massive difference between the numbers in forms filled and in practice. This action did not appear in Thuy Duong and Phu Thuong where only agricultural land (land use rights and rice crops) was acquired. Conversely, it occurred in Thuy Van and Huong So where both agricultural land and other physical assets i.e. graves/tombs (*mộ mã*) were dispossessed. In other words, wrong declaration have appeared as the assets on acquired land linked to beliefs and local customs. Here, three main reasons were distinguished: (1) one real grave (*mộ thật*) was compensated 1.6 million dong which equivalent 84.2 times the compensation rate for one square meter of agricultural land; (2) local governments actually did not know the number of “graves/tombs” managed by each family; and (3) the SCCC might not excavate to check inside the graves because of local customs.

**Box 2. Extra benefit from “wrong declaration” – a story in Thuy Van commune.**

One new road that connecting Pham Van Dong with Tu Duc – Thuan An road was constructed in Thuy Van since 2013. As a result, thirty-eight households had to move “*mộ mã*” (graves) from the local burial-ground to other places. According to the current land law, graves were recognized as the assets on land. Therefore, affected people had to declare with local authorities when they were displaced by land acquisition process. During this stage, some villagers sneaked in the local burial-ground (*nghĩa địa*) at night to make unreal graves (*mộ giả*) and hopefully, to get more compensation money. As a result, the declaration of villagers in the survey questionnaires was rather different from the number of real graves they owned. Mr. Tung, the director of Huong Thuy development land center said at a meeting that: “I cannot imagine! The graves in this locality spring like mushrooms. More than forty persons die per night.” However, there was no suitable solution found by local governments. Therefore, the SCCC agreed to compensate for “unreal graves” that created at every nights by villagers (According to a key informant in Thuy Van, November 2013).

It is surprising when we talk about the “delay” (not refusing) for receiving compensation money here. However, the fact is that it has taken place in Hue’s peri-urban zones. This mainly is explained

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<sup>5</sup> The SCCC conducted surveys on land size and assets on land. The affected people were required to declare how much land is acquired as well as to make a statement about their assets on land such as rice, vegetable, fish, animals, tree, house, etc. These documents were then sent to the People’s Committee at commune level and the SCCC for checking. The SCCC based on the result of surveys to prepare an overall compensation plan (Land Law, 2003).

by the fact that the compensation rates offered by local governments were much lower than the market values (see Table 2). In some cases, although farmers did not have fundamental knowledge of the land market, their dissatisfaction level is self-evaluated through use of the compensation money to lease/buy an equivalent parcel of land at the same village or to buy normal foods. In addition, the delay also originated from the compensation methods which did not seem suitable with local culture, especially in displacement projects. The story in Thuy Duong and Thuy Van are interesting examples for delay to get compensation money.

**Box 3. Delay for receiving compensation money because of low compensation rate.**

In 2004, one square meter of farmland in hamlet 1, Thuy Duong ward was compensated VND 1,250. Some farmers complained that it was not enough to lease a correlative area of land, or to buy a Hue's beef noodle soup (In 2004, the price of a Hue's beef noodle soup is VND 10,000). Not agreeing with the compensation paid, fifteen households affected by land loss for Dong Nam Thuy An project delayed to receive compensation money from the SCCC. To implement successfully the land acquisition process as well as overcome this constraint, the investor –Investment and Construction Joint Stock Company No. 8 (CIC8) – state owned company was very flexible in seeking solutions. CIC8 provided financial incentives and valuable “gifts” (TV, fridge, and electric fan) to all land loss households. After receiving benefits added from investor, those who delayed to get compensation money agreed with the compensation rate offered by local governments at that time (According to a key informant in Thuy Duong, November 2013).

**Box 4. Delay for receiving compensation money because of unsuitable resettlement policy.**

In 2013, fifty-two households affected by an infrastructure project did not agree to move to the resettlement area. Although they accepted the land acquisition decisions, they delayed to get compensation packages from SCCC due to two reasons: i) almost all people preferred to relocate within the old place - Xuan Hoa village where they have stayed in many years, and had good relationships with their neighbors; ii) each household was allocated from 90 to 120 square meters to build new houses. This amount according to villagers was not enough to build a new house and grow vegetable for food in the garden as they did before. Therefore, land loss people continued to wait for a suitable solution from the provincial government (According to a key informant in Thuy Van, November 2013).

*The second form of reaction is open individual protest.* This form is often conducted by those who did not accept the decisions of compulsory land acquisition. Accordingly, petitions and letters sent to appropriate authorities are traditional channels to express their disaffection about land loss. The secondary data shows that there were 120 letters<sup>6</sup> signed by the head of households (of which, 15 per cent deals with compensation and resettlement issues) sent to local authorities between 2010 and 2013.

Another form of open individual protest is face-to-face questioning at the formal meetings.

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<sup>6</sup> The study conducted in Thua Thien Hue province by Phuong (2011) showed that more than 3,500 letters were directly sent to district, provincial, and central governments, as well as national media in the period from 2008-2010. Of which, two-thirds of petitions were concentrated on land issues (land dispute, compensation rates, resettlement policy). Another study stated that the agencies of Hue city received 1,080 petitions from people between 2005 and 2010 (Khoi, 2011). Though these studies does not have quantitative data about how many letters or petitions signed by individuals or groups of people, these above numbers showed that letters and petitions have appeared as a popular form of protest in Thua Thien Hue province in recent years.

People normally have two important forums to raise their concerns: (1) the meetings between the SCCC and households affected by land loss in order to discuss about compensation plan; and (2) the meetings between people and people's councils at the communal level that are organized twice a year (in Vietnamese, it is called *Tiếp xúc cử tri*). A key informant in Phu Thuong noted that in spite of having many participants at the meetings, a limited number of participants can raise questions. The face-to-face questioning was conducted by those who have a good background of education or access to relevant information.

Regarding the quality of answers from local leaders for open individual protests, our key informant interviews indicated that nearly all questions raised at the meetings or mentioned in the letters related to compensation methods. Unfortunately, the communal leaders might not have enough competence to directly answer these questions. They listened or noted to what people mentioned, then reported it to district/city people's committee. Furthermore, to encourage the support from people, the SCCC together with local authorities have applied non-economic policies. They convinced people that urban expansion would create modern resident spaces and infrastructure improvement for local development. The party members, government officials, and people needed to "sacrifice" their own benefits to contribute to modernization achievements. As we did not see the role of local authorities in protecting the benefit of people, and since people affected by land loss did not receive practical interests derived from the meetings, it raised the question concerning what the purpose of meetings is.

**Box 5. Face-to-face questioning at the meeting – a story in Phu Thuong commune**

At a meeting between people and communal people's council in 2010, an angry villager who worked as primary teacher stood up and asked local leaders: "Chung toi (villagers) accepted the land acquisition decisions due to urban development strategies. However, we did not get much benefit from the My Thuong new urban area. The gainers were the investors. They only paid 21,000 dong per square meter for farmland but it was being advertised in the media at the rate of 5 million dong per square meter. It was not equal! Please told us whether land acquisition was for the public interest or the companies? The state was taking land from the people (poor) to give to the elite urban consumers and firms (rich). Was this public interest? I did not believe you"! (According to a key informant in Phu Thuong, December 2013).

*Open collective protest through petitions or letters.* The result of key informant interviews stated that this form of protest is a very rare practice in Hue's peri-urban zones, although some individuals have campaigned to make collective reactions. The fact that for those who lost over 50 per cent of their farmland with an inequity compensation were more likely to raise their concerns through open form of protest, while others were afraid or not ready. Yet, for those who had a higher educational level or good social networks tended to select open protests to express their disaffection. On the contrary, the vulnerable groups (the elderly, widowed, and disabled) were afraid of joining in the collective protests – either because of the lack abilities to understand the current laws and regulations, or because of the risks if their protests fail. Despite the reasons, we managed to find only one prominent example of open collective protest took place in Thuy Van commune in 2014. We might ask why it was not taken place in other cases. The answer is that being forced to leave their land for urban expansion without compensation was recognized as the main reason of collective protest.



land loss as well as its causes seem to be overlooked in the academic debates and policy researches. This suggests that it would be premature in drawing conclusions and recommendations about the form which people express their attitudes and behaviors to losing land in a case study as Hue. In this section, we attempt to bring out some tentative conclusions based on our findings and discuss possible explanations.

This study, first, shows that the acceptance and adaptation to land loss is a common feature of the affected farmers in the studied villages. The fact that the vast majority of people affected by land loss expressed their disaffection through the hidden forms of protest, including: complaint, wrong declaration, or delay for receiving compensation money. In a highly political pressure environment as Vietnam, Scott (1985) is right to note that hidden protest is a flexible form to express peasant's disaffection. It has actually existed within villages where villagers can join at any time, and there's no need to organize participants at specific time and place. For those who are seeking safety first; the hidden forms of protest are a good choice. However, the hidden protest does not represent a significant strength to change current situations (change in compensation frameworks). It only brought some immediate benefits (additional compensation and valuable gifts) for a limited number of land loss people, but not to the whole affected population.

As we might expect the appearance of stronger movements to create pressures for change in the compensation policy, the open forms of protest by individuals and groups (face-to-face questioning, petitions and letters) have appeared in Hue's peri-urban zones. The existence of open protest, first, is explained by the support from the current laws and regulations which allow people to raise their opinions. For example, to protect lawful rights of current land users, the 2003 Land Laws stipulated that "land users have right to lodge complaints about an administrative decision or administrative acts during administration of land" (Article 138). Moreover, the principle "people know, people discuss, people execute and people supervise" also mentioned in the Grassroots Democracy Decree No. 34/2007. This encourages every social organizations and citizen participating in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies at the local level. The second condition for the existence of the open protest is the role of individuals leaders who can campaign with others to raise their discontent. Despite the advantageous conditions, the open protest as found in this study have remained rather passive; its impacts on current situation might be less remarkable than that in the largest cities. It seems to lack a grassroots movement, like Van Giang commune in Hung Yen province or Tho Da village in the peri-urban Ha Noi with a strong focus on collective role (demonstration and violence) in protecting land rights.

The weakness and lower frequency of the open forms of protest, especially collective protest in Hue might be explained by three main reasons. *First*, Hue has not yet become one of the hottest localities of land buying and selling in peri-urban areas. In Phu Thuong, for example, a locality which is just 5 kilometers from central Hue, the value of agricultural land increased from VND 500,000/m<sup>2</sup> in 2005 to VND 1,5 million/m<sup>2</sup> in 2012. As acquired by the state for housing projects, each square meter is compensated VND 21,000 (lower than 23.8 times). Contrary to the example of Phu Thuong, Ngoc Mai's study in Dong Anh district (Ha Noi) provides a good example about rapid change in land markets. The common price of agricultural land is less than 3 million dong/m<sup>2</sup> in early 2008. Three years later, the most expensive plots cost 19 million dong/m<sup>2</sup>; the cheapest plots range from 10 to 13 million dong/m<sup>2</sup> (Ngoc Mai, 2011). Despite the urbanization that has quickly increased the value of land, one square meter of farmland in Ha Noi's peri-urban areas on average is only compensated VND 150,000 (lower than 126.6 times). As farmers usually expect to receive compensation according to market values, the level of increase in land values and an inequity in compensation rates have considered as important factors which determines the difference in protest forms. *Second*, the historical, social and cultural factors have significantly contributed to shaping the forms and extent of farmer's protest to land loss. Indeed, social life and characteristics of Hue's people are profoundly

affected by the ideology of feudal system under Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) as well as the spirit of Buddhism. The honesty, hospitality, and temperateness are salient features of Hue's people in daily life. People are often self-controlled and may not experience intense conflict as people in the North and South. In the face of discontents as land loss is, the majority of people always attempt to find safe forms to express their opinions. *Third*, activities of civil society organizations and mass organizations (Farmer Union and Women Union) are passive and limited. Social organizations, in principle, can play an important role to strengthening the civil society, however there was no action found from these organizations in defending farmer's benefits in compulsory land acquisition process – either because of the policy of local governments towards activities of social organizations, or because of the lack of attention on the political matter of farmers (land rights).

The presence of protest forms over land loss suggest that hidden forms of protest are situated in our daily life as a common sense. Their existence are suspicious signs of social tension from below that can lead to demonstration or violence at any time. Therefore, local governments should not underestimate the existing and impacts of hidden protest. Nonetheless, from an effect perspective of protest, the appearing of open protest in the context of transforming conditions in Vietnam might reduce the importance, and change the nature of hidden protest. In this sense, the hidden actions may be no longer “weapons of the weak” which contributed significantly to the transformation of national policy as Kerkvliet (2005) argued in the period of the collective farming cooperatives during the 1960s-1980s. This means that rural social movements which actively supported from civil society organizations are actually necessary to create equity for people affected by compulsory land acquisition process.

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