



Village festivals: the quintessence of Vietnam culture

Annually, perhaps hardly any Vietnamese villages open village festivals, in a small scale (within one day) or a large scale (many days) especially within years of abundant crops, village festivals are so merry. Village festival is the small image of the villages of Vietnamese people in general and of each village and hamlet in particular.

Although village festivals may not reflect every side of life of a village, locality but here there are some typical features to be noted: village festival is the symbol of the modern culture (according many books and history, it was fully developed under Ly dynasty). Village festival has a important role in life of village people. From the old time, village festival became a folk cultural activity, a spiritual dish that is dispensable of people in every village!



Village festivals in villages usually are held in spring – the beginning season of a year, the season of all things, plants and trees growing..., that is when the earth and the heaven harmonize, the nature is verdant, man's heart is eager. In the warm weather, people are excited to call for each other to go to festivals, play and spray for abundant crops and people will be happy.

In spring, people go out more crowded than usual. Some from far distances, some from near distances in luxurious clothes with eagerness to make the atmosphere of the starting spring more exciting. Perhaps, everyone wants to spends time going sightseeing and enjoying the fresh air with the beautiful spring. They visit historical relics, beauty spots, temples, pagodas of villages and communes to participate in traditional festivals. Only in January, there are many festivals to memorize national heroes, those who had contributions to fighting agaisnt foreign invaders such as : Đống Đa festival, memorizing the glory of the hero Nguyễn Huệ and commenorating those who died in the great war Đống Đa on January 5 ; An Dương Vương temple festival (Cổ Loa Hà Nội) on January 6 commemorating Thục Phán who contributed to founding Âu Lạc and building Cổ Loa

citadel; Cửa Suốt temple festival (Quảng Ninh) commemorating Trần Quốc Toản who contributed to expelling Nguyên enemy, Hạ Lôi temple festival (Mê Linh) commemorating Hai Bà Trưng, "Cơm hòm" festival in Phố Yên, Thái Nguyên on January 16 commemorating an unknown woman under the late Lê Dynasty who contributed to give schemes to fight against Minh enemy...

Also at this time, visitors from everywhere gather to attend Hoa Vội Khê festival (Nam Định) from 20 to 30th, January to enjoy flowers, pot plants of traditional craft village Vội Khê, the spring festival aspiring to a new prosperous year in Bà Đen Mountain (Tây Ninh). Especially in Spring, visitors went to Yên Tử Mountain to attend the pagoda festival, visiting an impressive site of the country and challenge their sincerity. To visit Hòa Bình to see Chơi hang festival, Xên Bần, Xên Mường of Thái people ; to visit Sơn La to harmonize with white flower forests on Ban flower festival days, visit mountains, go sailing, or go dug-out canoe on Ba Bể lake beauty spot.



Some Village festivals have become typical and famous everywhere such as : Hùng temple festival- Phú Thọ province, Cổ Loa, Lệ Mật, Phù Đổng of Hanoi, Liễu Đôi (Nam Hà), Đông Ky, Lim...(Bắc Ninh) .. Yên Thế, Xương Giang, Thổ Hà, Vạn Vân,(Bac Giang) , village festivals in Hà Tây, Kiếp Bạc temple festival (Hải Dương), Dâu pagoda festival, Bà Chú Kho (Bắc Ninh), Keo Pagoda festival (Thái Bình) and buffalo calf festival of K'mer people in the South, Festivals in Sam mountainous areas(Châu Đốc - An Giang) ...

It can be said that village festivals reflect the community deeply, that is the peak of harmony and solidarity for the common dream of prosperity of villages and communes. Village festivals are often held joyfully and warmly with neighbors, which is represented through the preparation steps to the ending of festivals. Only when you see the full meanings and the national pride with a golden tradition.

After a hardworking year working on the field, village festival day is a chance for everyone to relax. From those who were born in the lovely villages have grown up to travel on business nationwide country ... on village days, they long for reversion to the original point and stand in the middle of the light an incense to commemorate!

It can be said that on the base of diversity of festivals, in rural areas in Vietnam, village festivals are regarded as the most fascinated time for solemn rituals and of Vietnam only which are



transmitted from generation to generation: sacrifices, fun, sing...

Beside national festivals held by the feudal state, village festivals are often held by a village or can be held by some neighboring villages worshipping the same tutelary god and having the same historic connection through the legend of the god they worship. However, whatever it is the festival of a village or intervillages, village festivals can be compared to a through time artesian water, flowing in the material and spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Village festivals appeared long ago, according to the books and history, many village festivals are famous and typical of sexual beliefs which has been protected from the antiquity time. On the ancient timbal, there are patterns and signs of village festivals.

Spring festivals of each village currently is often opened in 3 days and taken place in the communal house. The first day is for opening the gate of the communal house, the second day(main festival day) consists of rituals such as : sedan chair procession, sacrifices, thurification and funs.....the third day is for : ending the festival. In the important days of villages, the main content mentioned is divided into two parts: Ritual and festival.

The ritual reflects the admiration for heroes, honor of famous people, those who made great contributions to the people, may be: gods, buddhas, virgins, supernatural people , representatives of religion, those who protect spirit and bring about prosperous and happy life for the community. The rituals often consist of activities of sedan chair procession, water procession and sacrifice...In ritual section, the procession parade has the largest and most imposing scale. The customs of procession are similar. It can be called « the force display » of the village. ! A big procession parade may have 300, 400 people and is divided into subcommittees, each subcommittee takes a duty. Supporting chair subcommittee: carrying chair, gongs, drums, incense table, imperial court.. Carrying chair subcommittee: Following the incense table, worshipping objects with flags, five basic element flags, state defending objects such as Truy dong, hong tuong, phu viet, and then solemn parasols with old-fashioned orchestra « lưu thủy » performing noisily.

The sound of drums of spring festivals hurries everyone, every corner of villages has an exciting atmosphere. People in crowds go to carry sacrifice to the communal house, temples and pagodas with all respects. The spirit and longing for commemorating the old people with the moral philosophy "When drinking water, remember its source », those who stand in front of the communal house want to express their sincerities and respects. Although it is the spiritual religious life, the sacrifice in festival days has the meaning of high education! It makes people stop doing evils and are inclined to the good. It throws away sadness and worries in the daily life to have a peaceful heart at the same time reminding yourselves and draw lessons for our next generations to show gratitude and respect to confucian deities, ancestors who contributed to the country and people. It is the pride of the family, clan and villages. The main ritual is time point-holy, the point that the holy descends on earth to bless on people, the point that each person attending the festival stops everything to receive favors.



So there is no solemn, respectful atmosphere of the sacrifice in the morning of 10th March in Hùng temple, there is a scenery of hustling at midnight in the seal opening ceremony at Trần temple (Nam Định), there are formal rituals of the parade walking 3 circles at the main temple to pave the wave for welcoming the new year on the new year's eve (on the night of solar calendar) in Chôn Chnam Thmây festival of Khmer people in the South. People harmonize with the holy time and space in a shortened prediction, even can omit the gap of the holy and the human world, and are awarded the limitless favors covering all the earth and heaven.

All rituals, parades, and purification, funs...show the respects, and sincerities of villagers to old people. Rituals in the communal house(temples, pagodas), are solemn as such but in contrast with the outside is the exciting interior decorations.

Village festivals in the old time had many funs such as : swinging, wrestling, flag abduction, cock-fighting, table tennis, volleyball, chinese chess... attract many people to join in and cheer. Besides, there are performances such as: hat a dao, hat trong quan, hat doi, hat doi quan ho in many places in the communal houses, temples, pagodas and on boats, at night there is "cheo" or exchanges of letters and arts and poems...in general, there are many cultural activities having strong folk traditions. Boys and girls in villages are strong, healthy and capable ploughmen and transplinters, the village festival night becomes the superb princes and princesses or elder sisters and brothers of love duets not only sing beautifully but they also dance very wonderfully and are good at farming.

Festival is a chance for cultural community activities from dancing, singing for exchanging love and worshipping, traditional stage performances, competition of sportmanship,(boat contest – Đăm village festival, flag running – Triều Khúc village festival, human chess – Xuân Phương village festival...), customs performances (rice cooking competition – Thị Cẩm village, dry swimming, and catch small eel in a jar - Hồ village, trade display- Sài Đồng village, poem competition, creating pot plants, cock-fighting, making breeding animals by wax, Bưởi village)...

In activities of festivals, everyone takes part in performing, composing, relaxing and enjoying after hardworking days not distinguishing the rich and the poor.

Village festivals bring about the sublimating minutes. Because in a special time and space, each person attending the festival plays a role different from the daily role. As a farmer, but attending the festival, they do not have to work hard anymore, as a businessmen, in a minute of festivals, they are not busy at all ;because when relaxing to attend the festivals, they are gentle boys and girls finding their partners, are old men and women free to enjoy the spring.



This "role" is rare to be performed but because of the demand for being sublimated and escaped from the daily rhythm of life, and experience the freedom of the emotion which is still alive somewhere in the deep heart of each person. This is the reason why people attending festivals are eager every year. That is the reason why Ms. Tam used to pick up paddies in rice to go to the festival.

That is the reason why there are exciting sentences in folk songs : Hội vui lắm lắm, Chứa kịp đi tắm, Chứa kịp gội đầu, Trầu chứa kịp tằm, Cau chứa kịp bổ, Miếng lành, miếng sỗ, Miếng chứa tằm vôi, Người có thương tôi, Mong người cầm lấy (the festival is so exciting, we have no time to take a bath and prepare betel quid and only have unfinished betel but if you love me, please receive them). That is also the reason why Nguyễn Bình was on a knife edge with spring festivals: Hội làng còn một đêm nay, Gặp em còn một lần này nữa thôi; Trên đường cát mịn một đôi cô, Yếm đỏ khăn thâm, trẩy hội chùa (village festival one night left, meeting you one night left ; on the smooth sand some girls, red bras with brown scarfs, together going on a pilgrimage).

Elder sisters and brothers attending the spring festivals of love duet is to come to the mind of the insiders, they do not attend the festival for seeing but going on a pilgrimage and love duet. On the occasion of Village festivals of the year Binh Tuat, an old man – namely Nhi, an artisan of love duet in Diem village who is over 80 years old and rewarded the title of precious man of living human culture let us know the words that love duet people often talk with each other : "Em do nhoi anh Hai, anh Ba. Nhat nien, nhat le, moi nam chi co mot lan. Anh hai, anh Ba, chi Hai, chi Ba len choi, truoc nua thi trong viec tho, sau nua thi choi voi cac ong, cac ba de cho chi em chung em duoc thua tiep. Xin moi quan ho cau vui. (elder sisters and brothers, as a rule, the festival is held annually so please come here, first to worship, second for us to welcome and enjoy love duets".

So sweet and polite are they, with thier own clothes, love duet people to spring festivals seem to go into mandarins festivals. Therefore, it can be said that village festivals have created the deep common understanding among members in the community and is the unity in the transmission of cultural values among generations.

In recent years, with the big concerns of the party and the state, many cultural relics in localities have been restored and embellished beautifully at the same time holding spring festivals is also diversified and strong.



However, beside positive elements of waking up the patriotism, the national pride, the awareness of turning to the original point, village festivals still exist some backward customs, superstitious marks, social evils. A new festival spreads around villages of Vietnam. We hope that village festivals still keep their attraction and eliminate backward customs and social evils. Because village festival is the quintessence of Culture of Vietnam, is the key of longevity – a guarantee to contribute to building Vietnam advanced culture with strong character.

In the country nowadays there are 8.902 festivals in a year, in which there are 7.005 folk festivals (accounting for 78,67%), 407 festivals of revolutionary history (accounting for 4,5%); 1.399 religious festivals (accounting for 15,7%) and 64 cultural tourism festivals, festival days (0,71%); 25 foreign imported festivals into Vietnam (accounting for 0,28%). The number of festivals is the largest in the North plain of the whole country. Village festival is a tool to transmit traditional cultural values. National cultural heritages are protected effectively in spring festivals: hát chèo, hát bội, folk games, folk songs...

Therefore, festivals can be regarded as a big encyclopaedic, a living museum of the spiritual life and the soul and personality of Vietnam from the old times to nowadays and the next generations.

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