

## INFORMATION

**International Seminar on Vietnam-Laos Relationships**

On the occasion of celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing the diplomatic relationships (5 September 1962 – 5 September 2007) and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of signing the Friendship and Cooperation Agreement (18 July 1977 – 18 July 2007) between Vietnam and Laos, with the approval of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party and the Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic, Vietnam's Academy for Social Sciences in collaboration with Lao's National Academy for Social Sciences organized an international seminar on "The Special Solidarity, Fighting Coalition and Comprehensive Cooperation Between Laos and Vietnam", in Vientiane, on 28-29 June 2007.

More than 400 delegates who are leaders of the Parties, States and ministries, sectors and localities of Laos, scientists working in research institutes and universities of the two countries Laos and Vietnam attended the Symposium. Dr. Si Lua Bun Kham, on behalf of the Presidium of Seminar, made an introductory address, underlining the purpose of the Seminar; H.E Sa Man Vi Nha Ket, Chairman of the Seminar, delivered an opening speech; H.E Nguyen Huy Quang, the Vietnamese Ambassador to Laos, had a remarks welcoming all delegates to the Seminar.

More than 30 papers were presented at the

Seminar, which focused on the two major themes: The special solidarity, fighting coalition between Laos and Vietnam; and, the comprehensive cooperation between Laos and Vietnam.

Delegates and various presentations at the Seminar analyzed the special solidarity, fighting coalition between Laos and Vietnam by referring to specific events. They particularly emphasized great contributions made by President Ho Chi Minh and President Kay Son Phom Vi Han to building the friendship and special solidarity between the two nations Vietnam and Laos; at the same time, reviewed crucial milestones in the relationship during the resistance wars against the French colonialists and the aggression of the American imperialists; underlined practical and fruitful deeds of the Parties and peoples of the two countries over the last 45 years; some presentations also mentioned contributions dedicated by voluntary Vietnamese soldiers fought in Laos and well as affection given by Lao peoples to these soldiers, considering them as their children, brothers of sisters.

The comprehensive cooperation between Laos and Vietnam in the diplomatic, economic, cultural, educational, information-communication fields and others were discussed in various presentations, in which authors analyzed and pointed out achievements recorded, causes of limitations that need to be overcome by the two sides in order to promote the cooperative relationships between Laos and Vietnam for the betterment in the renewal and construction

period of the countries.

At this two-day seminar, delegates arrived at an agreement that the special solidarity between Laos and Vietnam had been long lasting and this relationship had become a transparent and bright mirror, an example of faith that is unique in the history of international relations. Mutual assistance, solidarity and support was an objective requirement, a development rule of revolutions in Vietnam and Laos, and has become a priceless asset that must be permanently maintained and brought into play by the Parties, Governments and peoples of one to another generation of the two countries.

The seminar was very successful. In conjunction with the seminar, there were a number of other activities relating to Laos-Vietnam cooperative relationships. They included, among others, talks, meetings and signing ceremonies on cooperation in research and training in social sciences and humanity between Vietnam's Academy for Social Sciences and Lao's National Academy for Social Sciences from now to 2010 and beyond.

*P.V*

#### **Seminar: Vietnam's Mass Media in the current integration process**

On 19 June 2007, in Hanoi, the Institute for Journalism and Public Advocacy (IJPA) organized a seminar on *Vietnam's Mass Media in the current integration process*. Attended the seminar-included representatives from the Central Commission for Education and Publicity, Directorial Board of IJPA and researchers, lecturers, managers and executives, central

and local media agencies across the country.

Based on assessments, reviews of the path gone through and forecasts of trends in the coming time of Vietnam's mass media, participants at the seminar exchanged viewpoints, discussed and suggested solutions aimed at contributing to further development of Vietnam's mass media in the on-going integration process.

Around 50 papers were sent to the seminar, concentrating on the following three major themes: the role of mass media in the integration process; the current situation of Vietnam's mass media in the on-going integration process and challenges; and, directions and solutions for the development of Vietnam's mass media in the integration process.

With respect to *the role of mass media in the integration process*, participants held the view that mass media cultivated in individuals and the community new and multi-faceted perceptions on the world, including the nature, society and thinking. That process had changed behaviors and attitudes of individuals and the community of information receivers. Participants appraised the important role of the press in the integration process. It was acknowledged that press is a leading crucial mean of mass media, particularly its role to play in building and defending political institutions, educating and improving awareness of the public in social and economic fields, preserving and bringing into play the national identity in the globalization era.

The mass media (which include books, films, posters, banners, political pictures and especially the press with different types as print newspapers, audio and visual

broadcasts, electronic newspapers, picturesque newspapers...) in Vietnam in the recent time have had extraordinary development steps in all fronts. At present, Vietnam has 687 media agencies, 67 audio-visual broadcasting stations, 88 electronic newspapers, and more than 14,000 carded professional journalists.

Discussing and analyzing *the current situation of Vietnam's mass media in the on-going integration process and challenges*, having reviewed development periods of Vietnam's mass media, especially from 1986 up to present, participants admitted that it was the globalization era that resulted in the booming of audio and visual means. The emergence of internet became an effective communication tool. However, that was the adverse side of a declined reading culture. In the integration period, mass media face not a few challenges with respect to competitive environment, technical means, qualification of human resources, enforcement of copyrights, particularly the converging trend and convergence of multi-media, which is a characteristic of the world media and an unconverted trend in Vietnam.

Participants at the seminar also discussed difficulties in dealing with relationship between political-social and economic interests; the relationship between timing and oriented information; the model and operational principles of the Vietnam's media-communication group, etc.

Relating to *directions and solutions for the development of Vietnam's mass media in the current integration period*, papers presented at the seminar analyzed and suggested directions and solutions aimed at overcoming difficulties and challenges to the mass media of our country for their betterment in the time to come.

So as to develop mass media in the integration period, participants acknowledged that it is first and foremost necessary to improve awareness of the contingent of leadership, managerial and professional staffs on the nature of globalization, the role of culture and information in globalization. This would help them, in turn, to have appropriate viewpoints and approaches communication in the international integration process.

VANHA

### **International Conference on "Confucian thoughts in Vietnam: Studies from an Inter-disciplinary Perspective"**

On 9-10 November 2007, in Hanoi, the Institute of Han Nom Studies (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) in cooperation with the Harvard-Yenching Institute (US) co-organized an international conference entitled "Confucian thoughts in Vietnam: Studies from an Inter-disciplinary Perspective", aiming at marking the new development move in Confucianism research methodology in Vietnam, at the same time exploiting the values from Han Nom documentation related to Confucianism in Vietnam based on the inter-disciplinary perspective (philosophy, culture, literature, history, religion, ethnicity, etc.).

Attended the Conference were international scholars from different countries and territories (such as the United States, Russia, France, Japan, China, Korea, Singapore, Australia, Taiwan...) along with nearly 100 Vietnamese specialists and scholars from institutes, research centers, culture-related agencies and universities across the country.

In his opening speech at the Conference,

Prof and Dr. Do Hoai Nam, Chairman of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, emphasized that the Party and State of Vietnam have committed to build a Vietnamese culture with advanced aspects and profoundly imbued with the national identity. Thus, the Vietnamese culture must certainly succeed and bring into play the quintessence of the thousand-year traditional culture of the Vietnamese nation, including heritages of Han Nom and Confucian thoughts in Vietnam that played a key role in centuries in the social life in Vietnam.

Following the welcome remarks given by a leader of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Prof. and Dr. Trinh Khac Manh, Director of the Institute of Han-Nom Studies, presented an overview report on contents of supposed presentations at the Conference, clearly indicated the interdisciplinary perspective in studies on Confucian thoughts in Vietnam.

Presentations delivered by participants in four Panels at the Conference focused on the following major themes:

- 1/ The historical process of Confucianism in Vietnam – the formulation path and development;
- 2/ The circulation and reception of the Confucian classics in Vietnam: Presentations concentrated on the studies of Chinese Confucian classics (particularly the Four Books and Five Classics) and other materials composed by Vietnamese Confucian literati. These resources are invaluable; they reflect the role of Confucian thoughts in Vietnamese culture and the level of Confucian knowledge of Vietnamese Confucian scholars in the past;
- 3/ Interdisciplinary research on Confucianism in Vietnam; and

4/ Confucianism in contemporary Vietnamese society: Confucianism has had a profound effect on all levels of society throughout history of our country. Despite its limitations, there remain many constructive aspects meaningful to the construction of the nation in the present time.

The Conference on Confucianism this time was both highly international and interdisciplinary with participation of domestic and international scholars. It created new and diverse approaches in the studies of Confucianism in Vietnam, at the same time provided a forum for dialogue between Vietnamese and foreign scholars.

*HIEN LY*

### **The Co Loa Festival**

Co Loa is a commune in Dong Anh, a suburban district of Hanoi City. Getting there one can see the remains of three layers of concentric ream parts built by King An Duong Vuong, alias Thuc Phan, in the second century BC.

Every year, the 12 villages of Co Loa commune join hands in organizing the festival, which usually begin on the 6th of the first Lunar month. Early on the morning, 12 notables from each village come to the house of the chief notable in order to prepare for the procession which starts soon thereafter. Opening the procession is the music band, to be followed by the chief notable and the 12 village notables, and then the villagers who carry various offerings to King An Duong Vuong.

A couple of stone horses, one red and one white with embroidered saddles, stand on both sides of the outside part of the gate of

King An Duong Vuong temple. The road leading from the gate to the temple is lined with wooden stands for flags and other subjects of worship. The palanquins of the 12 villages are placed in accordance with a pre-arranged order.

For the occasion, the organizers put in front of the temple a big altar with a glass box containing two gold earrings and objects of worship. A smaller altar, containing the King's arms - swords, crossbow and bronze arrows - is set in front of the it. Beyond, there is a space where a number of red-rimmed mats are spread and where the notables and the population will carry out the religious ceremony. The chief notable officiates at the religious ceremony in honour of the God King, which is in terms of rities quite similar to other traditional ceremonies, amidst the sound of music from the ban. The notables are followed by the inhabitants. All beg the King to bestow peace and prosperity to the village. The ceremony lasts until 1 or 2 p.m. and is followed by a general procession, with the participation of all the 12 villages, in honour of the King. In the front ranks of the procession are the flags, the Miniature Royal Court and the sacred weapons of the Temple. Then come the music band and the village notables clad in traditional Court uniforms and holding the weapons supposedly wielded by the King - sword, crossbow and arrows.

Then come the notales and inhabitants of the Pagoda hamlet ad of each of the 12 villages with their own palanquins, flags and music bands. It is quite a long procession, which proceeds at a slow space, amidst the sound of music and stop regularly to burn a round of firecrackers. Starting from the Temple of King An

Duong Vuong, the procession comes to the Trong Thuy well, and then to the village gate. Thereupon, more firecrackers are set out and the contingent which carries the Miniature Royal Court and the population of the 12 villages would carry on the procession to their respective hamlets.

The religious and the procession end on the same day, that is, January 6th, while the festival goes on until the 15th of the month, with various traditional games and activities:

- In the night, there are fireworks, Ca Tru songs, folk theatrical plays (cheo) and conventional theatrical plays (tuong)...

- In the day, old men play chess and cards, old women perform rites and present offerings at the Pagoda, while young men and women, and children have their own games: wrestling, tugs-of-war, swing, rope climbing, martial arts, shooting from bows and crossbows, flags dancing, human chess (chess games in which human beings are used in place of traditional chess-men), cock-fighting, penny-pitching, rice-cooking contest, etc. People from neighbouring communes used to come in their numbers to Co Loa to participate in the festival, regarding it as a national festival and spring merry-making.

(Source: <http://english.cinet.vn/>)

## **Ao dai**

**The Ao Dai, literally meaning "long dress" or "long tunic," is one out of many traditional Vietnamese costumes worn (nowadays) primarily by women. It is the most popular national costume in Vietnam**

### **History**

Early versions of the garment date back to the early 1700's, and were influenced by imperial Chinese garb of the Qing dynasty, known as Qipao. Unlike its cousin the qipao, which is a tight fitted dress with slits on both sides (in its modern reincarnation), the áo dài is a looser tunic, which even in its tight-fitting form is still left wide and flowing at the bottom. Furthermore, the slits of the áo dài extend above the waistline, revealing a slight glimpse of the sides of the midriff.

The costume has faced countless modifications throughout the centuries but its basic form consists of a long flowing gown with a slit on both sides, often with a high fitted collar, worn over long silk pants.

Some historians have suggested that the áo dài was an evolution of different influences from many directions, including the ancient four-flapped tunic áo tứ thân, one of the other more well known (and much older than áo dài) traditional Kinh costumes.

The original Ao dai, or Ao ngu thân

While the indigenous áo tứ thân costume (which existed for at least a thousand years in Vietnamese society) is viewed as having a large hand in the design of the áo dài, the closest form to the áo dài that is known today made its first appearance as the áo ngũ thân which translates as "5-part dress".

Áo ngũ thân tended to be much looser fitting in general, sometimes designed with wide sleeves. In the past, rich Vietnamese often displayed their prosperity through clothing, often by wearing many layers at once. Some aristocrats were known to wear 3-5 layers of áo dài at one time.

The áo ngũ thân had a major difference from the modern áo dài in the way it was

made. 1800s áo ngũ thân were made of five parts (hence its name): This consisted of two flaps sewn together in the back, two flaps sewn together in the front, and a fifth flap hidden underneath the front main flap. This five-part áo dài was similar to its current incarnation in that it still appears to be a two-flapped tunic with slits on both sides, but the front and back flap were generally much broader, and of course the dress was much more loosely fit. The high collar, buttoned in the same fashion as modern áo dài was still intact, but women could also wear the dress with the first few buttons undone, revealing a glimpse of the áo yếm bodice underneath.

### **Modernization**

In 1930, the Vietnamese fashion designer Cát Tường, known to the French as Monsieur Le Mur, modified it. He lengthened the áo dài so that the top reached the floor, and made it fit the curves of the body closer. With the import of an abundance of foreign fabrics in 20th century Vietnam, including broader fabric, the modernized áo dài required less material to be made and as a result the flaps also became generally slimmer. In Saigon during the 1950s, Tran Kim of Thiet Lap Tailors and Dung of Dung Tailors modified the áo dài to a form closest to what is seen today. He produced the gowns with raglan sleeves, creating a diagonal seam that runs from the collar to the underarm. Áo dài only continued to become more form-fitting with time. In the 1960s the collarless ago day style was popularized by the infamous Madame Nub (former first lady of South Vietnam).

Despite the two major modifications to the áo dài in the 20th century, it has also seen

slight changes throughout each decade as fashion changes constantly. Everything from floral to checkered patterns, the use of transparent fabrics, the tunic length being largely reduced or lengthened, has all been seen throughout different eras of Vietnamese history.

The áo dài has always been more prevalent in the south than in the north, and has faced a surge in popularity in recent years, even with Vietnamese. In recent decades it has inspired worldwide renowned fashion designers such as Ralph Lauren, among other big names, to create entire collections of áo dài.

The most popular style of the áo dài as we see it today is tight fitting around the wearer's upper torso, emphasizing her bust and curves. For this reason, the áo dài, while it covers the whole body, is said to be provocative, especially when it is made of thin or see-through fabric.

### ***The Royal/Wedding Ao dai***

The royal costume most commonly known today would be the Áo mênh phu of the Nguyễn dynasty. It is predictably more festive (in color and decoration) and includes a long flowing outer robe (with large, wide sleeves).

This costume, once mandatory for royal women of the Nguyễn dynasty to wear at public functions, has subsequently become the mandatory costume for Vietnamese brides.

In addition, brides often wear khăn đóng, a crown-like headgear which is made from silk brocade.

### ***The áo dài and its place in modern-day Vietnam***

Although it disappeared somewhat for a short period due to the extravagance and elegance of the costume being seen as an excess, it has surprisingly come back with a vengeance both for Vietnamese in Vietnam and overseas. In addition to being worn at traditional and festive occasions, plain white áo dài is the uniform for female students in Vietnam in some middle schools, most high schools and some universities. Many companies also require their female staff to be attired in the áo dài, whether flight attendants, receptionists or women working in restaurants and hotels.

In 2007, the Vietnamese film *The White Silk Dress* was released to high acclaim worldwide, centering in particular on a white silk áo dài that is the sole legacy a mother in a poverty-stricken family has to give to her daughters. The film emphasizes the huge cultural significance the áo dài plays in Vietnamese culture and how it symbolizes the spirit of Vietnamese women.

(Source: <http://english.cinet.vn/>)

### **Nuoc mam: Hold your nose and dive in**

**Nuoc mam, fish sauce, is the most essential ingredient for everyday meals and cooking in Viet Nam.**

It is a signature aspect of Vietnamese cuisine, and distinguishes it from Chinese cooking, which is marked by its prominent use of soy sauce. This inimitable, Vietnamese sauce is obtained through the maceration of saltwater fish and their fermentation under sunny, natural conditions. The ingredients and climate are readily available thanks to the country's lengthy coastline and tropical forecasts.

The best *nuoc mam* comes from the islands of Phu Quoc and Cat Hai, respectively on the southwestern and northern coasts, and from the central province of Phan Thiet.

There's a Thai variation of *nuoc mam*, but it does not compare to the original Vietnamese product. *Nuoc mam* is rich in amino acids, sodium chloride, histamines and organic and mineral phosphors.

*Nuoc mam* may have a strong smell for the uninitiated, but it is no more intense than a Roquefort cheese or a gamy meat. Plus, there are ways to lighten the odour, namely by not using it when cooking over an open fire.

By flavouring it with a variety of condiments, *nuoc mam* can be used to enhance a number of different dishes. When ginger is added, it is perfect for boiled duck; vinegar, lemon, garlic and onion are added for fried fish; and a smashed, hard-boiled duck egg may be added for boiled cabbage.

*Nem*, spring rolls, require a very light sauce seasoned simply with vinegar, sugar and pepper, while *banh cuon*, a plain or stuffed rice wrap, goes particularly well with a wee bit of natural belostomid essence.

In Phan Thiet, home to one of the country's most famous brands, *nuoc mam* is

garnished with pineapple slices, while housewives in some other parts of the South boast a more exotic recipe: *nuoc mam* in boiled coconut milk.

But the ingredient that tops all others is chilly, fresh or powdered the hotter the better and lots of it. In addition to *nuoc mam*, there are paste products, generically named *mam*, also made from macerated marine fish and crustaceans and believed to have been introduced by the Cham and other ethnic groups of Malayo-Polynesian origin.

The most common of these other products is the shrimp-based *mam tom*, notorious for its strong smell but irreplaceable in regards to dog meat, pig organs, grilled tofu and fat pork. *Mam tom*, called *mam ruoc* in the central regions, is a must-have for certain Hue specialities, such as *bun bo*, beef noodles, and *com hen*, mussels with rice.

Still, there's nothing like *mam tom chua*, sour fermented shrimp, the crown jewel of Hue cooking. Farmers in the Hong (Red) River Delta have their own special brew, which they make from small, fresh-water shrimp and call *mam tep*. It's unforgettable once you've tried it with a little fat pork, noodles and some aromatic herbs.

(Source: <http://english.cinet.vn/>)