

BOOKS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES LIBRARY REVIEW

NGÔ ĐỨC THỊNH. **Concerning religious beliefs and traditional festivals**, H: Information and Culture Publisher, 2007, 495 p., Vv 7674

The author himself has spent many years to study on folk culture. He also has had a large number of researches published, such as: *Hat Van (Literal Song)*, *Dao Mau (Mother's Etiquette)* in Vietnam, etc. The book, *Concerning religious beliefs and traditional festivals*, is a collection of his research papers written in a long span of years regarding religious beliefs, folk culture and traditional festivals of Vietnamese, particularly those on the *Mother's Etiquette*.

The book consists of three major parts.

The first part assembles ten articles which provide a brief description of popular religious beliefs of different ethnic groups in Vietnam and give a focus on certain peculiar religious beliefs. Especially, through research papers on the beliefs dedicated to *Tan Vien (Mountain God)*, *Chua dao To*, *Ba Chua Kho (Logistics Goddess)*, *Ta Than*, etc... The author employs analytical measures to peel off cultural layers as well as symbolic images hidden in each form of worships, helping readers to visualize cultural values and significance of each form of religious beliefs.

The second part contains eight articles, narrating the beliefs in worshipping the *Mau (God Mother)* and Shaman ceremony (*singing and dancing worship*) of Viet, Cham, Tay and Nung ethnic groups.

The third part collects ten articles, focusing on festive issues and beliefs culture.

Additionally, this part also has some narratives on the research of religious beliefs and festivals in Vietnam and other countries.

Finally, the book provides a list of referential materials.

HOANG MINH

Vietnamese Enterprises in the Integration into the World Trade Organization (WTO), Hochiminh City: Information and Culture Publisher, 2006, 370 p., Vv 7585

The book introduces the organizational structure, membership, benefits, and resolutions of WTO; discusses the removal of trade barriers and protection; clarify the rules, opportunities and challenges in entering into WTO. The book also re-draws the picture of economic development before 2006 of Vietnam, which is marked by impressive socio-economic achievements of the country through the economic growth rate, import and export indexes, foreign direct investment volume.

The book constructs into three chapters.

Chapter one introduces basic facts of WTO, for instance: the organizational chart, rules on abolition of subsidies, Doha negotiation round, etc...; underpins the issues facing Vietnamese enterprises in the integration into WTO, such as integration strategies for developing countries, future markets, importance of trademarks, product quality, prices and services, etc. The authors also suggest some solutions aimed at improving the integration capacity of Vietnamese enterprises in the coming time.

Chapter two brings about state parties of WTO, the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods (CISG), history of birth and growth of WTO, consistence of rules and application scope, etc.

Chapter three discusses benefits enjoyed by states in acceding to WTO, some basic resolutions adopted by this organizations and relevant annexes.

HOA MAI

LÃ DUY LAN. **Cultural Identity of Vietnamese**. H: People's Police Publisher, 2007, 239 p., Vb 45219

The book attempts to brighten the cultural identity of Vietnamese, which is characterized by the inter-relation between two elements, namely land and water. Moreover, Vietnamese cultural identities are also represented by customs, practices, religious beliefs, rituals and festivals. It is important, says the author, to investigate the rise and development of culture from the national cultural cradle to get understanding of cultural identities of the nation.

The book consists of four chapters.

Chapter one presents the humanity – ecological characteristics as well as the formulation of water rice cultivating civilization of ancient Vietnamese (rituals, ceremonies, generations of ancient Vietnamese kings, description of cultivating exercises, worship).

Chapter two analyzes issues relating to cultural identity of Vietnamese, which are represented by peculiar customs, practices and religious beliefs.

Chapter three statisticizes the saints

worshiped, and briefly presents the formulation of rituals, ceremonies and festivals of Vietnamese.

Chapter four concentrates on the contents relating to cultural identity of Vietnamese through traditional and popular rituals and festivals. The author also partly describes individual rituals, festivals, legendary stories as well as the meaning of these rituals and festivals.

The book ends with a conclusion, annexes and a list of referential materials.

HÔNG PHẤN

TRƯỜNG MINH HẰNG. **Handcraft-villages of North Vietnam**. H.: Fine Arts Publishing House, 2006, Vv 7566.

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2. Metal manipulation (bronze, gold, silver)

** Bronze ware – a history echo*

4,000-year old found in Phung Nguyen (Vinh Phuc province) were used by archaeologists as a clue to determine the opening of the Vietnam bronze era. From Phung Nguyen to Dong Dau, Go Mun, and eventually to the Dong Son era (the pinnacle of the bronze industry), our forefathers in the time of Hung Kings had always been working enduringly. That working process was recognized and echoed eternally thanks to the production of the kettledrums – a supreme symbol of the Van Lang civilization. Hung Kings' era bronzes existed in various forms, with original shapes including working tools, weapons, household commodities, jewelry, fine art objects, human statues, birds, animals, and musical instruments such as bells, drums, horns, and pan-pipes. All the

skillful carved lines describing the Lac Viet people's every day life activities (boat rowing, rice pounding, dancing, hunting, etc.) and other stylized designs (like birds and animals) on the surfaces of the kettledrums, jars, and other bronze objects act as an 'ancient manuscript' for descendants to learn about their past.

People nowadays still mention "Annam's Four Great Objects" – the four bronze invaluable cast during the Ly- Tran Dynasty. Their size proves the gigantic progress made in metallurgy techniques at the time. Unfortunately, these truly artistic structures were lost in times of wars and upheavals, thus just leaving their vestiges in folk and historic literature.

** Ngu Xa village and the tradition of casting bronze*

Ngu Xa village was formed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Initially, Ngu Xa specialized only in coining money for the feudal states' goods trading and exchanging. Later on, the bronze trade was developed into producing goods for the peoples' religious and everyday-life needs.

In the past three centuries, bronze casting has always brought a good reputation and prosperity to Ngu Xa dwellers. Ngu Xa artisans have even participated in casting urns and decorating royal palace interiors in Hue. Besides Tran Vu statue in Quan Thanh temple, Ngu Xa artisans also cast a wide variety of bells, statues, etc. for temples and pagodas, as well as other exported handicraft products.

** Dai Bai bronze molding village*

Since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Dai Bai village, commonly known as Buoi (or Buoi Noi) village (Dai Bai commune, Gia Dinh, Bac Ninh) has been recognized as a thriving center of bronze molding, well-known throughout the North and the Red River Delta area.

Bronze molding requires fairly complicated techniques with major stages: (1) building furnace and refining bronze, (2) casting and laminating bronze, (3) smoothing laminated bronze, and (4) molding bronze. It is traditionally taught that in order to enhance product durability and minimize corrosion caused by acids and salts, the workers should adulterate the compound of bronze and zinc with 1-2 percent lead. The ancient bronze products were embellished with carved patterns on the surface. Dai Bai traditional products include household devices, musical instruments and worshipping objects. Over the past century, Dai Bai residents started producing bronze articles inlaid with three metals (copper, silver, gold), which was the combination of the conventional bronze molding and jewelry making arts. Using the technique of inlaying the three metals into bronze articles, the worker succeeded in making sophisticated products with high aesthetic values such as betel trays, trunks, urns, sword covers, censers, tea-sets, mugs, vases, and trays.

Dai Bai people quickly adapted to the economic structure change by converting to developing the conventional technique through bronze articles inlaid with three metals or silver-carved bronze products. A lot of models were added or modified so as to satisfy customers' tastes. Thankfully, numerous contracts have been signed with European partners. The success of Dai Bai

bronze molding artisans in the Worldtech International Trade Fair held in 1995 in Konrat (Thailand) once again affirmed the potentials and vitality of a traditional village.

** Dinh Cong village and the traditional jewelry trade*

Since the early centuries of the Dai Viet era, the jewelers of Dinh Cong village, a suburban of Thang Long, had brought their products to the city for trading and exchanging for other goods. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Dinh Cong artisans converged on Dong Cac precinct (currently Hang Bac Street) to carry on the profession, attracting jewelers from all over the country. The present location of Dinh Cong artisans on Hang Bac Street contributed greatly to the boosting of commercial activity in the area, making the street a bustling jewelry center where myriads of visitors come to trade.

Throughout the whole development process, Vietnamese jewelry has suffered more ups and downs than any other trade. From the first half of the fifteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, Dinh Cong jewelry products were widely known by all, both domestically and internationally. However, from 1954, the jewelry market grew increasingly unstable, in a fall which did not stop until after the economic reform. In 1988-1989, when the State applied the 'opening policies' for jewelry artisans in Dinh Cong to make a recovery, a Jewelry Association was established and jewelry shops appeared everywhere. Unfortunately, this prosperity only lasted until 1995. During the past 10 years, the change in agricultural and land structure has directly affected the village's labor.

The Dinh Cong jewelry trade in put at greater risk of falling again into oblivion after each upheaval.

** Dong Xam silver carving village*

Dong Xam (Hong Thai, Kien Xuong, Thai Binh) is an ancient village situated between the two rivers Tra Ly and Dong Giang. According to Feng Shui (winds and waters) Science, this is a 'favorable terrain' with 'magnificent scenery'.

The Dong Xam jewelry trade founded by Forefather Nguyen Kim Lau in the first half of the seventeenth century. The trade promised to yield high returns, though requiring fairly complicated techniques. Dong Xam traditional products include many types, each with their own features. A connoisseur of silver could easily distinguish Dong Xam goods from those of other places, because of their originality (in form, shape, intensity of decorative pattern), as well as all the skillful, meticulous carving lines presented in a perfect product.

Dong Xam products have been ubiquitously seen in Vietnam during the past few centuries. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Dong Xam products have been exported to various countries, including England, France, Belgium, North Korea, China, Thailand, and so on. The current "free trade" policy enables Dong Xam artisans to improve their manufacturing process, extend the production scale, and enhance economic as well as aesthetic values of the products.

3. Ceramics village

Being one of the earliest trades appearing in response to social demands, ceramics

has steadily developed during its course of history. Pottery has been widely used in various aspects of life for the past 4,000 years. The production of ceramic goods was also focused in some regions with their distinct styles in Phung Nguyen, Hoa Loc, Dong Dau, and Go Mun, to name but a few. In the late Bronze-early Iron Age, about 2,500 years ago, ceramic goods became much more diversified in form and complicated in technique. The rich treasure of patterns directly influenced the creation of shapes as well as the use of embellishing designs on many Dong Son products and those of later eras.

In Dai Viet time, ceramics leaped to a victorious pinnacle with numerous pottery products during the Ly, Tran or Le Dynasty. *Gốm men ngọc*, *gốm hoa nâu* (which first appeared in the fourteenth century) were recognized as great contributions to Vietnam ceramic history. Recent archeological discoveries have affirmed that various products of Chu Dau, Hop Le, Ba Thuy, and more, were spread throughout the coastal Southeast Asian markets from the fourteenth to seventeenth century. Great Vietnamese ceramic centers that have seen remarkable success include Bat Trang village in Hanoi and a number of ceramic pottery kilns in Hai Duong.

Pottery centers are normally located near river valleys, for the sake of easy transportation and product circulation. The formation and allocation of ceramics villages have, over time, been recognized as a static procedure, but each village has its own style with its own product forms. Ceramics trade was presumably formed spontaneously, but when it began to develop as a handicraft trade in the village, it had profound influence on the people's economic and cultural lives. For terra-cotta

or glazed terra-cotta products, a lot of regions in Vietnam are still maintaining the forms that have existed for hundreds of years, with materials and baking techniques remaining nearly unchanged. However, for enameled potteries or porcelains, the converse would be the truth. Besides the great achievements in foreign trade, Vietnamese enameled potteries have, for the past tens of years, made great strides in manufacturing technology with the introduction of gas kilns and modern production lines. Consequently, Vietnam has been able not only to integrate with, but also to take a firm stand in the world ceramics markets.

** Bat Trang village*

Bat Trang, one of the most renowned ceramic villages in Vietnam, was established in the first half of the fourteenth century and since then has been continually developing, even through to today. Bat Trang ceramic products are not only used widely in Vietnam but also exported to many overseas markets. A number of outstanding Bat Trang pottery antiques are still on display in many foreign museums. Bat Trang ceramic products are made with domestic materials, aiming to satisfy the needs of people from all walk of life, from the royal classes to the commoners. Archeologists have found a lot of Bat Trang enameled pottery branches that date from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, such as *gốm men nâu* (brown – glazed pottery), *gốm hoa lam* (blue-patterned pottery). The Mac Dynasty, together with the appearance of large-size ceramic candlesticks and censers, saw the birth of the skillful techniques of embossing and coloring patterns blue. This style of decorating potteries was maintained and developed till the seventeenth century. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

there appeared two other Bat Trang pottery branches, namely *gốm men rạn* (cracked-glazed pottery) and colorific enameled potteries. The former, a sort of potteries embossed with such patterns as foliage, the four supernatural creatures, and the four seasons, continued to develop until the twentieth century. The latter, known as *gốm tam thái* (three-color pottery), with moss-green as the key color, is often embossed with lotuses, birds, humans, etc. and seen on censers, candlesticks, and wine vials, to name a few. In the eighteenth century, embossing was such an overwhelming trend that it even superseded the style of coloring patterns blue. The *gốm hoa lam* trend gradually recovered and developed with the using of three colors (yellow, brown and white) to decorate the embossed patterns. On feature of Bat Trang potteries is that there are inscriptions carved on many products which help to set up standard criteria for researching and defining the date of Vietnam ancient ceramics from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries.

From 1980 up to now, Bat Trang became the most bustling producing and trading center of pottery products in Vietnam. The village now has more than 1,300 households participating in pottery producing with more than 2,000 kilns of different types and 30 sectors manufacturing and trading the products. The annual turnovers from potteries are estimated at approximately VND 500 billion, 300 billion of which comes from exportation.

* *Que village*

Que village is officially known as Danh Xa village, Que town, Kim Bang district, Ha Nam. Being one of the age-oldest ceramics villages in the Son Nam Ha area, Que pottery is famous for a unique product of

vermillion or red brown tea –set which is able to keep heat for an unusually long time and neutralize the surplus amount of preservatives in tea. Apart from tea – sets, Que village also produces a number of household goods. Raw material is the perfect-quality yellow clay which is developed right in the local areas. Despite not being enameled, Que products still have their own beauty, owing to special methods of engraving or embossing.

Que village is now home to Quyet Thanh Ceramic Company and over 20 manufacturing workshops, providing employment for more than 500 people and gaining an annual income of over VND 10 billion. In order to meet the current aesthetic tastes of the people, Que village is now boosting production of exported fine arts products.

* *Chu Dau village*

Chu Dau potteries were once widely known for about three centuries, and at the present, many Chu Dau ceramic products are still honorably preserved in numerous famous museums in Japan, Holland, France, Belgium, Turkey, etc. It is Chu Dau potteries produced in a ‘pure Vietnamese’ style that helped bring Vietnamese potteries to the world commercial markets, identifying our ceramics as a ‘distinctive line’ in the world’s ceramic arts. Unfortunately, Chu Dau potteries have been lost for nearly 400 years now.

Chu Dau potteries were of exceptional quality, with a diversity of form and type presented in three major categories: sapphire-glazed pottery, white-glazed pottery with blue patterns and black-brown-glazed pottery. Among them, the blue-patterned pottery was the key products. Additional background colors included green, moss green, light yellow,

and dark yellow. Some products were even double – enameled, with white for the interior and brown for the exterior. Others have designs colored with red, yellow, and green. A lot of products were painted in brown at the bottoms. The products, which were also various in forms, included bowls, dishes (accounting for the majority), cups, covered boxes and small jars of all types. The common decorative patterns were lotuses, daisies, peonies, and other stylized designs. In addition, many products were embellished with scenes with birds, fish, beasts, insects, or people.

Archaeologically, Chu Dau pottery dated from the fourteenth century at the latest flourished in the fifteenth century, remained prosperous in the sixteenth century and then deteriorated in the seventeenth century. The loss of Chu Dau ceramics was a great loss for the whole nation's ceramic heritage. But now, with a dream of revitalizing the Chu Dau ceramics village, Hanoi Commercial General Corporation (Hapco) has invested in the restoration of pottery production in the village. In 2001, Chu Dau ceramics Enterprise was established to restore all the old enameled colors of Chu Dau, bringing the ancient ceramic models back to the global market.

** Phu Lang village*

Like Tho Ha village (Bac Giang) and Huong Canh village (Vinh Phuc), Phu Lang (Que Vo, Bac Ninh) focuses on producing glazed terra-cotta pottery (also called brown terra-cotta pottery). The majority of Phu Lang's potteries are decorated with a layer of enamel. This layer has a unique yellow color presented in two variants, that is, light yellow and dark yellow (almost a brownish color).

According to many documents, Phu Lang ceramic trade first appeared in the Tran

Dynasty. Right from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Phu Lang ceramics had reached the highest classic standards, a feat that could hardly be accomplished in later times. One of the most famous products of the era was the censer. Some are still preserved by the Vietnam Historical Museum.

Phu Lang ceramics has had its share of ups and downs throughout the course of history. In 1985, Phu Lang's fine arts goods were sent to the National Consumer Goods Exhibition, and in the 1990s, thanks to intermediary activities, Phu Lang ceramic products were introduced and sold overseas. At the present, almost all ceramic products in the North and Central North of Vietnam are provided by Phu Lang village. With a change in occupation structure, six fine arts ceramic workshops were formed in 2002. Some features of fine arts products are the use of brown terra-cotta material, the upholding of some basic shapes for traditional products (such as pots or jars), and the maintenance of manual labor in material preparation, shape forming, and pottery backing. Although a Phu Lang fine art glazed terra-cotta vase has not yet satisfied necessary conditions to become a work of art, its pragmatic function are almost annulled.

According to recent statistics, privately-owned enterprises in Phu Lang account for 40 percent of village income from pottery production. The appearance of fine arts pottery enterprises is absolutely conformable to the rules of selection, competition, and elimination of the commodity economic mechanism. What is more important, it has opened up an exciting path for Phu Lang brown-glazed ceramic products, showing promise for the present time and for the future as well.

(To be continued)