

CHANGES IN RITUAL AND CEREMONIAL LIFE IN LA PHU HANDICRAFT AND TRADE VILLAGE*

NGUYEN THI THANH BINH

Introduction

After two decades of *Renovation*, Vietnamese rural life has gone through a tremendous change, not only in terms of material aspects but also in the increasing of family and community ceremonies and rituals. This phenomenon has drawn much attention from many scholars from different fields, both inside and outside Vietnam, to analyze and interpret the cause and the nature of the change (Luong, 1993; Kleinen, 1999; Malarney, 1993 and 1996; Truong Huyen Chi, 2000). Some suggest that the increase of an economic surplus along with ideological and socio-cultural transformation has enabled the people to host more complicated ceremonies and rituals (Luong, 2003). Some claim that the restoration and reinforcement of ceremonies and rituals are motivated by the process of self-reinforcement of several individuals and social groups inside the village so they can play a greater role in and have more influence on the local community (Malarney, 1993 and 1996; Kleinen, 1999). Meanwhile, others explain that the reorganization of village ceremonies and rituals is a result of the course of dialogue or negotiation among different interest-groups in the village, and the ongoing historical relationship between the village and the state or local authorities (Truong Huyen Chi, 2000).

Although there are currently some differences in interpreting the restoration and reinforcement of village ceremonies and rituals in Vietnam, a common key point in many studies is that most scholars have tried to learn and analyze what is being restored and how, for what end, and for whom. Research results show that village ceremonies and rituals have revived and accelerated since the 1980s but they are not completely the same as what they were before 1945; most of the ceremonies and rituals have been modified and partly recreated. The question to set out upon in La Phu and other well-off villages in the Red River delta is: with their way of life closely associated with the civilization of trading, manufacturing and urban areas, how are their ceremonies and rituals reinforced and transformed? Is there any difference between these villages and other merely agriculturally-based villages? And does the reinforcement of ceremonies and rituals influence the socio-economic development of the handicraft-trade village?

To address these questions, we will focus on several ceremonies and rituals, which take place at the communal house and the temple. Drawing on Malarney's idea (2002), we consider communal ceremonies and rituals as important events to learn how the villagers display and accomplish their moral roles. The wealthier

* This article was issued in the *Anthropology Review*, No. 4 in 2006 in Vietnamese.

people become, the more ceremonies and rituals are held - “Wealth and honors change manners.” A rich talented owner of a manufacturing enterprise or a business would be considered unmoral and not respected by the villagers if she or he did not host family ceremonies and rituals accordingly and was not fully involved in the community’s ceremonies and rituals. These events are also good opportunities to re-examine village relationships and community cohesion (Kleinen, 1999, p. 162).

Some Background on La Phu Village

Located in the area of “*bay lang La, ba lang Mo*” (seven villages that have the fist word *La*, and three villages that have the fist word *Mo* in their names), and well-known for its textile handicrafts, La Phu is a village of very self-motivated people of Hoai Duc district, Ha Tay province. Before the French-colonial time, besides textile handicrafts, the villagers also practiced and developed other sources of supportive income, such as livestock and wood dealing. Many of these supportive economic activities were maintained in the village, such as making knitwear, candy and noodles. However, the significant development of La Phu village has only started since *Renovation*; the income of the village has been based on two key specialized occupations: the making of wool textiles (making clothes, hats, and socks) and the manufacturing of candy.

Textile manufacturing in La Phu village has been industrialized with a focus on exporting products. In the village there are up to 23 limited liability companies and tens of small manufacturing complexes with modern machinery and equipment. The

percent of households engaged in handicrafts and services constitutes 66 percent of the total number of households. In 2003, the GDP of La Phu village was 344.7 billion VND; of which 280 billion VND was from the industrial sector (Ta Long, Tran Hong Yen, Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh, 2004). The development of handicrafts in La Phu changes not only the traditional economic structure of the village, but also helps create employment opportunities for thousands of people in the region.

With the rapid development of handicrafts and the dynamic new economy, the living standards of La Phu’s residents have reached a turning point. In 2003, the average income in La Phu village was 6,800,000 VND per person: higher than that of urban areas and double the average income of rural areas.¹ The prosperity of the village is reflected in the people’s houses and furniture. Although the everyday life of the villagers is partly influenced by industrial and urban civilization, the practice of community ceremonies, rituals, and customs and habits of the village are still maintained and reinforced more than in other villages in the region. Economic transformation and the development of handicrafts have created changes in community ceremonies and rituals compared to before. This study will examine the transformation of ceremonies and rituals at the temple and the communal house of La Phu village through different periods of time, so as to address the relationship

¹ Statistics from the Department of Statistics show that the average income in urban areas in 2002 was 625,900 VND per person and 274,900 per person in rural areas (Department of Statistics, 2003).

between economic development and the reinforcement of ceremonies and rituals in rural areas of Vietnam today.

Traditions in La Phu before the August Revolution

The center of ceremonies and rituals of the village before the August Revolution was the communal house. According to the village elders, the communal house of the village was built a long time ago but burnt several times because the materials used to build the house, mainly bamboo and leaves, were flammable. The year 1782 was the first time the house was constructed of valuable wood, bricks and tiles, as are still seen today. La Phu communal house is for the worship of *Tinh Quoc Cong Dai Vuong* [as Grand Genie], a legendary general who contributed greatly to protecting the country from foreign aggressors in the time of King *Hung Vuong* the Eighteenth. In the old days, when the ancestors of the La Phu people reclaimed the land, they founded the village named *La Nuoc* with two hamlets: *Thuong* and *Ha*. The former *Thuong* hamlet, included all the hamlets, which today make up La Phu village; The former *Ha* hamlet, which now is *Dong Nhan* village, belongs to *Dong La*, the neighboring commune. The two villages, La Phu and *Dong La* are only 1.5 km away from each other. Before the August Revolution, the two villages were under the same authorities. In 1948, when the French took over the region, the two villages were separated as independent entities.

Legend has it that when the *Thuc* aggressors invaded, *Tinh Quoc Cong Dai Vuong* was appointed to the post of a

pioneer general, and he was stationed at *Dong Nhan* village with his troops. Since his troops were stationed and trained at the village, the life of the villagers was secure and happier. To express their great gratitude to him, the villagers asked him to build a temple for them to worship him after he was gone and honor him as a village spiritual protector. They received his consent. After defeating the aggressors, the general passed away on the fourteenth of January (the lunar calendar) near the river bank. In that exact spot the villagers built a temple for worshipping him, which they named *Quan Chay*. Today, fourteen titles conferred by the Kings of various dynasties from 1730 to 1924 are still maintained in the communal house.

Ceremonies and rituals at the communal house used to be hosted very carefully and strictly for several occasions during the year and undertaken by six male groups (*giap dinh*) and *mon(s)* of the village. In La Phu, members of each male group are divided orderly into five tables, as opposed to three like in other places (Nguyen Tu Chi, 2003, p. 294). When a male child is first born, the parents get him a membership in the fifth table (designated for the youngest) of a male group. Then, gradually he will be upgraded to the fourth and the third tables. Once he is in the third table, he will be responsible for the male group's affairs. After four years being in the third table, he is accepted into the second table, and it takes four more years for him to get into the top table - *mon cha*. Being in *mon cha*, sooner or later, depending on the turn, he will have a chance to host ceremonies and to raise pigs

and prepare offerings for the worshipping of the village spiritual protector. As usual, members of a male group who are still at a young age often take part in the preparation of offerings, such as cooking sticky rice and killing the pigs. At the age of 20, many have the chance to host ceremonies.

In one year, numerous ceremonies and rituals are hosted at the communal house. Besides regular ceremonies that are held on the first and the fifth days of lunar months (*soc* and *vong* days), the village festival is the most important ceremony of the year. On the thirteenth of lunar December, villagers gather and assign preparation tasks for the festival at the village's communal house. Appointed members are divided into three groups with the titles: *Quan cu*, *Quan trong* and *Quan tieu co*. *Quan cu* represents and is appointed by *mon sac*. *Quan trong* includes six persons representing each of the six male groups who have the task of hosting and overseeing the ceremony of the year. Finally, *Quan tieu co*, consisting of 24 persons appointed by the six male groups, is assigned to take care of and monitor all general affairs. After the allocation of tasks is complete, beginning from the sixteenth of lunar December, the six persons who are assigned to the task of hosting and overseeing the festival must spend almost all of their time at the communal house until the fifteenth of lunar January. They are also in charge of buying and preparing offerings such as golden parasols for worship, hats, kerosene, and firecrackers for every round-ritual. They are also in

charge of changing the clothing and hat for the statue of the village spiritual protector.

At the beginning of the New Year, on the fourth day of Tet, when drum beats are sounded from the communal house, it is time for the villagers to gather to discuss the festival. Here the villagers will discuss and decide the form of the festival of the year: a big festival or an ordinary one. The sixth day of Tet is for feast entering. If a big festival is selected, palanquin, parasols, and other things are prepared to bring to the deity - the Grand Genie to the Lower Temple - on the seventh day of Tet, for worshipping him. After that, at about 5 pm of the same day, the villagers start to take him back to the communal house to arrive at about midnight for a ritual to welcome his peaceful return to the house.

Starting on the eighth, every hamlet prepares offerings to welcome his return to the house and sets up traditional games, music and folk song performances, such as wrestling, playing chess, traditional opera or folk songs, and cockfights. From the tenth to the end of the thirteenth, every night the villagers hold a round-ritual, and on the fourteenth two round-rituals are held. On the night of the thirteenth, the villagers organize a "pig procession;" meanwhile, at the communal house, an offering ritual called *te xac* is held. As usual, the pigs' procession to the communal house ends around 1 am on the fourteenth, and then the villager holds the ritual of the death anniversary. Then, on the night of the fourteenth, a collective worshipping ritual is held. Ritual activities only finish at the end of the fifteenth day, marked by the offering ritual of farewell.

The pigs' procession on the thirteenth of lunar January may be a special and particular ceremony of the La Phu festival. The decoration for the procession pigs is very sophisticated. After being killed, the whole body of the beast is kept. The villager puts the pig upon a bamboo table of about 1.2 meters in height and the section from its head to its back is covered by its side fat. The pig's head is raised higher by a wooden bar. The forehead and ears of the pig are decorated with colorful paper. The pigs' procession is held at night and the light of lamps and candles make it very beautiful.

Traditionally, while killing the pig, the villager must take some of its hair and blood curds, wrap them, and put them into a small candle on the bamboo table that the pig is laid upon before heading to the communal house. During the ritual, when the lay priest of the east side gives a declaration, the torches of all male-groups are raised, an action that announces to the village spiritual protector that the pigs are very fresh and healthy. After that all the torches are thrown into a pond in front of the communal house's gate. For a long time, a moderate competition has been held among male groups or hamlets. The male group or hamlet that has the most beautiful procession pig will receive an award. The award includes several small items such as some black tea and cigarettes, but its symbolic value attracts the attention of every villager and festival participant.

Besides the festival described above, the festivals held at the village temples are also very important to the community spiritual life of La Phu. Before 1948, La Phu had four

temples: *Thien Hung Tu* (so-called *Tong* temple), *Trung Hung Tu* (so-called *Ca* temple), *Quang Loc Tu* (so-called *Doc* temple), and *Kim Lam Tu* (*Bai* temple). *Kim Lam Tu* temple is located at Dong Nhan village, and because Dong Nhan was separated from La Phu village in terms of administration in 1948, all of the religious activities of Buddhism in La Phu have taken place at the remaining three temples since 1948. Thien Hung Tu, a big temple in the region, was built in the time of the Ly dynasty and used to worship three founder-deities: *Duc Tu Dao Hanh*, *Duc Nguyen Minh Khong* and *Duc Giac Hai*. Two temples in two neighboring villages, *Mua* temple (*La Duong* village) and *Van* temple (*Ngai Cau* village), which were formerly in the same canton as La Phu village, Yen Lung canton, also worship the three founder-deities mentioned above. For this reason, on the eighth of lunar March, these three villages organize the ritual of "deity procession" at the same time. On this day, villagers organize the "titles procession" from *Ca* temple to *Tong* temple and hold an offering ritual there. On this occasion, the family prepares offerings, and many traditional games are also set up during the festival.

In 1947, in response to the call of the scorched-earth policy of the Revolutionary Authorities, *Tong* temple was demolished by the villagers in order to prevent the French from using the temple as their station. From that point on, the villagers received and worshiped the three founder deities at *Ca* temple. Besides the ritual held on the first of the lunar month and other Buddhist rituals, other annual rituals and ceremonies of the

temple are also held on different occasions such as the Tet (the New Year), lunar December, and village and temple festivals. These are also occasions for the villagers to donate labor and money to the temple for hosting Buddhist rituals.

Changes during Wartime and the Agricultural Collectivization Period

The fact that ceremonies and rituals are held in six different places in the village shows that La Phu villagers traditionally attached much importance to community rituals and ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies played very important roles in the lives of the villagers before the August Revolution. However, during wartime and the period of collectivization, or co-operatives, these community rituals and ceremonies declined considerably. From 1945 to 1953, La Phu village did not hold the procession of the village spiritual protector. Before the period of the co-operatives, the village held one procession in 1954 and another in 1956. Due to war turmoil and economic difficulty, the villagers only held perfunctory processions during these years, with chicken offerings to the village spiritual protector instead of formal ritual of offerings or “pig processions.”

Unlike what happened during the Cultural Revolution in China, after seizing power, the government of the Republic of Vietnam at that time only paid attention to building a New Way of Life, or the so-called New Way of Life at the grassroots levels. The campaign for implementing the New Way of Life started on April 3, 1946, and was marked by the establishment of the

Central Government’s Board for mobilizing the New Way of Life. However, in the beginning, the campaign was only actualized in a small number of localities. By the end of 1954 it had expanded to the entire country (Malarney, 2002, p. 61). In reality, the revolutionary authorities only banned some rituals held at the communal house that were considered superstitious, such as offering rituals and Séances. Some other rituals and ceremonies that were considered traditional customs and habits were allowed or were only modified.

Because of the mobilization campaign mentioned above, the year 1954 was when the last traditional festival of many villages in the Red River delta was held. Many ideas claim that because of the establishment and growth of the co-operatives in the early 1960s, the interference of local authorities in religious affairs was stronger than the 1950s (Endres, 2001, p. 80). Communal houses were used as co-operative headquarters, as cultural houses or as container depots. In some places, due to the rigid or excessive implementation of the policy, Buddhist statues and other ritual objects in communal houses and temples were destroyed or burnt.

In La Phu, the middle communal house was used as the headquarters of the co-operative and as a stockroom for textile fiber. However, the rear section of the house was kept intact. The temples’ yards were acquired and used as spaces for drying paddy and rice straw, and for keeping livestock. Fortunately, the inside of the temples were protected. During that period, nothing harmed the cultural relics of La Phu village. To explain this phenomenon, local

people say that it is because the villagers were Buddhist believers. Sacred tales of the communal house and the temple made local people dare not damage or do anything harmful to these structures (Malarney, 2002, p. 93). Even staff members of the authorities at that time believed this, because during wartime, many of the Vietminh's activists had escaped the French encirclement by hiding in the communal house and the temple.

The local authorities' respect for these historical structures is partly reflected in the maintenance of the land of the communal house and the temple. After Agrarian Reform, the authorities of La Phu reallocated three *sao* of land (about 4,800m²) to the communal house, and two *sao* (about 3,200m²) to the temple for the guardians and monks to use for religious purposes. After traditional institutions such as *mãn* and other male groups were eliminated, the rituals of the first and fifteenth of the lunar month held at the communal house have been assigned to individual hamlets, with each one being in charge of four turns.

In the 1960s, the villagers still maintained the offering ritual to the village spiritual protector, although the offering materials were very simple, consisting of some small items such as chicken, fruit, sticky rice and cakes. Female elders still went to worship at temples, but only with simple offerings.

Rituals and ceremonies were really abandoned in the 1970s when the campaign of building the New Socialist Man was launched along with the campaign that

mobilized the New Way of Life. The main objective of the new campaign was to prevent or eliminate "backward, superstitious" customs and habits. These interventions created factors that broke traditional social structures and replaced the spiritual functions of rituals and ceremonies with political functions. The communal house as a cultural house was the place where collective weddings were held. Also, instead of holding yearly rituals and ceremonies at this place, the village held summations of emulation in production and meetings mobilizing co-operative members to fulfill and exceed their standard duties (Endres, 2001, p. 81). As mentioned about this period, villagers often called it the time of "*thit lon bop mui*"² (killing the pig secretly). The policies of preserving and making the cultural life of the family and the community healthy reduced spending on rituals and ceremonies to a minimum.

Moreover, all villagers thought that because everyone was very busy working for the co-operative during that period in order to accumulate working points and make ends meet for their families, nobody cared about ceremonies and rituals. Some villagers said, "At that time [the time of co-operatives], life was very difficult, who cared about ceremonies and rituals! "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mr. H.Q., Tien Phong village). The life of villagers was so burdened by the economic depression

² Implementing the Directive of Building New Way of Life, parties and feast were reduced to a minimum. Besides, the villagers were responsible to raise and sell the beast to the government as the set standard. Therefore, when they had to slaughter the beast for their own need, they must do this secretly without making any noise that made the authorities know.

in the end of the 1970s that they did care about temples and monks. Not only did the monks lack rice to make offering cakes, but they also lacked enough rice for themselves. A head monk of *Quang Loc Tu* temple even sold a portion of the temple's land, unbeknownst to anyone else.

In the beginning of the 1980s, the war was over and the life of people was somewhat better, due to the policy of Contract No. 100, promulgated in 1981. Since then, ceremonies and rituals at the communal house have been restored. However, because economic life was still difficult, when the ritual for worshipping the village spiritual protector was held, villagers in several hamlets pooled money to buy a small pig, about twenty kilograms, as an offering. With regard to other hamlets, villagers could only afford some small items for offerings such as sticky rice cakes and sweetened porridge. During this time, co-operatives also supported ceremonies and rituals with goods in kind, such as rice, meat, and kerosene. Ceremonies, rituals, and pig processions on the thirteenth of lunar January in La Phu were fully restored when the open-market policy started.

Restoration of Ceremonies and Rituals after Economic Reform

The restoration and maintenance of ceremonies and rituals at the communal house was reinforced by the establishment of a village committee of rites in 1985. Each elder in the village who was a member of the committee had to contribute ten kilograms of rice, and the sum was lent out for interest, which was then used for

worshipping rituals at the communal house on the thirteenth of lunar January. The restoration process really became powerful in the 1990s when many temples and communal houses were upgraded or reconstructed. This was also the time when the trade-handicraft-village economy of La Phu underwent numerous changes. Almost all of the villagers became wealthier.

The debated explanations of concerned scholars for the phenomenon of restoration of rituals and ceremonies can be divided into two sides. One claims that rituals and ceremonies depend on economic life, and the other emphasizes the influence of the open policies of the state on religious affairs, and the formation of social space in the village where individuals can express their views. This study considers that both could be valid explanations of the recent restoration process of rituals and ceremonies. However, in reality, the cases of La Phu and other villages show that the improvement of economic life is a necessary starting premise for this process of restoration.

In the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, when some rituals and ceremonies at temples and communal houses started to be restored, there were no formal state regulations in terms of organization. In many localities, people "broke the rules." In some places where worship prohibition was maintained by the authorities, people even hosted ceremonies and rituals secretly (Truong Thin, 1993, quoted in Endres, 2001, p. 86-87). The demand for the restoration of rituals and ceremonies, which was triggered by economic improvement, has created pressure on the authorities and made them

change policies regarding religious affairs and the management of cultural structures and festivals.

As mentioned above, while considering the restoration of rituals and ceremonies, two major concerns are: who restores and how is it restored? The study on Thinh Liet (Hanoi) of Malarney (2003) indicates the important role of female elders in the village affairs, whereas the study on Dai Bai, a bronze-molding village, of Endres (2001) shows that women look after family ceremonies and rituals rather than community wide ceremonies and rituals. The restoration of ceremonies and rituals of La Phu brings to us a more detailed picture of gender role.

Whereas the male elders of La Phu play a very important role in restoring *soc vong* rituals (rituals held on the first and the fifteenth of lunar months) and other rituals at the communal house, female elders are credited with reclaiming land for rebuilding the temple. As mentioned above, *Tong* temple of La Phu was destroyed in 1947 due to the scorched-earth policy. Since then, the land of the temple (about 14,000 square meters in area) has been occupied by several neighboring villagers and used by some state agencies as head offices. The remaining area of the temple was a small empty plot of land with wild grass and bushes. In 1990, while going to *Ca* temple, an old woman called for other female elders of the village to go to *Tong* temple to worship. Sixteen female elders went together, and brought offerings to find the old temple to worship. Later on, the thought of rebuilding the temple grew in their mind.

The endeavor of reclaiming the temple land took place drastically over a period of two years. At the beginning, they sent complaints to authorities of different levels, both the province and district, while they built a small shrine on the remaining land of the temple for worship. At that time, they encountered furious reactions from the state agencies that occupied the land, and their complaint was rejected by the authorities. While most of the villagers were not concerned with religious affairs, male elders of the village, while concerned, did not get involved because they were afraid of interfering in the authorities' affairs. Later on, an old man who was very familiar with legal procedures helped the female elders prepare a petition and guided them to competent agencies of the authorities. The man even sought out renowned scholars in culture fields for help. His well-prepared approach was also evidenced in the temple documents that were prepared to submit to the authorities.

During this time, some people worked on one front, renting cars to go to the central and provincial authorities, asking them to solve the matter. Other people worked on another front, putting pressure on the leaders and staff of the state agencies who occupied the land, so as to force them to return the land. Expenses (spent on traveling, food, etc.) for the lawsuit were paid for out of the people's own pockets. Many villagers considered this action unpractical, and the local authorities did not support it because they were afraid that achievements of the commune would have negative affects. Therefore the villagers who were involved in the lawsuit faced the pressure of the local authorities and even the people in the village and close relatives.

However, being faced with the drastic endurance of those elderly villagers, and considering the historical-cultural values of the old *Tong* temple, the authorities finally made a decision that granted the land for rebuilding the temple. Surprisingly enough, both the insiders and many other villagers themselves did not believe that they could make the headquarters of the district bank and a vocational school move off of the 14,000m² of land in dispute. At this point, many male elders and other villagers started to get involved in the action.

In 1992, the reconstruction of the temple began. This was a big event marking a strong period restoration of village ceremonies and rituals. It is noteworthy that before the event, many middle age and young people of the village were still absorbed in working and earning money, not concerned with community ceremonies and rituals. Village elders held a meeting of villagers and mobilized them to support the reconstruction of the temple. They encouraged young people by telling them how great labor and services of their forebears were contributed to building the temple when life was still hard. Now that life was much better, the elders argued, it was the young people's responsibility to maintain and develop the historical-cultural structures of the village. From that point on, the contributions in kind of villagers increased day by day.

From 1992 to 1995, the villagers contributed 500 million VND to rebuild *Tong* temple. In 1996, the villagers repaired *Doc* temple at a cost of 300 million VND. Later they repaired *Ca* temple at a cost of 500 million VND. In 2003, the communal house was repaired at a cost of 200 million

VND. The villagers not only contributed money to the rebuilding and repairing, but also donated decorative objects for worshipping. Before 1900, there was only a pair of parallel sentences made of paper in the communal house, and in 1901 there was a pair of wooden panels. Recently, during the short time of village mobilization, some twenty pairs of wooden panels, worth two million VND each, were donated to the communal house. Particularly, the pair inlaid with gold, donated collectively from Minh Khai hamlet was worth 10 million VND.

What has happened in La Phu in particular and other localities in general would provoke the question: as they became wealthier, why did these people not spend the money and labor on local infrastructure instead of spending it on donations to rituals and ceremonies? The answer is that there must be a reason underlying their choice. Being faced with the risk of losing emotional relationships, morality or cultural characteristics due to economic development, people have used part of their earnings to maintain or cling to these characteristics.

As common sense, many villagers think that making a donation helps them to accumulate merit, like "saving," therefore they do so voluntarily. There is no difference between a big donation and little donation. The elderly and families who are still poor are glad and excited to contribute even a small amount of money to the village's affairs. For better-off families and young owners of enterprises who are able to contribute or donate some tens of millions of VND, donations may be used as an approach to improve their reputations in the village or commune.

Some people consider the village's affairs as their own business. Some may take this moderately. Some who are better-off take this more seriously and contribute more. Making donations, beside owing to their good hearts, is also for their reputations (From the interview with Mr. P., an owner of candy enterprise in Thong Nhat hamlet).

Together with rebuilding and repairing temples and the communal house, festivals in La Phu were also restored in the early 1990s. Recently, the festival at the communal house has been held in a shorter time period, with the focus on several major ceremonies and rituals. To comply with the authorities' regulations, the procession of the village spiritual protector is held once every five years, on the thirteenth of lunar January. The festival receives enthusiastic support from the villagers. The expense for holding the festival is about 30 million VND. A major proportion of the cost is contributed by the villagers. Moreover, young people of hamlets often collect money among themselves to buy firecrackers for the festival. The cost can be up to some tens of millions of VND. The villagers' sense of respect for worshipping the village spiritual protector is also reflected through their full participation to fulfill their duties and roles in the festival, such as taking part as a member of the organization board, a palanquin carrier, or a receptionist.

Formerly, there were six male groups and each group had to appoint one member to be the next ritual holder, the person who must raise the pig one year prior to the coming festival. Today, pig raising is assigned to each hamlet. There are eleven hamlets in the village and some hamlets with

a higher population are divided in two groups, each in charge of a ritual offering table. Therefore the village has a total of sixteen ritual offering tables for the pig procession of the festival. Before, the pigs used as offerings were some tens of kilograms in weight. Today, as hamlets compete with each other, the pigs for offering can be as much as 100 to 200 kilograms. Because they are busy with working, it is difficult to raise the pigs themselves and they usually buy them. The sophisticated preparation and exciting atmosphere of the pig procession makes it a special and particular characteristic of the festival of La Phu village. And this is a great proudness of La Phu villagers of their traditional customs, of their large scale, crowded and imposing festival. Besides, many festive games and art performances are held from the seventh to the thirteenth, attracting many villagers to get involved, which makes community cohesion stronger.

For the villagers, the festival is a time to devote their spirits to their ancestors. Some may complain that large-scale festivals of the village waste money and time (Endres, 2001, p. 95; Truong Huyen Chi, 2000, p. 36), but it is not the case for La Phu village. It is difficult to find a complaint about this from any social classes, sexes, and ages. The elderly and the people who are responsible for organizing the festival are very worried because it is a hard task for them at their age. The young, who find the festival very exciting, urge the old to hold it more often and expect the village festival will be greater and more impressive.

Faced with this fact and in order to fully maintain the tradition of ceremonies and rituals throughout generations, the elderly

villagers recently held a new festive ritual. In 2004, they persuaded 53 males from 40 to 50 years of age to take part in the festival as novices with the hope that those males will step by step take over the new festive tasks of the village. This shows the villagers' creativity in a new situation. Before, if the males had a chance to get involved in the male-group, and got familiar with ritual procedure when they were very young, many were ready to take on important tasks of the village's affairs by the age of 20. Today, due to a new situation, everybody is busy and absorbed in working and earning, and their needs to be some way to deal with this.

Apart from the communal house's festival mentioned above, temple festivals taking place on the eighth of lunar February are also held more often these days. However, the Genii procession is not regulated in detail due to the fact that this involves two other neighboring villages that also worship the same three genii as La Phu. Even when a simple festival is held, most of the families in La Phu prepare offerings for the purpose of worshipping at the village temples, and villagers also set up festive games and art performances.

In the past, female elders were the ones who went to temples, but today, young women and middle-aged people also go to temples monthly. This fact is why some people say that nowadays the young generations adore ceremonies and rituals even more than the old generations. As they become wealthier, many female elders of the village travel more often to other temples for visiting and worshipping. When a temple in the region is upgraded or repaired, they contribute money as a donation.

During interviews, many villagers asserted that for a long time, the people of La Phu have been more religiously adherent than people of other villages in the region. For the villagers, devoting energy to the spiritual world, ceremonies and rituals is a way to continue their traditions, and pass down education to the young generations. Especially because La Phu is a handicraft and trade village, where competitiveness is unavoidable, and the fact that everyone in the village devotes energy together to the spiritual world and shares the village's affairs is a way to make emotional relations among them better.

To do religious affairs is to educate the children and lead them to have similar spiritual lives to the older generations. Doing this, we do not lose anything; our children will be more obedient, better and moral (Interview with Mrs. H. K., an old woman at Thong Nhat hamlet, La Phu village).

Taking care of the spiritual world leads people to live better, more morally and affectionately (Interview with Mr. Q., a young man at Tran Phu hamlet, La Phu village).

In addition, the responsibility of taking part in the village's affairs or ceremonies and rituals at the communal house and temples is an occasion for villagers to fulfill their obligations to the community and to their ancestors. Through these occasions, the villagers have a chance to reinforce community cohesion and emotional relationships. Along with restoring and maintaining community ceremonies and rituals, the villagers want to express their own village identity so that the fame of their profession as well as their beautiful traits of culture and spiritual life will travel far.

Conclusion

What is happening in La Phu village shows that the growth of the market economy does not lead to the loss of traditional values and norms passed down by our ancestors. Traditional cultural patterns of ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the village play crucial roles in guiding the cultural activities of the community. Through the villagers' social norms for behaviors, it is clear that this village as a small society has order, ceremonies and rituals, and community cohesion even stronger than agriculturally based villages in the region. Preserving traditional cultural values plays a very important role in maintaining cultural identities and the community cohesion of the village. Moreover, this becomes an important factor for the development of a handicraft and trade village, because of the resulting community cohesion in doing business. However, in modern times, and similar to many people in neighboring villages, the villagers of La Phu also have to reconcile traditional cultural values with the influence of modern lifestyles.

Practically, it shows that economic development along with preserving traditional cultural values has made La Phu become a wealthy village and the villagers are still able to maintain their traditional way of life and the good traits of rural people in Vietnam. More importantly, because of this the villagers can minimize negative social influences on their community that are common fates in many trading families in cities and other rural areas. However, looking from the other side derived from the idea "wealth and honors change manners," what is happening in La Phu as well as other localities is also an issue that needs to be well studied.

References

1. Truong Huyen Chi (2000), "Village affairs: The re-making of communal identity through the intensification of rituals in a northern Vietnamese village", *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies*, March 21-25, Chicago.
2. Nguyen Tu Chi (2003), *Contribution to Cultural and Ethnicity Studies*, Ethnic Culture Publishing house, *Cultural and Arts Review*, Hanoi.
3. Endres, Kirsten (2001), "Local Dynamics of Renegotiating Ritual Space in Northern Vietnam: The Case of the Dinh", *SOJOURN* Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 70-101.
4. Kleinen, John (1999), *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
5. Luong Van Hy (1993), "Economic Reform and the Reinforcement of Ceremonies and Rituals in Two Villages in North Vietnam, 1980-90", in: *Challenges in Indo-China Reform Process*, Borje Ljunggren (Chief Editor), Harvard University P.
6. Ta long, Tran Hong Yen, and Nguyen Thi Thanh Binh (2004), "The Development of La Phu Handicraft and Trade Village in Terms of Economics and Socio-Culture", *Annual Report*, Institute of Anthropology.
7. Le Hong Ly (Chief author) (2000), *Traditional Culture of Dong Ky Village*, Institute of Folklore, Hanoi.
8. Malarney, Shaun Kingsley (1993), *Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam*, Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan.
9. ----- (1996), "The Emerging Cult of Ho Chi Minh? A Report on Religious Innovation in Contemporary North Vietnam", *Asian Cultural Studies* 22, pp. 121-131.
10. ----- (2002), *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam*, University of Hawaii P., Honolulu.