

Impulsions for Invention of Tradition in Vietnam: Case of Ném Thượng Village Festival in Bắc Ninh Province

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Abstract: Tradition is built upon a compromise of the various impulsions in modern society. Through the case of Ném Thượng Village Festival, the article shows how these impulsions affect traditional festivals. While impulsions can drive the transformation of traditional festivals, the spirit and subject of the festival still play a decisive role in this practice. The community accepts these adjustments but its spiritual requirements also need to be satisfied. Therefore, traditions can be changed and reinvented based on compromises of many parties and in modern society there are more impulsions than just the relationship between the state and the people.

Keywords: Festival, slaughtering pigs, Ném Thượng, reinventing traditions, heritage.

Subject classification: Cultural anthropology

1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2015, right after the Lunar New Year, when village festivals in the Northern Delta began to open as usual, there was a fever in the media about a village festival which was then not known by many people: the Ném Thượng Village Festival. The pig-slashing ritual of the village festival resulted in massive press coverage, and public opinion was divided into two poles. One group supported the traditional practice of the villagers, and the other vehemently opposed it, demanding an end to the practice. Such a fever also spread beyond the territory of Vietnam when the press in many countries published news and photos about this festival. This event had a big impact on the cultural life of the country. This article is not intended to analyse the restoration of the Ném Thượng Village Festival, but to focus on the impacts of the debate in 2013-2015. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, combining analysis of the role of the press with

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documents collected from the two field trips in Ném Thượng village and a number of agencies such as the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Provincial Board for Management of Relics, and Khắc Niệm ward in Bắc Ninh province in the years 2016-2017, we would like to identify the impulsions contributing to the invention of a cultural phenomenon in today's society.

2. Tradition and invention of tradition

Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) is known to Vietnamese anthropologists and historians through his theory of “invention of tradition” in the anthology of the same name *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Although developed based on Marxist political-economic theory, Hobsbawm brought a new breath to the traditional Marxist concept that was culturally rigid. His research is sophisticated in uncovering the role of symbols, myths, and rituals in popular culture. By presenting the social contexts of Britain, France, Germany, and the United States between 1870 and 1914, he shows how these societies invented their national traditions. He argues that the “traditions” as we know them now are not true, or original, or very old traditions, but in fact were invented only from the 18th century onwards. He is of the opinion that, “Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T., 1983, p.1). He separates the invented tradition from the genuine tradition by arguing that the invented tradition is only artificially attached to the past. The invention of tradition is found all over the world, but often occurs during periods of rapid societal change. These “new” traditions then are grouped into three subsets: (1) those establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities; (2) those establishing or legitimising institutions, status or relations of authority; and (3) those whose main purpose was socialisation the inculcation of beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behavior (Hobsbawm, E. & Ranger, T., 1983). According to Hobsbawm, this function makes the “new” tradition particularly useful in situations where the rise of mass politics activities creates problems with social management.

Hobsbawm's theory of the invention of traditions can help shed light on the revival and practice of traditional festivals in Vietnam today. When discussing the flexibility and lissomness of culture, Lê Hồng Lý also commented, “Every cultural phenomenon is always changing to adapt to its existing circumstances and environment. Every society has its own culture and traditional customs, if not suitable with the current society, will also change accordingly” (Lê Hồng Lý, 2017, p.4). In cultural studies, ancient cultural practices such as the custom of sacrifice in some festivals in Vietnam, Spain, and Denmark are all original sources of materials that contribute to rebuilding the formation and transformation of the very ancient culture of each ethnic group (Công Khanh, 2015a; Vũ Việt Tuấn, 2015a).

Most festivals in Vietnam experienced a period of stagnation during the war period (1946-1975) and the country's difficult economic period until the late 1980s. Especially during the socialist construction period in the North, many customs, that were considered antiquated disappeared or were not practised (Lại Thị Hải Bình, 2017). Since 1975, especially after the State Council issued Ordinance No.14-LCT/HDNN7 in 1984 on the protection and use of historical-cultural relics and scenic sites and landscapes in the education of traditions of building and safeguarding the home country, a legal basis for the restoration of traditional festivals had been established (Lại Thị Hải Bình, 2017). Traditional village festivals were gradually revived through the memories of the elders and based on texts and records kept at places of worship, or if luckier, based on publications of the scientists who conducted fieldwork in the area earlier. The Giá Festival of Yên Sở village (Hoài Đức district, Hanoi) or the Gióng Festival of Phù Đổng village (Gia Lâm district, Hanoi) are bright examples of the restoration of festivals. Among the festivals in Vietnam, many festivals are associated with the legends of gods, relics or tutelary gods of the village and there exist unique rituals such as pig stabbing, buffalo spearing, and buffalo fighting.

We believe that, in the process of restoration and implementation, many traditional festivals have been reinvented to fit the context of the times and increasingly adjusted to the impulses of the modern world. The term “impulsion”, which comes from physics, refers to forces acting over time that produce a changing momentum. In this article, impulses are understood as influences from many sources, many subjects, and many levels to a festival in a period and they have caused the festival to be adjusted. These impulses come from the state, scientists, and domestic and international media, and especially increase strongly in the period of opening the country. The article asks, “Is that how culture can exist? Impulses can provide thrust, accelerating the transformation of traditional festivals. But who decided this cultural practice and how did they improvise?” These questions will be answered through the case of Ném Thượng Village Festival.

3. Origin of (re)invention of tradition

3.1. Ném Thượng Village Festival

Ném Thượng village (or Niệm Thượng) in the past belonged to Khắc Niệm canton, Tiên Du district, Bắc Ninh province. After Bắc Ninh town expanded its boundary, it became a city on 24 February 2014, and Thượng village became Thượng quarter, Khắc Niệm ward, Bắc Ninh city. In 2015, Thượng quarter had 750 households, with about 4,000 inhabitants.

Ordinations

The relic records were made in 2001 and kept at the Board for Management of Relics of Bắc Ninh province, which states: According to the view of the ancients, the land disposition in the village (communal village) makes it look like a snake, with its head turning westward and its tail eastward. The communal house is placed on the back of the

snake. Legend has it that the old communal house was built in the west-south direction, looking up at Nghè mountain (Phúc Sơn) where there are traces of Lý Đoàn Thượng recruiting soldiers to fight against Nguyễn Nộn.

Village elders said that Ném Thượng communal house had five ordinations, four of which appeared in the 10th Tự Đức year (1857), the 33rd Tự Đức year (1880), the 2nd Đồng Khánh year (1887), and the 3rd Duy Tân year (1909). Fortunately, all five of these ordinations have now been translated into Vietnamese. While the version translated by Nguyễn Tá Nhí in 2001 kept in the Board for Management of Ném Thượng Communal House Relics includes only four ordinations, the records of the Bắc Ninh Provincial Board for Management of Relics still keep the transliteration and the translation of five ordinations translated by Phạm Hương Lan (Institute of Sino-Nom Studies) in 2013.

The ordinations help to assert that:

1/ There are two tutelary gods worshipped in Ném Thượng communal house. One was conferred superior god whose family name was Đoàn, pseudonymised as Đông Hải, and the other with the family name of Nguyễn as the “god”.

2/ The tutelary god whose family name was Đoàn had the merit of “Saving the country and helping the people, showing the manifest holiness”. As for the tutelary god whose family name was Nguyễn, the origin and merits remain unknown.

3/ The head of the feudal state government, the king, assigned Khắc Niệm commune to “eternally organise the worship and expand the worship” of these tutelary gods.

When assessing the historical and cultural value of Ném Thượng communal house in Khắc Niệm commune, the 2001 relic history kept by the Bắc Ninh Provincial Board for Management of Relics states, “The communal house of Ném Thượng village worships General Đoàn Thượng as the real human being in the feudal history of Vietnam (the 11th and 12th centuries). He was one of the loyalists of the Lý Dynasty who stood up to gather troops against the Trần Dynasty to protect the royal family. Although it was not successful, it left a bright example of loyalty and devotion for generations to come”. The Bắc Ninh Provincial People's Committee in 2001 recognised the Ném Thượng communal house as a historical and cultural relic of Bắc Ninh province. Every year, Ném Thượng village holds a festival on the sixth day of the first lunar month.

Process of preparing the festival

In the early 1990s, the movement to revive the festival took place in many places and the Ném Thượng Village Festival. From memory fragments from village elders and documents preserved at Ném Thượng communal house, Ném Thượng villagers have reconstructed a festival organisation recognised by the village community. After Ném Thượng communal house was rebuilt in 1999, the first restoration festival was held in 2000. Ném Thượng villagers told us that the village was formerly divided into two sub-villages: Giáp Chính, which included all men with the Nguyễn Văn and Trần family names - the two largest clans in the

area - and Giáp Chung¹, which included men of the remaining clans such as Nguyễn Đăng, Nguyễn Đức, and Ngô, who were living in another geographical area. These two Giáp (i.e. sub-villages) every year had to raise pigs for worship purposes as a preparation for the village festival and prepare supplies of sticky rice for worship offerings in the festival.

The pair of pigs used for sacrifice are respected and called Ông Ỉn (i.e. sacred sacrificial pigs) by the villagers. The person raising the sacrificial pig is called the Đám. Each year, each sub-village chooses a qualified Đám, who is aged 49 according to the lunar calendar, whose parents and parents-in-law are still living and maintaining a harmonious husband-wife relationship with both sons and daughters and well-off enough to raise sacrificial pigs. The selection of a Đám was done as early as July so that by the full moon of August, the Đám can accept pigs of about 25kg each to raise. It is the Đám who has to prepare the food, feed and bathe the sacrificial pigs on a daily basis. Previously, the sacrificial pigs were pure black boars, but then it was difficult to find pure black pigs and the villagers decided to switch to pure white boars.

The Thủ Đao (i.e. headsmen) is the one who does the pig slashing in the sacrifice ceremony and is chosen as early as the full moon of the seventh month of the lunar calendar. Each sub-village chooses one Thủ Đao. In addition to the criteria for choosing the Đám, the Thủ Đao must be 47 years old according to the lunar calendar (symbolising wealth), who is strong enough to use a knife-shaped lance to slash a pig with just one blow. When restoring the festival, the village still kept the old pig-slashing knife-shaped lance, but recently it has been replaced with a longer and larger knife-shaped lance to suit the larger Ông Ỉn of today, which is about 160kg.

In addition, there are other important positions in the festival such as Tướng Cờ (i.e. the chief ensign), war horse procession, palanquin procession, drum and gong procession, and others, which are divided by age group to serve the practice of the festival. There is also an equal work division for both sub-villages and attention is paid to the age of those who are assigned the job. The village's regulations are that those men in their 50s are considered old age. All staff working for the festival are mainly under this age.

The festival process

On the morning of the fifth day of the first lunar month, the festival proclamation ceremony is performed, and there is a contest to cook sticky rice for worship. The team that cooks quickly and with the best quality will win. At the end of the competition, the sticky rice by both teams will be offered to the god along with two chickens prepared by the communal house staff in advance. The custom of sticky rice cooking and slashing pigs was explained by Mr Hân, an elderly person in the village, as follows: When the tutelary god Lý Đoàn Thượng held the troop banquet ceremony, due to time constraints, everything

¹ There are two ways of spelling: Giáp Trung and Giáp Chung. The article uses Giáp Chung, which can be understood in the sense that this sub-village belongs to the men of the remaining clans, in addition to the Nguyễn Văn and Trần clans.

had to be done quickly. People offered sticky rice and sacrificial pigs to him. He had the soldiers cook sticky rice quickly, slash pigs, skin pigs, and boil pigs quickly to keep up with the military mission. The villagers, who now hold a festival to commemorate him, also re-enact the same story and process the custom of cooking sticky rice and slashing pigs. Around 4-5pm on the same day, a procession takes place to carry the two Ông Ỗn from the house of the Đám to the communal house.

On the following day (the sixth of lunar January, the main event of the festival) at 7am sharp, the procession starts moving around the village in the direction of “East and West”, passing through Cửa Chùa, stopping for a rest, and then returning to the communal house. The order of the procession includes flags, flowers, and three fruit trays of the communal house carried on the heads of six young people taking turns; the national flag and Uncle Hồ’s photo are carried by the Veterans Association; others carry drums, gongs, parasols, umbrellas, and a set of eight weapons; the chief ensign; the tutelary god palanquin; war horses; accompanied by the Đám teams from both sub-villages (Giáp Chính and Giáp Chung) as well as representatives of authorities and mass organisations and villagers.

The procession must return to the communal house at around 11:30am, then perform the following rituals: the procession-ending ceremony, the flag flying ceremony at the communal house courtyard, the knife-shaped lance requesting ceremony, and the knife-shaped lance using ceremony (also known as the pig slashing ceremony) which must be performed at midday when *cỗ Ngọc tế Thánh* (i.e., the banquet of holy sacrifice to the tutelary god) is made. After the holy sacrifice to the tutelary god, the banquet food is divided equally between the Sacrifice Ceremony Board and the communal housekeepers. The sacrificial pork is also divided equally among the age groups of the sub-villages that serve the festival. Each ration must have pork from both sub-villages. The sacrificial pork is a holy fortune, so it is very precious and is never sold. Those members who are given sacrificial pork bring it home to prepare, worship at home, and for family members to eat. In the afternoon, the Sacrifice Ceremony Board, together with the Đám’s family, perform the festival closing ceremony.

The Ném Thượng villagers believe that these rituals are a way to show respect to the village’s tutelary god, to commemorate the merits, and to teach future generations about the patriotism and courage of the Saint Đoàn Thượng.

3.2. Pressure from Animals Asia Foundation

In August 2011, a Facebook page “Calling for a Ban on the Pig-slashing Festival in Tiên Du - Bắc Ninh” was established with not so many postings. In 2013, the Animals Asia Foundation, established in 1998, sent a letter to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of Culture) and the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (hereinafter referred to as the Department of Culture) of Bắc Ninh province, expressing concern and opposition to the pig-slashing ceremony in Ném Thượng

village because of its cruelty to animals and its negative effects on viewers, especially children (Quỳnh Trang, 2015e). In an interview on VnExpress, Nguyễn Tam Thanh from the Animals Asia Foundation said, “In 2013, we sent a letter expressing our concerns and objections to Minister of Ministry of Culture Hoàng Tuấn Anh and Nguyễn Văn Phong, Director of Bắc Ninh’s Department of Culture” (Hương Thu, 2015).

In 2014, the organisation still saw the festival taking place with sacrifices. Thanh said: “We oppose the pig-slashing ceremony because of its negative impacts on the welfare of animals and the whole society. In addition, a cultural festival is an opportunity for many people and generations to participate instead of being limited to few. Therefore, the locality should refine the programme to make it civilised and humane to spread a good tradition. Concerned that such a festival could be held in 2015, we continue to call for an end to the pig-slashing festival in Ném Thượng”. Moreover, Thanh also said that, as the Animals Asia Foundation recognises the unique beauty of Ném Thượng Village Festival, it only suggested not to organise the brutal pig-slashing ceremony because of its negative effects on the animal welfare as well as negative impacts on society as a whole (Thiên Lam, 2015). On 27 January 2015, the Animals Asia Foundation sent out a message calling for community signatures so that Vietnamese authorities could soon issue a law to end the pig-slashing festival in Bắc Ninh (Vũ Việt Tuấn, 2015a).

4. Impulsions for invention of tradition

4.1. From scientists

After learning about the message of the Animals Asia Foundation, scientists also commented on the Ném Thượng Village Festival with two lines of thinking, for and against. A special feature of this event was the role of the press and media in publishing the multi-dimensional opinions of scientists and the community. It can be said that the media served as the channel to create impulsion for opinions from scientists.

Respect the community’s decision

Many scientists suggested that the decision of the community should be respected and the issue should not be solved by administrative decisions. The authors would like to cite only two main points of view: (1) the ritual is not illegal, and (2) the community itself shall decide whether to abandon it or not. Bùi Quang Thắng from the Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies said, “The people of Ném Thượng village perform the pig-slashing ceremony as a sacred rite to commemorate General Đoàn Thượng. Ném Thượng villagers adopt this custom to remind their children and grandchildren of the village’s tutelary god. Therefore, this is ‘a ritual, not butchery’” (Công Khanh, 2015b). He believed that each culture had its own meaning containing differences, and it would not do to compare one culture with another culture.

Ngô Đức Thịnh pointed out one of UNESCO's principles that the customs and cultural traditions of each community are equal, as long as they do not infringe on human rights. He said, "I am always dissatisfied with the fact that some people give themselves the right to give very disrespectful judgments about the culture of another locality by using such words and phrases as brutal, barbaric, and unsound customs" (Cúc Đường, Mỹ Mỹ, 2015).

Nguyễn Chí Bền said, "Regarding the sacrifice ritual (i.e., the rite of slaughtering pigs), there is no international convention that prohibits this. This festival also does not plunge Vietnam into a state of violation against those international conventions that Vietnam has committed to" (Vũ Viết Tuấn, 2015c).

Lê Hồng Lý commented that, first of all, it was necessary to respect the role of cultural subjects because the cultural product belonged to them and was because of them, not anyone else. Therefore, he suggested that instead of using the law to ban a festival with unique cultural values, it was necessary to consult the community for changes and better preparation to ensure the festival retained its inherent values (Lê Hồng Lý, 2018).

Tô Ngọc Thanh said, "Don't impose standards of one area, one region, and one culture on other places. Even we, as cultural officials, only dare to consider and study the festival from its original nature, but do not dare to decide how to do with it" (Thiên Di, 2015).

Historian Dương Trung Quốc said that using such words and phrases as barbaric, cruel, and offensive when talking about a traditional festival was reckless. "If they say that when it comes to the request to protect wildlife in Vietnam, then I completely agree. But the rituals in the festival are associated with specific characteristics of traditional beliefs. Before making a final comment, one should be well-intentioned to understand the origins and history of those rituals" (An Nhiên, 2015).

It should not be maintained

Văn Như Cương expressed his opposition to this custom and said that it should be stopped. "I am against perpetuating the practice of slaughtering pigs," he said. "I read the newspaper and found the picture so creepy! I will forbid my children from going to the festival if they want to go there" (Thiên Di, 2015). From a psychological point of view, Vũ Thu Hương, from the Hanoi National University of Education said, "No one shall easily overcome the feeling of guilt when killing a creature for the first time. But once such a feeling has been overcome, it easily leads to other killings. This is a step towards greater crimes." Nguyễn Thị Hồng, from the Academy of Journalism and Communication said, "Those customs that were considered good in the past are no longer suitable for today's life and should be changed" (Quỳnh Trang, Hoàng Phương, 2015).

4.2. State agencies

Proposal to cancel the pig sacrifice ceremony

In 2013, after receiving many opinions expressing disagreement and proposing to adjust the pig-slashing custom at the Ném Thượng Village Festival, on 23 February 2013,

the Bắc Ninh Provincial People's Committee issued official document No.336/UBND-VX to the Department of External Culture, UNESCO, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on adjusting the custom of slaughtering pigs at the Ném Thượng Village Festival to make it acceptable. Accordingly, since 2013, the festival has not performed the pig-slashing custom, but the procession, worship, and other elements still follow traditional rituals (Thanh Thương, 2015).

In response to the proposal of the Animals Asia Foundation, on 28 October 2013, Bắc Ninh's Department of Culture also issued an official document stating: the Ném Thượng festival is a traditional one, dating back to the old days, whose content and form are in accordance with current regulations of the State. However, it is not recommended to maintain the ritual of slaughtering pigs as per the custom because this is offensive behaviour, not suitable for today's society (Thanh Thương, 2015).

In 2015, after receiving another message from the Animals Asia Foundation objecting to the continuation of the pig-slashing ritual, the Department of Culture of Bắc Ninh province sent an official document to the Bắc Ninh Provincial People's Committee proposing to change the pig-slashing festival in Ném Thượng village into the "pig procession" festival. Accordingly, this document proposed the collection of opinions of the residential community on renaming the "pig-slashing festival" to the "pig procession festival" from 2015 onwards. At the same time, it recommended Ném Thượng villagers to perform well the worship and procession as per the traditional ceremony. After the worship and procession, *cỗ Ngọc tế Thánh* is carried out without the pig-slashing ritual. In addition, it changes the custom of slaughtering pigs in the middle of the communal house courtyard into an area dedicated to performing the *cỗ Ngọc tế Thánh*, and limits the situation where participants dip their money in the pig's blood (Vũ Việt Tuấn, 2015c).

At the central level, Trần Thị Tuyết Mai from the Agency of Grassroots Culture said, "We have made it clear that we do not ban but also do not encourage time-honoured traditions with offensive, barbaric, and cruel images concerning public opinion" (Quỳnh Trang, 2015c). On 6 February 2015, the Sports & Culture newspaper quoted Phan Đình Tân, the spokesman of the Ministry of Culture as saying, "The view of the Ministry of Culture concerning this recommendation is not to support those festivals that carry violence because the Vietnamese culture is very humane, humanitarian, geared towards the values of truth, goodness, and beauty". Tân said, "Do not resort to the excuse of the community's tradition. Is the community of the pig-slashing village as big as the rest of the world? Following the reaction of the public through the newspaper coverage, I see that most of the readers oppose the pig-slashing festival. Some residents and researchers advocate maintaining that ritual because they are conservative" (Hoàng Lê, 2015).

At that time, Minister Hoàng Tuấn Anh (4 March 2015) also emphasised, "We cannot remain silent in the face of public anger over objectionable behaviour at some traditional festivals over the past few months". The minister asserted that such acts as stabbing

buffaloes and slashing pigs during festivals would have to be reconsidered. According to Minister Hoàng Tuấn Anh, those unsound customs of stabbing buffaloes, slashing pigs, and robbing bamboo flowers that took place in some recent festivals also carried many violent elements. Moreover, cultural organisations and animal protection organisations of the international community also expressed their deep concern. Therefore, we need to consider removing or changing certain forms and ways to ensure true harmony between tradition, culture, and contemporary values (Sỹ Liêm, 2015).

It is necessary to respect the opinion of the community

Among cultural management agencies, there are also views shared by some scientists that it is necessary to listen to public opinion. Trịnh Thị Thủy, Director of the Agency of Grassroots Culture under the Ministry of Culture said, “It is necessary to have a thorough study with the participation of cultural researchers to find out the root origin of that festival. Thereby, it is possible to determine which festivals are newly established, objectionable or not, that need to be terminated or not. This is because there are religious and spiritual festivals of many ethnic groups that have existed since time immemorial”. Therefore, Ms Thủy believes that for each specific festival, it is necessary to organise scientific seminars to have a multi-dimensional and objective view of the festival activities in that locality (Vũ Viết Tuấn, 2015a).

Sharing the same view, Nguyễn Thế Hùng, Director of the Department of Cultural Heritage said, “The essence of the problem needs to be clarified in the light of science. If researchers can prove the good and beauty of the festival, the festival must be maintained in the heart of the community as it is. Otherwise, the festival will adjust itself somewhat to accommodate the larger community. But with the festival of the customary nature as well as the long-standing nature, it is not possible to intervene by administrative documents. Also according to Nguyễn Thế Hùng, it is not good for management agencies to ban any festivals that touch animals in compliance with the calls of animal protection organisations. And the views of these organisations are for reference only” (Phạm Mỹ, 2015).

On 26 February 2015, Nguyễn Văn Ảnh, Deputy Director of Bắc Ninh’s Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, said that this festival had a tradition of several hundred years, embodying the cultural life of Ném Thượng villagers. “We cannot say quit and then quit right away,” Nguyễn Văn Ảnh asserted. “It is not possible to use administrative documents to ban the festival, if the festival does not violate the law nor goes against the needs and beliefs of Ném Thượng villagers” (Công Khanh, 2015b). Regarding the solution, he said that in the short term, it was necessary to ensure good security work to avoid the scene of jostling, pushing, or dipping money in the pig’s blood... In the long term, it was necessary to have time to propagate and mobilise for the village elders to change the perception of the pig-slashing ritual.

On the afternoon of 2 March 2015, at a regular press conference with the participation of leaders of nine ministries, Nguyễn Văn Nên, Minister-Chairman of the Government

Office, said that the pig-slashing festival in Ném Thượng village (Bắc Ninh), as well as other folk festivals of ethnic communities, is within the religious rites and cultural and spiritual life of locals. The organisation of the festival should be based on respecting the will of the community; at the same time, upholding good traditional cultural values and humanity, eliminating unsound customs that were no longer suitable for civilised society, and ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of UNESCO to which Vietnam is a party (Quỳnh Trang, 2015d).

4.3. Interaction between impulses

It can be seen that impulses that directly affect the pig-slashing ceremony of the Ném Thượng Village Festival came from three groups, namely, the Animals Asia Foundation, scientists, and state management agencies. The initial results of the above impulses led to the approval of Ném Thượng villagers in 2013 and 2014. During these two years, pig sacrifices for worshipping purposes still took place but in the backyard of the communal house and more discreetly (Quỳnh Trang, 2015b).

However, after two years of not holding the pig-slashing ritual at the communal house, the majority of villagers found that it was not appropriate, and tried to prove the origin and rationality of this ritual. Villagers expressed their frustration and maintained that the episode of “slaughtering pigs to make a *cỗ Ngọc tế Thánh* in the middle of the communal house courtyard is the true re-enactment of tutelary god Lý Đoàn Thượng’s soul, without that performance the festival would not be complete” (Phùng Thị Hải Thanh, Nguyễn Tiến Đức, 2015, p.24). On 10 February 2015, Soha newspaper reported that more than 100 elders of the Thượng quarter (Bắc Ninh) held a meeting and disagreed with the change of the name of the “pig-slashing festival” to the “pig procession festival” as suggested by Bắc Ninh’s Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism (Hoàng Đan, 2015). Accordingly, the old and local people all wanted to keep the status quo of the pig-slashing festival with all rituals, especially the ritual of “*khai đao chém Ông In*” (the sacrificial pig slashing ritual in the middle of the communal house courtyard). At the same time, the elders all asserted that the Ném Thượng pig-slashing festival had a clear historical origin, and that the ritual had been maintained since ancient times, so it cannot be abandoned.

Nguyễn Đình Lợi, an elder from Ném Thượng village asserted, “The elders in the village have decided to maintain the pig-slashing festival. It does not violate the law at all, so the choice belongs to us” (Hồng Duy, 2015). Trần Văn Hân commented on the meaning and value of the festival, “My village’s elders were very upset when they were asked to change the traditional features of the festival. Our wish is to keep the customs of our ancestors. This is an opportunity for children and grandchildren from all over the world to gather, and recall the old stories together, to educate the heroic, indomitable tradition and

the spirit of solidarity against the enemy of tutelary god Lý's army. The custom of raising sacrificial pigs also encourages locals to raise good pigs".

VnExpress has interviewed people of different ages:

- Nguyễn Thị Định (84 years old) wishes to keep the customs and habits of her home village: "If you keep it, the festival will be more fun. For the past two years, we have not slaughtered pigs in the communal house courtyard anymore. As a result, the number of people and tourists coming to participate in the festival has decreased sharply".

- In response to the opinion of the Animals Asia Foundation about the pig-slashing festival negatively affecting young people, Nguyễn Văn Cường (24 years old) said, "I look at the festival in the direction of traditional beauty, encouraging livestock farming, nurturing, and arousing pride, solidarity, and the resilience of the nation. I think this traditional custom should be kept and still held in the communal house courtyard for everyone to witness. If the elders continue to quietly proceed it inside, the younger generations will not understand the village's customs and such customs will probably be lost in time" (Quỳnh Trang, 2015b).

- Villagers suggested applying the saying "The King's will yields to the village's customs". "This custom has existed for many generations, but if pig-slashing is forbidden, everyone will oppose it. I still want this traditional ritual to continue. The festival is crowded every year. I have been married and living here for a long time, but I have never seen the scene of pig knifing. But it is a village custom and it would be very sad if it is not organised anymore," said Nguyễn Thị Hương (50 years old, Ném Thượng village) (Trần Oanh, Hải Yến, 2015).

And finally, on 24 February 2015 (i.e., the sixth day of the Lunar New Year), the pig-slashing ceremony took place at the communal house courtyard of Ném Thượng village. Mr Tịnh, the headsman of the 2015 festival said, "In this year's 'Ông Ỉn' slashing ceremony, we completed the whole thing in a period of seven minutes and followed the old traditions of the elders. I feel very calm, proud, and comfortable because I was chosen to slash the "Ông Ỉn" for the preparation of *cỗ Ngọc tế Thánh*. This is a traditional ritual of our Thượng area" (Hoàng Đan, H. Sơn, 2015).

On 22 December 2015, the Ministry of Culture issued Circular No.15/2015/TT-BVHTTDL regulating not to organise festivals containing the content inciting violence. The Ném Thượng Village Festival with its customary rituals of slaughtering pigs in the courtyard of the communal house is classified as containing a violent element. In January 2016, Lưu Đình Thực, Vice Chairman of Bắc Ninh city said that Ném Thượng village was not conferred the title of a "Cultural Village" in 2015 and the head would be dealt with if the pig-slashing ritual was still allowed to take place in the middle of the communal house courtyard (Quỳnh Trang, 2015a). Since then, although the Ném Thượng Village Festival has still been taking place, this pig-slashing ritual has now taken place discreetly in a tent set up at the corner of the communal house (Đỗ Mạnh Cường, 2018).

5. Inventing tradition from intersection of impulsions

It can be seen that a traditional festival is affected by many forces from many sides and levels. These impulsions, on the one hand, have prevented the village festival from taking place in a regular and immutable manner. On the other hand, they serve as impulsions for the traditional festival to change strongly so as to better suit new social circumstances. Going back to Hobsbawm, it can be said that the impulsions interaction process has contributed to creating new elements in a traditional festival and thereby asserting the role of the state in managing society. Further, this interaction also helps with the promotion of social cohesion when members of the local community are united in the process of negotiating and bargaining amid impulsions. Ném Thượng village's pig-slashing activity can be viewed as a case study for observing these impulsions in action.

First of all, it must be admitted that the pig-slashing ritual of this village festival itself is only reinvented through the stories and memories of the village elders during the restoration of the festival in the late 1990s. There is not a single text record that depicts the custom of slaughtering pigs as being practised. However, the practice wins the consensus of the village community and is said to be consistent with the legend and the rite of worshipping the village tutelary god. This ritual is the culmination of both the festival process and also the focal point of criticism of some impulsions. It can be seen that, before the appearance of widespread media coverage, visitors who went to see the festival only kept their emotions and feelings in their memories and photos. But since the appearance of social networks such as Facebook and YouTube, such images quickly spread and have a strong social impact.

Looking back at 2013, when the Animals Asia Foundation sent a written petition to the Ministry of Culture and the Department of Culture of Bắc Ninh province to oppose the pig-slashing activity: This first impulsion came from an international organisation. In the context of international integration, both the ministry and the provincial department responded and clearly expressed their attitude towards the proposal of the Animals Asia Foundation. Such an attitude turned into speeches and documents to interact with Ném Thượng villagers in compromising to change the festival process, towards stopping the pig-slashing activity. Under the pressure of the state management agencies, the ministry, the provincial department, and Ném Thượng villagers accepted the adjustment and downsizing of the sacrificial activities in the years 2013 and 2014.

However, after two years of adjustment, perhaps the organising committee of the festival in the village was also under pressure from itself and the community, so in 2015 the pig-slashing ceremony was again performed at the communal house courtyard. Interviews with villagers show that the community found that the removal of the most important ritual in the festival process reduced the emotions and lost the meaning of the Ném Thượng Village Festival. Then, the Ministry of Culture had to issue Circular No.15/2015/TT-BVHTTDL dated 22 December 2015 to regulate festivals with content that

incites violence. And since 2016, the villagers have compromised by performing this ritual more discreetly in a tent at the corner of the communal house courtyard².

Central or local state management agencies and scientists maintain both opposing and supportive views. Both views have valid and hard-to-refuse argumentative kernels. However, it should be recognised that the traditions and rituals of a community will only be perpetuated by that community. So, despite strong pressure, the Ném Thượng Village Festival is ultimately organised and performed by the villagers themselves. Villagers have made certain adjustments and negotiated with the cultural management system not to break the law, but to meet the requirements of the government and state management agencies, and to maintain community spiritual practice, as Lê Hồng Lý commented on the change of a cultural phenomenon to adapt to the situation and existing environment for its survival. For instance, the Phết Festival in Hiền Quan commune (i.e., Phết Hiền Quan Festival) in 2017 experienced a positive change after a discussion between the community, government, and scientists was held at the end of 2016 (Lê Hồng Lý, 2017). Similarly, when analysing the Đồ Sơn Buffalo Fighting Festival, Trần Hữu Sơn said that it is necessary to renew the management of the festival in order to have coordination between the government and the people (community) so that the festival can both be preserved and developed in accordance with the era of the market economy (Trần Hữu Sơn, 2018). As for the authors, festivals in modern society will also need to self-adjust to suit contemporary legal, ethical, and cultural requirements. Therefore, the violent images in the Ném Thượng Village Festival need to be considered by the community and cultural management agencies for improvement in the direction of minimising or symbolising so that the ritual is performed in line with procedures and still carries humanistic messages and meanings.

State intervention and participation in festivals are not new, but today there are also pressure from international organisations, scientists, and especially media agencies. All pressure contributes significantly to the adjustment of a cultural phenomenon, also known as the process of reinventing the tradition. To conclude the discussion, I would like to quote Trần Ngọc Thêm: “I think that, with the passage of time, the concept of culture and spirituality of Ném Thượng villagers may change. Ném Thượng village may eventually become urbanized, and the pig-slashing festival will either disappear on its own or in another way. But that can only be a natural process decided by the cultural subjects, outsiders cannot force them to change in the name of anything” (Hoàng Đan, H. Sơn, 2015).

6. Conclusion

The invention of tradition takes place anywhere, anytime, especially with controversial festivals. Through the case of the pig-slashing ritual in Ném Thượng village, Bắc Ninh

² However, Circular No.15/2015/TT-BVHTTDL was abolished by Circular No.05/2019/TT-BVHTTDL dated 17 July 2019.

province, the article wants to show that modern society contains many sources of pressure, bringing the transformational potential to any cultural phenomenon. It not only regulates the relationship between the community and the sources of pressure, but also promotes the transformation of cultural traditions. It is in that process that traditions are constantly being reinvented to fit new circumstances. Therefore, it is necessary to realise that the sources of impetus to promote change are diverse and that the negotiation and compromise process between the insiders is a way for the soul of the national cultural tradition to exist sustainably and healthily in today's society.

Note: Translator: Lương Quang Luyện. Language editor: Etienne Mahler.

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Correction: We would like to correct the names of the corresponding authors in the article “Conceptual Metaphor of “Nation is Human” in Vietnamese Electronic News” of No. 2 (208), 2022, as follows: 1. Nguyễn Thị Bích Hạnh, Graduate Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences; 2. Lê Viên Lan Hương, Faculty of Foreign Language, Vietnam Military Medical University. We are sincerely sorry for any inconveniences caused.