

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE AND COMMUNE ORGANIZATION IN THE NORTHWEST MOUNTAINOUS REGION (CASE STUDY OF THE MONG AND THAI ETHNIC GROUPS)

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In the era of modernization and international integration, Vietnam must tackle the relation between cultural identity and traditional and modern development which are very important today. Vietnam's culture not only is created by Viet people but ethnic minorities play a key role to diversify national identity. Thereby, researching village structure, social organization, and customs of the northern mountainous villages is very important. Researching traditional village models plays a key role to preserve positive values of minority culture, simultaneously, some proposed policies of modern villages may be applied for villages which lie in remote areas in Vietnam. This is a repercussion of the policy of making rural areas closer to urban areas and eliminating the disparity between the rich and the impoverished, cultural differences, and consolidating the national solidarity. Due to that, it is proposed to develop new rural development policies for the Northwest ethnic minorities in Vietnam. Because of the word limit of the article only the Mong people and the Thai people are the main case studies.

Keywords: Traditional village organization; Mong; Thai; Mountainous areas; Northwest; Solutions.

1. Introduction

Village (Lang) is a social organization and the primary system to establish the Vietnamese society. From the past to the present, agriculture village plays an important role in all aspects of indigenous inhabitants. Naturally, there are a handful of ethnic minorities that are residing in Northwest Vietnam, for example, Mong people and Thai people are conspicuous communities in population in Northwest Vietnam. Thereby, systematically research two ethnic groups is very necessary nowadays. Comparing these groups helps us to detect their analogies and differences, because the ethnic minority in Vietnam is extremely diverse so that we can not apply general policies to manage the villages. In fact, while Mong people live on the highest mountain, Thai people live in lower lands and gather in valleys, mountain cliffs. We need to pay much more attention to ethnic villages with a view to enhancing the revolution of modernization and urbanization, narrow the distance between different classes whose have distinct culture and lifestyle in our society. It also contributes to consolidating the solidarity and protect positive values of the ethnic

minority's culture.

2. Research overview

It is obvious that there are many reports which are relevant to village models published. Cam Trong came out his report in 1978, namely "Thai people in Northwest Vietnam". This report consists of Thai culture, society, and traditional customs. It took him a very long period to look into Thai people so that his work became well-known among anybody who would like to research Thai people. Moreover, Dang Nghiem Van, Hoang Xuan Chinh, Ha Trong Sinh announced a work, "Traditional culture of Thai people in Mai Chau" in 1988. These authors primarily referred to the village pilgrim of Thai people, furthermore, "Culture and history of Thai people in Vietnam" was published by Vietnam studies center in 1988 collected many reports in both domestic and overseas authors about Thai people. Many reports were congregated into the book, personally, "Chieng(Xieng), Vieng, Che-terms of the traditional community of Thai people" engrossed the author to be interested in it.

As for the village pilgrim of the Mong people, Pham Quang Hoan published his report, namely,

“Some characteristics of Mong accommodation”, printed in the Journal of Ethnic Studies in 1993. He referred to the main features of their houses, the structure of houses. As a result, this feature affects the common atmosphere, family structure, and community as well. In this journal, Pham Quang Hoan issued a report with the title “The roles of social structure to the management of natural resources of Mong people”, 1994. Hoan fully mentioned the social composition of Mong community and their family structure. Besides, Tran Van Binh came out his work, namely, “Culture of Northwestern ethnic community: issues and solutions”. In chapter 3, not only ethnic composition was reminded, but the native social structure of Mong people particularly harnessed.

Nonetheless, about both of two ethnic minorities in comparison, there was only work which referred to this topic, namely, “Traditional feature of Thai people in Son La province and Mong province and its influence to democratic rules in locals”, defended in 2000. This is a colossal work that mentioned the analogy and difference between Thai people and Mong people and some solutions are issued, included in the social structures of both these ethnic minorities. As a result, it has had either a particular work or a report to generalise two ethnic models and issues some solutions to protect and enhance the culture of social structures of these ethnic minorities. As a result, this report would like to foremostly clarify features of social models of Thai people and Mong people in comparison and propose some factual solutions for these affairs.

3. Research methods

First of all, there are two general methods of history to be applied for this topic, namely, the historical method and the logic method. The historical method applied to outline the evolutionary process of ethnic groups, in the case of Mong people and Thai people, accompanied by village structures. It is a very long-term evolution experienced by many complex supplantations. Hence, the historical method will play a key role to research the settlement process and village formation as well. Additionally, the logic method is utilized to seek a way to explain the paramount importance from characteristics of the traditional villages of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous areas, giving the most common features of the village. Thus, the author looks for answers to ameliorate traditional villages in the future.

In addition, the comparative method and the sociological investigation method have been applied for this report. The comparison method is used to compare the social structure, the organizational ways to set up a village. Consequently, the author

appoints common features of the villages of the Northwest mountainous areas. At the same time, the author also uses the method of sociological survey and ethnographic fieldwork, carry out field trips to villages of the Northwest mountainous provinces to conduct practical surveys in those villages. Particularly, Mong village in Sa Pa town, Lao Cai province.

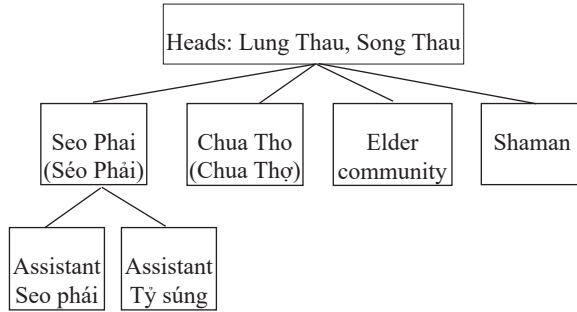
Finally, in research methods, the interdisciplinary research method is also implemented in this topic, which is the method of cultural research when studying ethnic cultures. Moreover, the sociological method to study the formation process and the development of ethnic minority communities are also important to research methods.

4. Research results

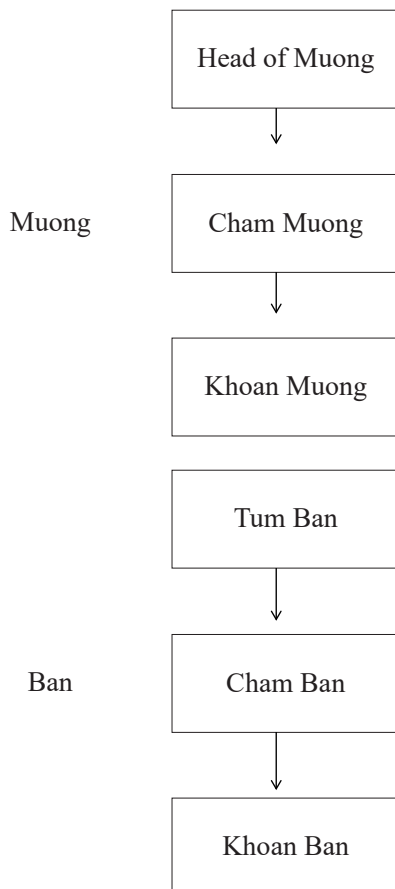
4.1. *Administrative organization depend on agriculture*

Conspicuously, ethnic groups associated with agricultural production so as to ensure their living standards. The economy is self-sufficient in the absence of an exchange economy, creating closedness. As for Mong people, the traditional economy includes three main parts, namely, cultivation, which is including husbandry and gathering, handicraft, and exchange. This economic structure creates a “footstep” in development. Thanks to it, the Mong has established a balanced of sustainability in the natural environment that poses many disadvantages to their food production. Moreover, agricultural society is the feature of these villages. As for Mong people, who manage the society through the “Giao regime”. Each unit contains from 5 to 6 families. The head is “Lung Thau”, under Lung Thau is Seo Phai and his subordinates. In addition, there is an elder council and the priests for the important occasions of the village. Private fields belong to the hands of the governor or the manager of Lung Thau. Peasants are freely cultivated because social class division in the Mong society is not so profound. Even though Seo Phai has many privileges but these people must still plow every crop with other peasants. Nonetheless, the “Tho Ty” regime is the main factor of agrarian management in Mong hamlets. Basically, the square of paddy fields are managed by “Giao”, even peasants are able to cultivate both public fields and private fields freely. Additionally, these owners of paddy fields have the right of birthright. As a result, the fields show the autonomous feature, namely, hereditary. Furthermore, referred to as the autonomy of these villages, each village in the Northwest region has its own characteristics of autonomy. For example, Mong village is autonomous and closed due to the characteristics of the ethnic group. The Mong people built their own village, encapsulated

in a family of at least 5 families. Besides, Mong people rarely interact with other ethnic groups so much as proof of their autonomy. They choose to live self-contained because they are an exotic ethnic group in the past and dwell on a relatively high mountain. Besides, Mong's community cohesion is very stable in the fight for their survival and immigration, attaching importance to the origins of ethnic groups.



Meanwhile, “Muong” and “Ban” are two basic units to create a village of Thai people. After that, its traditional model were influenced by Viet people and the suzerainty of French colony, this paradigm was constant albeit there were some changes.



“Muong” of Thai people was organized by the manor, based on the land without relationship of blood family. *“It is public fields, owned by extended families and different family. Ban is the smallest unit of Thai society”* (La Van Lo, Dang Nghiem Van, 1968: 24). Each manor has some “Muong”, includes central “Muong” and smaller “Muong” around. Central “Muong” is center of economics, culture and politics of the manor. Administrative organization is in there to hold religious activities and festivals. However, there is always a superior “Muong” to hold the power so that other “Muong” are not strong. Local office is located in central “Ban” where families, aristocracy and landlords live. The head of “Muong” called by “Tum ban” who has power of economy, property and authority. The traditional Thai economy is quite strong in agriculture. Economic activities in traditional society of Thai people consists of cultivation, handicraft, breeding, etc,... Both ways have not separate despite three working divisions occurred in history. Fields and lands play an vital role in Thai villages. As a result, water rice becomes a main food crops. Due to the agricultural production, the villages are often located along the edges of hills, rivers, streams, valleys, and close to fields. This poses many benefits for their agricultural development. Residents live mainly on stilts - a traditional house of the ethnic group, with a relatively solid structure. This site is both a place of economic activities and cultural activities. The stilt house is higher than the ground to avoid wild animals and provide favorite condition to raise livestock and poultry, raise all kinds of animals for trade and slaughter. The Field-house structure on stilts is the main structure in Northwest villages. However, due to the difficult socio-economic conditions, living in an unfavorable area in terms of transportation, the agriculture of the villages is boldly self-sufficient, only serving the needs. As a result, they have to face many obstacles. Thai people have a lot of experience in digging ditches, erecting rafts, and drawing water. Rice is the main source of food, especially sticky rice. The Thai also cultivate upland fields, cultivate upland fields, grow upland rice and crops, and many other fruits and tubers. Generally speaking, the Thai have a relatively discrete organizational model and relatively high autonomy because the state is modeled on the Mandala paradigm, the organizational apparatus. Despite it, landlords and assistants depend on their role and social position to hold the power in the agrarian management, exploit workers by tax and hard labour. Furthermore, land ownership also includes two types, namely public and private, but the land is divided into many categories, including temple fields, this characteristic is similar to Vietnamese

land ownership. The Thai people perform their autonomy by upholding the customary law of their people, so to a degree, the customary law of the Thai people overwhelms the law and handles the affairs of the village based on the customary law which has come from the tradition in their past.

4.2. Secondly, villages have both public and autonomy

The Mong village consists of either one or several families. A prominent feature of the Mong village is independent residence, living less alternately with villages of other ethnic groups. The Mong reside independently according to hamlets because the Mong has a very high sense of national conservation, only marriage relations within the same ethnic group, not residing with people of different ethnic groups. On the other hand, the living environment of the old Mong village was often stereotyped in isolated environments in upland areas, with limited relations, with few opportunities to increase opportunities for harmony and people of different ethnic groups. In addition, as for Mong people, the presence of Mong people makes the Northwestern area diversified compared to another region. Specified, Mong people structured by the basic lines: family, family line, ethnicity (ethnic group), country-ethnicity. These relations are closely linked on the basis of beliefs and religions at different levels: ancestor worship, house god, door god; clan worship rites; national-ethnic association ritual. These rituals of belief and religion make a solid structure in the community. About the autonomy, The Mong people reside alternately with many other ethnic groups, but still consciously gather into a small “ethnic” area. Perhaps, that is a common concept. The migrant community has to live on the land not of their native land, not the land of their ancestors. These areas are usually opposing slopes or valleys, with an altitude of over 1000m above sea level. These are unfavorable farming places, lands that were left behind by communities of people in search of their land. That is also one of the reasons creating national character, which rises to the occasion to assert themselves. The duality mentality, on the one hand, regrets the heroic past, wants to continue to achieve that, on the other hand, national inferiority has made the closed process more and more closed economically, humanly and culturally. This closure has the downside of being unaware or slowing down the recognition of weaknesses and the advantages to make adjustments in the new development, but on the upside it is to preserve almost all of their habits, customs, religions, beliefs, customs and traditional culture, ... The outstanding feature is the freedom, not wanting

to be touched, not wanting to join themselves in the framework. This lifestyle also greatly affects the views and perceptions of the Mong people in the surrounding world. The autonomy of the Mong village is also reflected in the closedness, hindering the exchange and development. The Mong villages of residence are scattered about several kilometers apart. Many nomadic villages are isolated and attractive. The living environment of the Mong people is almost closed, communication is limited, cultural exchanges are not expanded, the economy of self-sufficiency has created a “conservative” character according to the reasoning of the Mong. They do not need conditions to change their way of life. Currently, due to the requirement of economic restructuring, the Mong people have to go beyond their subjective consciousness. They produce according to the market needs and tastes of customers. They have to produce what people need and like. The demand for economic exchange has few development conditions, making it difficult to form markets in the Northwest region (except for border areas).

As for the Thai community, it is a close community of families, villages, and ethnic groups. Although the village is in the same Muong area, it is different from the other but the same region. Each house has a stream but the same village. The whole version heard a gong sound. Through the verse, it affirms the roots of the community, and of the nation. Community is not only shown in the life of struggling to make a living but also manifested in social activities. Especially in the forms of cultural arts, which are highly collective, Thai folk dance shows even more. The Thai people is a history of a group of people who persistently struggle, work hard to maintain life, to reach full happiness. The Thai have built their families, communities, hometowns, and peoples to develop in sustainable harmony. Therefore, all cultural values still overcome all challenges and shine. For many generations now, the Northwest Thai as well as the Thai people from all over the country have built invaluable spiritual and material heritage. These create a deep and simple identity in the community of ethnic groups. From their hard life, the Thai people have raised their intellectual level and developed in association with the ethnic groups. The autonomy of the Thai community is also manifested in the independence between the customary law of the Thai people and the law through self-governance. It is in customary law that Thai people have the ability to replace the law, reflecting the general level of development of society. Thai customary law has a positive value in Thai community organizations, such as regulations

on the rational use of forest resources, land, water resources, or progressive ideology on village protection. Not following the enemy, not raising the enemy was similar to the point of national defense. Reality shows that in many places, in the context that the law has not yet penetrated deeply, the role of customary law to replace the law is very necessary, especially in community management activities. Thai customary law has partly affirmed the role of social regulation, supplementing and supporting the necessary provisions of the law, creating conditions for the law to fulfill an effective social management role which results in meeting objective requirements in regulating relationships that arise in the community.

4.3. Thirdly, the head of villages control their villages by traditional regulations

As for Mong's regulations, the Mong village conventions (village conventions – cái lý người Mông) are based on the oral custom of the ethnic group, and at the same time based on the specific requirements of each village. But the strength of Dharma practices, the strength of the desire to strongly unite members, direct control of all members through village public opinion. Village public opinion is the official voice of the village community to protect Dharma customs and conventions. Especially, the Mong villages with low educational level, the communication environment is tightly molded in the relationships between the villages, the public opinion of the village plays an important role. The village public opinion became a force to guide and coerce the members to behave in accordance with the standards of conventions and legal practices. Village public opinion further influences the consciousness of members dominates the individual will, adjust it in accordance with the conventions, does well what has to be done. Public opinion is also an invisible rope binding all members to the operating mechanism of the village. The power of public opinion becomes even more powerful when the source of public opinion is a reputable person in the village such as village elders, village chiefs, family leaders. For example, customary laws may be applied to penalize the offender. Moreover, owners of cultivated fields will offer birthright to their male offsprings. The head is responsible for their fields. Silmutenously, Mong people respect the water resource so their customary laws focus on protecting the natural resource. Mong people in Lao Cai province consider forests to be the property of the community so that nobody is entitled to encroach into those jungles. Additionally, Mong people apply customary laws for burglary, divorce, marriage, and funerals. These laws not

only are custom but also modern laws that may be applied to the village. Two factors are consensus by the community. It is a regulatory fundamental to maintain and adjust activities in the village.

The characteristic of the customary law of Thai people is that it is not “law” and of course not “customary”, but an intermediate form between law and custom. In other words, it is a highly developed form of Thai customs and practices and is a primitive form, a form of legal precedent. Therefore, this form of customary law is suitable for pre-industrial society, small communities associated with each ethnic group, each specific locality. Thai customary law has a wide scope, including the entire Muong, the whole region, even many contents that adjust for the whole ethnic group. In the treasury of customary law, the Thai people do not limit the penalty, can execute a number of crimes, and have unlimited jurisdiction to judge, unlike the Vietnamese convention that the village has limited penalty and limit on maximum powers of adjudication. The customary law of the Thai people clearly demonstrates the mediating role of harmonizing interests and obligations among members of the Thai community. Although customary law provides for some local interest for the ruling class, for peer members in the community it is harmoniously regulated by customary law. Thai customary law plays a very important role in the social management of Thai people, regulating many relationships of social life relationships in the whole Muong and the whole region. It was like a law, as well as a law, a convention, an institution, and a state management tool at that time. Effective management of Muong law, depending on specific historical time, it has the effect of replacing the law, as effective as the law to regulate relations in the Thai community. With customary laws governing the Thai community is relatively comprehensive, the Thai community is always united and cohesive with the ethnic groups in the Vietnamese community, building and defending the homeland.

5. Discussion

Because of these above features, the role of the state management plays utmost importance to preserve the spiritual values of ethnic minorities living in Northwestern Vietnam. The efficiency of the state in culture management is very crucial to encourage positive values and hamper the negative consequences of the ethnic minority.

Firstly, Mong families play a key important role in the economic - social-cultural life. Therefore, it is essential to promote the operational factors of social institutions, at the same time actively eliminate the backward customary elements of the Mong villages,

clearly define the problem of building cultural families and cultural villages. Family and village are central social institutions, contributing to poverty reduction, security and political protection. Hence, it is necessary to base on cultural characteristics in Mong villages to build cultural village criteria. The first criterion of the Mong cultural village is to have a stable economic life, protect the environment, and ensure hygiene as well. The second criterion of the Mong cultural village is to inherit and enhance the traditional culture, well-organized activities to improve people's knowledge, and then eliminate social evils. Furthermore, most of the villagers still do not pay attention to the law and have not built a way of life according to the law. Henceforth, renewing the content of the convention is still crucial. The convention becomes a supplementary tool for the law, regulates the manner of each villager in the village. Meanwhile, the villages of the Thai ethnic community in the Northwest are arranged in harmony with the valley ecosystem, leaning against the foothills and overlooking the fields and streams. In the villages, families regularly clean around the house; Village roads and alleys planted many kinds of precious trees and fruit trees to make a green space for the village. Thanks to the perennial greenery system, natural disasters such as flood pipes, flash floods, landslides, salt fog, the cold front may decrease in the future. Thus, adaptation to the habitat of the Thai ethnic community is a valuable experience to maintain the sustainability of green spaces, respond to natural disasters in the Northwest mountainous region, ensuring livestock health. Moreover, the factor that holds an important position in forming the common identity of the Thai ethnic community is the folk knowledge system (indigenous knowledge) in the process of rice cultivation, shifting cultivation on sloping land, and forest protection, making water for irrigation. Consequently, combining solutions to boost livelihoods in response to environmental changes on the basis of maintaining the sustainability of the natural ecosystem. This will strengthen the Northwest community's capacity to face environmental challenges caused by natural disasters. Therefore, it is very necessary to have attention and practically support from state agencies, international organizations, scientists, research, and training institutions inside and outside the Northwest region.

Secondly, traditional regulations of minority should be preserved because it is very important to the protection of cultural identity in Northwest Vietnam. It is undeniable that customary laws containing progressive customs such as life experience, with many scientific factors leading to

a positive and progressive lifestyle, in accordance with the law, are circulated and applied by the community. This is the paramount importance because it contributes to preserving the fine customs and enhancement of the village. Also starting from that, the uplands have the rules and regulations to help forming cultural villages according to the criteria of the district and the province. For example, customary laws in family are being implemented to maintain the tradition of family in the presence of matrimony relationship, avoids discords inside a family. Next, customary laws make a cohesion in the community. Moreover, the members, even though no one told anyone, all quit the shifting cultivation. The customary law on ownership of environmental resources: most people believe that watershed forests are "sacred forests", "ghost forests" are governed by gods, everyone has the responsibility to protect. This is a reserve forest and a place to provide water for long-term use in the community (even though there is a spiritual element). In case of violation, depending on the situation of rich and poor, the buffalo, cow, goat, pig, wine or rice will be sacrificed to pray for forgiveness. Especially, some people were kicked out of the village. The exploiting and gathering natural resources to satisfy the need of eating, drinking and treating diseases is not permitted. Thereby, customary laws have many benefits which is relevant to national laws. Nonetheless, authority should encourage ethnic villages to eliminate backward customs and boost positive customs to harmonize national regulations of states and policies of the Party.

6. Conclusion

In the era of industrialization and modernization, the traditional pattern of villages has been broken. People gradually either leave villages to urban to settle down or live in isolated villages, far away from the center, with dangerous roads and terrain. These become two main trends of ethnic villages today. Developed in the direction of industrialization, the village has made changes such as abandoning stilt houses, building more spacious and modern four-level houses, expanding the scale of the village. But there are also villages that still retain the traditional traits of their own ethnic communities, such as living in stilt houses and living off agriculture. It poses a problem in mountainous rural development in order to build a new countryside and to improve the quality of life of ethnic communities. Therefore, the measures we propose are only suggestive, it is important to apply these measures for new rural construction to bring the ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous areas to catch up with the new trend of society today.

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ĐẶC ĐIỂM CỦA TỔ CHỨC LÀNG XÃ CỔ TRUYỀN Ở VÙNG NÚI TÂY BẮC

(NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP LÀNG CỦA DÂN TỘC MÔNG VÀ DÂN TỘC THÁI)

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Tóm tắt

Trong thời kỳ hiện đại hóa và hội nhập quốc tế, Việt Nam cần phải giải quyết mối quan hệ giữa bản sắc văn hóa và phát triển, truyền thống và hiện đại. Văn hóa Việt Nam không chỉ là sự đóng góp của người Kinh mà còn là đóng góp của các dân tộc thiểu số khác. Trong đó, vùng núi Tây Bắc nước ta là địa bàn cư trú của nhiều dân tộc thiểu số. Chính vì vậy, việc nghiên cứu những đặc điểm chung trong cấu trúc làng xã, tổ chức xã hội, phong tục tập quán của các làng xã miền núi phía Bắc rất quan trọng, góp phần thực hiện chủ trương đưa nông thôn gần thành thị hơn, xóa bỏ sự chênh lệch giàu nghèo, khác biệt về văn hóa, củng cố khối đại đoàn kết toàn dân tộc của Đảng và Nhà nước ta hiện nay. Từ đó, đề xuất xây dựng chính sách phát triển nông thôn mới cho các dân tộc thiểu số Tây Bắc. Do giới hạn của bài báo khoa học, nên chúng tôi khảo sát hai trường hợp, đó là làng của dân tộc Mông và dân tộc Thái.

Từ khóa

Tổ chức làng xã cổ truyền; Dân tộc Mông; Dân tộc Thái; Miền núi; Tây Bắc; Giải pháp.