

## **Preliminary study on traditional festivals in Trang Dinh district, Lang Son province**

**Nguyen Van Bach<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Van Tien<sup>2\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Viet Bac College of Culture and Arts, Vietnam*

<sup>2\*</sup>*University of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam; tiennv@tnus.edu.vn*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Trang Dinh is a mountainous border district of Lang Son province, characterized by a diverse and culturally significant festival system. Each festival encompasses unique cultural practices, including the welcoming and farewell rituals for the Moon Fairy and the performance of Nang Hai singing; the lion-cat dance; antiphonal folk singing; the sacred palanquin procession; and various traditional folk games such as boat racing, shuttlecock throwing, and stick pushing. These elements contribute to a rich and distinctive cultural identity. As invaluable cultural heritage, these traditions play a crucial role in affirming ethnic cultural identity in the global context. Therefore, their preservation, promotion, and sustainable development are essential to ensuring their continuity for future generations.*

**Keywords:** *Festival management, festivals, traditions, Trang Dinh district, Lang Son province*

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### **I. Introduction**

The development of socio-economic life in the current era of global economic integration has had significant impacts on various aspects of society, including the management of traditional festivals in Trảng Định district, Lạng Sơn province. These impacts are both positive and negative. On the positive side, economic and technological advancements provide opportunities and modern conveniences that enable festival management to align with the overarching goals of heritage preservation and promotion while adapting to the socio-economic conditions of both the locality and the country. Additionally, traditional festivals contribute to job creation for local communities and reinforce cultural identity through promotion and public engagement.

However, socio-economic development also poses challenges to festival management. Cultural resources are at risk due to the erosion of ethnic cultural identity, the influence of foreign cultures, and the effects of urbanization. Economic resources have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulties in mobilizing social contributions in mountainous areas, inefficiencies in festival organization, and budget cuts for cultural activities. Furthermore, human resources have been impacted by employment-related migration, posing further challenges to the sustainability of traditional festival management.

### **II. Literature review**

Traditional festivals and their management have been a subject of extensive research from various perspectives.

The book “Contributions to the understanding of Vietnamese Culture” (Social Sciences publishing house, 1996) is a collection of essays by Professor Nguyen Van Huyen, originally written in the early 20th century. This book includes numerous studies on Vietnamese festivals, rituals and Tet, with a notable focus on the Phu Dong Festival.

In 1958, Nguyen Dong Chi published an article titled “Some ancient customs and games of the Vietnamese during the Lunar new year and spring” in the *Journal of Research on literature, history and geography*. This work provides an analysis of both the positive and negative aspects of traditional festivals, helping to distinguish between religious beliefs and superstition, as well as beneficial and detrimental festival practices.

In 1974, a group of authors including Tran Quoc Vuong, Le Van Hao, and Duong Tat Tu published the book “Spring and Vietnamese customs” (Culture publishing house). Besides offering an overview of Vietnamese customs and traditions, the book introduces spring festivals of ethnic minority groups (Chapter V) and those of the Vietnamese majority (Chapter VI).

In 1984, Thu Linh and Dang Van Lung published “Traditional and modern festivals” (Culture publishing house), one of the first works to examine festivals from a state management perspective. The book analyzes the historical development of festivals, their structure, components, values, and socio-cultural impacts. Additionally, the authors provide insights into the future development of festivals.

In 1992, the Vietnam Folklore Institute published “Traditional festivals” (Social Sciences publishing house), which compiles various studies on traditional festivals in the northern delta region of Vietnam. Notably, Le Trung Vu’s essay “On the classification of festivals in Vietnam” establishes a theoretical framework for categorizing traditional Vietnamese festivals.

In 2002, Bui Hoai Son published “Management of traditional Vietnamese festivals” (Ethnic Culture publishing house). This book, divided into four chapters, provides an overview of festival studies as cultural heritage, examines management challenges in the modern era, analyzes the current state of festival management, and proposes strategies for improving festival governance.

In 2005, Hoang Nam published “Some solutions for managing folk festivals” (Ethnic Culture publishing house), focusing on the folk festivals of the Tay and Nung ethnic groups in Lang Son province. The book outlines key characteristics, cultural significance, and values of these festivals while suggesting management strategies for effective festival organization in mountainous regions.

In 2008, Professor Le Hong Ly published “The impact of the market economy on religious festivals” (Culture & Information publishing house and Institute of Culture). This book thoroughly examines the concept of religious festivals, discusses theoretical issues related to their study, and explores the market economy’s influence on festival practices. The book also presents management models of two prominent religious festivals in Vietnam: the Ba Chua Kho temple festival and the Ba Chua Xu shrine Festival.

The book “Building civilization at relic sites and festivals” (National Political publishing house and Ethnic Culture publishing house, 2014), authored by Bui Hoai Son, Pham Lan Oanh, Le Hong Phuc, and Minh Anh, explores the close relationship between heritage sites and festivals.

In 2014, Hanoi University of Culture, in collaboration with Labour publishing house, released “Event and festival management”, compiled by Dr. Cao Duc Hai and M.A. Nguyen Khanh Ngoc. The book consists of three chapters and two appendices, providing a structured, practical, and legally compliant guide for managing events and festivals.

In 2015, Professor Nguyen Chi Ben published “Traditional festivals of the Vietnamese: Structure and Components” (Social Sciences publishing house). This book meticulously examines the key elements of traditional festivals, including worship figures, performances, offerings, and rituals. In Chapter 8, the author proposes measures for preserving and promoting festival values in the contemporary era.

### **III. Research methodology**

To accomplish the research objectives, this study employs several methodologies, including the systematization of documents, sociological survey, fieldwork, and analysis and synthesis methods. These approaches are utilized to systematize relevant information and data concerning the research subject, as well as to examine regulatory documents governing festival management in Trang Dinh district, Lang Son province.

### **IV. Research results**

#### **4.1. Number of festivals**

Trang Dinh district has a relatively large number of traditional festivals. However, due to prolonged periods of war, social unrest, and a lack of objective recognition, most of these festivals were discontinued for a significant time. From 1979 to 2001, only three festivals remained active in the district: the That Khe temple festival, the Nang Hai festival, and the Goc Sung Temple Festival. Since 2001, the local government has actively worked to restore traditional festivals in Trang Dinh district.

In 2002, the Department of Culture and Information of Lang Son province conducted a comprehensive survey of traditional festivals across the province. Specifically for Trang Dinh district, the survey recorded a total of 44 traditional festivals, most of which had not yet been revived.

In 2021, the Department of Culture and Information of Trang Dinh district conducted survey of local festivals. According to this survey, 13 festivals were actively being organized, including nine traditional festivals and four cultural or occupational festivals. However, as of April 2023, several additional traditional festivals have been successfully restored.

#### **4.2. Types of festivals**

The classification of festivals plays an essential role in festival research, as it helps managers identify the nature of the festivals, which in turn allows for the development of optimal management strategies. According to Decree 110/2018/ND-CP, Vietnamese festivals are classified into four main categories: traditional festivals, cultural festivals, occupational festivals, and foreign-origin festivals.

1/ Agricultural festivals: These include festivals related to seasonal rituals and reflections on agricultural cycles, such as the “Lồng Thồng” festival, “Oóc Pò” (Plowing festival), Rain Prayer festivals (Phải Lừa and Fireworks festival), and the Nang Hai festival. In Lang Son, fertility festivals are not conducted independently but are embedded within other rituals, such as the procession of “Tàng Thịnh” (Male fertility

symbol) and “Mặt Nguyệt” (Female fertility symbol) during the Ná Nhèm festival in Tran Yen, Bac Son, and the worship of the Nàng Tiên at the *Lồng Thờ* festival in Bung Kham, Trang Dinh district.

2/ Love and spring festivals: In the Tay and Nung languages, these festivals are referred to as “*thờng Báo Slao*” (Field of young men and women) or “*háng Báo Slao*” (Love market). These festivals typically consist only of social gatherings, without formal worship rituals, and focus on the exchange of songs between men and women. The participants, according to their age groups, have different purposes: younger participants seek romantic connections, while middle-aged and older individuals engage in these festivals for reflection on life and societal matters. These festivals are usually fixed to occur on a specific market day during the year.

3/ Festivals associated with other beliefs and folk religious festivals: The term “other beliefs” is used here to distinguish between agricultural festivals, which are closely linked to the region's geographical and cultural characteristics, and festivals related to other belief systems such as the worship of the *Tam, Tứ Phủ*, and the worship of *Đức Thánh Trần*. Religious festivals in Lang Son are generally associated with folk Buddhism, often taking place at temples self-managed by local communities, such as Tiên Temple, Bac Nga Temple, and Ta Lai Temple. The religious elements in these festivals are not as pronounced, making them closely related to traditional festivals. Thus, religious festivals are classified into this group.

4/ Folk historical festivals: These are festivals that commemorate historical events, whether real or mythologized, that have been passed down through generations in folk culture. In Lang Son, two prominent examples of this category are the Ná Nhèm festival (Tran Yen, Bac Son) and the Trờ Ngô festival (Yen Thinh, Huu Lung), both of which feature performances depicting battles against bandits or the Ngô invaders.

5/ Small community folk festivals: These festivals are organized within small local communities. For instance, in the town of That Khe, every year on the 2nd day of the 2nd lunar month, local neighborhoods perform a ritual at the *Thổ Công* temple, where only households from the respective neighborhood participate, with no involvement from other neighborhoods. While small in scale, these festivals can still be considered as a form of celebration because they include both ritual offerings (ceremonial part) and communal meals (recreational part). Similarly, the forest deity worship rituals in some regions of Lang Son can also be categorized as such small-scale festivals.

From this, it can be observed that the traditional festivals of Trang Dinh district are not only numerous but also diverse in terms of types and characteristics. Trang Dinh hosts a variety of festivals, including agricultural festivals such as the *Lồng Thờ* and *Nàng Hai* festivals, as well as trade-related festivals like the *Mẫu* temple festival and the *Gốc Sung* temple festival. The district also accommodates both ethnic minority and Vietnamese festivals.

#### **4.3. Scale of the festival**

In the past, due to difficult transportation and road conditions, the participants in traditional festivals in Trang Dinh district were mainly local residents from the surrounding areas. To this day, some festivals, such as the *Lồng Thờ* Bản Tét festival (held on the 8th day of the first lunar month in Bản Tét village, Hùng Việt commune), continue to attract mainly local villagers. Additionally, due to Trang Dinh's proximity to the Chinese border, many visitors from across the border have attended the festivals, both in the past and currently. These visitors are primarily the Zhuang ethnic group from Guangxi, China.

Currently, due to improved transportation, the scale of festivals in Trang Dinh has expanded, and the number of visitors has steadily increased over the years. Among these, the *Lồng Thờ* Bung Kham festival and the *Thờng Báo Slao* festival are the two most popular traditional festivals, attracting the largest number of visitors to the district.

Foreign visitors to Trang Dinh's traditional festivals come through two main sources: invitations from the People's Committee of Trang Dinh district and independent visitors. Organized groups invited to the festivals are easily monitored, as they have official invitations and specific guest lists, whereas independent visitors are harder to track, as they do not register with the festival organizers. However, the local security and border protection forces in Trang Dinh manage these independent visitors very closely, beginning from the immigration process.

Based on the festival data, it can be concluded that, over time and through the historical changes, the scale of festivals in Trang Dinh district has gradually expanded. Each year, the number of festival participants increases steadily, including both domestic and international visitors. This trend presents challenges for festival management, as it must be accompanied by maintaining security and order in the border region. Thanks to the strict control by security and border forces, no serious national security incidents have occurred during the festivals in Trang Dinh from 2015 to 2023.

## **V. Discussion**

In the context of globalization and international integration, traditional cultural values, including traditional festivals, face numerous challenges, difficulties, and even the risk of being diminished. However, alongside these challenges, there are still opportunities to promote, develop, and help cultural heritage establish

a sustainable position amidst the global storm. Achieving this requires effective strategies and management methods. The management of traditional festivals in Trang Dinh district is no exception to this reality. In recent years, Trang Dinh district has successfully revived many festivals that had been interrupted for a long period. Nevertheless, in order to protect and further develop these achievements in the current era, there remain many issues that need to be seriously studied. A key concern in determining the best path for the survival and development of traditional festival activities in Trang Dinh is to explore the contents of festival management at the local level.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The traditional festivals in Trang Dinh are diverse, rich, and unique, as they have been formed and developed on a cultural foundation that is both deep and expansive. In the past, almost all villages and neighborhoods in Trang Dinh district had their own traditional festivals. However, due to the impacts of war and turmoil, these festivals were nearly completely interrupted for a long period. In line with the spirit of Resolution TW5 of the 8th Party Congress on “Building an advanced Vietnamese culture with a strong national identity”, and responding to the aspirations of the local people, traditional festivals have been gradually revived since 2001 and have regained their significant role in the lives of the ethnic communities in Trang Dinh by 2023.

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