

# THE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL CHANGE OF MUONG PEOPLE IN HOA BINH PROVINCE TODAY

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*In the process of development, every culture has its absorption, influence and change due to the impact of certain socio-economic conditions. Culture of ethnic minorities in general and traditional culture of Muong people in Hoa Binh province in particular, are also undergoing constant changes under the impact of economic, political and cross-cultural factors. In the context of the dramatic change of the country's economy, the traditional culture of Muong people in Hoa Binh province also has profound changes on all aspects of life, such as spiritual culture, material culture, social culture... This transformation manifests itself on both positive and negative sides. Therefore, studying and pointing out problems arising in the process of cultural exchange and acculturation will help to give solutions, plans and orientations for the preservation and promotion of traditional culture of Muong ethnic group in Hoa Binh province in the near future.*

**Keywords:** Traditional cultural change; Muong people in Hoa Binh province; Production practices of Muong people; Culinary of Muong people.

## 1. Introduction

Hoa Binh is a mountainous province located at the northwest gateway of Vietnam. According to the 2019 national census, there are many ethnic groups living in Hoa Binh province, of which the largest one is the Muong, accounting for 63.3%. In the current development conditions, the material culture and spiritual culture of Muong people in Hoa Binh province are also affected by many factors, both positive and negative, therefore the traditional ethnic culture constantly changing. The problem for us today is not to limit the change, but to show what is happening, thereby offering a reasonable solution to preserving and promoting the traditional culture.

## 2. Study overview

So far, the study of factors affecting the cultural change of ethnic groups in general and Muong ethnic culture in particular has been interested in studying by many scholars at different angles. Typically, some research works such as: Grassroots project, “*Impact of urbanization on socio-economic changes in ethnic groups in the Northern Mountainous Area, 1986-2004*” (Tinh & Ha, 2005); Trinh Thi Hanh, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Lan, “*Changing livelihoods of Muong people in Ke village (Hien Luong, Da Bac, Hoa Binh) after resettlement up to now*”, graduation thesis, Faculty of Ethnic Minority Cultures, Hanoi University of Culture; “*Traditional culture of some ethnic groups in Hoa Binh*” (Nga,

1999); “*Muong people in Tan Lac - Hoa Binh province*” (Nga & Thanh, 2003); “*Folk cuisine of Muong people in Hoa Binh province*” (Chi, 2001); ... In this article, we analyze the cultural change of traditional Muong people in Hoa Binh province in the current period. On that basis, point out the issues that need to be considered and solved in order to preserve and promote the traditional cultural values of Muong people in Hoa Binh province, in the trend of integration and development.

## 3. Research method

In this article, we use these following methods: Primary source collection method, secondary source collection method; method of document analysis; methods of synthesis, comparison and statistics.

## 4. Research results

### 4.1. The transformation of material culture of Muong people in Hoa Binh province

*First, the change in material production practices..*

Currently, Muong people are still mainly engaged in agriculture, but they no longer grow a lot of glutinous rice but instead switch to growing new rice varieties with high productivity. “In farming, Muong people have increased their investment in science and technology, shifting from traditional sticky rice transplantation to mixed sticky rice ...” (Tinh, 2015a). The area of upland rice cultivation

is not large because the way of growing upland rice is no longer suitable and does not bring high economic efficiency. On the other hand, old-style cultivation affects the environment, eliminates forest and hill, and is contrary to the State's policy on hill and forest land management. At present, the industry structure is gradually changing, reducing the proportion of people working in agriculture, increasing the proportion in industry and services and people being more active in production labor towards meeting the needs of market, capture new production knowledge, proactively apply science and technology in agricultural production, in hillside garden economy. The material life of the Muong people has improved markedly, especially changes in consumption of goods, use of family living facilities, use of mass media and the facility to participate in cultural activities. However, there are still a part of Muong people living in remote areas where technical infrastructure has not yet developed, therefore awareness of market economy and scientific application in production is limited. A part of Muong people who migrated from the Hoa Binh Hydroelectricity lake still faces many difficulties, because the new place is not very favorable for economic development. Therefore, the State has invested in a number of socio-economic development programs and projects, stepped up the change of production methods, helping Muong people gradually stabilize their lives.

*Second, the change in social organization, the village*

Presently, villages of Muong ethnic people tend to expand near major roads and developed economic centers. In the villages, there are more people from other ethnic groups living together, from which appeared multi-ethnic families of culture and bloodline.

*Third, the changes in the house*

The house of Muong people in Hoa Binh province is the place where daily activities take place, symbolizing the harmony between heaven, earth and people. Muong people in Hoa Binh province usually live on stilts, which are modeled after folklore, called tortoise houses: *there are 4 roofs, 3 floors modeled on the concept of 3-floor 4-world space in the worldview of Muong people.*<sup>1</sup> The space in stilt houses clearly shows

<sup>1</sup>. The Muong people believe the universe is divided into three floors and four worlds. The top floor is the world of Muong Troi (Muong K, Loi) which is the residence of the King of Heaven and his servants. The middle floor is Muong Pua - the world of the living, families, neighbors, Muong, nature. The third floor has two worlds: Muong Pua Tin on the ground and Muong King Khuong (Muong Bua Khu) at the bottom of the water. The world below the ground is not the underworld, not the supernatural world but the world of the tiny people, the small ones, the way to the human world. King Khú's world is a kingdom of Khús under the rule of King Khú. The "three-floor-four-world" universe system is Muong Pao - the world of the people living at the center, all the worlds gather here. Each

the harmonious combination between utility and sacred, living space and cultural space, expressing the social order of Muong people.

Currently, the construction of Muong people's houses also has many changes. In the trend of change, the organizational rules in the space of Muong stilt houses are still complied with. Materials for house construction are also starting to become scarce, so it is very rare to have a stilt house according to the standards of an old stilt house. The stilt house of Muong is still present in the daily life of Muong people in Hoa Binh province, although over time it has many changes to suit the requirements of economic and social life. The old houses's buried pillars, wall, cork has been replaced with stone pillars, wooden walls and floors, both superficial, durable and handy, and the direction of the house often faces the road.

Muong people have an architectural exchange through skilled workers from other ethnic groups or villages. The traditional stilt houses are scattered, the current house is mainly modern style with different materials suitable to the economic capacity and comfort that the family wants.

In the past, Muong people used materials to make houses from herbs, bamboo, thatched leaves... today, building houses made of wood is very difficult. Therefore, depending on the economic conditions of each household, the appropriate materials are selected. Besides stilt houses, roofs and high-rise buildings also appear. *"Today, due to the growing economic conditions, the living standards of the people are improved, therefore, besides the traditional stilt houses in many areas of Muong people, there are tile roofed houses, flat roofed houses and tall buildings. The architecture of these types bears a Vietnamese impression. This change is happening more and more strongly and increasing incessantly"*(Tinh, 2015b). The houses on stilts are concreted and transformed accordingly, divided into bedrooms, common areas, places of worship. Kitchen is taken outside to avoid heat and dust, avoiding the messiness in life. The outdoor structure or the campus of the house also has many changes. The rice mortars placed at the foot of the stairs or the water trough for guests to wash their feet before go up the stairs also gradually disappear, instead of modern items such as household rice mills, taps led from suction pumps. water from wells or drilled wells. The gardens are surrounded by solid masonry walls for cultivation and animal husbandry.

In general, the strong socio-economic changes in Hoa Binh province in particular and the country in

world has its own nature, so the communication between the worlds is limited. Muong Pua is the natural world, the "realm" of Muong people. Muong Pua Tin, which is often trade with Muong Pua, is a natural but inferior world. Muong Troi is the most complete supernatural world: the time here is endless. Muong King Khu, more of a fairytale nature than religion, is a kind of supernatural world.

general have affected the community relations and residence model of Muong people. Corresponding to that model of residence, new standards and lifestyles gradually formed next to the valuable traditional community values of the Muong people. “*The manifestations of the relationship between people and the supernatural forces no longer weigh on the Muong stilt house. Instead, there are new relationships of new life possessing each house. An old style of living is lost to suit the current life*” (Tan Lac District People’s Committee & Ha Son Binh Department of Culture and Information, 1998). Corresponding to the change of residence model, new standards and lifestyles gradually formed alongside traditional cultural values of Muong people.

#### *Fourth, the change in culinary culture*

The culinary culture is changing in terms of materials due to the decline in traditional food supply, also borrowing the way of food processing to create delicious, beautiful and more attractive dishes. The Muong people tend to simplify dishes, the dishes during the festival appear more often in daily dishes. Eating and drinking utensils are also simple, borrowed in the direction of convenience and economy. The processing and preservation of food have also changed a lot, instead of salting or drying, Muong people have used refrigerators to preserve food.

Currently, Muong people in Hoa Binh province still retain the culture of using alcohol in the holidays. Many families still use natural leaf yeast to brew wine, but in the way of fermentation, the brewing technique has many changes. “Currently, at the fair, there are many ready-made yeasts that bring them from the bottom of the market, which are more convenient to cook. Therefore, traditional yeast does not work much anymore” (Nga & Thanh, 2003). Young people today prefer taste-stimulating drinks such as foreign wine, beer, fruit juice, and carbonated soft drinks. In general, the cuisine of Muong people today has gradually reduced the traditional symbolism, bringing new features of the economy and modern lifestyle, but still heavily of the cultural community of the Muong people.

#### *Fifth, the change in costumes*

Muong people treasure traditional costumes very much. In the holidays, Tet, festivals, weddings, funerals, Muong men and women wear traditional costumes. Currently, Muong people’s clothing tends to be classified into two categories: daily wear and festive costumes. Traditional costumes of Muong people today have many changes, simplified many details, with changes in designs and materials. There is a gradual transition from traditional attire to mixed attire that is mediated with borrowing from a Western suit to be handy. The use of traditional clothes is no longer regular in the daily life of young Muong people.

## **4.2. The transformation of spiritual culture of Muong people**

### *First, the change in language*

Currently, wherever there is a lot of Muong people living, the use of Muong language in daily activities still happens regularly in the family. However, there are borrowings of some words from other ethnic groups, especially Vietnamese, which have just appeared in the Muong language. Up to now, there are still a part of young Muong people who rarely use Muong language, mainly use Vietnamese, or do not know, or can hear but cannot speak Muong language.

### *Second, the change in beliefs and festivals*

In the life of Muong people, spiritual activities are very popular and abundant. Two prominent types of religious life of Muong people are polytheism and ancestor worship. The festival of Muong people in Hoa Binh province is usually small scale, bearing the popular beliefs that reflect the worldview of the ancient Muong people and is an expression of cultural exchange. Most festivals are related to agriculture and usually take place in the spring. In recent years, some folk beliefs of the Muong people are gradually fading, especially agricultural beliefs, many customs are gradually fading over time. The practice of ancestor worship also has many changes. The festivities have been simplified, the ceremony minimizes rituals therefore the sacredness fades. The festival is focused on creating a fun atmosphere, satisfying the needs of entertainment in the community.

### *Third, the change in marriage, birth, funeral*

The wedding is an important milestone in the married life of Muong people in Hoa Binh province. From the past to the present, Muong people always consider marriage important, so the wedding is sacred and cherished, the traditional marriage of Muong people follows the monogamy. To be considered husband and wife, it is necessary to organize a wedding ceremony, which is a condition for the community to recognize the coexistence of a couple. The wedding ceremony of Muong people in Hoa Binh province according to traditional ritual has many complicated procedures, including steps of pre-engagement ceremony, asking for marriage and welcoming the bride. To perform a traditional wedding ceremony is very expensive, time-consuming and requires a matchmaker (ông Mò), a marriage ambassador. The wedding ceremony of Muong people is held big, in addition to inviting brothers and relatives to share the joy, also inviting upper and lower villages to come to celebrate the bride and the groom.

Today, due to legal provisions, in the marriage, Muong people not only organize weddings to inform brothers and villages, to congratulate, but also men and women who are preparing to get married come

to local authority to get marriage registration. The implementation of marriage according to the State regulations is strictly implemented. The marriage rituals of Muong people now shorten the time and the ritual steps, follow the new lifestyle regulations, no longer cumbersome and expensive as before. So ông Mò's role is no longer as important as it used to be. The wedding also changes in a practical way, instead of giving self-woven fabric or essential objects in life as presents, most of Muong people celebrate the wedding with money to be able to buy really necessary things. In general, in the Muong wedding in Hoa Binh province today, there are many similarities with the wedding of the Kinh and some other ethnic groups. This shows that the cultural exchange and interaction has a strong impact on the culture of ethnic groups, including Muong people.

*Fourth, the change in childbirth and parenting practices*

After marriage, Muong people attach importance to giving birth and raising children. "The first criterion of a woman is to have the ability to give birth, know how to give birth and know how to be a mother" (Ha, 2011). The birth of a child has many important meanings for the family and clan. The Muong people in Hoa Binh province do not use whips, do not scold, but educate their children through actions in daily activities. By observing the gestures, attitudes and behaviors of adults, children learn and gradually form their personality. In the family, the eldest brother must learn how to perform rituals from his father, then the children imitate or learn from their older brother.

Nowadays, Muong people have a change in perception about giving birth and raising children, giving birth to only one or two children. The birth of a single child, especially a girl, is now also more openly recognized, boys or girls are raised very well to have a better life, have morality, good life and good living. Muong women during pregnancy are given special attention, taken to health facilities or health centers and commune clinics for routine pregnancy check-ups and pregnancy monitoring, vitamins and vaccinations as prescribed. The convenience for women to take traditional medicine also no longer exists. Worship rituals during pregnancy are no longer common. The vulgar, backward and unfounded taboos for pregnant women are also removed. Childbirth at home almost does not occur. Postpartum women are not laying on the oven even in winter or summer as before. The care and fostering of nutrition for pregnant women and babies are concerned, and follow the instructions of the medical staff. The concept of naming children also has many changes, if previously the Muong people thought that naming children bad for easy raising, today Muong parents give their children a very nice and meaningful name. At the school

age, children go to school. Parents are especially interested in the development of children.

*Fifth, the change in funeral customs*

The Muong people in Hoa Binh province have simplified many funeral rites, did not organize a stepping (Đạp ma) or cutting thread (Kẹ) ceremony, the funeral day also shortened to two days. The funeral have funeral families and local authorities, many agencies and organizations assist the funeral families in organizing, welcoming guests, cooking and serving funerals and making a list of guests. Rich families will invite shamans to conduct rituals, difficult families will invite shamans to organize funerals like Kinh people.

Previously, the coffin when taken out of the house was passed through the head window of the house where there is the main staircase, if the window is small, the house owner unloads the gable wall and passes the coffin through. Today the coffin is placed in the nave and taken through the main door. The previous eulogy in Muong language is now in Vietnamese, read by the Fatherland Front staff. The customs, such as cutting hair, rolling on the road, wearing mourning headband for three years until the end of the death anniversary, are only kept in some small villages and hamlets.

At present, there are almost no shamans who are proficient in funeral procedures according to traditional procedures and rituals, no funerals last for twelve nights, and not all three shamans (the main shaman, the two assistant shamans) perform rituals. When the family is in mourning, the Muong people restrict going to places for entertainment, festivals, weddings and also do not organize marriages for their descendants within a year. The Muong people believe that the taboo will help the family religion to be peaceful, avoiding the bad things.

**4.3. Issues raised in the cultural change of Muong people in Hoa Binh province today.**

Studying the cultural change of Muong people in Hoa Binh, we found that there are a number of issues that are posing in the current period:

- The relationship between economic development and preserving cultural identity of Muong people in Hoa Binh province, has not been deeply aware, cultural development has not kept up with economic development.

- Educational level is raised but there is a clear difference in the consciousness of the subjects about preserving and promoting the cultural values of Muong people in Hoa Binh province. The Muong people, especially the artisans, the older generation are aware of preserving traditional cultural values. A part is also inclined to pragmatic value, convenience... so there is a tendency to simplify cultural activities. A part of young people lack confidence, lack of pride in their national cultural identity, indifference to traditional culture.

- The traditional cultural changes of Muong people in Hoa Binh province poses urgent issues for current cultural policies. The cultural change associated with the process of socio-economic structural change under the impact of the State's policies and integration shows that the cultural change is double-sided and dependent on economic and political-social changes, with relative independence. With these changes, we need to develop appropriate cultural management policies.

## 5. Conclusion

Culture is not an immutable entity, through each different historical period, culture has changed to suit the general requirements of society. Today, under the impact of the market economy, the exchange, cross-cultural and globalization process that culture has certain changes. In that transformation, there are both positive aspects and negative effects which are not suitable with the local culture. The problem for us is to support positive changes and limit the negative changes affecting traditional cultural values.

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# BIẾN ĐỔI VĂN HÓA TRUYỀN THỐNG CỦA NGƯỜI MƯỜNG Ở TỈNH HÒA BÌNH HIỆN NAY

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## Tóm tắt

Trong quá trình phát triển, nền văn hóa nào cũng có sự tiếp thu, ảnh hưởng và biến đổi do tác động của những điều kiện kinh tế - xã hội nhất định. Văn hóa của các tộc người thiểu số nói chung và văn hóa truyền thống của người Mường ở tỉnh Hòa Bình nói riêng, cũng đang có sự biến đổi không ngừng dưới tác động của các nhân tố kinh tế, chính trị, giao thoa văn hóa. Trước bối cảnh biến đổi mạnh mẽ của nền kinh tế đất nước, văn hóa truyền thống của người Mường ở tỉnh Hòa Bình cũng có những biến đổi sâu sắc trên tất cả các mặt của đời sống như văn hóa tinh thần, văn hóa vật chất, văn hóa xã hội... Sự biến đổi này thể hiện trên cả hai mặt tích cực và tiêu cực. Vì vậy, việc nghiên cứu và chỉ ra những vấn đề nảy sinh trong quá trình giao lưu, tiếp biến văn hóa sẽ giúp đưa ra những giải pháp, kế hoạch, định hướng đối với việc bảo tồn, phát huy văn hóa truyền thống của tộc người Mường ở tỉnh Hòa Bình trong thời gian tới.

## Từ khoá

Biến đổi văn hóa truyền thống; Người Mường ở tỉnh Hòa Bình; Tập quán sản xuất của người Mường; âm thực của người Mường.