

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CHANGES IN MEANING OF THE *PADIL YAYA* SYMBOL IN THE KATU CULTURE

(Chake hamlet - Thuong Long - Nam Dong - Thua Thien Hue -Vietnam)

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INTRODUCTION

The *Padil yaya* symbol is very popular in the Katu hamlets and is commonly found in their performances, sculptures, daily activities, festivals, etc. Made from wood, cloth and engraved on the body, the symbol carries a wide variety of meanings, ranging from spiritual, witchcraft, decorative motifs to therapeutical, etc., but is commonly associated with religious beliefs. The symbol depicts a dancing woman. In the Katu language, *Yaya* means *dancing*, *Padil* means *woman*, *Padil yaya* means *dancing woman*. It functions both as a noun (a dance) and a verb (to dance). I am trying to recollect the feeling when I encountered this symbol everywhere: in textile products, body tattoos, drawings in the *Guol* house, sculptures on the village gate, statues on graves, the sacrifice offering festival, praying for rain and the head returning festival in the olden days.

As a matter of fact, the Katu people's life has undergone substantial and multi-faceted changes in economy, culture and society, in common with those of the whole country under the influence of various factors, among which is the policy of the State of Vietnam. The *Padil yaya* symbol has been subjected to direct and indirect influences exerted by these self-evident changes. Prof. Ngo Duc Thinh said that "*during the renewal process of ethnic cultural traditions, under the influence of endogenous and exogenous factors, the ultimate question is whether those traditions correspond to the socio-economic conditions or not*" (Ngo Duc Thinh, 1991). Echoing his opinion, Dr. Pham Duy Duc wrote "*adaptation is the self-adjustment and modification of endogenous factors in order to be suited to*

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exogenous ones”, and it is not “*opportunism or loss of identity and abilities of the nation but the development and confirmation of their cultural identity and dignity*” (Pham Duy Duc, 1996: 23-24).

In an approach to anthropology, this research focuses heavily on the involvement of the *Padil yaya* symbol under the impacts of natural factors and cultural, socio-economic policies and find out the influences of these changes on the cultural and religious life of the Katu thereby.

The Katu community in Chake hamlet, Thuong Long commune, Nam Dong District, in the West of Thua Thien Hue Province, 70km from the city centre was the destination of my field trip. Emigrating from Quang Nam in 1973, the Katu community here has the population of 317 people in 58 households (2003). Every year, they usually perform *Padil yaya* in ceremonial occasions, especially in the festival of new rice that continues to live on today. In the hamlet, there is a newly built *Guol* house, which in the past witnessed the presence of *Padil yaya*. Further, a large number of elderly people have profound understanding about *Padil yaya* and elder women wearing traditional costumes with the *Padil yaya* symbol is a common sight in the hamlet.

THE TRADITIONAL KATU SOCIETY AND THE *PADIL YAYA* SYMBOL

The Katu people number about 55,000 residing in and around the Truong Son range, the central region of Vietnam (40,000) and Laos (15,000, Sekong, Sanavan and Champassak provinces). In Vietnam, the Katu, for the most part, live in Quang Nam Province (Nam Giang, Dong Giang and Tay Giang districts) and the rest in Thua Thien Hue Province (Nam Dong and A Luoi provinces).

The Katu language belongs to the Mon-Khmer language group, which is among the 4 groups belonging to the South Asia language family (Austro – Asiatic). The Mon-Khmer language group consists of 9 branches: Katuic, Pearic, Khmer, Bahnaric, Khmuic, Monic, Palaungic, Khasi, Viet Muong (Davis Thomas, 1973: 138 – 141).

The Katu people are engaged mainly in the slash-and-burn cultivation, using simple techniques, such as hacking and burning off trees for seedlings and rudimentary agricultural implements like knives and sticks for poking holes. They use neither fertilizers nor tend their crops, but depend heavily on nature and the blessing of Gods. Therefore, the crop yields are low and unstable, which is partly remedied with everyday hunting by the young men and gathering by the women and children.

The *Vel* (hamlet) is a grassroots social unit which exists independently is not subordinate to any higher organizations. The hamlet is headed by *Takoore Vel*, who

is elected in democratic meetings and assigned with the tasks of administrating and managing all of the *Vel*'s affairs such as moving the hamlet, production, building the *Guol*, punishment, offering sacrifices, weddings, settling disputes, etc., in accordance to customs. He is an old man who is of the highest credit in and out of the hamlet, well learned in traditions and customs, and well experienced in farming and fighting. The *Tahar* (hamlet elder) and the *Takoor To* (head of the lineage) work as his advisors and assistants.

It is customary for the Katu to station their hamlet adjacent to waters. The traditional Katu hamlet is arranged as an oval shape with the surrounding fences and gate. In the *Vel*, the *Guol*, or the communal house, is situated in the middle or end of the hamlet where higher lands provide a good observation post, and exactly in the middle of the front yard of the *Guol* house stands a *Sinuar* (buffalo stabbing pillar). The *Guol*, where all important affairs are implemented, assumes a tremendous importance in the Katu's mind and their everyday activities. That is why *Guol* is considered as the heart of the hamlet, where Gods are worshipped and precious objects like gongs and jars are stored, where captured prey is exhibited, festivities and punishment take place, where the hamlet elders tell stories to his fellows, educating them on traditions and passing on experience; where the fighting plans are formulated and relations between clans are established, where single and elderly men sleep, etc. Therefore, the magnificent proportions of the *Guol* is their pride as it represents their power, prosperity and talents for other communities to see.

The Katu have a copious variety of festivals which are closely related to farming and life cycles. A large number of festivals are held on an annual basis in families and in the whole community such as *Cha avi teme* (festival of new rice), *Paach Guol* (inauguration of the *Guol* house), *Prong Och* (fraternization ceremony), victory celebration, safety begging ceremony when there is outbreak of disease, crop begging when there is starvation, celebration of young men's maturity, weddings, grave building ceremony *Teng Ping*, etc. In big festivals, they hold the buffalo stabbing ritual, dance the *Padil yaya* and sing folk songs like *chachap*, *kaloi*, *babooch*, *co lau co lenh*, etc.

According to L. Pichon (1938), the *Padil yaya* symbol can be found everywhere in the hamlet; on drawings in the *Guol* house, statues on graves, decorative motifs on clothing, sculptures on the gate, on the *Guol* house roof, tattoos on some men's foreheads, etc. (L. Pichon, 1938:370).

He maintained that *Padil yaya* is a sacred dance in crop begging, head hunting and buffalo stabbing ceremonies. This involved 6 women spinning their bodies and at the same time moving on tiptoe rhythmically around the buffalo stabbing pillar anti clockwise. Meanwhile, 6 men with shields and javelins dance the *Tantung*, which depicted Katu men hunting.

Unlike L. Pichon, the French scholar Bazacier (1951) focuses exclusively on forehead tattoos and stated that *Padil yaya* is not exactly a dancing woman, but symbolizes the human soul. According to him, only the hamlet elders, but not women, had tattoos of this kind. And this is exemplified by the case of the Bolo hamlet mayor in Hien district, Quang Nam Province. (Bezacier, 1951).

Agreeing with to Bezacier, the American scholar L. Mole (1970) holds that this symbol is the materialization of the human soul. Katu men usually have *Padil yaya* tattooed on their foreheads in a belief that it is their protective spirit which safeguards them from diseases, gives them wisdom and good fortune. (L. Mole, 1970).

Prof. Nguyen Quoc Loc (1984) also admits the popularity of this symbol. In his opinions, in the days of old, both Katu men and women had tattoos (crosses, the sun, etc.), the most popular was *Padil yaya* on the arms or foreheads, but he doesn't mention whether men or women had the tattoos. The tattoos were not merely for adornment but also for protection from illness and misfortunes induced by evils. Noteworthily, he says it was a way of marking the way home for the spirits and ensuring the bearer would not fall sick.

Ta Duc (2002) has recently conducted his research into the dance relating to the buffalo stabbing ceremony, and Nguyen Huu Thong (2003) in his typological approach associates the posture of the dancing woman to the buffalo stabbing pillar and the *Cai Dromang* pillar in the *Guol* house. They both agree that *Padil yaya*, which is associated with 'Mother Rice', is a sacred dance in the crop begging ritual depicting the woman's hands facing the sky as when begging for and receiving vitality from Gods, heaven and earth. (Ta Duc, 2002:52, 66; Nguyen Huu Thong, 2003)

CHAKE HAMLET AND THE CHANGES

The Chake hamlet was set up in 1920 in A Vuong commune, Hien district, Quang Nam Province with two main lineages Ta ruong and Pbling; its population was roughly 40 people distributed in 8 households. The first hamlet mayor was Mr. Koanh A Tuong (1920 – 1964). Chake was the name of a small stream pouring into Thu Bon river.

Economic activities in this period were highly primitive, people were engaged primarily in slash and burn farming, hunting and gathering for their livelihood and were heavily dependent on nature and Gods' blessings, which resulted in low and unstable crop yields. They had to adhere to customs, regulations and taboos in order to please Gods for fear that their spirits would be captured, triggering diseases and crop failures. Therefore, when breaking new grounds, they had to ask for Gods' permission through dreams. They would farm the new land if the dream

was good. Conversely, the Gods didn't grant them support and they would uproot themselves from the new land and seek for another one to avoid the punishment of Gods and evils.

As described by the chief hamlet elder A Vech (former hamlet mayor in the 1980s), when in Quang Nam, the hamlet had a round shape, the *Guol* house was set up at the end of the hamlet, the buffalo stabbing pillar was erected in the middle. There were surrounding fences but no gate. The *Guol* house was adorned with a great many *Padil yaya* drawings. Buffalo stabbing and *Padil yaya* dancing were an essential part in the festivals of new rice held annually. However, regarding the *Padil yaya* tattoo on human bodies, he said the motifs varied greatly from one man to another, such as round spot, three spots, the sun, etc., but only two elder men whose names he had forgotten, had *Padil yaya* tattoos. Besides, Rapat A Hong, the present hamlet mayor gave further information about this tattoo on his grandfather's forehead.

In face of the disturbing reality and development demand of the highlands, home to ethnic minority groups, in conformity with the Party's policies on nationalities, the State of Vietnam promulgated a series of cultural, socio-economic policies.

In 1968, the permanent agriculture and permanent settlement program was formally launched. This was a pivotal policy that brought about extensive changes in the residential areas of ethnic minority peoples, laying firm foundations for socio-economic development. The policy aimed to eliminate shifting cultivation and nomadic existence, clearing forests for new lands, eliminate poverty, providing all households with crop lands, residential lands and gardens; to provide electricity supply, roads, schools, medical stations, clean water supply, and to ensure sustainable agro-forestry production for forest protection.

The permanent agriculture and permanent settlement program came into effect in 1968, but not until the Katu community in Chake settled in Thuong Long commune in 1973 was it put into practice. This was owing to, according to hamlet elders, the topographical disadvantages they had to suffer in the former Chake hamlet, lack of croplands and difficult transport, which was hardly possible in rainy season (from October to the next February). The movement to Thuong Long commune generated forceful changes in terms of living environment, working and living conditions. The traditional economic activities such as slash and burn farming, hunting and gathering were still of prime importance. However, our compatriots acquainted themselves with wet rice cultivation. In addition, the barter and trading system was formed following the settlement of the Kinh people, who traded in farm produce like manioc, rice and other necessities in 1974.

In this period, the hamlet was made up of only two family lines, namely Ta ruong and Rapat, who occupied the only two long houses, each of which

encompassed 7 households who were regulated according to the number of kitchens. That is why despite the absence of the *Guol* house, the control was exerted strictly by the hamlet mayor. The regulations, traditional rules and taboos were still observed, as the hamlet elder A Vech put it “only in buffalo stabbing festival is *Padil yaya* dance performed”. The *Padil yaya* symbol can be found in textile products, graves and in festivals. But this is now on the wane.

In 1985, there appeared the phenomenon of bad death, the Katu believed that the land was punished by devils, which triggered their displacement to a new land 1km away, at the foot of *Toi Aka* mountain along the *Aka* spring. The topographical and natural conditions in Chake caused a host of difficulties to agriculture, transport and trading due to the separation and enclosure caused by the spring and mountain.

Topographical characters also greatly affected the hamlet’s make-up. After moving to the new land, the Katu didn’t live together in a large house but split up in different households. Despite the continued existence of stilt houses, houses built directly on the ground made their first appearance. Nevertheless, *Guol* house was not built as it was, according to A Vech, unnecessary for the hamlets.

Concentrated and interwoven residence began to take shape in Thuong Long commune. As well, the following years saw the settlement of some other hamlets, such as *Aprung*, *Kadai*. To the north-west of the hamlet was *Toi Aka* and *Chavo* hills, the other side of which was Thuong Quang commune; to the south east was the *Aka* stream across which lied *Axang* and *Agol* hamlets; the north east neighbored upon *Achieu* hamlet where People’s Committee of Thuong Long commune was situated, to the south west was Kadong hamlet.

Together with the development of the Thuong Long commune, household economy was diversified. However, slash and burn cultivation, hunting and gathering still played the foremost role. In the hamlet, a barter point was created by the only Viet household who had settled down here since 1994 and conducted trade in farm produce, sundry goods, rice husking service, alcohol distilling. Apart from on the spot trading with the Pacoh from A Luoi and the Katu from Hien, Viet, our compatriots brought farm produce and hunted animals to markets held along provincial roads (road number 49) such as Huong Giang market (5km away), Khe Tre (10km) or Xuan Loc (30km), La Son (48km, on the national highway 1A).

By 2003, this Katu community had lived there for 30 years, but it was not until mid-1990s that significant changes were made thanks to inflow of foreign investment. More importantly, generous and comprehensive investment produced multi-faceted changes in occupation structure, people’s intellectual standard, management work, material infrastructure and amenities, etc.

In face of the many difficulties posed by scattered residence and shifting cultivation nomadic residence, in 1996, the Government of Vietnam issued Instruction 393 regarding “*Population planning, infrastructure enhancement, production arrangement in mountainous areas*” which deals with 3 main issues: population planning, infrastructure building; production rearrangement in the long-term over a 15 year plan (1996-2010). Special attention is focussed on population rearrangement, mobilization for voluntary settlement in favorable areas in accordance with transport system planning, raw material areas, processing enterprises, in close coordination with the implementation of the permanent cultivation and residence and 327 programs, etc.

In 1997, the Prime Minister inacted Decision No. 35 concerning “*Building commune complex in mountainous regions*”. The goal of the program was creating cultural and socio-economic complexes in sub-regions, progressively bridging the gap between rural and urban areas; building material infrastructure, bringing science and technology achievements and information to ethnic minorities-populated areas; promoting cultural exchange and impulsing the economic development and economic structure shift, laying groundwork for the course of industrialization and modernization.

In 1998, the “*Socio-economic development of extremely poor highland communes*” program (Decision No. 135 is called Program 135 for short) was enforced. The objective was to upgrade the quality of material and spiritual life in extremely poor communes, to eradicate poverty and backwardness and to keep abreast with whole country’s development.

One may say that it is the State’s policies and above all, the permanent cultivation and residence program that have produced remarkable changes in the economic and social structure, transport system, festivals and religious faiths, etc. On the other hand, the concentrated and interwoven living pattern provide good opportunities for interactions among people of different nationalities, which explains the changes in folk cultural elements and adoption of new ones in costumes, rituals, language, etc. This affected the traditional environment of *Padil yaya* (festivals, sculptures and decoration) with the resultant altering of the *Padil yaya* symbol in terms of both meaning and form.

In this period, the staple economic activities remained slash and burn agriculture, but the economic structure was more multiform. Wet rice cultivation, animal husbandry, afforestation, gardening, VAC (garden – pond – pigsty), trading, etc. were brought into existence. In addition, hunting was still maintained but intermittently.

Above all, the Chake hamlet has owed their all-round infrastructure improvements to the projects “*Socio-economic development of extremely poor highland communes*” and “*Building commune complexes in remote areas*”. From

2000 to 2003, the results were already visible: 15 reservoirs (on average, 3 households share a tap), inter-hamlets roads (linking the hamlet with the commune centre); electricity supply, nursery schools and secondary schools for 3 communes. The projects radically changed the living conditions of the ethnic minorities, especially the transport system, trading, purchasing household utensils. In the hamlet, after road building was complete, the number of motor cycles went up to 3, this figure was 28 for bicycles; more than 90% of the households had access to electricity which they used for lighting and electrical appliances like TV (19 households), radio (30 households), cassette players (25 households); 2 houses were strongly built thanks to good roads that facilitated the transportation of building material. This reflected not only the betterment of the people's life but also their aspiration for a modern life.

With regard to social structure, contrary to the past when the Katu were independent communities in *Vels*, existing apart from higher organizations, the *Vel* is now a part of the contemporary State of Vietnam. The institution of the hamlet's governing apparatus which is under the management of the commune People's Committee and which pertains to the administrative system of the State of Vietnam, is composed of hamlet mayor (Ra pat A Hong, 32 years old), hamlet secretary (Ra pat Voi, 40) and chief hamlet elder (Ta ruong A Vech, 80), which reveals a profound change in the management system. Besides, the hamlet has 1 Party branch committee (14 members) and 5 political organizations, namely Vietnam Fatherland Front, Youth League (18 members), Women Association, Farmer Association and War Veteran Association who constitute a major contributing factor in economic development, law abidance, population administration, promotion of literature and art, etc. The role of "*Council of hamlet elders*" is not as important as it used to. However, when it comes to religion (making offerings), it still plays an essential part. Nowadays, the chief hamlet elder is elected after two meetings of the hamlet's Executive Committee and an enlarged meeting attended by 5 social groups, which is followed by an announcement to the public. Chief hamlet elder is more a symbolic title than reality. However, he enjoys the respect of the young because he is an elder man who has a good reputation and a broad knowledge of customs and traditions.

The Chake hamlet now contains only two ethnic groups, which are the Katu (in a majority) and the Viet (1 household) with 5 lineages of Ta ruong, Rapat, Pbling, Arat and Nguyen. Nowadays, beside Katu names used everyday, many of the names used in administrative documents are borrowed from the Kinh people since the 1980s such as Ho (Ta ruong), Tran (Arat), Pham (Pbling), etc.

The religious practices have also went through many changes. Some abstention and taboos ceased to exist; some liturgies relating to slash and burn farming practiced when seeking croplands, sowing seeds, harvesting and in new rice festivals, etc. have been simplified (time, venue, attendants, etc.). A change in the

new rice festival: held in May (summer rice harvest) and in individual families instead of October (winter rice harvest) and the whole community, may serve us a typical example. The newly introduced means of production (tools, strains, techniques, etc.) have advantages of productivity. As a result, new farming methods are brought into existence, leading to changes in the traditional harvest cycle. Furthermore, some religious practices have been adopted from the Kinh such as New Year festival, year-end offering, offering to Mr. Tao, setting up ancestral altar or Uncle Ho altar, etc., which means the role of deities has diminished, so has a system of religious conceptions regarding the god of rice, the god of earth, the god of rivers and springs, guardian angel, etc. It can be inferred that the religious environment (rituals) of *Padil yaya* has changed.

However, these changes proclaim the Katu's awareness of their falling behind economically, and therefore, all the State's policies are fully implemented and is accepted enthusiastically, which is launching a massive innovation movement across the ethnic minorities-populated regions. It is taking an accelerating trend that strongly affects all aspects of their life, including that in Chake, especially in the recent years.

The reality shows that there exist two culture adaptation tendencies in the new context. First, the ethnic minorities conserve and enhance appropriate traditions, making them their exclusive coloration (For example, the *Padil yaya* symbol is used in some materials as an expression of their demands for a new life. On the other hand, they invent many new *Padil yaya* motifs). Second, they liquidate inappropriate traditions, adopting new ones and enriching their cultural stock. (During the war time, the Katu, in response to the call of soldiers, they wore their hair short, kept livestock away from their house, cultivated wet rice, etc.). However, these trends don't manifest themselves clearly, and the integration of the two can be found in Chake.

This is how the Katu in Chake hamlet has preserved their ethnic identity in the current context. Because in the past, the Katu's ethnic identity was shaped and conserved in isolation from the external world, but now it is conserved and promoted by the economic, cultural, social policies of the Vietnamese State. Therefore, it is noticeable that these changes vary greatly among Katu groups according to where they live.

It is common knowledge that traditions are vulnerable in the tide of overwhelming changes, especially in underdeveloped ethnic minority groups and where development is urgently needed. It is not without reasons that hamlet elders are worried about the traditional standards being torn down, especially among the youth, who are sensitive to new ideas. In the hamlet, most of the youths model themselves on the Kinh's way of dress; they wear watches, drive motorbikes, drink coffee; they lose interest in traditional costumes and are ignorant about taboos in

hunting, building houses and hesitant to sing *chachap*, *babooch*, etc. Contradictions arise in the sense of tradition protection and modern way of life. It is impossible to preserve terraced field culture when people turn to wet rice cultivation for their livelihood; it is difficult to keep traditional cultural activities alive if they always dream for devices like TV, radio, motorbikes, etc. for a decent life.

It is notable that the Katu's confidently proclaim their awareness of folk culture conservation, which is conducted side by side with the needs of development and integration. They are attired with modern clothes that make it easy for them to do everyday activities and engage in social intercourse. But in festivals or art performances attended by other ethnic groups, they favour traditional attires.

In 1998, the policy "*Building and development of the advanced Vietnamese culture rich in cultural identity*" was promulgated by the Government of Vietnam (the Central Resolution 5, session VIII). This is one of pivotal cultural strategies which has made potent impacts on the cultural life of minority nationalities including the Katu. The centerpiece of the policy is the conservation and expansion of ethnic minorities' culture such as language and script; investigation, research and dissemination of cultural values; building up a civilized way of life and highly cultured families; socio-economic development, poverty alleviation, improvement of the quality of life, illiteracy eradication, improvement of people's intellectual standards, liquidation of corrupted customs. One of the big movements initiated by the Vietnamese Government is "*The whole population unite to build a cultured life*" which is meant to enhance the Central Resolution No. 5 as well as socialize the preservation and promotion of the national cultural identity.

The coordination of socio-economic policies and the movements "*The whole population unite to build a cultured life*" and "*building cultured hamlets*" brought many changes to life in Chake (under the project 135) to meet the demands of people's economic and cultural life such as inter-hamlets roads, water supply, establishment of 3 art performance teams, planning of volleyball field, some families buying more traditional costumes, 39 households now have toilets, 15 have bathrooms, building more breeding facilities, not letting cattle wander, etc. These are criteria laid down for the "*cultured hamlet*" title.

A noticeable change is found in the lay-out, outline, structure and building material of houses in the hamlet. In Chake, there are 5 thatched cottages, 2 tiled roof houses, 1 stilted house (belonging to the chief hamlet elder), the rest are tiled roof wooden houses or iron roofed wooden houses, 4 of which consist of 3 compartments and 2 lean-tos and were built by Northern workers in the 1990s. The mighty, spacious *Guol* house of the hamlet was constructed in 2001 to which the villagers contributed manpower (for logging and building) and subscriptions

(50,000VND/person x 312), which were spent on the buffalo for the inauguration ceremony and food for the party.

It is the common view of managing cadres in charge of cultural matters in the hamlet that the restoration of *Guol* depends on the budget for building. However, what I noted during the field trip was that the strong individuality of households pulled them away from traditional activities in the *Guol* house. Besides, the impotent role played by hamlet elders in the re-building of *Guol* was a matter of concern. The interviews revealed people's longing for a *Guol* house, but not a pressing need to use it (only 3/8 hamlets in Thuong Long commune, hamlets 2, 6 and Chake, have *Guol* houses). The driving force behind the birth of the *Guol* house in Chake is that it is one of the criteria set forth for the "cultured hamlet" title. Therefore, it is understandable that it has no attachment to the people. This points to different trends in the reinstatement of *Guol* houses in particular and cultural communal houses in general.

The first trend, a representative of which is Mr. A Vech, a former hamlet mayor, who was more intimate with *Guol* than his own home, shows hamlet elders' desire for the restoration of traditional architecture. The second trend, which is gaining currency among minority people in the Truong Son region, is building *Guol*, which has acquired new functions, as a response to the "building cultured hamlet" movement. Moreover, *Guol* is now no longer the index of strength and pride of the hamlet. Therefore, the presence or absence of *Guol* house as well as its decoration and upkeep have no longer attracted people's attention, which affected the building of a new *Guol*, evidenced by the vanishment of *Padil yaya* in the interior and on the *Guol* house top, etc. This can only be accounted for by the modification or disappearance of role, functions and structure of *Guol* house.

Guol in Chake hamlet today is different from the traditional ones to a large extent. The top of *Guol* is still attached with a cockered, a universal symbol in Nam Dong district, but which has been stylized into a yellow star. In the interior, the decorative designs generally have 3 basic colours of black, white and red, which are now diversified with chemical paints. Noteworthily, a wide range of new designs such as airplane, soldier, motorbike, red flag and yellow star, etc. have come into being.

THE CHANGES OF THE *PADIL YAYA* SYMBOL IN CHAKE HAMLET

The changes in the *Padil yaya* symbol were recorded based on different memories of Chake people about its meanings, forms, existence environment, etc. According to the hamlet elders A Vech (80 years old), A Keu (66 years old) and the managing cadres A Hong (hamlet chief, 32), Voi (hamlet secretary, 40), *Padil*

yaya is a sacred dance in sacrifice offering rites of the Katu which expresses the villagers' happiness and gratitude to deities' help. The Katu only dance *Padil yaya* on occasions of new rice festival, seedling festival, fraternization ceremony, successful hunting and head returning victory celebration, *Guol* house inauguration and grave building ceremony, etc. In compliance with Katu statutes, buffalo stabbing is always coupled with *Padil yaya*. Otherwise, gods will capture the villagers' spirits and send diseases, bad deaths and bad harvests. However, in different existence environments (rites, decoration), disagreements broke over the meaning of *Padil yaya*.

As far as the seedling ceremony is concerned, the *Padil yaya* dance is meant to implore gods for successful crop growing and harvest. Therefore, in the festival of new rice, rice seeds are placed on *Padil yaya* dancers' hands as an offering to gods, especially the god of rice/ Mother Rice. As to the meaning of head returning victory celebration, *Padil yaya* is thanks sent to gods who helped prevent hamlets' casualties. This view met with no protest, because only a handful of people knew about it. In safety begging ceremony in case of disease or evil deaths, *Padil yaya* is intended to placate gods and evils.

In grave building ceremonies (*Teng ping*), *Padil yaya* expresses people's joy as they have enough wine, rice, meat and money to build a large, beautiful grave for their ancestors, fulfilling filial piety. There was an unanimous agreement on this because the ritual is still thriving. At the turn of, or in difficult hunting seasons, when large animals (about 6 spans large plus), are brought down, people will perform buffalo stabbing ritual and *Padil yaya* is danced in celebration on the *Guol* yard. But some held that only a few elder women took part in the event in the *Guol*.

Opinions differ on the number of *Padil yaya* dancers in each of the rituals. In the fraternization ceremonies between 2 hamlets (*Prongooch*), most of those interviewed said that the number of people joined the dance was unlimited, but the hamlet elders said that the number was 6 women. Similarly, regarding head returning victory ceremonies, the opinions divided: unlimited and 6 women.

If in hamlet-wide festivals (fraternization, head returning), people usually attended in large numbers or 6 at least, in family-scale festivals (wedding, grave building), the number of dancers was very small. In weddings (*Pooi*), there was an identity of opinions that only 2 elder women of the two families performed the dance and to add to the fun, young boys and girls in the hamlet joined in: 6 boys and 6 girls. In *Teng ping*, in that sense, almost all of opinions highlighted the role of the eldest daughter-in-law in the performance of *Padil yaya* as her honor and duty.

The number of people involved in the dance varies according to different festivals and regions. However, most of the opinions agreed on the exact number

of 6 men dancing *Tantung*, 6 women dancing *Padil yaya*. These changes are shared by varied opinions of the members of art performance teams: the middle-aged and the adolescence. The main source of information provided by the middle-aged (in the Youth League and Fatherland Front) is their father and grandfather's accounts of monumental events of the community and lineages. Therefore, their impressions about *Padil yaya* differ in extents. The adolescent members have little knowledge about *Padil yaya*, but they are keen participants in festivals, where they wear traditional costumes and join the dancing team.

A Vech called my attention to the hands, which faced the sky, of *Padil yaya* dancers. According to him, in the olden days, the *Padil yaya* was danced in sacrifice offerings, that's why the hands were faced up, which evinced offering to gods and pray for favours. However, others agreed on a *Padil yaya* featuring dancers putting their hands on the hips instead of holding them up. According to them, when both men and women joined the dance, the women had their hands on the hips, and when only women did, the hands were held up and faced the sky. This was due to, according to Rapat A Hong, the Katu's wish to diversify the dances other than *Padil yaya*. Moreover, this changed was made in order to tailor the dance according to people's dancing ability.

Addressing this change, A Vech said the Katu's criteria set for a good dancer were: facing the hands upwards in a way that the seeds wouldn't drop; making soft and lissom movements on the tiptoes; holding the arms on a level with the shoulders, not too low or too high; gathering the fingers but stretching the big one a little and throwing out the chest, etc. Together, these formed an excellent and solemn dance before gods.

As to the meaning of *Padil yaya* patterns on traditional costumes, in the *Guol*'s interior or tattoos on forehead, etc., there was an unity of opinions on their aesthetic value. The *Padil yaya* tattoo on forehead, according to them, derived its virtues from adornment, protecting its owners from spells, saving their health and also serving as an indication of acquaintances and relatives. However, unlike the Katu in the past, no one in Chake was found having *Padil yaya* tattoo, only one women had a large round spot tattoo on her forehead to be protected from spells. Five people in the whole commune were discovered to have tattoos, but not *Padil yaya*.

Taking into account the correlation between the buffalo stabbing pillar *Sinuar*, the main pillar in the *Guol*, *Dromang* and the symbol of the *Grooc* bird on the *Guol* roof with the *Padil yaya* dance, all those asked didn't have sufficient grounds to assert that they were the simulation of a dancing woman in sacrifice offerings. But they gave no counter arguments. They showed great concern and interest in the *Sinuar*, *Dromang* pillars, with the symmetrical *Guong* and the woman's hands upheld.

This correlation led me to a judgement that the most considerable change of *Padil yaya* was in world outlook and philosophy of life. In the Katu's taste of art, symmetry, which is indicative of dialectical thinking, is crucially important. In Katu language, there are no equivalents of East, West, South, North. There are only 2 directions where the sun rises and sets, it has become a spirit axe: orientation of gravesite, distinguishing neighbouring groups, aspect of the gables, and especially on the *Sinuar* and *Dromang* pillars, *Guong* must be symmetrical in sun-rising and sun setting directions.

In Chake, the *Padil yaya* symbol was found in 3 different places: designs on traditional costumes, statues in the grave and dances in festivals.

Padil yaya statues in different poses are made of wood and are placed in the grave after the grave building ceremony. There have been many changes in material and structure of the statues, which are now absent from some graves. 8 out of 11 graves in the graveyard of the *Ta ruong* line were surveyed. The *Padil yaya* statue stood next to 3 others in different postures such as playing a wind instrument, playing drum, gong, offering wine, wearing back basket, etc. and was placed on a square plate (20 x 20cm) on the coffin. As A Vech explained it, these statues were designed to give the dead respect and send off through the above forms of entertainment.

Weaving products also provide *Padil yaya* with a good environment of existence, which, however, has experienced many changes in materials, colours, decorative styles, etc. In Chake, only a small portion of families (15/58) have traditional costumes. Surveys conducted in 10/15 households revealed that only 10/66 loin cloths, dresses and shirts of 8/10 households had *Padil yaya* patterns of many variations. This amount rose as some families bought new clothes in preparation for the cultured hamlet building ceremony held in December, 2003.

It should be noted that in Chake, brocade weaving, the products of which are bought from the Pacoh (A Luoi district) who market their commodity locally or bring them to Chake, is not developed. In addition, among the selection criteria of costumes, *Padil yaya* is not attached much importance. It is the price and quality that people are really concerned with. The majority of the Katu in Chake, with the exception of some aged people, don't wear traditional costumes every day. They do so only in cases of big events like festivals and art performances, which are attributable to inconvenience and high cost.

The traditional costumes of the Katu people, which act as their heirloom and marriage offerings, are made of natural cotton and decorated with precious glass beads made of lead. However, the weaving products I encountered had been modified to a considerable extent: they are woven from synthetic fiber, dyed with chemical colours and decorated with plastic beads, and their value changed

accordingly. For adornment, people used old motifs beside new creations of weavers. In Chake, I collected more than 18 *Padil yaya* designs.

Padil yaya is a mere pattern of decoration on clothes, but in festivals, it carries a loftier meaning: conveying ethnic identity which constitutes their own colouring on the integration path. Nowadays, the dance has been widely used in Chake's cultural activities. It is no longer subject to the rules of Katu statutes: *Padil yaya* performance must be conducted together with buffalo stabbing. That means, there have been changes in the environment and meaning of this sacred dance, which results in many other changes with respect to this symbol.

The change from a *sacred* to a *normal* dance, performed in a modern context such as in New Year Festival, Middle of August Festival, anniversary of Youth League's foundation 26 March, the National Day 2 September, the "building cultured hamlet" movement launching ceremony, receiving distinguished guests, etc., is the most sizeable. Everyone can go in for the event. I am not a woman, but I took part in the dance to the villager's delight. This is because, as far as I understand it, *Padil yaya* is one of the only 3 dances of the Katu (*Padil yaya*, *Tantung*, *Yazon*), therefore it appears in every big event of the hamlet and is quickly gaining in popularity. On the other hands, this change has blown fresh vitality to *Padil yaya* in its new environment, especially when decoration, sculpture and weaving have lost their grip on people and buffalo stabbing is not always feasible. Besides, the guideline for socialization of culture and art activities have greatly influenced this change with a view to preserving immaterial cultural values.

On observation of a dance performance, it is immediately obvious that the motions are made freely from all the rules. When dancing, the woman spins her body only halfway round the circle, advancing around the pillar; her arms are not held up on a level with her shoulders; she is attired in a dress and a shirt instead of a long dress. These observations in Chake hamlet speak undeniably to one fact that the *Padil yaya* dance is now very different from what was described by L. Pichon 60 years ago (1938).

CONCLUSIONS

Under the influence of the State's policies, the social, economic, cultural and environmental situation in Chake hamlet has gone through vast changes and the consequent changes in many other traditional values, which have made strong impacts on the environment of *Padil yaya*'s existence. Moreover, given the overwhelming globalization and innovation, modernization policies of the Government, those changes are irreversible. It is gaining strength to become a powerful wave in Vietnam's mountainous regions and we can feel its growth everyday. These changes, among which is *Padil yaya*, are self-evident as the traditional social background has changed.

Firstly, there is a generation gap in the awareness of *Padil yaya* in Chake. The impressions of the young about *Padil yaya* are not deep enough to draw their attention to its disappearance. As for the elderly, their memories of *Padil yaya*, the most forgettable of which is festivals due to rules of the statutes and the sacredness of the dance in their spiritual life, differ in its meanings and existence environment.

Secondly, the scope of *Padil yaya*'s existence has been narrowed. Today, *Padil yaya* can only be seen in weaving products (decorative figures), festivals (dance) and in graves (statues).

Thirdly, the change from a sacred dance that can be seen only in buffalo stabbing rituals and that conveys people's wish for a plentiful and peaceful life to a dance used widely in festivals of all kinds for aesthetic purpose. The passage from a sacred dance in a narrow environment (religion) to an art form practiced in a large environment (popular culture) that frees itself from restrictions of time, space, subjects and objectives is the biggest change of this symbol. The changes of *Padil yaya* itself are also the changes of thinking, awareness, perception of the people about traditions, customs, abstention and adaptation in the contemporary context.

The changes in *Padil yaya*'s meanings in festivals reflect the changes in conceptions about gods, abstention and taboos in the traditional religious faiths: they point to a loosened relationship between man and gods and a not-so-important role of gods in their life. What is more, they point to the shift from passiveness and dependence to initiative and independence from the supernatural gods.