

Viet-nam BULLETIN

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THE FOLKLORE OF SPRING
Painting by Tran Dac

TET 1971 IN VIETNAM! By Phu Si

Saigon (MF) - When the clock strikes midnight on January 27th, the first day of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, millions of Vietnamese will exchange toasts of good wishes for the coming year of the Hog.

The greetings are familiar and always concern the well-being of the family, the focal point of Vietnamese life. "May I wish you," so goes the toast to the head of the family, "nothing but prosperity in your endeavours. May you have a son at the beginning of this year and a daughter at the end. May your fortunes increase tenfold and may peace and happiness be with you and your family..."

"Tet Nguyen Dan" or the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, begins this year on midnight January 27th, 1971 and the festivities will last three days. The traditional Vietnamese calendar runs in cycles of twelve years. A genie, in the form of an animal figure, dominates each year. They are, in the following order: Ty (mouse); Suu (buffalo); Dan (tiger); Mao (cat); Thin (dragon); Ty (snake); Ngo (horse); Mui (goat); Than (monkey); Dau (cock); Tuat (dog); and Hoi (hog). As the old year gives way to the new, the ruling genie quietly

bows out to the next. This coming year will be the year of the Hog.

On Tet, the home is brightly lit and the family altar resplendent with flowers, fruits, cakes and sweets to welcome the new genie on this festive night. It used to be that firecrackers erupted on the exact moment of transition, as is the custom in many western countries. In Vietnam, they serve an additional purpose -- to chase out the evil spirit -- but since the infamous Tet attack of three years ago, the use of firecrackers was banned by the authorities.

At dawn, the family sits down to a banquet in honour of the ancestors to whom they pay their respects by ritual bows before the family shrine. When the meal is finished, it's time to dress in one's best fineries and meet the parents and grand-parents to wish them luck and happiness in the coming year. The youngsters especially look forward to this ceremony as each one of them receives a small sum of money wrapped in the traditional "red envelope".

It is an ancient belief in Vietnam that fortune or misfortune which occurs on New Year's Day sets the pattern for the rest of the year. The morning of Tet is of particular importance. The character of the first visitor to the home will leave his imprint on the family for the rest of the year. This ancient custom is called "Xong Nha". If the visitor is good, kind and honest, the family is in luck. But if he or she happens to be a rather shady type, the year is off to a bad start. It is not unusual in many homes to firmly lock the gates and wait until a few minutes after midnight to admit a favoured friend as the "first guest in the New Year" who, in the meantime, has been walking around the block, waiting for his cue to make his "guest appearance".



The Pagoda draws a good crowd in the early morning hours on the first day of Tet

Another important aspect of Tet is the family visit to the Pagoda or Church to pray for good fortune and happiness. The remainder of the holidays is filled with visits to friends and relatives, family games and just relaxation. In the countryside the ceremonies include a tilling event to insure a plentiful harvest after the spring planting.

And so once again, as this Tet event is about to take place, the people of Vietnam hope and pray to see an early end to the enemy's activities in this unhappy land. Mothers pray that their sons will return safe and sound. Wives pray that their husbands will finally shed their uniforms and remain with the family at home. The people of our nation, tired and weary from incessant war, destruction and bloodshed, once again hope that this Tet may bring peace. They hope the invaders from the North will finally realize that guns, bullets and terror will never succeed in forcing upon the South Vietnamese an alien form of rule which rejects the culture, customs and traditions of our land. Cunning, treachery, deceit and violence marked Hanoi's role in the 1968 Tet offensive, a tragedy which will be long remembered, especially by the citizens of the city of Hue.

Our people deserve good fortune in the coming year of the Hog. Whether they will get it, depends to a large extent upon the actions of the Hanoi regime. If the enemy is willing to let the people of South Vietnam determine their own destiny -- in peace -- the coming year will, indeed, be a happy one. If not, our people will continue to resist, as they have been doing for more than a decade. For if nothing else, the past year of the Dog has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that the people of South Vietnam are willing, able and determined to keep on fighting for their freedom and independence until such time the enemy from the North withdraws and decides to leave South Vietnam alone.

THE UNICORN DANCE AT TET By Minh Tam

Saigon (MF) - According to ancient Vietnamese history, the unicorn made its first appearance during the Duong Dynasty, about 600 AD. Emperor Duong Cao To, after a military victory which resulted in his conquest of the Central Highlands, popularized the dance of the unicorn to celebrate peace. The unicorn, like the dragon, is a mythological animal and tradition has it that wherever a unicorn appears, people will have peace, happiness and prosperity. Originally the dance came from China where it is called the dragon dance, but in Vietnam it only became accepted after Emperor To's victory.

Today, there are two varieties of the Vietnamese version. In North Vietnam, it is called the Lion's dance and it is celebrated on the 15th day of the 8th month of the Lunar Year, sometime around autumn. In South Vietnam, the Unicorn dance is held only during the Tet holidays. The techniques are similar, although the traditional procession varies a little between the two zones. The North Vietnamese lion comes out at dusk and is accompanied by a group of youngsters with different shaped paper lanterns suspended on long poles. The lanterns take the shape of various animals like rabbits, dragons and fish or they may appear like multi-winged stars.

In South Vietnam, where the dances take place during the day and evening, many brightly coloured square flags take the place of lanterns in the procession of the Southern unicorn.

Leading this procession are the flag carriers. The flags are usually donated by merchants whose shops are visited to obtain annual donations which is the purpose of the undertaking. The Vietnamese believe that the unicorn is a symbol of wealth and prosperity and therefore they are generous in their donations to the unicorn dance teams. After the flags comes the unicorn. Big processions may have more than one. Then there is a mythical creature called "Dia" known by a moonlike facemask and a man carrying a pole which is topped with a round ball representing a piece of jade. At the tail end come the drums and cymbals, usually mounted on a cart which provide the loud and rhythmical accompaniment to the dance.

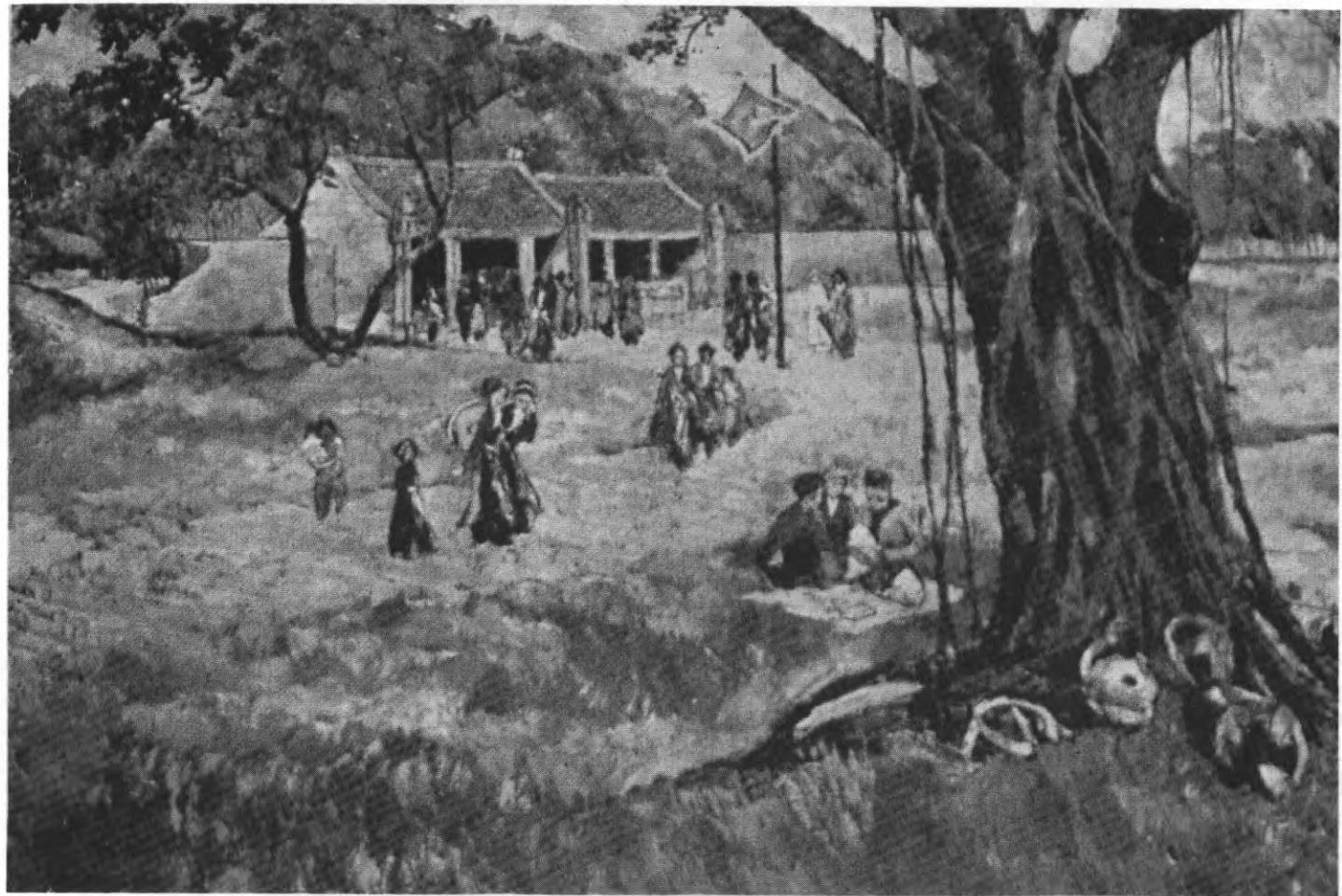
Several men take turns handling the unicorn. They wear tight uniforms of various colours which are often identified with a particular locality where the dance takes place. Each unicorn group covers a well-defined area and they do not trespass on each other's territory.

In Saigon, the unicorn procession begins early in the morning on the first day of Tet. It systematically visits every home and shop in its area. As soon as it appears in front of a house, the place swarms with children and onlookers. First, the drums and cymbals sound a salute to the occupants of the house. The unicorn stoops down, bends its head several times before the entrance door, then steps back to repeat the same gesture five or six times before beginning the dance.



A unicorn dance group approaches a house for its annual Tet gift

The home owner or shopkeeper then presents his donations, but to make the event more difficult and exciting, he suspends his gift from the first story balcony or window from the end of a pole very similar to the bait on a fishing rod. To cope with this challenge, unicorn dancers are strong and agile people and must be good climbers. To get at the target, the unicorn must be elevated through a human pyramid to the height of the suspended gift or sometimes they get at it through the use of a one column ladder. All the while, the unicorn dances to the rhythm of the throbbing drums while the excited crowd below noisily shouts encouragement. The climax comes when the prize is "swallowed" in the unicorn's mouth and then slowly the group moves on the next house for another donation.



Village Temple in Springtime
Painting by Pham Co

Vietnamese Legend

THE ORIGIN OF TAO OUAN, THE THREE KITCHEN GODS

Adapted by George F. Schultz

There is a popular belief in Viet Nam that Tao Quan, the Three Kitchen Gods, are present in the kitchen of every home. These gods observe everything that takes place there. At the end of the lunar year, on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, they depart to make their report to Ngoc Hoang, the Jade Emperor, supreme divinity of the Taoist Heaven. On that day Tao Quan are offered the best of food and spices and are presented with gifts of money and clothing.

The idea of a threesome is unique to this story. More often the kitchen god or genie is described as a single person and may be called Ong Tao, Ong Lo or Ong Vua Bep.

Long, long ago, when Earth and Sky met in the Valley of Whispers, in the dense, green forest there lived a woodcutter and his wife. They were very poor and often-times the man was unable to earn enough to buy their food. Frustration and worry drove him to drink, and he would come staggering home at night in a vile mood. Since there was only his wife to listen to him in their ramshackle cottage, he poured out all manner of abuse on the poor woman. Because she was his wife, she had to accept it. Sometimes he would try to appease his rage by smashing the furniture; but when he took to beating her she could endure it no longer. One night, she fled the cottage and was never seen there again.

For days and weeks, the woman wandered in the forest. She was hungry and her feet were torn and bleeding. Finally, she came to a hunter's cabin. The owner was an honest man, who gave her food and permitted her to rest in his home. She kept house for him then, and after some time they were married. They lived together in great happiness, and it seemed that the woman had forgotten the terrors of her previous marriage.

One day, when Tet (Vietnamese New Year) was approaching and the hunter was out in the forest looking for game, a beggar knocked at the door of the cottage and asked for alms. He was clad in rags and his hair was matted and unkempt. The compassionate woman prepared a meal for the man; while he was eating, she suddenly recognized him as her former husband.

The beggar was still eating when the woman heard the steps of her returning husband. In her mind's eye she saw rapid end of her newfound happiness and became panic-stricken. Quickly she hid the beggar under a hay cock.

The hunter had been very successful that day and was returning home with some excellent game. As soon as he entered the cottage, he prepared to roast it in the haycock quite unaware of the beggar's presence there.

When the beggar found himself ablaze, his first impulse was to cry out; then, fearing that the hunter might kill the woman on discovering him there, he remained silent.

As tongues of flame consumed the haycock, the poor woman was torn with grief. She realized of course that her former husband was meeting death for her sake and that she did not want. Hesitating for no longer than a moment, she threw herself into the fire in order to die with him.

The hunter cried out in dismay when he saw what his wife had done. He tried to pull her back but was unable to do so. Thinking that some act of his had driven her to such desperation, he too jumped into fire, preferring to die with her rather than to continue to live without her.

When the people learned of this touching story, they bowed their heads out of respect for the noble motives that had brought on the deaths of the woman and the two men. They were later acclaimed as Tao Quan, the Three Kitchen Gods.



Writing New Year's wishes

NEWS IN BRIEF

CALLING FOR PEACE

Saigon, January 2. - Saigon Archbishop Nguyen Van Binh yesterday afternoon appealed to all those who play the key role in the Vietnam war "to put justice and the common interest of the Nation above their own opinions so as to find out a settlement for the present war in the respect of the basic rights of the national community as well as of every individual."

In his sermon at the celebration of World Peace day at the Saigon Basilica, Msgr. Nguyen Van Binh laid stress on the search for peace in Vietnam and called for "mutual concessions" which he regarded as an urgent need of the hour "to help rebuild the nation".

According to the Saigon Archbishop, both sides must try their best to restrict at the maximum all incidents likely to harm the lives and properties of innocent civilians, pending the signing of a peace agreement.

At the ceremony, Saigon Vicar Nguyen Huynh Duc, read aloud a message of Pope Paul VI on world peace, January 1, 1971, which dealt with the theme "all men are brothers".

Present at the prayer service for peace in Vietnam were Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, Senate President Nguyen Van Huyen, a number of senators and representatives, Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem and a number of Cabinet members and representatives of the Diplomatic Corps.

Several religious delegations headed by Ven. Thich Phap Tri, Deputy Director of Vien Hoa Dao (An Quang Pagoda) and Mr. Nguyen Tan Dac of the "Buu Son Ky Huong" Budhhist sect as well as many Catholic priests and organizations also attended.

NEW AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR PRESENTS CREDENTIALS

Saigon, December 30. - Mr. Arthur Malcom Morris new Australian Ambassador to Vietnam, presented his credentials to President Nguyen Van Thieu at a ceremony held at 11:30 a.m. today at Independence Palace.

Amb. Morris was Australian Ambassador to Laos during the 1960-1964 period. Before his appointment to Saigon, he served in Vienna (Austria).

In reply to Am. Morris' speech at the ceremony Pres. Thieu said he was "very glad" to have Mr. Arthur M. Morris as the Australian Ambassador to the Republic of Vietnam.

The President added that friendly ties between the Republic of Vietnam and Australia have been strengthened since the day Australia sent her troops to Vietnam to help thwart the Communist aggression in this part of the world.

The Vietnamese people are very proud of and grateful to the assistance the Australian combatants have granted to their Fatherland, the President said.

The RVN President insisted that after 20 years of struggling for the just cause, the Vietnamese people are determined to fight for freedom and will never accept a peace in slavery, as well as continue to foil any Communist attempts to impose any regime on South Vietnam, irrespective of the South Vietnamese people's right of self determination.

The Vietnamese people, the President said, believe that, thanks to the growth of the RVN Armed Forces and the sincere assistance of Australian and other allied nations, Communist dark schemes will be smashed down, and the Vietnamese people themselves will realize for a genuine peace in democracy, freedom and prosperity.

GEN. MINH PRESENTED WITH JAPANESE RELIC

Saigon, December 24. - General Duong Van Minh Wednesday afternoon received a Japanese "national relic" granted by a group of Japanese Buddhists at a ceremony held at Gen. Minh's private residence on Hong Thap Tu street.

This "national relic" is an helmet used by a Japanese warrior leader hundreds of years ago. The helmet made of bronze weighs nine kilos and a half.

In return, Gen. Minh presented a Buddhist statue made of ivory to the head of the Japanese Buddhists group.

Addressing the visiting delegation on this occasion, Gen. Minh as a Vietnamese citizen thanked the Japanese people and Buddhist followers for their noble assistance to flood victims in Central Vietnam and for their considerable contribution to the search for peace in Vietnam.

Gen. Minh also expressed his emotion when receiving the Japanese relic which, he said symbolizes the indomitable spirit of the national heroes who had sacrificed themselves for their nation and people.

MORE COMBAT CRAFTS FOR RVN NAVY

Saigon, December 30. - One hundred and twenty five small coastal and river combat craft of the U.S. Navy were transferred Wednesday morning to the Vietnamese Navy.

In a simple ceremony aboard a single river patrol boat moored at the Vietnamese Navy Hqs pier, Vice Adm. Jerome H. King, Jr. Commander of the U.S. Naval forces in Vietnam and Rear Adm. Tran Van Chon exchanged signatures on documents officially transferring the last I25 American small combat craft to the Vietnamese Navy.

On this occasion Rear Adm. King remarked that the Vietnamese Navy Force has made constant progress for the past two years and is now ranking tenth among naval forces in the world.

In reply, Rear Adm. Chon stressed that the patrol boats the U.S. Naval Forces transferred to the Vietnamese Navy were a kind of warship very useful and very effective in the geographic situation of South Vietnam to cope with the Communist guerilla warfare.

These river patrol craft have been used by U.S. Naval Forces in South Vietnam since March 21, 1966 to interdict the infiltration of Communist troops and weapons through rivers and canals.

NEW BOOK IN VIETNAMESE

Saigon, December 28. - The Center for Vietnamese Studies at the Southern Illinois University (USA) just issued the publication of the first book in its Language Series. Nguyen Dinh Hoa's Colloquial Vietnamese is a sequence to his Speak Vietnamese. It is intended for intermediate level or second-year students of the language.

Sources from the Center for Vietnamese Studies said, it plans to publish other works on the languages, literatures and cultures of Indo-China. It will also issue Southeast Asia: An International Quarterly as well as other manuscripts and data papers.

Professor Hoa is Associate Director for Language and Culture at the Center for Vietnamese Studies located on the Carbondale campus of Southern Illinois University.

1971 OFFICIAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS IN VIETNAM

<u>JANUARY</u>	1	Friday	New Year's Day
	4	Tuesday	Buddha's Enlightenment Day
	26	Tuesday*)
	27	Wednesday) <i>Afternoon only</i>
	28	Thursday)
	29	Friday)
<u>APRIL</u>	5	Monday	Hung Vuong Anniversary
	II	Sunday	Ascension Day
<u>MAY</u>	1	Saturday	Labour Day
	9	Sunday	Buddha's Birthday Anniversary
<u>NOVEMBER</u>	1	Monday	National Day
<u>DECEMBER</u>	25	Friday	Christmas

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