

THE TÉT

By ĐO-VÂN-MINH
(Chief of Documentation service
Departement of The Interior,
Vietnam)

To the foreigner who first visits VIETNAM, the TÉT would cause at the same time delight and displeasure. Delight - as he could not help sharing an unanimous enthusiasm. Displeasure for the TÉT lasts too long; the foreigner feels falling into a "Black out" town (if he is in Saigon, for instance). He will probably think himself: "What do the Viet-namese do during all that week? What's the use of all these festivals"?

Well now, listen to a few details on the TÉT :

At the end of the year, at midnight, the Viet-namese celebrate the "GIAO-THÚA".

It is not like in America where the people in their new-look dresses wander all over the town dancing and singing.

It is not like in Japan where you have to climb up a hill to wait for the "New-Year sunrise".

In Vietnam, everybody remains at home and attends the ceremony in silence. The whole family gets together around a huge censer of fragrant smoke. With spring flowers around and a cloud of smoke overhead, they are deep in their thoughts.

What do they think about?

They think of their ancestors who fought to create and preserve their country, their families. They think of some intimate friends who are far away. Sometimes, tears appear on some eyes: are they ashamed of some bad deeds?

Often, a writer, very ceremoniously begins the first few lines of a poem.

At the same time, the whole family is to welcome the "Home Genius" who is coming back. In fact, a week ago (on the 23rd of the last month of the year) the Genius had left home

for the Court of the Jade Emperor. He had been given ritual offerings: three paper caps and three living carps which were supposed to carry the Genius up to the sky. Now every house lets off crackers to welcome his return and the beginning of the New Year.

At the "Head Day" of the year (as the Viet-namese usually call it) they pay visits, wishing "A Happy New Year" to one another.

A great number of people go to the pagoda to pray Boeddha so that peace may reign among their families, over their country. They never forget to pick up and carry home branches of fresh plant as a "symbol of Welfare".

On the second day, amusements and games are performed, and that last for almost a week.

We'll now describe some of the games they like, especially in older times :

- There was The Genius Ceremony of Da-La. During the ceremony, all lights are suddenly put off. In the darkness, you may hide, play and thoroughly enjoy yourself in full freedom.

- Then there was The Genius Ceremony of the Pagoda Lim. When the ceremony is over, young men and girls get acquainted with love songs.

- The association of battle-loving men. In the provinces of Hà-Đông (North Viet-Nam) the people of three villages had the custom to "make war on one another". After an hour of battle, they return home to attend the ceremony.

There were also plays of "Beggars association" of "Robbers association", of many others....

But they belonged to an "Ancient era" (1) under foreign domination. The Vietnamese peasants were not long to find there was "a violent poison hidden in them". Numberless amusements had been allowed and encouraged (?) on pernicious purpo-

It had been done to keep the people in full blind respect of a certain Genius, to plunge them in ever-lasting plays. Injurious entertainments have been suppressed then.

On "New Year", all Vietnamese shout: "Ah ! Spring has come again." Everybody knows however that it is neither the same spring as last year nor the years before; An immense revolve has occurred in the Universe; Numberless revolutions have spread out in human societies.

So, nowadays, the Vietnamese welcome the New Year with a new spirit. The TET becomes a pastime to gather new vital forces, to confront new struggles. The will acquire new experiences, undertake a more active "program" to rise the average of their life, to serve more efficiently their IDEALISM. /-

FEBRUARY 1956

DO-MINH