

Women storytelling



**STORIES ABOUT DAO TIEN ETHNICITY
BY DAO TIEN WOMEN IN VIETNAM**

2022

Suggested citation

Open Development Initiative, Women Storytelling - Vol 4 - Stories about Dao Tien ethnicity by Dao Tien women in Vietnam, 2022.

@Open Development Initiative. Licensed by CC BY SA 4.0.

Editor

Nga Nguyen
Nguyen Hoang Duc

Design and layout

Nga Nguyen

Photo and narration

Women storytelling club - Bai village, Cao Son commune, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh province, Vietnam.



Acknowledgments

This book would have not been possible without the contribution from Dao Tien ethnic minority women. These dedicated women utilized technology to enthusiastically and proudly tell stories about their life and ethnic identity. We would like to give special thanks to all members of the women storytelling club for interesting stories and pictures, and for allowing us to share their work with the public.

We would like to thank artisan crafts people and ethnic villagers for sharing their rich knowledge of history, traditional customs, and religious practices of the Dao Tien ethnicity. This knowledge constitutes the basis of all the stories told here and are deeply connected to land and place which are rooted in their religious belief systems.

Our sincere thanks go to Madame Luong Thi Truong and Mr. Hoang Duc Nguyen from the Center for Sustainable Development of Mountainous area (CSDM), who led community activities. We greatly appreciate the support and facilitation from Women Union in Cao Son commune and other related local authorities in Da Bac district, Hoa Binh province.

Many thanks also to the Open Development Vietnam team for providing technical support and their contributions to the expression of religious freedoms of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.



Foreword

This picture book is a collection of nine stories made by Dao Tien ethnic women in Bai village, Cao Son commune, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh province. These women have encapsulated in pictures and words, their lived experiences through their lens. You will find simple stories about daily meals, traditional costumes, musical instruments, or special cultural practices such as the wedding ceremonies or offering trays of the Dao Tien people in Da Bac. All of these details create and define the Dao Tien's ethnicity through unique culture and religion.

We hope that these stories will inspire ethnic minority women across Vietnam to share their stories with confidence. Encouraging them to document and preserve their ethnic identity helps to strengthen their cultural beliefs and religion. Equally, it contributes to community unity, promotes gender equality, and empowers women to become active leaders in their community and their lives.

All stories maintain storyteller voices and have only been edited to formalise the English.

Contents

Authors

- 1 Embroidery in Dao Tien's costume
- 2 The drum of Dao Tien
- 3 Offering tray for Pure Brightness Festival
- 4 Beeswax printing technique for skirts
- 5 Sour meat
- 6 "Bem" and "Diu"
- 7 "Hoang" wine
- 8 Dao Tien's wedding ceremony
- 9 The Dao "Nom" script



Authors

The ten women who contributed to this booklet are Dao Tien sisters from Bai village, Cao Son commune, Da Bac district, Hoa Binh province. They formed a women's club on a voluntary basis with the desire to protect and preserve Dao Tien traditional culture and religion. Together, they have woven the colorful stories presented here.

These young and inspiring women were quick learners. They adapted to technology readily and applied the skills from training to use applications on smartphones for storytelling.

The nine following features are lively pictorial stories that reflect the most prominent activities of the Dao Tien people through the eyes of the women.

In this project, besides using their original photos for storytelling, the women have created videos and maps using the Mapeo app on their phones to facilitate locating and monitoring essential places in the community that need protection.



Ms. Dang Thi Son
Head of Bai village's women union.
Dao folk song lover



Ms. Ly Thi Mui
Music and cinema lover



Ms. Dang Thi Chuc
Dao costume
embroidering lover



Ms. Ly Thi Ngo
Dao's embroidering and food
lover



Ms. Ly Thi Hang
Dao ethnic costume lover



Ms. Ly Thi Hoa
Dao ethnic music lover



Ms. Trieu Thi Phuong
Dao ethnic festivals lover



Ms. Ly Thi Mui
Beeswas printing lover



Ms. Ban Thi Dung
Dao culture lover



Ms. Ly Thi Siu
Dao ethnic skirt
making lover



1

Embroidery in Dao Tien's costume

Embroidery in Dao Tien's costume

Authors: Ly Thi Hang, Ly Thi Siu, Ban Thi Dung, Ly Thi Ngoc

The Dao people in Hoa Binh today still use traditional ethnic costumes typical from ancient times. The costumes are made entirely by hand thanks to the ingenuity of the Dao woman, from dyeing fabrics, cutting clothes, sewing, embroidering, or printing beeswax. The traditional costumes of the whole family are made by the mothers and wives who work very hard; besides farming, whenever they have free time, they create these costumes for their husbands and children and preserve the ethnic identity.



After weaving, the white fabric will be dyed in indigo and then embroidered. Dao people use colored threads to embroider indigo fabric.



A complete outfit of a Dao Tien woman includes a head scarf, floral embroidered shirt, beeswax printed skirt, and leg wrap. Men's traditional clothing is simpler, consisting of an indigo jacket. A head scarf will take about ten days to complete, and a floral shirt takes more time—a few months to a year.



The head scarf is embroidered with floral shapes, decorated with coins, beads, and red thread tassels.



The shirt is embroidered around the flap and along the shoulders with different floral shapes.



The skirt is printed with sophisticated beeswax motifs and is stitched with red fabric around the hem.



The leg wraps are embroidered with patterns on white indigo fabric, using only white and black colors.

Ethnic costumes must be stored separately and are not washed to avoid fading; they are only worn on important occasions such as maturity/naming ceremonies, weddings, and ethnic festivals.



Dao Tien women in traditional costumes dancing on the occasion of Great National Unity Day.



Little girls wearing traditional outfits in the Lap Tinh ceremony (naming/maturity ceremony).



Old ladies wearing traditional costume in the Tau Sai ceremony (12 lamps ceremony).

2 The drum of Dao Tien



The drum of Dao Tien

Authors: Ly Thi Mui, Ly Thi Hoa, Dang Thi Chuc

The Dao Tien people have a unique drum that is found nowhere else. Drums are made from "Hong" wood, which is flexible, unbreakable, and light, creating a resonant sound. Each Dao family kinship must have this drum for important festivals and rituals. To make a Drum with a good sound, the drum maker must be skillful and meticulous, so not everyone can do it. Mr. Ly Van Manh is a famous drum maker in Bai village, Cao Son commune.

Materials for making Drums include "Hong" wood (the largest body part); Charmois skin for making the drumhead; rattan; and steel wire.



Step 1: Hollow out the "Hong" wood to make a round hole, and continue cutting to make a border of about 2 cm thickness.



Step 2: The piece of chamois skin is stretched and held by steel wire, then attached to the wooden body to form two drum heads. In the picture is Mr. Ly Van Manh, a famous drum craftsman from Bai village.



Step 3: The rattan yarn is plaited into pieces of strong string, used to connect and stretch the two ends of the drum. The rattan strings run along the drum's body, about 5 cm apart.



Step 4: To adjust the drum volume and tension of drumheads as desired, the craftsman inserts triangular pieces of wood under the rattan strings.



The drum is used in important ceremonies of the Money Dao people, such as the "Lap Tinh" Festival (naming/maturity festival), funerals, and new year festivals. Only men can beat the drum.

3 Offering tray for Pure Brightness Festival



Offering tray for Pure Brightness Festival

Authors: Ly Thi Ngo, Trieu Thi Phuong, Dang Thi Son, Ly Thi Mui

Every time the Pure Brightness Festival comes, the Dao people have a tradition of preparing a tray to worship their ancestors and the dead spirits. The offering tray for this festival cannot be complete without fish and colored sticky rice.

The fish dish with fish scales represents a roof tile, meaning remodeling the house. Therefore, the fish dish could not be replaced by pig or chicken for worship. Fish are caught in lakes and ponds and brought back to be cleaned and cooked.



Colorful sticky rice is an offering to the passed-away elderly for them to go to the forest to cut trees. To create the color for the sticky rice, the Dao people use indigo and turmeric. The indigo plant has two types—red indigo and purple indigo—that give the red and purple color. The yellow color is obtained from turmeric. Villagers often grow indigo and turmeric in their home garden or the field.



The plants and tubers are washed and boiled to get colored water for rice soaking. It often takes 4 to 5 hours of rice soaking to get the desired color.



After soaking, the rice is put into a pot to steam. Today, people often use aluminum pots, but some households use traditional wooden pots to steam rice, making the rice more sticky and delicious. When the rice is cooked, it is poured into a tray and shaped into pieces.



The complete offering tray for the Pure Brightness Festival includes fish, colored sticky rice, "do" paper cut into small pieces and imprinted with a wood stamp symbolizing the money of the underworld, a bowl of incense burning with agarwood, a bowl of water, and four bowls of wine. In the family, if the grandfather knows how to do the praying procedure, he will conduct it himself. If he doesn't, the family will have to ask neighbors who know how to pray to come and do it for them.





4

Beeswax printing
technique for skirts

Beeswax printing technique for skirts

Authors: Ly Thi Mui, Ly Thi Hoa, Dang Thi Chuc

The skirt is an indispensable item in the traditional costume of Dao Tien women. The skirt is both to beautify and to keep the tradition. When a young Dao girl gets married on the wedding day, it is impossible not to wear a skirt printed with beeswax. The skirt has an important and sacred meaning and is meticulously hand-printed by artisans. Only women know and are allowed to print and make skirts. Each Dao Tien woman has 10 to 20 skirts.

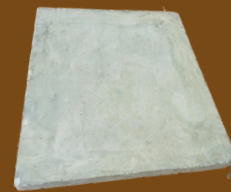
Materials and tools



White fabric



Beeswax



Grindstone



Wild boar fang



Bamboo mold



Bronze mold

Printing process



Use wild boar's fang to grind fabric on the grinding stone's surface to make the fabric smooth and silky.



Cook the beeswax until it melts into a liquid for dipping bronze and bamboo molds.



Use bamboo mold dipped in beeswax liquid to print on the fabric's surface, creating patterns of straight lines, N-lines, and diamond shapes.



The bronze mold creates smaller patterns, filling in the diamond shape created by the bamboo mold.



Piece of fabric after printing.



The fabric is then dyed in indigo and dipped in boiling water.



It takes up to 40 days to create a completed skirt. The process of printing beeswax takes seven days, dyeing indigo takes 30 days, and sewing and attaching red and white skirt edges takes three days.



Women in Bai village in traditional costume.



A Dao Tien bride wearing a skirt printed with beeswax.

5

Sour meat



Sour meat

Authors: Trieu Thi Phuong, Dang Thi Son, Ly Thi Mui

Sour meat is a specialty of the Dao, completely different from the sour meat dishes of the Phu Tho people or Thanh Hoa spring rolls. It can be made from buffalo, beef, pork, most commonly pork. Sour meat is a precious dish of the Dao people, used in holidays such as "Lap Tinh" ceremony, weddings, or inviting guests. In the past, sour meat was a way of preserving meat for a long time in preparation for important occasions. Sour meat is unique because it needs time for fermentation—at least 12 months or more to be served.

Materials: Fresh pork, white salt



Making process:

Wash the meat, cut it into long pieces, and keep the skin. Then sprinkle a lot of salt evenly over the meat. Put the meat in a jar, and cover it with salt to seal.



Jars of meat are covered and incubated for ten days to one month. After a month, the meat is taken out, squeezed with hot rice, put back in a jar, rice is added on top, and covered. After 2-3 months, the rice is changed again. The rice helps to lighten the salt and ferment the meat. The above process is repeated 2-3 times before it can be eaten.



After a year, the sour meat can be served. Sour meat is usually chopped and rolled with assorted leaves such as guise leaves, fig leaves, young cabbage leaves, Buddha's hand leaves, etc. The meat has a sour, salty, aromatic, chewy taste, with no fishy taste.





"Bem" and "Diu"

"Bem" and "Diu"

Authors: Trieu Thi Phuong, Dang Thi Son, Ly Thi Mui

"Bem," a small chest, and "Diu," a net backpack, are two items to store a young lady's dowry when she gets married. Whether rich or poor, everyone must have them.

The "Bem" is woven with two bamboo layers. Inside, it is lined with a layer of dried young palm leaves for moisture-resistance. When the bride goes to her husband's house, she must have a "Bem" to store her ethnic clothes.

The "Diu" is knitted of parachute rope and used to store a blanket—the bride's dowry. Later, "Diu" will be used as a backpack to store clothes when needed.



The bride is taken to her husband's house on the wedding day. On the next day, the bride's dowry clothes and blanket will be brought to the husband's home by a man and a woman who are uncle and sisters of the bride.



7 "Hoang" wine

"Hoang" wine

Authors: Ly Thi Ngo, Trieu Thi Phuong, Dang Thi Son, Ly Thi Mui

Each ethnic group and each region have different specialties. The Dao Tien ethnic group has a unique drink called "Hoang" wine. In the past, ancestors took rice to the field to eat and hung the left-over on trees; after a while, they obtained drops of natural wine from those rice balls when returning to the field. "Hoang" wine was born from this and has been handed down to this day. "Hoang" wine is made from upland sticky rice, having a different taste and color from other wines. This drink is indispensable in any offering tray and reception occasion of the Dao Tien.



Newly harvested upland sticky rice is plucked and milled into the rice. Rice is grown on the field without using pesticides or stimulants, simply rubbing, so it is not as white as regular rice.



The rice is soaked in water for 30 minutes.



The Soaked rice is steamed until thoroughly cooked.



The cooked rice is cooled and mixed with yeast. Yeast is made by the Dao people.



The rice is continued brewing for ten days.



Wine liquid is then filtered out.



The wine liquid is then cooked in a jar until it boils thoroughly.



It takes about ten days to get "Hoang" wine from rice steaming. "Hoang" wine has an opaque yellow color, with a mixture of bitter and sweet taste and aromatic upland sticky rice. The wine has a very low alcohol content, so both men and women can enjoy it.



"Hoang" wine is an indispensable part of Dao people's tray of foods.



8 Dao Tien's wedding

Dao Tien's wedding

Authors: Ly Thi Hang, Ly Thi Siu, Ban Thi Dung

Weddings of the Dao Tien people are always held in traditional style—which is kept through generations and unchangeable. The wedding ceremony takes place over three days and two nights with multiple sophisticated preparations, especially for the groom's family. Before the wedding, the groom's family must bring two coins to the house of the relatives who know the customs and ask them to bring the wedding presents to the bride's house. The groom's wedding delegates will consist of six boys and two girls. On the first night of the wedding, the groom's family will send matchmakers and the groom's sister to the bride's house to ask for agreement on bringing the bride home.

Wedding preparations

The groom's family prepares baskets, salt divided into many small packages, cloth cut into pieces, "gio" paper, "dong" leaves, pork, cake, sour meat, two pairs of raw chicken, one piglet of 10kg, one piece of silver, one jar of wine, red thread, votive... The bride's family prepares one "bem" (a bamboo chest), one "diu" (a net backpack), one pair of mats, one blanket, clothes, scarves, and dowry (necklace, earrings, ring, bracelet, etc).



Wedding procedures

Day 1: Representatives of the groom's family go to the bride's family to propose marriage for the two children.



Day 2: After the two families agree, the groom's family organizes to welcome the bride in the following day. The matchmakers make a spell to safely bring the bride to the groom's house. The bride's family invites 12 more people to accompany the bride to the groom's house.



After picking up the bride, in the afternoon, the groom's family brings the presents to the bride's house to complete the wedding procedures. The presents include two baskets of salt, 12 baskets of meat, four chickens, one piglet, one jar of wine, one piece of silver, paper, "gio" paper, votive paper, cake, and many small packets of salt.



In the evening, upon receiving the groom's family's wedding presents, a representative from the bride's family will check the presents; if they are in full quantity, the praying ceremony can be started. After praying, the bride prostrates and offers wine to the bride's family to present as a new member part of the family. The meat and salt will then be divided among the bride's family relatives.

Day 3: On the last morning—the 3rd day—the two families gather to weigh the silver brought by the groom's family to see if it is enough quantity. The bride's family will return a part of the silver to the groom's family at will. At the same time, the girl's family must send two people (one man, one woman) to bring the dowry to the groom's house.



When every procedure is done, the bride and groom become husband and wife with the blessing of the two families.



"Nom Dao" script



"Nom Dao" script

Authors: Trieu Thi Phuong, Dang Thi Son, Ly Thi Mui

"Nom Dao" script is an ancient script of the Dao Tien people. Today, mainly the older generation still uses it. "Nom Dao" script is used in many books of the Dao people, such as teaching, science, ethics, and worship. Today, "Nom Dao" script is taught in small numbers in Dao communities.



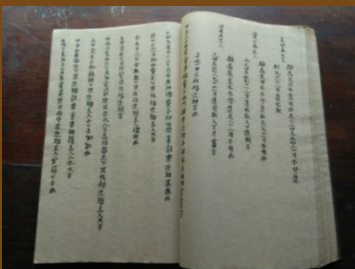
Ground ink



Brush



"Gio" paper



Books written in "Nom Dao" include many genres, such as holy books, humanitarian books, worship books, horoscope books, etc.



Mr. Ly Van Henh, artisan, "Nom Dao" script teacher in Sung village



Mr. Trieu Phuc Hanh, Nom Dao script artisan in Sung village

Community exhibition

The work of the women was displayed and introduced in the Dao Tien community in Cao Son commune on September, 24, 2022.



The exhibition attracted a lot of attention from the local people because it was the first time that familiar activities of the Dao Tien ethnicity were depicted, recorded, and introduced in a formal way.



The authors expressed their pride when presenting their work for the first time, reflecting enthusiasm and love for their ethnicity. The authors were very emotional when they were praised, given encouragement, and given recognition from the audience for their meaningful work.



The commune women club performed traditional dancing and singing to welcome the community exhibition.



