

For Development of Traditional Guilds During the International Integration

by Ass. Prof, Dr. ĐÀO DUY HUÂN

Traditional guild is one of characteristics of rural areas. In the past decades, especially after the economic reform was launched, many traditional guilds have been revived and developed along with appearance of new guilds in an effort to meet the increasing demand from the domestic market.

Some questions arising from their development are as follows: What are their contributions to the economic growth? Why did some of them decline while others prosper although they enjoy the same socio-economic environment? What measures and policies are needed for developing them when Viet integrates into the world economy?

A survey conducted by the Ministry of Industry shows that traditional guilds employ some 1.3 million craftspersons and from three to five million seasonal laborers, which affirms their role in creating new jobs; preserving and developing traditions and supporting the urbanization in rural areas. By developing well in rural areas, they help reduce flows of migrants to cities which cause many social issues there.

Average income of laborers in the traditional guilds varies between VND600,000 and 1.5 million, higher than that from rice growing, especially in such populous areas as the Hồng Delta. Moreover, traditional guilds can offer jobs to old folks, the disabled and children who can't find employment in other sectors.

According to the Vietnam Association of Cooperatives, guilds that want to get recognized as traditional ones should ensure the income from their businesses equals at least 50% of the total income for their members and employ at least 30% of the working force or families of their home villages. Up to June 2006, some 1,451 villages were registered as traditional guilds. Of this number, 1,068, or 73.6%, were in the North; 116 (8%) in Central Vietnam and 267 (18.4%) in the South.

The Hồng Delta in the North housed 821 guilds. The biggest figures were found in Hà Tây (196); Thái Bình (159); Ninh Bình (78); Hải Dương (72), Bắc Ninh (66); Hà Nam (49); Vĩnh Phúc (48); Hà Nội (44); Nam Định (43); Hưng Yên (42) and Hải Phòng (24).

Hà Tây ranked first in this list. The number of guilds there rose from some 80 in 1996 to 196 at present employing some 160,000 laborers. In 2005, their output was worth some VND3,000 billion and

the average income for a family was 14.7 million. Typical among them were the silk weaving guild of Vạn Phúc; blacksmith guild of Đa Sí; wood carving guild of Dư Dụ; furniture guild of Chàng Sơn; lacquerware guild of Ngọ Hạt; and hat making guild of Chuông. In Vạn Phúc Village (Hà Đông Province), there are guilds making silk, dying cloth and printing patterns on cloth employing 45% of the village population. The guild of blacksmiths in Đa Sí employed some 3,000 laborers, or 60% of working population of the district and ensured an average income of VND13 million a year for each family. In the guild of mechanics in Phùng Xá (Thạch Thất District), there were 3,200 laborers, or 52.2% of the working population of the district, and their average income was VND10 million a year for a family.

In Central Vietnam, Quảng Nam Province housed 66 guilds, Bình Định 19, Phú Yên 11 and Quảng Ngãi 11. In Quảng Nam, guilds employed some 20,000 laborers to produce silk and cloth (Mã Châú and Duy Trinh in Duy Xuyên District), baskets (Âu Cơ in Núi Thành District), tea (town of Tam Kỳ) and marble (Tràng Thạch in Đại Lộc District). These guilds usually accounted for some 90% of the income and output of the villages.

In the South, An Giang had the biggest number of guilds, 70, and was followed by Đồng Tháp 31; Tây Ninh 25, Cần Thơ 24, Cà Mau 20, Bình Thuận 19 and HCMC 12. In An Giang, besides guilds making cloth in Văn Giáo (Tịnh Biên District) and Châú Phong (Tân Châú District); farming hand tools in Phú Mỹ (Phú Tân District), and sugar from Cambodian palm trees in Tịnh Biên and Tri Tôn Districts, there were new guilds making carpets from water hyacinth in Chợ Vam (Phú Tân District).

Regarding their products, there were 952 handicraft guilds, or 65.6%, making objects from bamboo and rattan (276 guilds); rush mats (131); wooden works of art (123); embroideries (98); carpets, rope and bags from jute (41); ceramics (35); copper and silver engraving (7); and metalwork (4), 264 guilds, equaling 18.2%, processing farm products to make foodstuff (112); sugar (27); spirits (16); rice milling (15); tea (12); fish sauce (19); and herbal medicines (8), 153 guilds (10.5%) making small industrial articles, such as industrial spare parts (61); household appliances (31); clothes, leather and leatherette (31); or processing cotton and feathers (13), and 82 guilds (5.7%) producing building materials, such as tiles, bricks and sand (79); and stone (3).

At present, there are some 200 handicrafts supplied by traditional guilds. Most of these products have been made in Vietnam or Indochina for hundreds of years and used for agricultural production. As for products made of bamboo and rattan, they have been used as household goods (such as baskets, bails, farming tools, etc.). Wooden goods might be pieces of furniture, statues used for worship or cutlery. Ceramic goods might be dishes, bowls and ornaments. Techniques of craftspersons are handed down from generation to generation and perfected continuously.

After their revival and recent developments, traditional guilds still face difficulties and defects: their development is unruly; their size are small; their technology is obsolete; areas needed for extension is lacking; sources of raw materials are sometimes deficit; pollution is not dealt with properly and some guilds start producing goods according to orders placed by major customers and detach themselves from traditions.

According to a survey conducted by the Center for Environmental Protection under the Vietnam Association of Cooperatives in 2006, the environment in many traditional guilds is alarming causing harm to the public health and agricultural production.

In Đa Hội (Bắc Ninh) where a guild that recycles iron articles dumps from 350 to 400 cubic meters of untreated effluent every day to the Ngũ Huyện Khê River. Tests show that in water samples taken from this river, the content of BOD is seven times, and of COD eight times, higher than the standard limits.

In the paper recycling guild in Phong Khê (Tiên Du District, Bắc Ninh Province), there are 900 production lines that dump some 300 cubic meters of untreated effluent to the Ngũ Huyện Khê River every day, and as a result, some three hectares of rice in the Cầu Tiên field have become waste land for years.

In Phúc Lâm Village (Việt Yên District, Bắc Giang Province), there are some 30 slaughterhouses that dump some 9 tonnes of solid waste and effluent every day to surrounding lakes and ponds where no fish could be found. All wells in the village are polluted severely. The smog stays permanently above the Đông Mai Village (Văn lâm District, Hưng Yên Province) where guilds recycling lead articles are operating. The lead content in sources of water is from 32 to 65 times higher than the standard limit while the dust content in the air is from five to 10 times higher than the limit.

In Hà Tây Province, the provincial Service of Resources and Environment says that operation of guilds in 2005 polluted both the air and water. In the mechanical guilds of Phùng Xá, vain Phúc, Hữu

Bằng, Thanh Thùy and Chàng Sơn, the noise level usually amounts to 100dBA. The average dust density in the air in the dry season in these villages is usually three to four times higher than the standard limit. Lack of effluent treatment plants in most guilds leads to severe pollution of ground and underground water.

According to the Institute of technology and Environment under the Hà Nội University of Technology, all water samples from guilds in the North give higher-than-standard-limit pollution indexes. Recent studies from the Institute of Labor Protection show that the most common diseases among laborers in traditional guilds are respiration ones, such as pharyngitis (30.56%) and bronchitis (25%). In the lead recycling village of Đông Mai mentioned above, all laborers are poisoned by lead; 65.6% of its population contract respiration diseases; and 19.4% of them suffer some reduction in their red blood cell. In the spirit making guild of Văn Hà (Bắc Giang Province), 68.5% of its population contract skin diseases and 58.8% intestine ones.

To help traditional guilds deal with their problems, develop steadily and survive the international integration, the Government should pay more attention to them (it always pays too much attention to the public sector) by adopting progressive policies to support them in many aspects and levels, and at the same time, encourage them to cooperate with one another to improve their competitiveness. ■



Photo by Huỳnh Thơ