

# Traditional Social Structure and Its Changes in Current Muong Societies in Hoa Binh Province, Vietnam

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## Abstract

This article examines the traditional social structure of the Muong and its influences on their society in the modern society of Muong people in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The author employs the methodology of Structuralism and Functionalism along with anthropological methods, observations, data collection, and in-depth interviews. The author points out that the Muong people still appreciated the role of religious dignitaries and the critical existence of the elder in their occupation despite the fact that their social structure has been officially eliminated since 1954. Nowadays, the local authority of Hoa Binh province is paying more attention to preserving the traditional values of shaman and stimulating the young Muong people to study their patois to protect positive cultural values through the role of Muong social classes in the context of modernization. Simultaneously, the author intends to propose some influential solutions

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to consult with the authority and local groups of Muong people in Hoa Binh province to implement appropriate policies of cultural preservation in Hoa Binh province effectively in the future.

**Keywords:** Muong People, Social Structure, Structuralism and Functionalism, Hoa Binh Province, Vietnam

## Introduction

Muong people are one of the largest ethnic groups among 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam, and its estimated population in Hoa Binh province is 529,026 among 1,452,059 Muong people nationwide in 2019 (General Statistics Office, 2019: 44). It can be seen that the number of Muong people in Hoa Binh province accounts for a one-third population of Muong people in Vietnam. Historically, Muong is an ethnic group of the Viet-Muong ethnic community but experiencing a little influence by Chinese rule, so several researchers stated that Muong people originated from ancient Vietnamese people. The division of ethnic groups is supposed to occur in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Muong people resided in mountainous areas in Northern Vietnam, while a group of Viet people moved to the Red River Delta and were assimilated by Chinese people and became Vietnamese people. This evolution ended circa the 12<sup>th</sup> century as scholarly consensus (Keith, 1983: 180) as soon as the Viet people permanently built their own state in the Red River Delta and made the so-called Great Viet Civilization. Like other ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Muong people have a well-established history of the agricultural economy, and its social structure is very analogous to public social structures in Vietnam in feudal society. In the past,

administrative units of Muong people were organized by “Muong”, which can be seen as the largest unit of Muong people. Inside a Muong, there is a leader called “Nha Lang” who ruled smaller units of Muong people. This paradigm strongly existed over the course of feudal societies (Vong, 2014). It was not until the annexation of the French, that they established a new province named Hòa Bình or *Tỉnh Mường* (Muong province). In 1892, the Indochinese Governor sanctioned a directive with the aim of reorganizing the Muong people and assigned six Quan Lang (Muong leader) via an election while the remaining six Quan Lang was appointed by Hoa Binh Minister (Tu, 1996), and the French parallelly maintained the traditional ruling of Muong. In the meantime, they combined with colonial administration to manage Muong units in Hoa Binh province. In social structure after the debacle of the French in Dien Bien Phu campaign, Vietminh demolished former administrative units of Muong people as well as some negative social classes in Muong societies, they were Quan Lang (Muong leaders/landlord) and reconstruct Muong societies based on their management. Muong societies were highly autonomous during the socialism building in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War and a new organization has been formed since Doi Moi with an administrative level including province level, district level, ward level, and village level (Nam, 2021: 113-114), which adapted to a reunited administrative unit of Vietnam after the war. However, the decline of the old social paradigm since 1954 probably did not trigger the declining role of the shaman and the elder playing a critical role in the current life of the Muong people. While the elder takes care of the material life of Muong, the shaman represents a superpower to

patronize and bless the life of villagers. There are three research questions to be dealt with in this research paper.

1. How was the traditional social structure of Muong people shaped in the past and what constitutions did it have?
2. How has the Muong traditional social structure changed since the dismantlement of old paradigms replaced by administrative units as well as the alternation of social classes in the current Muong societies?
3. What policies can be issued and suggested to facilitate a well-preserved culture of Muong people which is on the rise of cultural loss ipso facto the rapidity of modernization and industrialization in Vietnam are negatively impacting the traditional culture and commune organization of Muong people in the future?

## Methodology and Research Methods

### Methodology

The notion of social structure is solidly established by various theorists in the world. George P. Murdock, in *Social Structure*, supposed that kinship systems in preliterate societies and utilized social structure as a device for classification, comparison, and examination of numerous aspects of the kinship system (George , 1949). In the majority of the East societies, the kinship system plays a vital role in consolidating all members of a family. Based on this foundation, every individual has a tendency to expand their family to establish a community. The benefit of the husbandry and culture formed traditional villages, and the relations in a village originated from the

kinship system in the area of that village. The culture of family led to the mutual values of village culture. Meanwhile, Levi-Strauss stated that for structural anthropology, primitive societies are social forms largely dominated by complex networks of kinship that perform crucial functions to maintain the whole social order. These networks are conceived as an analytically isolatable domain of facts that make up one 'level' of the whole social form (Alan, 1979: 44). It is indicated that the formation of social structures, primarily in primitive societies, deprived of the kinship system. This mechanism contributed to building a social stratum, and social classes appeared. In the Muong society, the kinship system, particularly in the domination of the Quach, Dinh family in Hoa Binh province, led to the social division and initially shaped an entire feudal social structure of the Muong people.

In addition, William A. Haviland assumed that social structure is really a political organization. He defined that political organization refers to the means a society uses to maintain order internally and manage its affairs with other societies externally. Such organization may be relatively uncentralized and informal, as in bands and tribes, or centralized and formal, as in chiefdoms and states (William, 1999: 343). Based on this viewpoint, researching the Muong social structure thus generalized the evolution of Muong society from tribes and bands to the feudal system, which is under the management of chiefdoms and states. The Muong social structure is a kinship organization that developed from the tribe organization. The formation of *Nhà Lang* is a typical example of this statement. Probably, this definition is proper to other societies of both the

old Vietnamese social structure and other ethnic groups in Vietnam in their feudal period.

Additionally, the author is to examine the changes in the social structure of the Muong people, so the Functionalism theory of Bronisław Malinowski plays a decisive role in specifying cultural transformation in this mechanism. According to Malinowski, the social structure way is likened to the body organ. In the case of the Muong people, traditional structure plays a vital role in reproducing the traditional culture of this ethnic group. Malinowski also emphasized the public economy of the tribe as his central theme. He paid attention to the role of the chief as an accumulator, through customary channels of obligation, of a high proportion of the tribal agricultural produce, which gave him status and power of social control and of organizing tribal enterprise (Firth, 1972: 467). This theory is congruous with the hypothesis of this article. The leading role of the chief, psychist, and religious dignitaries in the Muong ethnic group contributed to establishing their social structures. Simultaneously, they appreciate the role of the family as the smallest unit of that social structure to preserve their culture and rituals.

Generally, the traditional social structure of ethnic groups in Vietnam was constructed based on the agricultural economy and the critical role of families. The solidarity of people in labor and flood control results in the formation of villages and communities. Headman originated from the universal election of commoners, but the unequal distribution of production led to social-class division, the rising of the kinship system, and the onus of feudalization. The social structure of all societies is fundamentally formed based on the kinship system and patriarchal

birthright along with the totalitarianism of headmen in their political power and land ownership.

### **Research methods**

This paper is a qualitative design that employs qualitative research methods in anthropology. The author collected valuable information on the Muong ethnic groups in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam in fieldwork in some districts of Hoa Binh province, including Luong Son district, Lac Thuy district, Mai Chau district, Cao Phong district, Lac Son district, Tan Lac district in July 2021. First of all, data collection was applied at some administrative offices of those districts to have a specific statistic concerning the number of shamans in Hoa Binh province. Relied on the statistic, the author showed in the paper and closely examined the figure so as to depict the tendency and fact of the shaman role as well as the reality of the Muong language in maintaining traditional societies and culture in Hoa Binh province.

Besides, the author participated in Muong people's daily life in Lac Son district, which has several shamans in Hoa Binh province with the intention of conducting observation and in-depth interviews. The author selected a variety of occupations, genders, and ages, including prestigious people (village elders, village chiefs, family leaders, shaman), people involved in local government work, and socio-cultural work. The content of the in-depth interviews was prepared with a set of questions suitable to the research content of the topic. However, the purview of this research is only limited to some specific groups which own a large population of the Muong people in Hoa Binh. This group represented the author's research sample in conducting surveys, including 25 Muong interviewees in those districts.

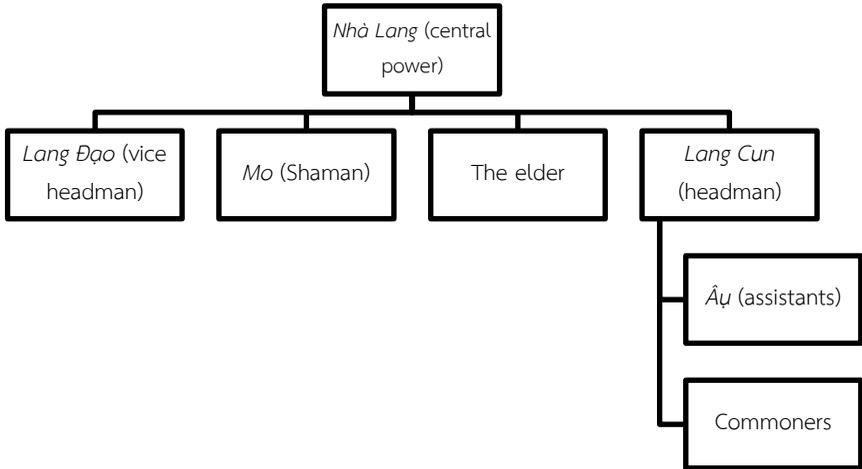
Meanwhile, the secondary literature analysis is an important source of material for the topic. Because of being a desk-research paper, the author systematized and analyzed the research results of previous scientists on the culture of the Muong people in order to have an overall view regarding traditional and current Muong societies and culture

Last but not least, the method of the policy analysis stated that the modern social structure is strongly influenced by the traditional structure. The reality of the current Muong social structure helped the author suggest a wide range of solutions in order to remain the role of social classes in current Muong societies and encourage it in the future.

## Research Results

### The traditional social structure of the Muong people

First and foremost, Muong people in the past had a densely-populated census regionwide. They occupied a large square of land and congregated in low mountainous regions very close to their land and fields. According to Bui Huy Vong, there are three categories of villages: *Lang Chiêng*, *Lang Trai*, and *Lang Chéo* (Vong, 2014). Muong is the unit that consists of many *Lang* in a village. A prominent characteristic of the Muong commune organization is the formation of *Nhà Lang*. They called their villages *Mol*. Meanwhile, Jeanne Cuisinier in *Muong people and their human geography* argued that as for the seigneur, they must ensure the right of the next-in-line prince. This person partially rules the fief. It is a fundamental reason which helps Muong self-establish their traditional society (Cuisinier, 1985: 31). The traditional social structure of Muong can be illustrated below



**Figure 1:** Traditional social structure of Muong people in Hoa Binh province

*Nhà Lang* is a fundamental social structure of the Muong people in Hoa Binh. The most influential person is the seigneur called *Lang*. This class appeared in Muong's old society during the reign of the Hung Kings. Due to a specific characteristic of villages in Vietnam, namely the close relationship between the leader and commoners. *Langs* were very well-behaved and respected the role of their commoners in a *Nhà Lang*. Also, they assisted the people to cultivate the land and protect them from wild animals. Particularly, *Lang* assisted the impoverished in a *Nhà Lang*. When required, the poor got ready to serve *Nhà Lang* or other better-off classes. This tied relationship of the Muong people is very similar to the state of the Vietnamese people under the regime of the Hung Kings. The benefits of *Nhà Lang* equated to the common rights of villagers in *Nhà Lang*. As a

result, Muong people have ethnic solidarity in the face of danger. One more instance, *Nhà Lang* supported their residents in adversities, but they had an obligation to the spiritual life of the Muong people. Therefore, the punishment would be unavoidable once they do not take responsibility for ordinary events. Commoners were entitled to vote for a person who has the experience to become a *Lang Cun* because it is compulsory that a person undertake the role in their rituals. The commoners were very staunch with their heads and gave them an offering after their harvest. Doan Hungs a foundation for local democratic building in villages in Hoa Binh province nowadays (Hung, 2004: 61).

On the contrary, this relationship became more and more conflicting because of the centralization of the feudal system. The headman of *Nhà Lang* was classified into two social classes including *Lang Cun* and *Lang Đao*. *Lang Cun* is a person who powerfully ruled the domain of the Muong people, and this paradigm is very patriarchal. *Lang Đao* belongs to peripheral issues, so he had to obey *Lang Cun* but was entitled to control a smaller unit of a *Nhà Lang*. *Nhà Lang* is an archetype of Asian Production based on the theory of Karl Max. This paradigm reveals that all units of the village possess a large square of public fields and lands. *Nhà Lang* monopolized land distribution in the domain. The relationship between *Nhà Lang* and commoners has been profoundly democratic in primitive history, but this relationship became unequal during the feudalization among the Muong people. In fact, despite living in the vicinity of the Kinh people, they were hardly impacted by the autocratic style in their early history. The feudalization stimulated the central role of males in a family, and the family of the Muong people was very patriarchal then. Tran Tu

supposed that a *Nhà Lang* ruled all commoners, and this class was a noble in Muong society (Hung, 2004: 62). They had a right to distribute the public field of *Nhà Lang*. Meanwhile, there are three methods of land ownership in Muong society. *Ruộng lang*, *Ruộng dân* (civic lands), *Ruộng công* (public lands). *Ruộng lang* belongs to *Nhà Lang*'s ownership (Cuisinier, 1985). Moreover, two types of labor are *Mường*, *Xâu* (general labor), and *Nõ* (household labor). *Nhà Lang* depends on these methods to exploit peasants in the community. *Xâu* is preponderant of *Lang Cun*. Peasants must have no-paid exploitation in the fief. *Ậu* plays an overseer to production and harvests. Meanwhile, *Ruộng Nõ* is the method of household labor. Thus, peasants can benefit from this model, but they still pay tribute to *Nhà Lang* and *Lang Cun* (Ethnic minorities in Vietnam, 1978: 80; Tu, 1996: 17-51).

The lowest position in this mechanism is *Ậu*. There are many people in charge of different missions. In some cases, they take responsibility for civic meetings.

**Table 1:** The list of positions for Au in the Muong villages (Ha Kinh, 1983)

No.	Positions	Obligations
1.	Ậu Chấu	Services of commoners
2.	Ậu Hóa	Weddings and funerals
3.	Ậu Huyền	Harvests and hydropower
4.	Ậu Quyền	Food
5.	Ậu Chiêng	Human resource
6.	Ậu Dọ	Temples and shrines overseeing

No.	Positions	Obligations
7.	Ậu Ban Thường	Carrier
8.	Ậu Công Khó	Meritorious persons of Nhà Lang
9.	Ậu Cai Xã	Tax
10.	Ậu Cai Cả	Vigilante
11.	Ậu Cai Nhâng	Nhà Lang's diet
12.	Ậu Cai Lĩnh	Military services

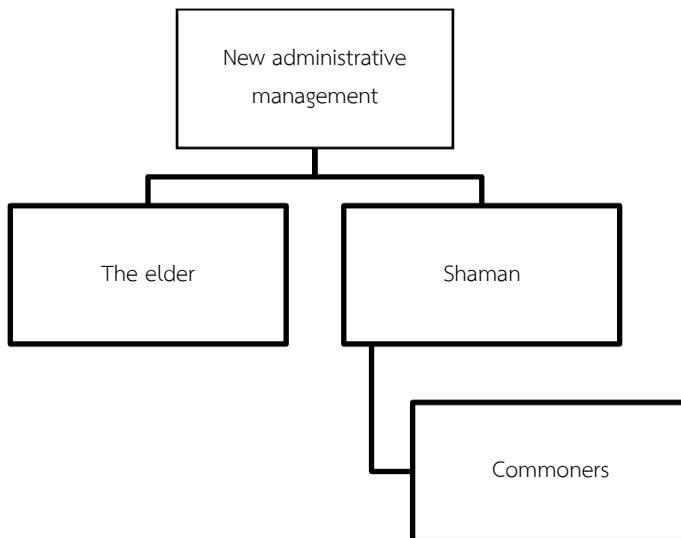
The position unveils that there is a clear division in the old paradigm of the Muong people. The well-organized arrangement of *Nhà Lang* and *Ậu* helped seize his domain effectively. However, *Ậu* did not have the birthright. These people were likely to be reassigned by *Nhà Lang* when they performed their duty incompletely.

Besides, the Muong people perform their duty toward their own ancestors via the central role of magicians, named *thầy cúng* (shaman). Theoretically, Mauss put an emphasis on the resemblance between magic and religion. In Mauss's viewpoint, both involve mystical power. Magic is a "social fact," a fundamental unit of society. Every rite that is not communal involves magic (Steven , 1975: 80). It implies that religion plays a critical role in the majority of ethnic groups' communities, and Muong people are not exceptional. In the past, magicians can be seen as a go-between both consulted with *Nhà Lang* to organize annual festivals and family occasions for the Muong people. The existence of magicians in the modern Muong social structure unveils that spiritual life lies at the heart of the Muong people. The animism and traditional belief originated from the agricultural

culture. They gave their full credence to the role of Siant, who is believed to patronize the Muong people and bestow them with a fruitful harvest. Religious practice is an occasion to gather all members of families and villages, and the feature of solidarity and ethnic's notion is rising through the nuptial and funeral occasion of a village. From the past to the present, the Muong people have consistently raised the value of the role of the shaman in their spiritual life. These people had been family heads, older people, family leaders, and magicians in a village in the past. Shaman has deep knowledge about conventions, customs, and practices, and these people are reputable people in the community, often standing out to resolve conflicts within the village, conflicts between families and clans (Tu, 1996: 179-227). Meanwhile, the elders became the most prestigious and experienced people to be assigned by *Nhà Lang* for managing families, villages, and smaller units. In Muong families of the old societies, their family is exceedingly paternal compared to the traditional family of Kinh people. The man is the breadwinner, and he plays a role in deciding all affairs of the family. His posterity was entitled to inherit all of his assets. This paradigm helped the Muong people maintain their cultural reproduction, mostly in rituals and customs (Tu, 1996: 8-11). Additionally, the old Muong people still maintained polygamy in their society. A man simultaneously tied a knot with several women, and their offerings mutually lived under a house. A man married a lower-class woman, yet a woman was not allowed to tie a knot with an upper-classman (Hung, 2004: 63-64).

### The current social structure of the Muong people

The former paradigm of Muong society was officially eliminated in 1954 and replaced all units of social structure in the Muong society with new management reorganized based on administrative units of the new regime. Despite the disappearance of Muong's old social structure, Muong people still respected traditional organizations within their families and villages through the role of shaman and the elder. It seems reasonable to say that Muong old villages promoted their autonomy throughout their history to protect the positive values of social structure, especially in rural areas (Hung, 2004: 64-67).



Nowadays, the shaman is a person that is prestigious and deeply understands the traditional rituals and customs. Also, the shaman is a counselor and communicator in both spiritual life and the actual situation.

Muong people always invite shamans to pay their tribute to their ancestors on all occasions of life circle. There are three key occasions, namely, birthday, marriage, and funeral, but shaman also takes over their role in their house-warming party and other occasions. The owner prepares complete offerings, and then a psychist helps the owner rapport with their ancestor. Shaman conveys the owner's wishes and petitions to the ancestry and the descendent wish to harvest bountiful crops and health. According to an occupant in Tan Lac district:

"I nearly approach the 80<sup>th</sup> year of my life. I and my neighbors have lived here for a very long time, even since the primitive history of my ethnicity. Thanks to the role of shaman, I can live long." (*Female, 79 years old, Phong Phu ward, Tan Lac District, Hoa Binh, Vietnam.*)

The spiritual life of the Muong people clearly appears on their New Year's Eve via the voice of the magician.

"Shaman is very important in our life. Some difficult words are unreadable because I do not know them. Therefore, we have a magician help us. For example, in my family, offerings on New Year's Eve include chicken, glutinous rice, and self-pray. The magician is responsible for the important days of New Year's Eve. He spends one hour completing his ritual. He conveyed our wishes by his words." (*Male, 45 years old, Muong Vang, Hoa Binh, Vietnam.*)

After a year of labor, the Muong people invite a shaman to assist them to express honor to their ancestors and pray for a bonanza year. Provided that the villagers are in ailment, the shaman is expected to pray for the patronage of the owner's ancestor. However, the role of the shaman in Muong modern societies is widely unrecognized because most of them misunderstand this religion as a superstitious belief. However, a shaman expostulated this wrong opinion:

"Many people opined that the magician is very excellent, lenient, and has a likeliness to banish evil spirits and treat diseases for people. In fact, the magician lacks knowledge of medicine. Some magicians learned to cure the patient based on their personal experience, and the two missions are quite different. People see our worshipping be very magical, so they rumored that we are a witch." (A shaman, 64 years old, Muong Bi, Hoa Binh, Vietnam)

There are altogether 190 shamans in Hoa Binh province in the present. According to statistical figures, most of them live in the Lac Son district and sporadically reside in the Lac Son district. The table below illustrates the number of *Shamanin* Hoa Binh and the percentages.

**Table 2:** Numbers of *shaman* in Hoa Binh province (2018) (Hoa Binh People's Committee, 2018)

No.	Districts	Number of <i>shaman</i> (people)	Percentage (%)
1.	Cao Phong	15	7.9
2.	Da Bac	10	5.26

No.	Districts	Number of <i>shaman</i> (people)	Percentage (%)
3.	Hoa Binh city	5	2.63
4.	Kim Boi	18	9.48
5.	Ky Son	5	2.63
6.	Lac Son	45	23.69
7.	Lac Thuy	3	1.57
8.	Luong Son	8	4.21
9.	Mai Chau	4	2.1
10.	Tan Lac	74	38.94
11.	Yen Thuy	3	1.57

The data unveils that Tan Lac district has a considerable number of the shaman, 74 people, and the percentage accounts for 38.94%. Meanwhile, the number of the shaman in Lac Thuy district and Yen Thuy district is only three people, accounting for 1.57%. Thus, it is evident that the distribution of shamans is uneven in the province. In fact, the Muong people paid their honor to the shaman, and this man is indispensable in all rituals and customs of the Muong people. If the village's commune has shaman deficiency, it will directly threaten their society and culture.

Moreover, Muong people in some districts still increase the *Già làng* elder's importance in their living areas. The longevity of the Muong elder in contemporary social structure proves that *Nhà Lang* has a strong influence on the perception of Muong people in their society. The *Già làng* is a person that is very adept at local regulations of Muong people, even the non-verbal

regulations are applicable in modern society, and *Già làng* will become a consultant of a local on key occasions for Muong people, such as New Year's Eve, traditional festivals and other common affairs. There is 70 percent of Muong responders stated that *Già làng* shoulder the responsibility of conveying commoners' wishes to administrative leaders of a hamlet/ward/district, and *Già làng* are suggested to appear on key occasions in villages.

In addition, the contemporary Muong people in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam, are patriarchial, but the division of family member roles is becoming more transparent. The modern Muong family is a nuclear family including three or four members living under a roof. In comparison with former social structures, this number is fewer than in the past because Muong people no longer have a penchant for extended family. According to statistics of the author's survey, 100% of 25 interviewees responded that young Muong people would not live with their parents when they become older. Meanwhile, Muong people no longer have a perception of son-born responsibility to a place to depend on their life during their aging. 77% of interviewees replied that it is not crucial that Muong women must deliver a son to their family while the other part still appreciates the existence of a son in their family. When asked who takes liability for family income, the majority of responders reached a consensus that both genders earn money for family income, accounting for 75%, while the other part supposed that husbands still play a central role in boosting the household income. In a family, Muong people still speak their mother tongue in daily life. There is 75% of responders self-evaluate their language proficiency from intermediate to advanced level. However, unfortunately, 25% of

interviewees stated that they do not speak the Muong language in their family or speak a very poor language of their mother tongue. This sign reveals that traditional cultural values and rituals will not be preservable and cause the decline of cultural disturbance in young Muong people.

The Muong people's modern social structure is rather well-ordered despite the disestablishment of the traditional social structure. The highest position of Muong society is magicians, the elders, and experiencing middle-aged. They played a vital role in preserving the traditional cultural traits of the Muong people. Particularly, the notion concerning the role of magicians as a connector between their ancestors and Muong people illustrated that a mutual belief helped all Muong people enhance their solidarity and raise the young Muong people's awareness of their provenance and their responsibility of preserving Muong people's traditional culture and cultural production to defend local culture in their future. In contrast, Shaman becomes an indispensable class in the Muong society. The elders and experiencing middle-aged become key advisers in common events of the Muong villages and encourage all Muong people to join traditional festivals annually enthusiastically. They are likely to cooperate with local authorities in Hoa Binh province in order to timely propagate the political policies of the party and the state.

## Discussions

In fact, there is a lack of research papers to shed light on the role of Muong social classes to protect culture and societies of them in the context of alienable factors. There is no denying that shamans and seniors that still exist in current Muong societies are instrumental in encouraging

the spiritual life of Muong people and then, traditional societies and culture are likely to be secured nowadays. In fact, the intervention of modernization and other ethnic groups in Hoa Binh province posed a serious threat to preserving the traditional societies and culture of the Muong people. While the number of shamans is still humble and the role of Muong seniors is no longer transparent, the young Muong people living with other ethnic groups are undergoing dialect disappearance, and the majority of these people are not conversant in their mother tongue. This drawback is interfering with their awareness of the relationship with their own community. Also, the growing influence of general Vietnamese culture is likely to influence the Muong people's cultural conservation in the present. Dinh Thi Thanh Minh (2019) argued that in the villages, there are more people from other ethnic groups living together, from which appeared multi-ethnic families of culture and bloodline (Minh, 2019: 123). This fact has both positive and negative influences. Muong people may have a well-integrated culture with Vietnamese people, yet it probably posed a menace in eliminating the traditional culture and societies of Muong people. As a result, the research result helps Muong people surmount their impediments to preserving their social structure and cultural values.

First of all, it is recommended that the authority appoint village patriarchs as members of the People Council and Committee in the local political system. According to Daniel F. Detzner, a useful way to understand the changing structure of families is to examine the types and number of individual roles they currently perform compared to their roles in the past and those of other, similarly situated groups (Daniel , 2004: 69). In most countries in Southeast Asia, the role of males becomes a deep-rooted

feature of their societies. The predominance of Confucianism and the opening of villages contributed to the acculturation process, and the Muong society is not exceptional. Hickey, in his research regarding a case study of a Vietnamese village, points out that greater gender equality may emerge for women living in Southeast Asia in old age after the death of their spouse (Daniel , 2004: 70). On the other hand, a male in a family plays a headman and is likely to become a headman of a village while the role of women is disdained. It indicates that the male role is a prominent feature in feudal countries' traditional social structures, including Vietnam. Generally, a village patriarch is a person who wins the heart of commoners and is appointed to lead the locals in main occasions and decisions of a village both in the past and the present. In essence, the village patriarch is a rebirth of *Lang* in the earliest society of the Muong people. This class was initially accorded with the commoners prior to its feudalization then. Simultaneously, *Lang Cun* is known for its ability to grasp the traditional customs and rules of the Muong people. They also play a central role in winning the people's support for specific events and the spiritual life of the Muong people nowadays. It is crucial that the Muong recover the role of the village patriarch in their current social structure. Muong people are suggested to vote for prestigious village elders in the village management. It is the pristine democracy that is referred to as research findings, and it is high time it was applied in the modern social structure of the Muong people. Also, the village patriarch is responsible for the role of advisor to local authorities of Hoa Binh province.

Besides, it is necessary that the authority stimulate cultural and social reproduction in Muong society. According to Durkheim, cultural reproduction is searching for the appropriate collective credo that will

ensure the reproduction of solidarity in the face of change (Chris, 1993: 8). The urgent problem of the Muong people is the loss of their mother tongue and intangible culture in the context of modernization. First, the majority of young Muong people are incapable of speaking their own mother tongue, which is on the verge of extinction in modern society. Hoa Binh province is one of the most rapid urbanizations so the local Muong people are only distributed in rural areas. Thus, Muong people who live in urban areas are very challenging to understand their language because of the widely speaking universal language in their daily life. In fact, language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives (Edward, 1970: 207). Minh argued that educational level should be encouraged in order to promote the cultural values of the Muong people and avoid pragmatic values, confidence lacking, and traditional culture indifference (Minh, 2019: 125). It can be seen that people can spread their idea, culture, rituals, and religion via their own language. Additionally, language is a bridge to tie antecedent to descendant. Protecting the entity of the mother tongue is a common liability of every member of a clan. When members get away from their inherited culture to clash a new language and practice the language daily, they are likely to get accustomed to the culture of that language, and gradually, they are strongly influenced by an exotic culture in the absence of their original culture. Thus, it is likely to result in a disconnection between parents and offspring.

Also, the level of solidarity of an ethnic group will be declined. Nam stated that the Muong people still have a solid coherence and solidarity seen as a positive traditional value of Muong people (Nam, 2021: 115). However, it will be infeasible once the Muong people are unable to retain their mother tongue. The loss of Muong language among young people is explainable that a policy is needed to preserve the culture and language of Muong people in urban areas. Initially, the role of the Muong family critically decides to instill cultural and traditional values into children at a young age. It is suggested that Muong's parents and grandparents should teach their children both the Vietnamese language and their mother tongue. In 2016, Hoa Binh's People Committee issued decision No. 2295/QĐ-UBND on the approval of the Muong language's letter in Hoa Binh province (Hoa Binh People's Committee, 2016). This decision stimulated the role of vernacular among the young Muong people. In the future, this language is expected to be standardized so as to be universally taught in schools or families. Education also plays a critical role for the young Muong people to approach their mother tongue. Schools should enroll in Muong language classes and promote folk culture through folk literature and time-honored cultural history. Thereby, the subsequential period of cultural reproduction is social reproduction. The young Muong people get imbued with ethnic identity and show great respect for their origin. They are likely to reorganize their society toward both tradition and modernity. Mostly in rituals and language protection.

In addition, the authority should be fully aware of the paramount importance of religious practice, and a complete policy of shaman cultural preservation is crucial to protect the positive values of this folk culture.

*Shaman* contains valuable types of folklore: Folklore, performance, music, dance, theatre, belief, and pieces of knowledge. The spoken Muong language in these genres contributes to taking pride in the Muong's cultural and historical values. In 2018, Hoa Binh's people committee issued decision No. 3015/QD-UBND on promoting the project "Preservation and enhancement in *Shaman* cultural heritage values in 2019-2025 and the Following Years". They appreciate the role of the Muong epic in their history, awareness, and solidarity (Hoa Binh People's Committee, 2018) but this policy is insufficient to widely retain this culture in the future. Meanwhile, *Shaman* is confronting obstacles to put a solid position in modern society. First, *Shaman* is considered to be a superstitious belief by many people. They are biased toward this custom. According to People Committee, the proportion of Muong's knowledge about *Shaman* is very superficial.

**Table 3:** The level of knowledge about Shaman regarding Age range (2018)  
(Hoa Binh People's Committee, 2018)

Age ranges	The level of knowledge about shaman	Number of ballots	Percentage (%)
Under 40	Superficial understanding	68	34
	It is considered as a superstitious belief	11	5.5
40-60	Deep understanding	8	4
	Superficial understanding	55	27.5
	It is considered a superstitious belief	14	7

Age ranges	The level of knowledge about shaman	Number of ballots	Percentage (%)
Below 60	Deep understanding	19	9.5
	Superficial understanding	23	11.5
	It is considered as a superstitious belief	2	1
Overall		200	100

According to the table, it is evident that the number of deep-understanding people in *shamans* is deficient, respectively, 19 persons in the age group below 60 years old and eight persons in the middle age group. Meanwhile, the number of superficial-understanding people is strikingly high. There are 55 people in the middle age group and 23 people in the below 60 group. It implicates that the old groups are accustomed to the *shamans* because they are the posterity of the former generation. However, the number of superficial-understanding people is high. It is explainable that the role of the *Shaman* remains undervalued in the Muong society. Moreover, the number of young people considering the *Shaman* as a superstitious belief is relatively high. It indicates that the young Muong people have a poor cognition of traditional values. Hence, the authority of Hoa Binh province should facilitate the Muong people to practice their belief in the community extensively. Muong people should educate the young generation on the positive values of the *Shaman* because this religion plays a central role in Muong people's cosmology and worldwide in place of prejudiced viewpoints. According to a well-known shaman, he supposed:

I convey my wish to my posterity should retain their human dignity because of the traditional values of the Muong people (*A shaman, male, 54 years old, Man hamlet, Van Son ward, Lac Son district, Hoa Binh, Vietnam.*)

Besides, religious dignitaries should enroll and train young people in the art of shaman. In fact, the number of shamans is relatively low in Hoa Binh province as they could not find prestigious and ambitious people. As a result, the authority should allocate the budget to Shaman training courses. The project of recognizing the intangible cultural heritage of Shaman should be urged in order to avoid causing the loss of the Muong language and folk culture in modern society.

Last but not least, the Muong people managed their village by unspoken rules in the past, so the authority should encourage local hamlets, wards, and villages to form new village conventions based on the combination of national law and traditional favorable regulations Muong people. According to Michael and Henril, a community formalizes its values as norms and codes of conduct through the establishment of conventions. These conventions form a kind of shorthand for how to act in ways that will satisfy the other members (Michael & Henril, 2011: 84). However, the original conventions of the clan need replacing by new conventions that can be adapted to the new context of the community. The coherence of the Muong people is likely to increase once the authority encourages Muong people to compile their new conventions based on the national law. Thus, the writing of traditional conventions in the Muong culture is likely to preserve the positive culture of Muong more effectively. The authority

legitimate the Muong regulations followed by articles of religion, customs, and behavior.

## Conclusions

In brief, researching Muong societies is significant to academics because this issue is underresearched in both Vietnam and in the world. While anthropological scholars are only paying attention to the traditional belief and religions of the Muong people, it is urgent to bridge a gap in the traditional social structure of the Muong people in Hoa Binh province, which can be considered as a central region of Muong people in Vietnam and the world to build a notion of an ethnic group in Vietnam historiology. The research result unveils that the social structure of Muong people is instrumental in maintaining traditional cultural values in the context of cultural degradation among Muong groups in Hoa Binh province. Even it would be dangerous once Muong people totally integrate into Vietnamese and other ethnic groups. The disappearance of shamans and the declining role of seniors will blight the developmental prospects of Muong societies in the future. Hence, this paper intends to press the advantage of critical social classes of Muong societies and lay the groundwork for further research concerning specific contributions of those social classes for Muong. The paper has recourse to authority's attention via practical solutions to make a joint effort for deepening a sense of traditional and current Muong societies in the annals of ethnic minorities in Vietnam and in the world.

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