



Community cultural education via Village Ponds, and Village Wells of farmers in the Northern Delta Region

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Abstract

Village ponds and village wells are common, communal water surface spaces that are very popular, and typical of village culture in the Northern Delta. This is a place that is closely connected and very close to the lives of farmers in many activities of daily life, such as providing water for daily use, washing, raising fish, raising duckweed and raising pigs it is a place of communication save, entertain, and imbue the spirituality of farmers. Therefore, this is also a place to educate people with a high sense of community. In this article, the author focuses on deeply understanding the characteristics of cultural space: village ponds, village wells, and their value in educating community awareness, and also offers some educational methods. Community culture for local people.

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1. Introduction

Each area, each region has very different cultural features, it is made up of natural, economic, social conditions and history of formation; It reflects people's lifestyle, customs and practices, and also governs human behavior.

The Northern Delta is the region with the longest history of exploration in the country. It is also the cradle of village culture, with very specific symbols, associated with the daily lives of the local residents - village ponds and village wells.

For an extended period, village ponds and village wells have served as vital water sources for the community's daily activities, providing water for households and irrigation for agricultural production, as well as serving as spaces for leisure, entertainment, and more. However, in recent years, the expanding urbanization into rural areas has led to gradual transformations and disruptions in the traditional village structure. The communal culture associated with village ponds and wells has shifted in a negative direction as a result. Therefore, researching and engaging in community cultural education through the living spaces of village ponds and village wells among the farmers in the Northern Delta is essential. This endeavor helps us develop a deeper understanding of the core values and enables us to propose measures to preserve and safeguard these beautiful aspects of traditional culture.

2. Research overview

The cultural life of farmers in the Northern Delta is a subject that numerous cultural researchers have explored and delved into. Nguyen Ngoc Thanh, with the work "Cultural Characteristics of the Red River Delta Region". In this document, the author introduced the land and people of the Red River Delta; historical relics and landscapes, culinary culture, costumes, crafts; Customs, practices, and festivals are also mentioned and analyzed by the author. Author Huynh Cong Ba, with the work "Characteristics and Cultural Nuances of Regions and Sub-regions in Vietnam". In this document, the author points out the typical cultural features of each region in Vietnam, then focuses on researching and carefully analyzing the cultural features of each sub-region associated with the actual conditions of each location. Author Thanh Thi Hanh, with the article "Cultural Aspects of the Northern Delta Villages".

Or author Than Thi Hanh with the article "Village culture of the Northern Delta" focuses on researching and pointing out the factors that form villages, and the cultural characteristics of villages in the Northern Delta. These works highlight many distinctive cultural traits of the region, analyzing the factors that shape them. However, when it comes to the specific details and imagery of village ponds and village wells within the cultural fabric of farmers in the Northern Delta, most articles merely touch on these subjects briefly and generally, lacking in-depth analysis. Particularly, the aspect of analyzing community cultural education through these shared living spaces hasn't been addressed.

3. Research Methods

Based on the author's practical knowledge gained from an extended period of living in the rural areas of the Northern Delta, coupled with the collection and analysis of relevant documents, the author presents a comprehensive, detailed article about the imagery of village ponds and village wells within the cultural context of the Northern Delta farmers. Additionally, the article proposes approaches for community cultural education that align with the local culture, drawing from the author's first-hand experience and gathered insights.

4. Research content

4.1. Community culture

4.1.1. The concept of community culture

Community culture is the culture of a community of people living together in a certain space. These are the common creative products of a group of people living together.

According to Pham Hong Tung, "Community culture is the behavioral culture of a community, encompassing the methods and principles of conduct within specific historical environments, spaces, and timeframes." (Tung, 2010) ^[6].

Community culture entails progressive values within lifestyles, ethics, and behavior in individuals' daily lives within the community. It serves as a common ground to establish the cohesion of a group, forming the core that fosters connections and guides members within the community.

Any group of individuals living within a certain space will always have common rules and regulations to maintain stability and sustainability within the community. The conscientious adherence to these shared regulations constitutes community culture.

4.1.2. The importance of community culture

Community culture encompasses the shared cultural values of a group of people. As such, it goes beyond being merely a collection of common cultural activities and values - it profoundly influences various aspects of the lives of individuals within the community and the broader society as a whole.

- Community culture fosters and develops connections and bonds within the community. Throughout the course of living within a community, shared cultural activities create opportunities for individuals to establish connections, build bonds, and cultivate a sense of unity. This in turn generates social support and creates an

environment of positive interaction. Shared cultural activities stimulate each individual to construct and nurture connections within the community.

- Community culture shapes and influences the lifestyles and habits of each individual. It embodies values, norms, and codes of conduct to be adhered to. Engaging in activities within the realm of community culture leads to continuous interactions among people, thereby molding lifestyles and habits according to the community's standards. Lifestyles and habits not only contribute to the formation of the cultural environment and identity of the community, but also promote equality among community members, shared responsibilities, and contribute to the development of each individual's character.
- Community culture builds the identity and reputation of the community: it reflects the unique characteristics of the community, creating its own reputation and identity. This contributes to fostering love for the homeland, national pride, and encourages love and care for the community.
- Community culture passes down knowledge and experiences from the previous generations to the future generations, ensuring continuity in the development of a community's traditions.
- Community culture supports the development of the economy and society: Community culture provides the foundation for the development of economic and social activities by defining the values, principles, and lifestyle of the community. This helps shape business and social activities that are in line with the community's values and identity.
- Community culture is a valuable resource for community tourism development. The unique and distinctive cultural aspects of each community and locality serve as attractions for tourists, driving local economic development. Developing community cultural tourism also promotes local culture to regions nationwide and globally, creating opportunities for cultural exchange between different communities.

So, community culture plays a crucial role in the development not only of that community but also for the nation and the ethnicity as a whole. In this era of deep and extensive economic integration as it is today, the role of community culture becomes more critical than ever. It is the 'soul' of the community and the nation that needs to be preserved and promoted. However, due to the rapid changes in the economy, awareness of community culture is also being influenced. Therefore, it is essential to have initiatives and educate individuals about the importance of building and preserving community culture.

4.2. The communal pond and village well spaces in the life of farmers in the Northern Delta region

4.2.1. Overview of village ponds, village wells

Village ponds and village wells are distinctive community and cultural spaces of the Northern Delta farmers in Vietnam.



Fig 1: Village pond in the Northern Delta region (Image: Internet)

- Pond is a noun that refers to areas holding water, typically stagnant. Ponds are larger than puddles but smaller than lakes.

In terms of origin, there are two types: natural ponds and artificial ponds. Natural ponds are depressions in the land formed naturally by rainwater or other sources of water collecting. On the other hand, artificial ponds are created by humans digging into the ground, making depressions deeper than the surrounding land, and then accumulating water to form a pond.

Village ponds are typically artificial ponds used as a communal water source for the entire village.

- Well is also a noun that refers to an area of stagnant water.

Usually, when referring to a well, people commonly understand it as a place where humans dig deep into the ground to reach underground water sources. These underground water sources are tapped into to collect water, which is then called a well. This type of well is known as a "source well" (well tapping into underground water sources).



Fig 2: Village well in the Northern Delta region of Vietnam (Image: Internet)

However, in the North Delta region of Vietnam, there is another type of well: a shallow well, which is almost as wide as a small pond, with a round mouth, clear and clean water, often used by villagers as a source of drinking water. This is known as a village well.

Village wells are typically located on communal land, shared by the entire village, such as near temples, pagodas, and other sacred places. Consequently, people often associate village wells with legends, mystical stories, and folklore. This is also the reason why the local residents hold village wells in high esteem and take great care of them.

4.2.2. Factors affecting the formation and development of village pond and well culture of farmers in the Northern Delta

a. Natural geographical factors

- In terms of topography, the North Delta region is

generally relatively flat, but there are still the existence of ancient alluvial terraces (over 3 meters high), natural levees (formed by the silt from the Red River and its tributaries during floods), and low-lying areas (lower than sea level by 0.2 - 0.5 meters), creating varying terrain elevations. Additionally, humans have built embankments to prevent flooding, resulting in even more differences in terrain. These low-lying areas become difficult to drain, leading to flooding during the rainy season and the formation of ponds and lakes.

- Regarding the climate, the North Delta region is located in a humid subtropical zone, receiving a significant annual rainfall ranging from 1500 to 2000mm per year. Combined with the low-lying terrain in many areas, this has created a dense network of rivers, ponds, and lakes.

b. Economic, social and other factors

- In terms of history: Vietnam has a long history of resisting foreign invaders. During these historical moments, the North Delta region was also a resistance area. Therefore, village ponds were designed as a defensive measure to prevent enemy encroachment.
- Economically: The North Delta region is predominantly an agricultural area, closely associated with rice cultivation. Therefore, water resources are of utmost importance. Besides rivers and lakes, ponds become an essential requirement for agricultural production, serving as a water source for rice fields during the dry season and a reservoir to prevent flooding during the rainy season.
- In terms of population and society: The North Delta region has the highest population density in the country, with 23.45 million people (as of 2022), and the majority reside in rural areas (62.4%). Rural populations often live in small communities, enclosed by bamboo dikes, waterways, and surrounded by fields; this constitutes a village. Each village typically accommodates 800 to 1000 households, often comprised of people with shared ancestry, family ties, or shared occupations. Consequently, residents in the village tend to have close-knit relationships, fostering a strong sense of community. This sense of community is manifested in shared spaces such as village ponds, village wells, and other communal areas.

4.2.3. Cultural values of village ponds, village wells in the life of farmers in the Northern Delta

Village ponds and village wells are water spaces intimately connected to the lives of the farmers in the North Delta region of Vietnam. They have become familiar customs and practices for these farmers.

a. Village ponds

Village ponds are communal spaces, quite typical in the North Delta region of Vietnam. In each village, there are usually several village ponds, with the most important one

being the pond in front of the village. This is often the largest pond, separating the village from the rice fields, and it runs parallel to the main village road (for example, some ponds in Dai Thang commune, Vu Ban district, Nam Dinh province: Bai village pond, Si village pond, Nguyet Mai village pond, etc.). On both sides of the pond, coconut trees and bamboo clusters are often planted to provide shade and enhance the landscape of the village. The village side of the pond is typically equipped with several pond banks, featuring multiple tiers for the convenience of residents to access the pond water. These pond banks may also be designed with bamboo bridges. On the other side of the pond lies the rice fields, and there are usually no pond banks or bridges on that side. The pond bank on that side is typically smaller, facilitating the distribution of water from the pond to the fields during the dry season.

The design of village ponds immediately in front of the village holds several reasons:

+ During the period of resistance against foreign invaders, the pond was used as a barrier to prevent the enemy's invasion: "The pond is the defense, bamboo is the fortress." This arrangement aimed to create an impregnable defense and prevent the enemy's infiltration.

+ In terms of feng shui: According to the feng shui perspective of "pre-water, rear mountain," having a "pre-water road" in front of the village is believed to bring prosperity, positive energy, wealth, and health to the village residents.

+ In terms of architecture and aesthetics: The village pond acts like a large mirror, reflecting the village's idyllic scenery in the clear water. Through the water's surface, the village's structures are doubled; the village's image becomes enchanting, mystical, and poetic. This is why many homeowners later dug ponds in front of their houses to create suitable feng shui conditions.

+ In terms of functionality: The village pond is dug along the main village road, separating the village from the fields. This provides the means for irrigating the fields during the dry season and facilitates the daily activities of the villagers.



Fig 3: Rural life of farmers in the Northern Delta region at village ponds (Image: Internet)

After returning from working in the fields, farmers with muddy hands and feet would wash themselves in the village pond. They would chat and socialize while washing, discussing farming, work, family matters, creating close and

friendly relationships.

The village pond also serves as a playground for children in the village. In the late afternoons, after helping their parents in the fields or tending to cattle and cutting grass, they would

jump into the pond, carefree, and indulge in the cool water, swimming and playing. Those who could swim would teach those who couldn't, or they would use long banana stems as floats, learning to swim. As a result, most children in the North Delta region know how to swim. However, there were also some unfortunate incidents.

When night fell, the village pond would be deserted, and it

was the time when young girls could bathe in the cool water of the pond. The sound of water flowing through their long hair, along with the croaking of frogs and toads, created a beautiful and mystical atmosphere at the pond.

In addition to being a place for bathing, the village pond was also used for washing clothes, blankets, and mats because of its large size and abundant water.



Fig 4: Fishing in village ponds during the Tet holiday (Image: Internet)

The village ponds are also known as an important source of food for the entire village, providing fish, shrimp, crabs, snails, and frogs... This food source is quite diverse. On both sides of the pond, snails are abundant, and there are many crab holes. Just by wading into the pond for a short time, farmers can collect a basket full of snails, of various sizes, or a basket of crabs to improve their family meals. The main animals raised in the village pond are fish and shrimp, which are caught on village festivals or important holidays. The days of catching fish in the pond are celebrated events. Village residents gather by the pond, watching and waiting for their share. Strong men in the village are the main workforce for this event. The products obtained after catching fish in the pond are used for village activities (e.g., ceremonies, festivals, etc.), and the rest is distributed among the villagers. The cooperative yard is bustling with excitement. Every household receives their share of fish with smiles and chatter. However, sometimes, unfair distribution can lead to unnecessary disputes among farmer households. On the water's surface, the village pond is used to cultivate water spinach to feed pigs.

The space of the village pond serves not only a material purpose but also a spiritual one. It is the place where various games are held during village festivals, including activities like cooking on the water, blindfolded duck catching, walking on bamboo rafts, and swimming competitions.

Therefore, the village pond is closely intertwined with the lives of farmers, playing multiple roles and becoming a distinctive aspect of their culture.

b. Village well

Like village ponds, village wells are a source of water for people's daily activities. But unlike village ponds, village wells are a source of water for eating and drinking, not for bathing and washing purposes. Because the village well is a symbol of sacredness.

In the countryside, the banyan tree, well, and communal

house are three symbols that often go together, placed at the beginning of the village. According to ancient Vietnamese beliefs, if the banyan tree has a god, the pagoda has a Buddha, then the well also has a water god and a mother water god. It was that concept that led to the village well having a sacred nature, like a god. Villagers often take water from the village well to worship Buddha, worship the tutelary god, or take holy baths during village festivals. In many places, many people often come to worship at the well to pray for good luck and blessings. Many wells also have a mysterious look, becoming humanistic legends and legends, expressing the spiritual culture of the entire community.

For example: In Phu Tho's Hung area, there is Gieng, which is said to be the mirror of two princesses Ngoc Hoa and Tien Dung (the 18th Hung king's son). In Co Loa temple ruins (Dong Anh - Hanoi) there is a relic of Ngoc well, associated with the legend of the love story of princess My Chau. It is said that if the pearls are washed with this well water, they will shine brightly. Or in the Upper Palace of Linh Tien Quan (Hanoi), there is a well of water that is clear and sweet all year round. People often take water here to make offerings to the gods. People who are sick and tired, when using well water, will recover quickly. Or in Mong Phu village (Duong Lam - Hanoi) there is a well "begging for milk", mothers who lack milk to feed their children come to pray for milk, then drink the well water to have enough milk to breastfeed.

In addition to the spiritual meaning, the village well has a close meaning in terms of life: the village well is the source of clean water for the villagers to use for eating and drinking. According to the concept of the ancient Vietnamese, the well is the symbol of the negative, the place where the essence converges, the bridge between heaven - earth - man; The well symbolizes the prosperity and vitality of the villagers. The well is the source of life!

In the northern countryside, almost every village has at least one village well. Village wells come in many shapes and sizes. Village wells are usually round - a symbol of heaven.

The well was dug quite large, the circumference of a small pond. In the past, the well bank was not built, leaving the land bank intact, but in recent years, when the village's economy is better, the surrounding and well walls have been built with

bricks, stacked with stones or laterite, and built with stairs provide residents with easy access to the well. A well that is not built into a wall is an earthen well.



Fig 5: Scene of women carrying water at the village well in the Northern Delta region (Image: Internet)

In the late afternoons, the village well is the place where village women go to fetch water. The water brought in is stored in jars and tanks for gradual use. Especially on the afternoon of the 30th day of Tet, the village well is very crowded, every family goes to carry water. They rush to carry water home to prepare for cooking offerings on the afternoon of the 30th, cleaning the church, and storing water for the three days of Tet (for sacred things like worshipping, only clean water is allowed - village well water). Every time they go to carry water, the village well is like a mirror, helping village girls see themselves as charming. That's why village boys often keep an eye on the village well. This is also a dating place for boys and girls.

Although it is very close to the lives of farmers, the use of village ponds and village wells also has a lot of very strict regulations, requiring all villagers to strictly follow them.

For example: Village ponds and village wells are very close to people's daily life, but not everyone who wants to go to the well or use pond water can use it all the time. The village girls when "months" (menstruation) are not allowed to go to the village well. Because according to the opinion of the people, the days when women have their periods are the dirtiest days, so they are not allowed to wade into the well to pollute the drinking water of the whole village. At the same time, village wells were built in the grounds of communal houses and pagodas, which are places of worship and solemnity, so women are not allowed to come here in the coming days. Or village pond: women are not allowed to wash their menstrual clothes in the village pond.

The village's conventions about those common living spaces, for the most part, are not written into law, but are very seriously implemented. Everyone has the right to use that common water source, but everyone has the responsibility to protect and maintain hygiene. That has created a close bond between farmers in the village, educating them about a deep sense of community. That's cultural value!

This cultural value has great significance in this day and age, when the economy is developing rapidly (in the whole country, and also in the Northern Delta), the new rural movement is flourishing, the villages are tiled, concreting, tap water is brought to the house, or many economists are better off, can build large tanks, store rain water for the whole year, then village ponds and village wells' roles are gradually

forgotten. In fact, in many places, there are many village ponds and village wells that have been leveled for construction (especially village ponds), or left abandoned and unsanitary, causing village ponds and village wells to be polluted. Serious water contamination. However, not all village ponds and wells have been pushed back into the past, there are still some places that still retain the rustic features of the village, with ancient architectures: banyan tree, well, communal courtyard. The preservation of this country spirit is probably because it is associated with the sacredness of those objects.

For example, in Dai Phung Village (Dan Phuong, Hanoi), the village well is still carefully maintained and preserved as a treasure. Every year, villagers clean and refresh the water source. The water from the village well is still used for making tea or cooking sticky rice. Another example is at Dau Pagoda (Bac Ninh), where there is a well with no high walls around it. According to legend, this is where Lady Man Nuong planted Khâu Đà La's walking stick, creating a source of water to combat drought. Today, this well remains clear, always filled with water, and the temple still uses it for various activities. In the Upper Temple of Linh Tien Temple in Cao Xa Village (Hoai Duc, Hanoi), there is a special well that the local people consider a sacred and miraculous spring. The water never runs dry, is always sweet, and no matter how much you scoop, it never depletes. People still use water from this well for worshipping the deities. (Tuấn, 2017)

The gradual disappearance of the communal spaces of village ponds and wells symbolizes the decline of a beautiful and distinctive cultural aspect of the people in the North Delta region of Vietnam. This decline also results in the loss of the sacred values associated with these community spaces, which have brought significant cultural richness to individuals and the entire community. Therefore, the preservation of village pond and well spaces in localities is essential, and it requires fostering a strong sense of community awareness among the population.

4.3. Community cultural education through the living space of village ponds and village wells of farmers in the Northern Delta

Community cultural education is the process of building a culture of conduct in public spaces, with ethical and legal

standards established by the community, aiming to create a cultural environment that benefits the entire community. (Tung, 2010) ^[6].

To provide North Vietnamese farmers with cultural living spaces in village ponds and village wells, several educational measures need to be implemented simultaneously. It involves establishing a civilized social environment that is respectful, courteous, and friendly to everyone.

- **Creating a friendly environment:** This means creating public spaces where everyone can easily access and feel comfortable, being welcomed, and providing favorable conditions for goodwill to be expressed.

A friendly and comfortable space at village ponds and village wells is simply about constructing spacious, clean pond banks where farmers can wash their feet and chat with others after working in the fields. It also involves building wide well yards where people can fetch water, cool off, or even design seating areas and plant some greenery for shade. This space is ample enough for farmers, after their strenuous work, to sit, rest, and share stories to alleviate fatigue. However, today's friendly spaces also need to pay attention to public waste bins, fostering a shared awareness of maintaining a clean and beautiful environment.

- **Promoting participation and interaction:** Encouraging community activities at village ponds and village wells, such as organizing pond clean-up events, well-related festivals, and other gatherings, provides opportunities for people to meet, converse, and build deeper relationships among community members.
- **Establishing clear rules and regulations for participation in public spaces at village ponds and village wells is essential.** These are the rules of conduct in public places, guiding people to have proper behavior when participating in communal activities, aiming to create a safe, clean, and civilized environment and a cultural landscape that adds beauty to the community and homeland. Alongside these rules, measures for management and supervision should be applied to ensure that people comply with the rules and regulations.
- **Using communication methods:** Employing communication tools such as signs, banners, and other means to convey messages, rules, and instructions for participating in community activities at village ponds and village wells.
- **Encouraging self-discipline:** Promoting farmers' self-discipline to follow the general regulations in village ponds and village wells, reminding each other to adhere to these regulations to maintain good behavior in public spaces.
- **Applying disciplinary measures for violations:** While encouraging positive discipline, it's also important to implement disciplinary measures for misconduct. However, it's preferable to focus on positive forms of discipline rather than relying solely on penalties and punishments to correct behaviors.
- **Promoting cultural activities in village pond and village well spaces.** These cultural activities not only foster a stronger sense of community among the local farmers but also instill pride and affection for these communal living spaces. It nurtures a deeper love for the homeland and a heightened sense of responsibility towards preserving and nurturing the local community's cultural spaces, ultimately leading to more civilized behaviors

and interactions within these shared living spaces.

Promoting cultural activities at cultural spaces like village ponds and village wells is also a way to create unique and distinctive cultural features for the locality and community. It provides an opportunity to showcase the local culture to other regions within the country and globally.

- **Collaboration with local authorities and organizations for the management, cooperation, development, and respect for community culture at village ponds and village wells.**

With the active participation and collaboration of everyone in the community in implementing these comprehensive measures, a healthy and positive cultural environment will be created, impacting the way of life and the civilized behavior of North Vietnamese farmers in the Red River Delta region.

5. Conclusion

Village ponds and village wells have been a source of life for farmers, providing water for drinking, daily activities, and bathing. They have also held spiritual significance, serving as places of faith and aspirations. Village ponds and village wells have woven a very humane and community-oriented cultural fabric, fostering a sense of unity and neighborly love among farmers. They lived for each other and for the community. It's where the concept of community consciousness was instilled in each farmer.

However, with economic development, rural areas are gradually changing, and a new rural landscape is emerging. Village ponds and village wells are gradually fading into the image of Vietnamese countryside, particularly in the Red River Delta region. Therefore, government authorities, local governance bodies, and the community need to take measures to preserve and restore these cultural symbols. They represent cultural values that need to be conserved and passed down to future generations.

For the remaining village ponds and village wells, efforts should be made to preserve and educate the community about their use and development. This will help cultivate a unique, characteristic, and deeply humanistic cultural heritage among the farmers of the Red River Delta. It requires collective action from the community, local authorities, and social organizations.

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