



# The Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc People in Vietnam: An Approach from the Perspective of Ethnic Cohesion



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## [ *Abstract* ]

This paper explores the Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc people in Quang Binh Province, Vietnam, from the perspective of ethnic community cohesion. The Ruc people's Peace-Wishing Festival is not only a spiritual ritual but also a significant social event aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural identity of this ethnic group. Through the festival, the lifestyle, mindset, and history of the Ruc people, both past and present are reflected. Additionally, this festival symbolizes community cohesion and demonstrates the relationship between humans, nature, and deities. The study employs ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, applying social functionalism and structuralism to analyze the festival's role and significance in Ruc communal life. The research findings indicate that the Ruc people's Peace-Wishing Festival has been revitalized within the context of policies promoting the preservation of ethnic minority cultural heritage, with active participation from the community and local authorities. The festival activities not only contribute to strengthening community solidarity but also play a crucial role in maintaining and promoting the cultural values of the Ruc people. This study

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enriches the understanding of Ruc cultural traditions and offers insights into strategies for safeguarding ethnic heritage in contemporary Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Peace-Wishing Festival, Ruc people, Ethnic cohesion, community solidarity, cultural values

## I . Introduction

In most traditional societies, festivals constitute a central expression of collective identity, reflecting the distinctive values and beliefs of each ethnic group. They are not only occasions for communities to express their reverence for deities but also opportunities to connect, interact, and strengthen solidarity among members. Traditional festivals function as symbolic events that actualize the spiritual conceptual world, utilizing rituals as a mechanism for human communication with the divine. Any traditional festival is intertwined with two components: the ceremonial and the celebratory. The ceremonial part consists of the rituals created by humans to interact with deities; the celebratory part involves communal activities that build a sense of camaraderie among individuals of different statuses, who are usually separated by an invisible barrier in daily life.

For the Ruc people in Quang Binh, the Peace-Wishing Festival serves as a quintessential example of the integration of human, natural, and spiritual elements, reflecting their adaptation and development in a mountainous forest environment. According to interviews with the elders, the Ruc's Peace-Wishing Festival has existed since ancient times when their ancestors lived in the forest. Initially, the ritual involved only a few families, who performed it to seek peace from forest deities while they lived a nomadic lifestyle. However, due to the influence of natural and social environments, the festival was not held for a long period, especially after they settled into villages. In the past 20 years, the ritual has been revived, based on the past belief in worshipping forest deities, with the participation of both the community and local government representatives.

The organization of the Peace-Wishing Festival reflects the joint efforts of both the community and the government to meet the needs of all parties involved. For the Ruc people, this festival is a sacred space where traditional rituals take place and community solidarity is reinforced. The revival reaffirms their cultural identity while simultaneously fostering community interaction and development. For local authorities, the organization of the festival aligns with the policies of preserving the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, particularly through the National Target Program on Culture and decisions such as Decision No. 1270/QĐ-TTg and 2493/QĐ-TTg. The local government supports the organization and maintenance of the festival to ensure that cultural values are passed down to future generations and to promote socio-economic development. The festival not only enriches the cultural identity of the community but also strengthens the role of the state in enhancing cultural values. At the same time, the festival embodies profound social and spiritual values, contributing to cultural diversity. By examining the Peace-Wishing Festival, this paper aims to critically analyze its function in bolstering community life in Quang Binh and to investigate the mechanisms through which it preserves and promotes Ruc cultural identity in the face of modernization.

Research on community festivals has attracted significant attention from both foreign and Vietnamese scholars since early on. Émile Durkheim (1912) focused on religious rituals in simple societies, emphasizing the role of religious ceremonies in fostering social solidarity. He viewed community festivals as manifestations of collective gathering and the reinforcement of communal spirit. Mary Douglas (1966) analyzed purity and impurity in societies, shedding light on the role of rituals in establishing and maintaining social boundaries. Victor Turner (1969) explored rites of passage, introducing the concept of “liminality” to analyze the role of festivals in maintaining and restructuring society, considering them as spaces for social renewal. Clifford Geertz (1973) developed the method of “thick description” to analyze rituals as profound cultural symbols reflecting the community’s cultural values. Richard Gerson (1996) emphasized festivals as important social and cultural activities that express and preserve communal values. Michael DiGregorio and

Oscar Salemink (2007) examined the role of rituals during the revolutionary process and their influence on modern Vietnamese politics and society. Luong Van Hy and Truong Huyen Chi (2012) explored the negotiation and restructuring of festivals in Northern Vietnamese villages, highlighting the complexity inherent in the making and negotiation of traditions and reflecting multi-dimensional socio-cultural relationships at the local level.

Vietnamese scholars researching festivals and rituals have emphasized the role of festivals in maintaining and developing cultural identity and community solidarity. These works often apply various research methods such as interviews, participant observation, document studies, and content analysis to delve deeper into the community festivals of Vietnam's ethnic groups. Scholars like Thu Linh-Dang Van Lung (1984), Toan Anh (1991), Le Trung Vu (1992), Dinh Gia Khanh and Le Huu Tan (1994), Nguyen Thi Kim Doan (2003), Sakaya (2004), Nguyen Van Huy (2012), Nguyen Chi Ben (2013), Truong Thi Thu Hang (2014), Hoang Van Hung (2017), Ngo Duc Thinh (2019), Tran Dung (2023), Ngo Hai Ninh and Nguyen Thuy Linh (2023), Huynh Duc Thien (2023), and others have affirmed that festivals are not merely religious events but also complex social phenomena that reflect and sustain the values, beliefs, and social structures of communities. These studies primarily focus on the rituals, ceremonies, and processes within community festivals, aiming to understand more deeply the cultural, religious, and ethnic characteristics of different communities. They also emphasize the role of festivals in forming and maintaining social relationships, as well as in reinforcing community identity and solidarity. Furthermore, these studies explore the historical development of festivals, changes in their meanings and forms, and their role in preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Thanks to these research efforts, we gain a comprehensive view of the diversity and richness of community festivals from various research perspectives and theories, enhancing our understanding of the role of festivals in modern society and culture.

Through the study of the Ruc people's Peace-Wishing Festival, this paper aims to analyze the festival's role and significance in the life of the Ruc community and to explore how this festival

contributes to the preservation and promotion of the ethnic group's cultural identity in a modern context. Given that no prior research has specifically focused on the Ruc's Peace-Wishing Festival, documenting and examining its unique cultural features is an urgent task for preserving the cultural identity of this ethnic group. By examining the festival in depth, the research clarifies the significance of the event for community cohesion and cultural survival, and provides insights that can inform broader efforts in cultural preservation for ethnic minorities.

## **II. Theoretical Approach and Research Methodology**

### **2.1. Theoretical Research Approach**

In the work of Luong Van Hy and Truong Huyen Chi (2012), the authors divided theories on rituals in Western cultural and social anthropology into three main schools: functionalism, structuralism, and conflict theory. Functionalism has two main branches: Malinowski's psychological functionalism, which emphasizes the role of rituals in psychological reassurance, and the social functionalism of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, which views rituals as means to strengthen community and social systems. Structuralism, based on linguistics, interprets rituals through the meanings of space, time, and behavior. Conflict theory, influenced by Marx and Foucault, sees rituals as tools in economic and power stratification, with new traditions created to symbolize solidarity and reinforce institutions, (Luong Van Hy and Truong Huyen Chi 2012: 235-237).

Social functionalism, articulated by Durkheim and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, posits that socio-cultural structures persist primarily due to their functional capacity to maintain communal stability and coherence. In "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life" (1912), Durkheim analyzes the role of religion in reinforcing community bonds and creating social cohesion. He argues that religion is not merely a system of beliefs but also an expression of society, with rituals and symbols that strengthen the community spirit and maintain social order. According to Durkheim, religion provides a system of shared symbols and values, helping individuals feel part

of a larger whole. Radcliffe-Brown extends this theory in “Structure and Function in Primitive Society” (1952), suggesting that rituals and cultural practices not only sustain social relationships but also create stability in the community, reduce conflict, and ensure the long-term survival of the community.

Applying the functionalist framework, this analysis posits that the Ruc Peace-Wishing Festival is instrumental in strengthening community solidarity and fostering ethnic cohesion. The Peace-Wishing Festival is not only a religious ritual but also a social event that functions to reinforce social relationships, enhance solidarity, and foster a sense of belonging among community members. The Ruc Peace-Wishing Festival can be seen as a concrete manifestation of the social cohesion that Durkheim described. In the festival context, community members participate together, share common symbols and values, thereby experiencing a sense of attachment and connection to their community. Moreover, according to Radcliffe-Brown, this festival helps maintain and strengthen social relationships, ensuring the stability and continuity of the Ruc community in the context of social change.

Structuralism, developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, emphasizes that social and cultural phenomena can be understood through the underlying structures that govern them. In “The Elementary Structures of Kinship” (1949), Lévi-Strauss analyzes social and cultural phenomena through basic structures, especially dual systems such as clean/dirty and sacred/secular and explores how cultural elements connect in dual systems to maintain social order. In subsequent works like “Structural Anthropology” (1958) and “The Savage Mind” (1962), Lévi-Strauss expands his analysis to clarify how myths, festivals, and other cultural forms reflect dual structures and social relationships.

Mary Douglas, a British anthropologist, extended structuralism into the study of rituals and symbolic systems in society. In “Purity and Danger” (1966), Douglas analyzes the concept of cleanliness and impurity, emphasizing that norms about purity and pollution are formed from dual structures in human thought. She argues that social norms about cleanliness are not only related to personal hygiene but also reflect how societies maintain order and control

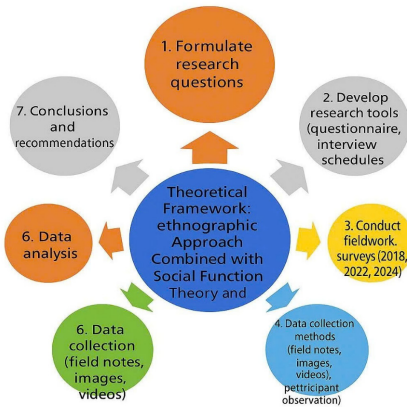
through symbolic systems.

Applying structuralism and Mary Douglas's perspective to analyze the Ruc people's Peace-Wishing Festival in Vietnam, it is evident that this festival is not just a religious event but also an expression of the dual structures in Ruc thought and culture. These dual structures include opposing elements such as ritual and festival, sacred and impure, male and female, nature and human, cleanliness and dirtiness, as well as the supernatural world and the human world, reflecting the division between different spaces and times in the festival. The symbols and rituals in the festival also reflect the cohesion and unity of the Ruc community, reinforcing the relationship between humans and nature, between the real world and the supernatural world. Mary Douglas' perspective on cleanliness and impurity helps to better understand how the Ruc people maintain social norms and order through purification rituals and other ceremonies in the Peace-Wishing Festival, thereby preserving the cohesion and cultural identity of the community.

## **2.2. Research Methods**

This study employs ethnographic fieldwork, combined with social function theory and structuralism, to analyze the current state and profound significance of the Peace-Wishing Festival in the life of the Ruc community. The fieldwork spanned four surveys conducted between 2018 and 2024, beginning with the development of data collection instruments such as questionnaires, interview guides, and fieldwork schedules. The author conducted four fieldwork surveys: the first from July 5 to July 11, 2018; the second from December 18 to December 24, 2019; the third from February 15 to February 22, 2022; and the fourth from April 28 to May 5, 2024. In addition to these field trips, the author recently conducted online interviews via telephone in June 2025 to update demographic data and gather new information about the community. The research process also involved the preparation of research instruments such as questionnaires, fieldwork schedules, interview guides, and technical equipment to facilitate systematic data collection.

In the course of this research, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with 52 informants, selected through



<Figure 1> Diagram of the research methodology process

Source(s): By author

purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, gender, occupation, and social roles. The interviewees included village elders, ritual specialists (shamans), village heads, Party members, ordinary residents (both male and female across different age groups), local government officials, and a folklorist. This sampling strategy aimed to capture the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations surrounding the Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc people. Among the

participants, 12 were elderly individuals-including village elders and shamans-who possess deep knowledge of the community's history and ritual practices; 25 were middle-aged community members, representing those who play key roles in maintaining household and cultural continuity; and 8 were young people aged 18 to 30, providing insights into how the younger generation perceives and engages with the festival in a modern context. In addition, 6 government officials and border guards- primarily from the Ca Xeng Border Post-offered perspectives from state actors involved in supporting the Ruc people's livelihood stabilization and socio-cultural restructuring. The final participant was a folklorist who had previously conducted research on the Ruc, contributing an external viewpoint on the process of festival revival and transformation. This sampling design helped capture a wide spectrum of social groups and perspectives, offering a comprehensive view of lived experiences and cultural engagement in the festival. In parallel with the interviews, the author also engaged in participant observation throughout the festival's organization and performance, gathering direct data on ritual activities and community interactions. The combination of in-depth interviews and field observation enabled the construction of a comprehensive and nuanced account of the social, cultural, and spiritual significance of the festival in the contemporary life of the Ruc people.

These methods were integrated to ensure comprehensive and objective data collection. The collected data were subsequently validated through comparison with secondary sources such as reports, survey data, and comparative analysis of past and present livelihood changes. This validation process enhances the reliability of the information and provides a multidimensional view of the transformations in the livelihoods of the Ruc community.

By combining the data obtained from in-depth interviews and participant observation, we conducted an analysis and comparison with previous theories and studies on ethnic culture to provide a profound and scientific insight into the Ruc people's Peace-Wishing Festival. These findings serve as a foundation for proposing policies to support the Ruc community in addressing future challenges.

### III. Research Findings

#### 3.1. The Current State of the Ruc People's Peace-Wishing Festival Historical Context

The Ruc people are a local subgroup of the Chut ethnic group, primarily residing in the mountainous areas of western Minh Hoa district, Quang Binh province, near the Vietnam-Laos border. The Ruc are believed to have migrated from northern Vietnam several centuries ago. Their name "Ruc" originates from the name of a stream in their residential area. In 1959, the Ca Xeng Border Guard discovered a group of people living in caves in the mountains near the Laos border. These individuals lived a nomadic life, relying on hunting and gathering, and used tree bark



<Figure 2> Map of Thuong Hoa Commune, Minh Hoa District, Quang Binh Province, Vietnam.  
Source(s): By author based on Google Maps

to make clothing. After contact with authorities, the Ruc were encouraged to relocate from the caves to settle in villages within Thuong Hoa commune, starting with an initial population of 34 people. Since 1979, owing to resettlement policies, healthcare provision, and improved living conditions, the population grew rapidly, reaching 191 individuals, more than five times the initial figure. During the period 1990-1996, the population increased from 217 to 243, indicating a steady growth trend, albeit at a slower rate than in the preceding phase. This was also the period when the Ruc began transitioning from hunting and gathering to swidden cultivation, while gaining greater access to basic social services. As of June 2025, the Ruc community consists of approximately 109 households with about 440 people,<sup>1</sup> living in three villages: On, Yen Hop, and Mo O - O O within Thuong Hoa commune, living alongside the Sách and Kinh people.

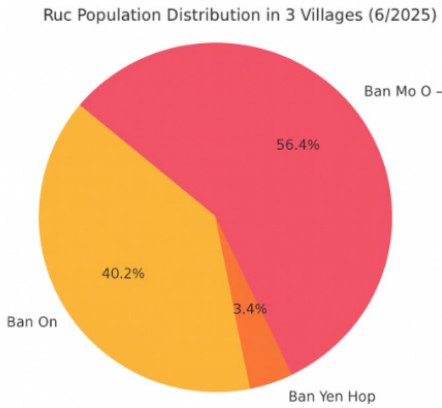
Among the total 440 individuals, Mo O - O O has the largest population with 248 residents, followed by On with 177, while Yen Hop has only 15. The population distribution data reveal a pronounced disparity in settlement size. The pie chart clearly illustrates this concentration: Mo O - O O accounts for 56.4% of the total population, On for 40.2%, and Yen Hop for only 3.4%. This indicates that the majority of the Ruc population is currently concentrated in Mo O - O O and On, whereas Yen Hop functions merely as a minor settlement.

They cultivate rice, corn, sweet potatoes, and other crops. Hunting and gathering still play an essential role, providing food and materials for daily life. The traditional housing of the Ruc consists of simple, low-lying houses made from basic wood materials. The Ruc have a rich belief system, worshipping various deities and believing that natural elements like mountains, forests, and streams possess spirits. In the past, they performed rituals when entering the forest or during seasonal events to pray for safety and abundant harvests. These beliefs form the foundation for the current Peace-Wishing Festival.

It can be said that festivals play a significant role in the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview information with local authorities in June 2025.



<Figure 3> Population Distribution of the Ruc People in the Villages of On, Yen Hop, and Mo O - O O.  
(Source: Survey Data, 2025)

spiritual and cultural life of every ethnic group. Each place, region, and ethnic group possesses unique traditional festivals. Festivals are a means through which people express their relationships with the natural environment, the community, and the supernatural world, where they believe the presence of deities will protect the community from danger and bring peace. The Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc is a significant

religious and cultural event, deeply marked by folk beliefs, reflecting a harmonious blend of tradition and natural elements. This festival not only aims to pray for peace and health for the community but also symbolizes the unity of the people through traditional rituals and ceremonies.

Although the Ruc have transitioned from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled existence, their life connected to the mountains and forests remains deeply ingrained in their consciousness. This is clearly reflected in the community's Peace-Wishing Festival. The festival not only showcases the solidarity among people but also represents the fusion of humans and nature, expressing the hope for a peaceful and happy life. This festival occurs every three years. According to informants, the festival has existed since their ancestors lived nomadically in the forest, initially organized simply with a limited number of participants, including just a few families. After transitioning to a settled life and developing a swidden-based economy, the Ruc performed new rice rituals after each harvest season. By the 1980s, due to difficult living conditions, these rituals gradually faded. In the early 21st century, the Ruc reestablished the peace-praying ritual, building upon the agricultural rituals and the

worship of forest deities that are central to their spiritual life. The residents and village leaders in Thuong Hoa commune convened to agree on organizing the Peace-Wishing Festival in a rotational manner among the villages, with the event held at the community cultural house. According to informants, the most recent Peace-Wishing Festival was held in January 2022 in On village, with the previous one in 2019 in Mo O - O O village. The Peace-Wishing Festival takes place on the 15th day of the first lunar month (Rằm tháng Giêng) and is alternately organized by the Ruc in Mo O - O O, Yen Hop, and On villages in Thuong Hoa commune, Minh Hoa district.

According to Ruc customs, the village head, who also serves as the shaman, is responsible for organizing and presiding over the Peace-Wishing Festival. The shaman is a person knowledgeable in spiritual matters, respected in the area, and chosen by the people to perform the necessary prayers and requests to the deities. The shaman plays a crucial role as the intermediary between humans and the supernatural world, conveying the hopes and wishes for a peaceful and healthy life. Currently, in On and Yen Hop villages, the village head presides over the rituals in festivals and related events. In Mo O - O O village, the village head is a young person without experience in conducting rituals. The previous shaman has passed away, and no successor is available in this village, so they have had to invite a shaman from Yen Hop village. This shaman is of the Sach<sup>2</sup> ethnicity, coming from a family with a long tradition of shamanism.

The scale of the festival is determined by the village head, the village elders, and the local Party Secretary, based on a meeting to gather residents' opinions and set the contribution levels for each family. Contributions vary depending on the village's economic

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<sup>2</sup> The Sach people are a local group of the Chut ethnic group, primarily residing in the highland communes of Minh Hoa district, Quang Binh province, such as Thuong Hoa and Hoa Son, and scattered across several mountainous communes in Tuyen Hoa and Bo Trach districts. Currently, the Sach population is approximately 3,000 individuals. They typically live intermixed with the Kinh and other ethnic minority groups. In Thuong Hoa commune, the Sach people cohabit with the Ruc people in Yen Hop village, where the Sach population is larger.

conditions that year. The villagers pool their money to purchase offerings for the rituals (pigs, chickens, rice wine, sticky rice). Typically, each Ruc household contributes between 100,000 and 200,000 VND. All contributions are gathered for the village head and respected community members to purchase items for the festival. They usually buy one or two pigs, a few chickens, and rice to organize the festival, with the size of the pig depending on the amount of money contributed by the villagers.

Before the festival, the community undertakes several preparations to ensure its successful execution. Men and young adults go into the forest to collect firewood, women gather banana blossoms and wild vegetables, while respected elders seek out stones and forest leaves for the rituals. The villagers collectively contribute a pig weighing over 30 kg along with other offerings such as local rice wine, glutinous rice, and regular rice (based on an in-depth interview with informant HP, male, born 1943, Ruc, Mo O-O O village).

A notable aspect of the preparation phase is that only unmarried young men and village elders are involved in slaughtering the pig and preparing the offerings. These young men are considered “pure” as they are unmarried and childless and are thus deemed suitable for handling important festival tasks. Additionally, in the days leading up to the festival, the young men of the village must adhere to certain taboos, such as abstaining from alcohol, and must be present from early morning to carry out the preparatory work.

### **3.2. The Structure of the Festival**

Like many festivals of other ethnic groups, the Ruc people's festival is divided into two parts: the ritual and the celebration. The ritual segment usually begins in the morning, around 6 a.m., at a pre-selected location about 100 meters away from the village. The festival space is typically chosen to be clean and far from areas with graves, as the Ruc people believe that such places are easily disturbed by spirits. Here, the village elders, the shaman, and unmarried young men gather to perform the initial rituals.

Only those who are clean are eligible to participate in the forest spirit rituals, namely elderly individuals over 50 years old and unmarried youths. Those of reproductive age and women who are menstruating are considered unclean and are not allowed to participate, as the deities do not accept them. Even the preparation of offerings, such as pork, rice, and soup, is done by the youths. It is strictly forbidden for those of reproductive age to participate in any preparatory stages, as it would offend the forest spirits. The reason only elders and youths are allowed to represent the community is that these groups are considered clean, pure, and will be blessed by the deities to protect the family and village (excerpt from an in-depth interview with informant CH, male, born in 1974, Sách ethnic group shaman, Yen Hop village).

The ritual offerings to the deities are the most important part of the festival, with the participation of the shaman (usually an elderly person of high standing within the community) and the village elders. The shaman recites prayers in the local language, invoking the spirits of the forest, mountains, and streams to bless the villagers with peace, health, and abundant harvests. Before performing the rituals, the elderly and respected community members go into the forest to find seven special stones and a bundle of specific leaves known as *lá tràng*, *lá hang*, and *lá thiên liễn*, all types of leaves found in the forests near where the Ruc people live. Unmarried youths slaughter pigs and chickens to prepare rice offerings and are required not to drink alcohol or go out on the night before the festival to ensure they arrive on time.

Before the festival, the elderly and respected individuals are responsible for going into the forest to find seven special stones and a bundle of forest leaves called *lá tràng*, *lá hang*, and *lá thiên liễn*. These leaves typically grow on high rocky outcrops and are difficult to find; they are also used to soak in alcohol, which is believed to be good for health. The task of finding these stones requires experienced individuals to select stones that will not explode when heated. Before the official peace ritual begins, the seven stones are cleaned, heated until red hot, and then dropped into a basin of water infused with *lá tràng*, *lá hang*, and *lá thiên liễn* placed right at the entrance. Afterward, the unmarried young men, who are considered clean, are invited to the communal house to slaughter

pigs and chickens to prepare rice offerings. The village youths are notified that they must not drink alcohol or go out the night before the festival so they can be present on time in the early morning (excerpt from an in-depth interview with informant HP, male, born in 1943, Ruc ethnic group, Mo O-O O village).

The ritual offerings include alcohol, a tray of rice and soup, and either a chicken or a pig. If a pig is used, the head, tail, four legs, and blood are placed in a cup. They prepare two basins, add a little water, and put various leaves such as *lá tràng*, *lá hang*, and *lá thiên liên* into them. Blood from the pig is added to both basins, followed by the leaves. Next, they heat stones in a fire and place them in the blood-filled basins. Three stones are placed in one basin, symbolizing cleanliness, which represents health, luck, and peace. The remaining four stones are placed in the other basin, symbolizing filth, evil, and danger, representing the challenges, misfortunes, or accidents that people may face. The use of three stones for cleanliness and four stones for filth may signify a balance between good and bad in life. The Ruc people believe that life is a mixture of fortune and trials, and this ritual helps them mentally prepare for both. This is not just a random act but part of the symbolism and deep meaning in the Ruc rituals. It reflects their understanding and belief in balance in life and their relationship with the supernatural world. The shaman chants prayers to invite forest spirits and deceased ancestors to the ceremony to witness the villagers' sincerity. In his prayers, the shaman always asks for peace and good fortune for the villagers. He uses a branch of *lá hang*, dips it into the blood basin, sprinkles it around, and then discards the stones. Afterward, he invites the spirits, ancestors, and forest spirits to partake in the meal. According to Ruc beliefs, this action will "cleans the body," removing any sins and impurities before the peace ritual. If the body is not cleansed before the peace ritual, the deities will not accept and will not bestow good fortune and blessings upon the supplicants due to a lack of respect.

Two basins are prepared, with blood and various elements like water, *lá tràng*, *lá hang*, and *lá thiên liên* inside. These three are mixed with blood and cold water. Seven stones are placed into two pots: four in one, symbolizing filth and dirt. The four stones

represent filth due to various reasons—children going about tasks in the jungle, climbing trees, gathering honey, and fishing. Cleanliness is symbolized by the three stones placed in one pot. Then, the shaman sprinkles water around and invites the spirits, ancestors, and the largest trees in the forest, in the *ri* [dense forest]. He invites them to come and bathe, and to cleanse the people. This filth is from the body, the land, and society. The cleanliness is to bathe and cleanse everything—heaven, earth, and the land. Number one, number two, number three. Afterward, the ancestors go out, have fun, then come back to bathe with everyone, with water, and with the land. After the seven stones are placed, they are discarded, either thrown away or buried. The shaman pours out the contents, and it's done (Excerpt from an interview transcript with HP, male, born in 1943, Ruc person, Mo O-O O Village).

Besides the peace ritual to worship and pray to the deities, the Ruc people also perform rituals to appease the “hungry dead” and “thirsty dead.” The “hungry dead” is a colloquial term used by the Ruc to refer to spirits that were not properly worshipped, abandoned, and thus suffer from hunger in the afterlife. The “thirsty dead” similarly refers to spirits who were forgotten or not worshipped, lacking water in the afterlife, and often causing mischief or calamities for the villagers. The ritual of seeking divine approval, known as *xin keo*,<sup>3</sup> is performed using two pieces of bamboo—one side representing the outer layer (*cât*) and the other the inner layer (*ruôt*)—or occasionally two pieces of tree bark, designated to distinguish between the “upward” and “downward” sides. When these pieces are cast onto the ground, if one lands with the “upward” side facing up and the other with the “downward” side facing up, it signifies that the request has been granted by the deities. Conversely, if both pieces land on the same side, either “upward” or “downward,” it indicates disapproval from the deities, requiring the ritual to be repeated until the desired outcome of one “upward” and one “downward” side is achieved. This task is

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<sup>3</sup> *Xin keo* asking is a common practice among the Ruc people. When faced with significant matters related to daily life, they often seek guidance from forest deities or deceased ancestors through keo asking. The procedure and rules for keo asking involve using two bamboo pieces, one with the pith side and one with the inner side, or two pieces of tree bark, to distinguish between heads or tails.

typically performed by the village elder, and if the request is accepted, he will clasp his hands in prayer to the deities. Additionally, they are required to report to the deities about the demographics of the village. For instance, they would inform the deities that the village comprises 100 households and specify the total population. This serves to notify the deities that the land is entirely cultivated by their descendants, who engage in clearing fields, farming rice and corn, consuming the produce, and celebrating the New Year. During this process, other participants also clasp their hands and offer their respects.

After the peace ritual concludes, the festival begins with a communal feast at the village's cultural center. This is an opportunity for everyone to enjoy food, converse, share stories, and strengthen bonds. The pig's head and feet are brought to the cultural center to mark the start of the festivities. The other pig, slaughtered earlier, is prepared into eight trays of food, each with a bottle of alcohol, to serve all the villagers. Participants are diverse, including the elderly, young, and middle-aged, with each family represented. Besides the Ruc community from the three villages, guests include the village party secretary, border patrol soldiers, and local authorities.

The Ruc festival is simple, primarily focusing on food and drink. The dishes are carefully prepared and evenly distributed among the trays. Alcohol is a must, creating a friendly and close atmosphere. Unlike many other ethnic groups, the Ruc festival does not feature many recreational activities. Instead, it focuses on eating and socializing, fostering community bonds. Though modest, the festival reflects the Ruc's traditional culture. The presence of local authorities demonstrates the state's interest in preserving and promoting the cultural values of the Ruc people. This helps bond the Ruc community with the government, creating a close-knit atmosphere while maintaining and enhancing traditional cultural values, thereby strengthening community relationships.

The Ruc's peace ritual, aimed at bringing good fortune to the community, reflects their simple and innocent nature. It is also an occasion for the Ruc people to invite representatives of local agencies and units to join in the celebration, tightening relationships

in maintaining security, order, and protecting the forests and borders of the country. The Ruc festival embodies the interaction between humans and their environment, contributing to the stability and development of the community in today's context. For the Ruc, the festival provides spiritual support, connecting, maintaining, and strengthening community ties.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Previous studies on the Ruc people have not specifically addressed their Peace-Wishing Festival. However, through interview data and living conditions, it is evident that the Ruc have practiced simple spiritual rituals aimed at seeking peace since their forest-dwelling period. The forest environment has profoundly influenced their cultural and spiritual practices. These rituals, though personal, have formed the basis for the current Peace Wishing Festival, where spiritual elements are closely linked with nature. The festival is not only a spiritual ritual but also reflects the harmonious relationship between the Ruc and nature, respecting supernatural forces. This relationship is demonstrated through offerings such as alcohol, meat, and natural products like forest leaves and stones, symbolizing a connection with the environment. In the Ruc worldview, the forest is a repository of ancestral spirits and deities, creating a deep harmony between humans, ancestors, and deities. Therefore, the Peace-Wishing Festival becomes a symbol of faith in protection from the supernatural world while reinforcing community solidarity and preserving traditional values.

The Ruc festival, much like those of other indigenous communities (Dinh Gia Khanh 1994; Sakaya 2004), operates as a critical site for the reenactment of traditional values and the consolidation of cultural identity, demonstrating adaptability amidst social change. In Quang Binh, the Ruc Peace-Wishing Festival stands out due to its distinctive features that reflect a nomadic heritage and profound connection to the forest environment. However, the Peace-Wishing Festival also exhibits distinctive features. Unlike the Chol Chnam Thmay festival of the Khmer (Tran Dung 2023), which is closely tied to Theravada Buddhism and a fixed agricultural

calendar, the Ruc festival is rooted in animistic belief in forest spirits. Its triennial, rotational organization and strict purification rules—most notably the exclusion of individuals of “reproductive age” from core rituals—reflect a nomadic heritage and profound connection to the forest environment. From the standpoint of Structuralism and Conflict Theory (Luong Van Hy and Truong Huyen Chi 2012), this prohibition not only enacts Mary Douglas’s purity/pollution dichotomy but also reveals power asymmetries: elders and unmarried youths monopolize ritual authority, relegating other groups to dependent roles. Ritual regulations and the allocation of resources (e.g., pigs and rice) both mirror and reinforce local hierarchies, corresponding to Foucault’s conception of power as operating through discourse and practice. Thus, although ethnic festivals universally foster social cohesion, their symbolic content, timing, and exclusionary mechanisms remain deeply contingent upon historical context, environmental conditions, and power relations.

The structure of the Ruc's Peace-Wishing Festival can be understood through a series of fundamental contrasts, or 'binary oppositions,' which reflect the Ruc worldview. Drawing on structuralist theory, particularly the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949, 1958) and Mary Douglas (1966) we can analyze key distinctions such as sacred versus profane, clean versus polluted, and nature versus human. These opposing pairs are not just symbolic; they organize the ritual space, define participant roles, and reinforce the community's social order. The ritual portion of the festival takes place in sacred spaces, usually forests, connected with supernatural forces, reflecting solemnity and reverence. In contrast, the festival segment occurs in community centers, where members gather for socializing and entertainment, highlighting the contrast between the sacred nature of the ritual and the social aspect of the festival. The opposition between sacred and profane is also evident in the rituals, where “clean” individuals (elder men and unmarried young men) are allowed to participate in sacred ceremonies, while women of childbearing age are excluded due to their perceived “pollution.” This emphasizes the role of men in maintaining and performing religious rituals, while women are marginalized,

reflecting a clear gender division within Ruc society. The structural opposition between nature and human is represented by the spatial division of the festival, with forests symbolizing the sacred, while community centers represent society and the community. This opposition not only maintains cultural structure but also reflects how the Ruc perceive and interact with their surroundings. Mary Douglas's analysis of purity and pollution is pivotal here, as only individuals designated "clean" are permitted to participate in core rituals, while those deemed "polluted" are excluded, thereby delineating social boundaries and reinforcing structural hierarchy. Finally, the binary opposition between the supernatural and the human world is embodied in the role of the shaman, who serves as a mediator between humans and deities, affirming the distinct separation between these worlds. However, within the Ruc belief system, the boundary between the living and the dead is not clearly delineated, creating a spiritually profound opposition where rituals help preserve and reinforce cultural values. These binary oppositions not only reflect social structure but also contribute to the preservation and transmission of traditional values across generations.

Viewed through the functionalist framework of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, the Peace-Wishing Festival emerges as both a ritual expression of faith and a mechanism that reinforces social solidarity within the Ruc community. The collective activities during the festival, including rituals and social interactions, allow participants to experience a profound connection with the community while affirming their roles within it. The festival not only sustains social relationships but also contributes to maintaining stability and creating a space for members to share and understand one another. Additionally, it serves as an opportunity to preserve and renew traditional cultural values while adapting to societal changes. Through organizing and participating in the festival, the Ruc people preserve ancient customs while also innovating and developing their culture within a modern context. This reflects the social function theory, where cultural practices not only express religious beliefs but also help strengthen the community and ensure its long-term survival. In the contemporary context, the festival helps the Ruc maintain their cultural identity and broaden their interactions,

incorporating new external values while playing a significant role in their social transformation and development.

However, a critical application of these theoretical frameworks reveals their limitations. Although functionalism elucidates how rituals sustain cohesion, it tends to overlook the gendered asymmetries embedded within these practices. The exclusion of women, rather than simply preserving order, can be read as an institutionalized form of patriarchal control. Similarly, while structuralism (Lévi-Strauss, Douglas) is powerful in mapping the festival's symbolic logic (e.g., clean/polluted), it can portray these structures as static and timeless. This perspective may not fully capture how these binaries are currently being negotiated, challenged, or reinterpreted by younger Ruc, particularly women, who are increasingly exposed to alternative gender norms through education and media. Thus, a more nuanced understanding requires seeing the festival not just as a site for reinforcing tradition, but also as an arena where cultural meanings are actively debated and potentially transformed in response to contemporary social change.

In the modern context, the development of the market economy has profoundly impacted various aspects of life, including festival activities. The rational mindset of the market economy has replaced many traditional sacred elements, leading to changes in festival organization and participation. Nevertheless, the Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc continues to maintain its connection with nature, playing a crucial role in reinforcing empathy and community cohesion. The festival not only expresses reverence for forest deities but also serves as a reminder for younger generations about cultural traditions and their connection to the natural environment. Despite the encroachment of the market economy, the Peace-Wishing Festival remains a symbol of cultural connection, reinforcing community cohesion and preserving the traditional values of the Ruc.

While the Peace-Wishing Festival continues to be a cornerstone of Ruc cultural identity, its practice is not immune to the pressures of modernization and economic integration. The transition to a market-oriented economy introduces complex challenges. For instance, the increasing need for cash income may

lead younger community members to migrate for work, reducing their participation and weakening the intergenerational transmission of ritual knowledge. Furthermore, there is a potential risk of commodification, where the festival's spiritual essence could be diluted if it is promoted primarily for tourism without careful management. The influence of mainstream media and digital technology also shapes the worldview of the younger generation, potentially altering their perception of and commitment to traditional rituals. These transformations highlight a critical tension: while the festival functions to reinforce cohesion, the very socio-economic forces shaping modern life can simultaneously erode the foundations upon which this cohesion is built. Therefore, preserving the festival requires not just celebrating it, but also navigating these contemporary pressures thoughtfully.

Apart from its spiritual dimension, the festival also functions as a bridge-facilitating the Ruc's engagement with government authorities and neighboring communities, and as an educational platform that imparts cultural heritage to the younger generation. The Ruc festival, therefore, exemplifies how an indigenous community can integrate new external values and influences (like the concept of cultural heritage preservation promoted by the state) into their traditional framework, thereby ensuring the festival's relevance and the community's continuity amidst change.

The organization and execution of the Peace-Wishing Festival are a collective responsibility of the entire community, rather than that of an individual or single family. To organize this festival, planners such as elders, shamans, and village leaders engage in meticulous preparation to ensure practical and effective re-creation. Close community cooperation is essential. Village elders and leaders collaborate with villagers to gather information and opinions, ensuring consensus and inclusiveness. The role of local authorities is also crucial in cultural re-creation through the festival. Authorities facilitate, create legal frameworks, and encourage the community to maintain and promote Ruc cultural values. This also provides an opportunity to educate younger generations about spiritual and cultural values, helping them continue to preserve and take pride in their cultural identity. Organizing the festival aims not only to

preserve but also to enhance cultural identity, creating a positive environment for social and spiritual development of the community.

## V. Conclusion

The Peace-Wishing Festival of the Ruc community in Quảng Bình Province represents a living synthesis of folk beliefs and ecological awareness, underscoring the enduring relationship between humans and the natural world. This festival not only serves as an occasion for community bonding but also as a means of preserving and reinforcing traditional cultural elements while adapting to the changes of modern society. The peace-seeking rituals, with their strict rules regarding “cleanliness” and the roles of participants, reflect a deep reverence for the supernatural forces believed to protect and bless the community. The festival strengthens community ties and reinforces traditional culture while adapting to societal changes. However, it also faces challenges in preservation amidst modernization, necessitating efforts to safeguard and promote the unique cultural values of the festival to maintain the cultural identity of the Ruc people and contribute to national cultural diversity.

To ensure the ongoing preservation and effective promotion of these values, collaborative involvement between local authorities and the Ruc community is essential. The state and policymakers need to integrate local knowledge with scientific advancements, invest in early education for the younger generation of the Ruc people, helping them understand their culture while accessing new global knowledge. Local authorities should implement specific support policies, providing the necessary funding and resources for the annual organization of the Peace-Wishing Festival while creating forums and discussions for the community to share ideas and experiences. Educating the younger generation about rituals, customs, and cultural values is crucial to ensure they can carry on and develop this tradition in the future. Through these measures, the Ruc Peace-Wishing Festival can be preserved and promoted, becoming a cultural symbol that enriches the cultural identity of the ethnic group. Preserving and promoting traditional cultural values is

not only significant for the Ruc community but also contributes to the diversity and richness of the national culture.

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