



Nguyen Ngoc Bich, *Tet! The Vietnamese New Year*. Vicana, Springfield 2004. 144 pp.
Price not stated. ISBN not stated. – Reviewed by *Petra Müllerová*.

The author is the renowned Nguyen Ngoc Bich, educator, writer and translator from Vietnamese language. Thanks to the author's deep knowledge of traditional Vietnamese culture and values, the reader can acquaint himself with the detail of the Tet festival.

Tet Nguyen Dan is known around the world as the essential festival of the Vietnamese people. Falling between the second half of January and the first half of February, Tet is celebrated as the beginning of Spring by every Vietnamese around the world as well as in Vietnam.

Each chapter deals with one point of the view on Tet Nguyen Dan:

- 1) Agricultural origins (pp. 11–20): agricultural revolution; agricultural calendar; the meaning of spring to the Vietnamese.
- 2) Daoism and Tet (pp. 21–26): Influence of Daoism; Tet flowers and their meaning.
- 3) Confucianism and Tet (pp. 27–33): influence of Confucianism, the patriarchal system and ancestor worship; communal birth celebration.
- 4) Primitive beliefs (pp. 34–42): one woman and two men, the story; the Kitchen God goes to Heaven; the *neu* pole; firecrackers.
- 5) Buddhism and Tet (pp. 43–46): the moon in Buddhism; midnight mass; importance of the 15th of the first lunar month.
- 6) Symbolism and Tet behaviour (pp. 47–56): parallel sentence; the magic of tet; closing accounts; the last bath; *giao thua*; starting out right; „picking buds“; the best of behaviour; the „first visitor“.
- 7) Tet Fare (pp. 57–64): „eating“ Tet; *banh chung* and the legend behind it; other Tet dishes; *cau „dua“ du „xai“*; preserved fruit (*mut*) and watermelon seeds
- 8) Tet games and pastimes (pp. 65–72): *bau cua ca cop*; *tam cuc*; *bat* and *tu sac*.
- 9) Tet specialities (pp. 73–92): Tet issues; Tet decorations: folk paintings, parallel sentences, Tet calendars – Tet poetry: *Khai but* – Tet songs; fortunetelling and *Boi Kieu*.
- 10) Regional Variations (pp. 94–97): natural cause of regional variations; *do sam huong* and *bai choi*.
- 11) The dance of the Unicorn (pp. 98–101): different from the dragon dance; meaning of unicorn.

- 12) Tet and the City (pp. 102–104): Office closings; Tet away from home.
- 13) Tet outside Vietnam (pp. 105–111): Importance of the Tet Fairs; A Family affair.
- 13) A Chronology of Tet (pp. 112–118).
- 14) Conclusion (pp. 119–122).
- 15) Appendices (pp. 123–142): The Vietnamese Zodiac; Spring Festivals; The Central Role of a Vietnamese Woman.

It is very interesting that illustrations used in the publication are not only traditional woodblock prints (for example A Mouse Wedding Party, p.10, Toad, The Scholar Teacher, Jealous Woman, Coconuts, Honour and Glory, Wealth and Nobility – pp. 78–90) from Dong Ho Village and one coloured drawings (pp. 26, 29, 37, 55, 99, 130, etc.) but pictures done by modern Vietnamese artists *Nguyen Thi Hop* (p.86), *Bui Xuan Phai* (p.127) and *Nguyen Tu Nghiem* (p. 65, 140) and modern photos as well. It's a pity that a list of used bibliography or recommended further readings is missing in the publication. However, the book is highly recommended to those who would like to acquaint themselves with one of the basic Vietnamese customs and its modern image in the homeland and as well as abroad. The publication may be appreciated by those who will be able to compare their own culture, e.g. European or American, with the Vietnamese one.