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A Shamanistic Ritual and its Associated Ceremony[[1]](#footnote-1)

In this case, we focus on an ICH element in which ‘traditional’ gender roles are subverted.As living heritage, some ICH represents a form of socially subversive commentary, as in cases where there is a form of role reversal between authority figures and others presenting a bottom-up critique of authority and the social constraints that frame people's normal life. In this way, ICH may provide a cultural space within which alternative social attitudes are expressed, including ones that subvert ‘traditional’ gender biases and roles. According heritage value to such ICH, then, can in itself be a means of encouraging respect for non-mainstream gender groups and their cultures within the majority community.

The ceremony described here originated in the 16th century as a form of religious art frequently performed during a shamanistic mediumship rite. It combines trance singing and dancing with a variety of musical instruments playing specificrhythms, pauses and tempos, among which the moon-shaped lute is the main instrument. The ceremony serves two main purposes: it puts the medium into a trance thus, making them receptive to the deities; and, at the same time, provides an appropriate musical accompaniment for the medium's actions. To begin with, the Master of Ceremony performs some incantations to the underworld and invites the spirits to come. During these incantations, the person who is to speak on behalf of the spirits―she is commonly a woman―sits on a mat in front of the altar. The Master of Ceremony and orchestra then play together to encourage the spirit to take possession of the medium and, once this event has occurred; the possessed medium informs the Master of Ceremony with a specific gesture. Traversing gender is integral to this ritual. When they are possessed by male spirits, female mediums take on ‘male’ roles and characteristics and become famous scholars, fierce warriors, playful princes or naughty boys; they wear male tunics, perform military dances with swords and spears, use ‘masculine’ language, smoke cigarettes and drink rice wine. In a similar manner, when they are possessed by female spirits, male mediums become beautiful women, graceful unmarried princesses, and cheeky young girls; they wear dresses and colourful head scarves, speak in falsetto voices, dance elegantly with fans, chew betel and serve exotic fruit. Thus this ritual reflects the entanglements of gender and power often found in spiritual practices whereby practitioners employ a series of strategies to create spiritual communities that do not result in gendered hierarchies.

1. . Barley Norton (2009)’Engendering mediumship,’ Songs for the Spirits - Music and Mediums in Modern Vietnam, [University of Illinois Press](http://muse.jhu.edu/browse/publishers/illinois) at pp. 155-189; Philip Taylor (2007) Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)