

Van Phuc traditional village is one of northern Vietnam's most famous "traditional craft villages" but local silk producers are using so many imported materials and modern machinery that soon it might not be so traditional. Down a small snaking lane in Van Phuc village, five men lug a large silk dryer towards Nguyen Vinh's house. It will take three days to install the new equipment so Vinh's family has temporarily stopped producing silk. Although he will lose out today, soon Vinh speculates he will be earning much more with the new machinery, which will dry silk more quickly and so boost his capacity. "I have spent VND270 million (,200) on three new driers," says Vinh. "All houses around here use power-run driers and weaving machines now. It takes too much time to dry and weave silk manually." Pointing at an old handloom in his kitchen corner, he says that it's a merely a keepsake. Only one year ago when I first came to Van Phuc, one of Vietnam's most famous 'traditional craft villages', reams of silk were drying in the sunshine alongside paddy fields and by the banks of the Nhue river. Foreign tourists snapped photos while art students tried to capture the glistening silk in the afternoon sunlight on canvas. But according to Vinh nobody dries silk outdoors anymore. It makes sense. Silk could only be dried outside when the sun shined. Now, with modern machinery, you can dry silk rain or shine, day and night. Foreign travelers can apply [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) to come by air to visit the village.

Silk drying is a crucial stage determining the smoothness and color of the end product and Vinh sees both pros and cons to power drying silk. On one hand he believes it's better looking but less durable than silk that's left to dry in the natural heat of sunshine. "There's nothing traditional about making silk now," says Vinh. The name Van Phuc is synonymous with silk. Some will tell you that silk was first produced here around 700 years ago when a woman from China's Hangzhou city, also well-known for silk products, arrived in the village. At the time the village was desperately poor, so she decided to teach the villagers how to weave silk so they would have a trade. Another legend said that a princess during the reign of the semi-mythical Hung Kings introduced silk making to the area nearly 2,000 years ago. But yet another story goes that 1,200 years ago, a young woman called A La Thi Nuong from Cao Bang province, who married a man from Van Phuc, taught the village how to cultivate mulberries, raise silkworms and weave silk. After she passed away, she became a tutelary village genie. In feudal times, silk products were made exclusively for kings, queens, mandarins and other members of the royal court. In colonial times

Van Phuc silk was highly prized and sold in international fairs in Marseille and Paris, held in 1931 and 1938 respectively, and distributed across Europe afterwards.

Today nearly 700 households are engaged in silk weaving in Van Phuc with more than half of the village's population involved. The village produces 2.5-2.7 million square meters of silk every year and is home to nearly 100 shops. Traditionally Van Phuc produced silk from locally-made materials. The villagers liked to say they had their secret methods when it came to producing silk. But now you can buy silk from elsewhere in Van Phuc. Roughly half of the products in most shops are believed to be either imported or produced from imported materials. "You will never find any family cultivating mulberries or raising silkworms now because of the lack of cultivated land and a lack of human resources," says Pham Anh Nguyet, who works in a silk-producing workshop. Pointing to a large, flat basket filled with dried silkworms, the 17-year-old says that it's only for decoration. When she started to weave silk three years ago, the locals had given up raising silkworms. Nguyen Anh Nga, Nguyet's mother, claims she is an exception, though her daughter said they used materials that were bought from Bac Ninh, Nam Dinh and Hai Duong provinces. "We make silk materials ourselves and we also raise our own silkworms," Nga says. According to a number of shop owners, there are only 10 kinds of locally-made silk and each silk-producing household makes the same kind of samples. "Meanwhile, more and more shops are appearing, so if we don't import more samples, our sales will be poor," says Nguyen Van Thuc, one shop owner and silk producer. As I purchase three shirts from his shop, Nguyen Van Thuc chats freely, not suspecting I am a journalist. He confesses that only a small ratio of the shirt's material is actually made from silk. "The remainder is made up by nylon fibers," says Thuc, before adding with a whisper, "The imitated products cannot be spotted unless you're an expert." I tell Thuc that two months ago a colleague came here and bought a silk dress only to discover it was Chinese-made when she got home. According to Thuc most shops sell imported goods, including garments that can be found in markets around the country. Van Phuc, he claims, has been "invaded by foreign goods".

Source: [dulichso.com](http://dulichso.com)