

MATERIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF THE KỶ YÊN FESTIVAL AT VĨNH BÌNH COMMUNAL TEMPLE, TIỀN GIANG, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The economic reform (Đổi mới) that began in 1986 and the current strong development of the market economy have left many marks on almost all aspects of social life in Vietnam, including community beliefs and public ritual space. Material-economic factors penetrate into public ritual spaces (such as a communal temple) and become one of the important driving forces for ritual spaces in some places. Moreover, material-economic values have become important resources to promote the development of rural public. This study of a festival held at the Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple (Tiền Giang province) describes the trend of material-economic factors in rural festivals and identifies a new phase of development and a new experience of a local communal temple festival. The material-economic factors are the intrinsic factors of the festival. If used properly, they can enhance the festival atmosphere, promote community cohesion, and enhance the atmosphere of the festival. This case study shows that material-economic factors can be appropriately

used as the catalysts for improving the effectiveness of communal festivals and they play a significant role in helping to protect and develop communal institutions in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Material-economic factors, the Kỳ Yên Festival, Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple, negotiation, transformation

INTRODUCTION

In the past four decades, Vietnamese society has witnessed profound changes in traditional concepts and the protection of traditional culture, especially its spiritual aspects (see Lương 1994: 437–481; Endres 2001, 2002). Many communal temples and festivals have been gradually restored and redeveloped. Under the new market economy, many significant changes have occurred in religious structures and public festivals. The most typical among them are the rise of material value (i.e., luxurious ritual objects, modernised equipment, etc.) and economic factors (i.e., the attachment of trade fair) in religious rituals. Research conducted by Lê (2007) shows that material values and economic benefits are becoming key factors in the ritual awareness and behaviour of almost all festival participants, including cult committees, local communities, and pilgrims. The insecurity of the market's rapid development and fierce economic competition in business have prompted people, including corrupt officials, illegal businesses, loan sharks, etc., to participate in religious rituals with a desire to be protected and blessed. In another study by Lương and Trương (2012) in northern Vietnam, material value, although not clearly pointed out, was a direct factor that stimulated villagers to “negotiate” and “invent” their traditions. More specifically, Ngô (2012) investigated the changes in a southern village festival, where economic transformation (from wet rice cultivation to shrimp farming) and the rise of riverine barge services have facilitated the development of the local temple festival. Nguyễn (2020) and Hoàng (2017) pointed out the profound changes in annual rituals in their research cases in suburban areas of Ho Chi Minh City under the context of urbanisation. These case studies all showcase the increasing impact that material-economic factors have on communal festivals; however, the representation of these components varies from region to region and from case to case. The Kỳ Yên¹ festival held in Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple (Gò Công Tây, Tiền Giang province) discussed in this article could be a special case in which material-economic factors are stimulated by the local government to meet various governance and communication purposes. The separation

of the ritual and non-ritual spaces (zones) throughout the festival allows the material-economic factors to act as catalysts for attracting and connecting people without undermining the sacredness of the communal temple festival.

Vĩnh Bình, the centre of Gò Công Tây district, is home to a variety of religions (Buddhism, Caodaism, Hoahaoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, etc.) dominated by the agricultural economy. In comparison to Mỹ Tho City or Gò Công City in the same province, Vĩnh Bình has a slower pace of urbanisation and industrialisation. However, the influence of the market economy permeates every corner of the town. The development of global information technology networks and science has stimulated the material consumption of its residents, making it easier for them to cross the boundaries of the traditional social space. Therefore, village temples and public festivals are no longer the sole “spiritual property” of villagers. In some specific cases, communal festivals have become common events for the entire region. As the largest festival in Tiền Giang province,² the Kỳ Yên festival at Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple showcases an organised interweaving of dual concepts: tradition and transformation, spirituality and materialism, inward cohesion and outward communication, etc. Traditional culture and the inward cohesion of the Vĩnh Bình residential community are conveyed through sacred rituals and the consciousness of “homeland”, while material-economic factors help narrow the emotional gap between the local community and outsiders.

In this study, the term “material-economic factors” refers to the rise of material values and economic factors in contemporary Vietnamese spiritual life, such as village festivals and family ceremonies, and especially religious rituals. This study suggests that festivals in Southeast Asian farming communities should pay appropriate attention to the participation of material-economic factors and their positive impacts to ensure greater effectiveness of festival activities.

Basically, material-economic factors already exist in the beliefs and practices of current Vietnamese communal rituals. Will these factors change the inherent nature, characteristics, and functions of rural communal temples and festivals? If so, what is the magnitude of these influences and how are they reflected in the community’s perception? As mentioned above, the degree to which material-economic factors have an impact in each region differs; thus, they should be evaluated based on specific circumstances. The authors assume that the material-economic factors vividly displayed during the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình today are an enhanced and expanded manifestation of the inherent material-economic factors of a traditional communal festival, while the local governmental centralisation in non-ritual activities that are included

in the festival have caused more recent changes. The Marxist perspective may argue that the material factors may cause social change (including communal festivals); however, this case study in Vĩnh Bình indicates that the core values of a communal temple festival can only be fully maintained when the ritual space is well protected and the material-economic factors are controlled by the location of the catalysts, the driving force behind the effort and the way in which the festival is celebrated.

This research is based on a field survey and second-hand data analysis methods. During the 2017 festival season, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted on-site (purposive convenience samples and “snow-ball” interview method) with the temple executive committee (two people), local authorities (one person), local-born intellectuals (one local teacher and two lecturers working in Ho Chi Minh City), eight local self-employed traders, and eight random participants. The researchers also observed and participated in four group conversations between temple executive committee members and local seniors, enterprises, and participants. The researchers observed the whole process of the ritual procession and had brief conversations with some local observers to understand their feelings about the festival as a whole and about the ritual procession in particular.

After conducting the on-site investigation, a qualitative analysis of the collected data was implemented based on a comparison with similar cases, especially the studies of Quách (1996), Lê (2007), Lương and Trương (2012), Ngô (2012), Nguyễn (2020), Phí and Nguyễn (2020), and Ngo and Nguyen (2021). The study alternatively identifies the structure of ritual and non-ritual space and their related activities to analyse and discuss the mutual interaction of both aspects. The study goes further in applying Bourdieu’s (1997) concept of social capital cultivation to discuss the ongoing discourses and dynamics of the ritual community, the masses, and the local government.

The researchers argue that although traditional Vietnamese village festivals are based on a moral and spiritual foundation, material values and economic factors are always the intrinsic components that shape the festival from the very beginning. Farmers silently include their wishes for prosperity and good harvest in every ritual of the festival. The transformations of the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình—its ritual simplification, concentration, and increasing secular public activities—results from the material-economic, political, and other demands of contemporary life. However, the experience of the festival and the mental rewards people derive from it are not wholly new. They have links to traditional Confucian and Buddhist values. The relationship between the local government and the festival has shaped the sociocultural

meanings of the transformations. The local government controls the secular public activities in conjunction with the community's active control over the ritualistic activities. The balance between the ritual and material-economic factors of the festival has vividly shifted, with the former remaining consistent over the past 40 years and the latter intensifying. This appears to be rooted in the relationship between the goals of the local government and the spiritual goals of the community; each party makes the connection between the two in different ways. The government pays attention to public safety, economic gain, and heritage to tie people to the community; the community argues that upholding moral values is the essential goal of the festival. This "negotiation" between local governments and communities limits the material-economic factors as the catalysts and drivers of rural festivals. Rural Vietnamese festivals are getting revitalised in new trends, and the dynamics of rural communities in integrating the spiritual, political, social, and economic dimensions play a major role in shaping the new "look" of the festivals.

Southeast Asian agricultural festivals are born out of a wish for peace, prosperity, and good harvest. These festivals are celebrated by entire regions under various forms, not merely among those who are in the business of agriculture. In this regard, the festivals serve as a bonding mechanism for local areas, encompassing the population, all of whom unite over a common goal. As one can imagine, the universality of such events serves as a positive influence in the collective psyche of the population and brings about a rise in material-economic factors across all sectors.

With the passage of time and different official purposes, these festivals have added many functions, such as ideological education and cultural unification. While, to an outsider, an agricultural festival may appear on the surface to be nothing more than a local party, such an event serves a multi-faceted purpose culturally, ideologically, psychologically, and financially in the form of a boost in material-economic factors. In today's era of globalisation, if material-economic factors are properly managed, they will continue to contribute and strongly support the main objectives of the festival.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATERIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS AND RELIGION IN VIETNAMESE CULTURE

This section begins by focusing on the nature of the material-economic components of public festivals based on religion. In relation to festival activities, are these components symbiotic factors or internal factors? In fact,

the communal temple festival is an important part of contemporary Vietnamese spirituality in which the participants' mental excitement/sublimation, sincerity and experience sharing³ during the ceremonies are identified as important criteria to "evaluate" the festival's effects. Not all of the people participating in temple festivals are seeking material-economic benefits in secular life. However, to be able to obtain the spiritual values mentioned above, the ritual community still needs some of the most basic material "means" to ensure the best conditions for spiritual cultivation. This is why the Vietnamese have the saying, *có thực mới vực được đạo* (the complete way [in life] can only be attained thoroughly when the practical/pragmatic values [of life practices] are sufficiently satisfied). The material-economic views of rural communal festivals have always been rather vague. Lê (2008) said that festivals based on popular religion are related to life "experience"⁴ and is always affected by contemporary social and economic activities. To clarify this issue, the researchers examine the views of Confucianism (neo-Confucianism) and Buddhism (Mahayana tradition), both of which have important influences on Vietnamese village festivals.

Confucianism focuses on how to cultivate and educate social morality and promote the formation and maintenance of social order. Accordingly, morality is the root of all relationships. It neither promotes nor destroys material factors in the process of revitalising a moral society. Wang Anshi (1021–1086) once advocated for the concept of wealth management means generating more wealth (理財就是生財). He believed that the wealth and power of the country are very important and do not harm personal interests in any way (see Tu et al. 1992: 21). The work, *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (鹽鐵論), shows that ancient China fully supported the large-scale trade managed by the central government. Until the Ming and Qing dynasties, Wang Yangming's thoughts (especially the modification and new interpretation of Mencius's theory of *Zhiyan Yangqi* (知言養氣, understanding words and nourishing the vital force) emerged on the basis of the rise of commerce and urban society in southern China, with the focus on cultivating personal morality. Consequently, as long as merchants can self-cultivate their mentality, maintain trust, and protect the interests of the country and society, they will also be valued. They are even called Confucian merchants (儒商, *Nho thuong*). Many people from southern China have immigrated to Southeast Asia, adding specific significant value to the traditional business model in that region.⁵ Therefore, the later Confucian ideological system paid a significant amount of attention to the material-economic factors in social life and the reconciliation between spiritual morality and material-economic interests. In Vietnam, the emphasis

on agriculture and restraining commerce during the monarchical ages can be said to have had a direct effect on people's lifestyle and their way of thinking. However, this concept underwent profound changes during the French colonial period, and it is now being reversed under the wave of new economic reforms and regionalisation. The arrival of French colonialists in the second half of the 19th century has partially inspired and motivated the Vietnamese to attach importance to the coexistence of material and moral values in the ideal of building a prosperous society. In southern Vietnam, where "Confucianism is not clearly defined" (Cao 1996: 147; Nguyen and Nguyen 2020), local pre-modern Vietnamese Confucianists adopted Wang Yangming's views, promoted by many local Chinese scholars, which had various direct and indirect consequences. The production and trade economy of pre-colonial southern Vietnam once flourished on the international trade route of Guangzhou-Saigon-Bangkok-Singapore (see Li 2010: 96). Compared to the traditional northern region, the folk culture of southern Vietnam tends to integrate classical Confucianism with the spirit of no trade, no wealth (*phi thương bất phú*).

Mahayana Buddhism, which has many characteristics in common with early Confucianism, considers that economic activities are for the well-being of life; they are not the ultimate goal in life. Although Buddhism advocates a simple lifestyle (documented in the Abhidhamma Sutra and Bhikkhu Dharma), this does not mean that material prosperity is completely abandoned. Rather, the focus of Buddhism is to set limits to control excessive economic activity that exceeds the parameters of moral values. According to Buddhist philosophy, one cannot be completely enlightened if one lacks basic material conditions. Thus, wealth and balance in spiritual and material life are two of the initial foundations of self-cultivation and spiritual enlightenment. Especially, Zen Buddhism attaches great importance to labour and advocates that "one should not receive food/treats if he is not working hard" (一日不耕一日不食, *nhất nhật bất canh, nhất nhật bất thực*) (see Suzuki 1974; Moore 1992: 181). Therefore, according to Buddhist beliefs, working ethically and conducting legal activities are still regarded as ways to enrich spiritual enlightenment (see Bubna-Litic 2000: 189). However, the economic factor must be juxtaposed with Buddhist ethical principles (morality, integrity, fairness, compassion, etc.). Both Confucian and Mahayana Buddhist concepts are integrated into Vietnamese folk ideology, guiding the way people live, work, and behave in their social life. Consequently, Vietnamese folk Buddhism attaches great importance to worldly life, while Vietnamese Confucianism focuses on the most practical aspects of society (see McHale 2004).

The above analysis shows that a moderate quantity of material-economic elements can be a vital internal factor of and effectively stimulate the process of spiritual cultivation in Vietnam. There is always an organic relationship between material-economic factors and the mental sublimation of participants during the ritual process. However, the former should not be over-emphasised, even if they change over time.

After the Vietnam War, Vietnam's anti-superstition movement severely affected many religions and faith-based traditions, including the communal temple and its festival. The *Đổi mới* policy of 1986 allowed for the restoration of these traditions (see Endres 2002); however, the entire restoration process was carried out step-by-step. Due to the strong observance of the Nguyen Dynasty's ritual laws by the local community in the south, rituals and related spiritual activities were one of the first clusters to be restored in southern Vietnamese villages. At the beginning of the 21st century, as Vietnam accelerated the pace of its global economic integration, many ritual-related components were changed, strengthened, or expanded (see Lương and Trương 2012, Ngo and Nguyen 2021). Among them, material-economic factors in a communal temple festival are easily changeable. The case of the Goddess of Treasury Festival in Bắc Ninh in Lê's (2007, 2008) studies and in the researchers' personal observation in 2016 shows that overwhelming commercialisation and secularisation have kept this festival away from being considered one of the mainstream traditional Vietnamese village festivals. In this case, the "inappropriate" structure between the spiritual faith and material-economic factors has aroused serious criticism from scholars and the public, thus far. In the study of Ngo and Nguyen (2021) in southern Vietnam, the enthusiastic participation of wealthy families in the village festival helped increase the necessary material conditions for organising the festival, while the ritual structure and the participants' faith remained unchanged. Throughout the country, the influence of material-economic factors on public festivals is becoming more obvious; however, in most cases, decidedly local forces, the masses and local authorities have resolutely engaged in discussions and made adjustments to ensure that these factors will not overwhelm religious faith.

In the past, material-economic elements (such as offerings, collective meals, and entertainment activities) were essential. However, the prominence of these elements has not been revived until recently. Some researchers believe that this trend is closely related to the development of the market economy and global economic integration. Luong (2007) observed that many rural festivals in Vietnam are currently in the process of "re-creation" (439–453), "at least as much in the dialogic relation between the Vietnamese socialist state and local populations, as in the stronger integration of Vietnam into the

global capitalist system” (439). However, Lê concluded that the development of economic opportunities, the sudden increase in income, the insecurity of the uncertainty of wealth opportunities and the lack of a good legal system applicable to the economy in contemporary Vietnam are significant reasons for this festival explosion (Lê 2007: 497–498; 2008: 377). In fact, the above-mentioned changes (transformations) are only temporary, and material-economic factors will continue to be deeply integrated into religious festivals in the future, at least in this case study in Vĩnh Bình.

It seems that the restoration of rural communal festivals seems to require a new kind of motivation and vitality to ensure community attention and cohesion and to create conditions for the maintenance, development, and execution of its inherent social and cultural functions, such as connecting and regulating the relationship between individuals and groups, creating opportunities for interpersonal communication, shared experience, economic cooperation, and improving social welfare. Therefore, how do the material-economic factors shape today’s rural communal festivals and their meanings?

VĨNH BÌNH COMMUNAL TEMPLE AND ITS KỶ YÊN FESTIVAL

Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple

Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple was built in the late 18th century right after the establishment of Vĩnh Bình Village (formerly, Vĩnh Lợi Village). According to Mr NVK (a 58-year-old Vĩnh Bình resident, interviewed on 10 January 2017), Trần Văn Huê, a wealthy man, and a group of people from the central region of Vietnam headed southwards and settled in the area. They built a communal temple with a bamboo structure and leaf roof to worship the Guardian God (*thần Thành hoàng*) and another one to worship Goddess Thiên Y Ana.⁶ In 1947, the temple was burned down during the Franco-Vietnamese war, and the royal seals/edicts⁷ were all destroyed. In 1950, the villagers re-applied for the royal edict from the Nguyễn court agency in Huế. In 1994, a wealthy woman, Mrs Sáu Biếu, mobilised people to rebuild the temple on new ground based on the model of Trương Định⁸ Temple and officially named it Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple. According to Mr NVK, villagers added the worship of Trương Định⁹ since they believed that this anti-French hero would protect them from natural disasters and “invisible forces”. Currently, this temple pays homage to the village guardian god, Trần Văn Huê, and other meritorious pioneers.

Although the overall architectural design of Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple has changed over time, the interior decoration is still consistent with the traditional style. Inside the temple, shrines, altars, plaques, couplets, copper furnaces, ceremonial swords, and other objects are still arranged in traditional ways. The main hall houses the tablet of the guardian god, covered with a red cloth, and on both sides are two ceremonial umbrellas decorated with embroidered dragons and phoenixes. In the middle of the main altar is the 1.2 m long and 0.6 m wide word “神” (God). The image of a dragon is painted on the wallpapered wall, surrounded by a 卐-shaped (*chữ Vạn*) frame. The communal temple also venerates meritorious pioneers and ancestors placing them on both sides of the main altar. The altar of President Ho Chi Minh is located near the main entrance of the temple. The temple still retains a set of ceremonial swords granted by King Tự Đức (1829–1883, r. 1847–1883).

Currently, the temple executive committee is composed of 17 members who work effectively together. The funding for community activities comes from many different sources, mainly urban residents, and partly from the support of enterprises and local agencies.¹⁰

The Kỳ Yên Festival

Every year, from 14 to 16 December,¹¹ people eagerly participate in the Kỳ Yên festival¹² held at Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple. This is a typical rural festival, which includes rituals and various sports, folk games, shopping, dining, and other entertainment activities, making the festival colourful and attractive. The Kỳ Yên festival is the largest of the yearly festivals held at this temple. Normally, it is organised every three years, in spring (January, February) or autumn (August, September) (see Huỳnh 2003: 72). Unlike the old tradition, the Vĩnh Bình Kỳ Yên festival is now held from the 14th to 16th of the last lunar month of the year. In 2017, an estimated 5,000–7,000 locals, domestic, and foreign tourists participated in the festival.¹³

The Kỳ Yên Festival in Vĩnh Bình includes three main ceremonies i.e., *Túc Yết* (feast), *Đàn cả/Chánh tế* (main ritual), and a ceremony to worship ancient meritorious pioneers and ancestors. Generally, the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình is held over three consecutive days, as follows:

The first day (14 December)

Cầu an ceremony (praying for peace and prosperity) is chaired by the head of the temple cult committee, monks, and Buddhists of Linh Sơn Pagoda in the morning. They chant prayers for peace and prosperity.

*Rước Long đình/Bàn nghi*¹⁴ ceremony (the welcoming ceremony of the sacrificial altars) takes place in the afternoon in all areas of town. Six *long đình*, representing the six neighbourhood-level temples in Vĩnh Bình, are all “invited” to participate in the Kỳ Yên festival. The ceremony is accompanied by drums and gongs, a dragon and unicorn dance, *Ông Địa* (a person playing the role of the Earth God), and many ceremonial performances. All the *long đình* gather in the courtyard of the temple around 5:00 p.m. to be ready for the other ceremonies.

The ceremony to bring the royal edicts to the Goddess Thiên Y Ana Temple begins at 6:00 a.m. The royal edicts are taken to *bàn nghi* in the front yard and are carried to the goddess’ temple. The parade begins with a group of dragons and unicorns dancing to pave the way, followed by flower-decorated station wagons and minivans with many lucky symbols and the New Year’s mascots. Groups of students wearing appropriate costumes (boys in trousers and shirts and girls in white *áo dài* [Vietnamese long dress]) holding flags printed with congratulatory idioms, such as *Vạn sự như ý* (to have all one’s wishes), *Cung chúc tân xuân* (happy new year), *An khang thịnh vượng* (peace and prosperity). All six of the neighbourhood *long đình* follow the procession. The masses walk after the palanquins. Upon arriving at Thiên Y Ana Temple, the cult committee and ceremonial masters solemnly carry the royal edicts into the temple and prepare vegetarian food to serve to all the participants.

Thiên Y Ana worship ceremony takes place at midnight. Before that, a *múa mâm vàng* (golden tray dance) performance to serve the goddess and all participants is organised in the main hall (see also Trần 2006: 132). At 12:00 a.m., the ceremonial master reads aloud the sacrificial text dedicated to the goddess and performs the ceremony of offering incense, flowers, and wine in accordance with the rhythm of gongs, drums, and ritual music. After the ceremony, he burns the text. Finally, people line up to offer incense and pray to the goddess.

The second day (15 December)

Ceremony to worship ancient meritorious pioneers and ancestors runs from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and is conducted by the temple cult committee. As a part of the ceremony, the unicorn and dragon dance teams perform around the market to bless the locals.

Xây chầu - Đại bội ceremony (drama performance) starts at 4:00 p.m., with special ritual drums and drama performances. After the drumming ceremony, the ritual drama begins and lasts about three or four hours. Popular

dramas, such as *Trần Bình Trọng*, *Sát Thát*, *Trung Nữ Vương*, *Lưu Kim Đính*, *San Hậu*, etc., are alternatively selected every year by the organisers. All the ritual dramas have a common feature, that is, the emphasis on honouring the king and/or heroes. However, since 1994, drama performances have only been held every three years in Vĩnh Bình.¹⁵

The third day (16 December)

Túc Yết (feast) ceremony takes place at 12:00 a.m. The head of the cult committee reports to the Guardian God and asks to begin the upcoming festival activities. He chants the sacrificial text loudly and performs rituals of offering incense, flowers, tea, and wine in rhythmic ritual music. The ceremony ends at approximately 2:00 a.m., when the courtyard space is about to welcome early participants and visitors. All visitors are invited to have a collective meal in the courtyard.

Tống ôn (plague-driving) ceremony takes place at 12:00 a.m. at the local riverside. In advance, the executive committee orders a small boat made of bamboo and paper for the ritual. People put incense burners and many offerings, such as boiled duck, rice, salt, cakes, fruits, offering money, amulets, and some lanterns, on the boat and push it to the riverbank in the ritual of reciting prayers. The *Tống ôn* ceremony is also the final ritual activity for the Kỳ Yên festival.

Non-ritual collective activities

If the purpose of the ceremonies is to facilitate spiritual faith, then, the non-ritual collective activities aim to promote the sense of sharing in the community and create a joyful festival atmosphere. The Kỳ Yên festival at Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple is held parallel with the large-scale event organised by the District Office of Culture and Information, the Spring Fair (*Hội Xuân*), which takes place at the District Stadium in December from the 14th to the 18th. Many exhibitions and sales booths are arranged to sell clothes, shoes, kitchen utensils, and other daily necessities. In addition to cultural, social propaganda, national defence, and public safety activities, local authorities announce their local socio-economic achievements to the public. Small traders introduce and sell local products and commercial commodities, such as fruits, flowery ornaments and bonsai, decorative rocks, and consumer goods. Moreover, various joyful activities, such as an animal circus, a flying circus, modern games, musical theatre, and other art performances, attract many participants.

Folk games are an indispensable part of the Kỳ Yên festival. According to Lê (2015: 53), in the past, festival activities were carried out in the alleys of Vĩnh Bình. From the afternoon of 14 December to the morning of 16 December, folk games were held throughout the town. Currently, for safety and order considerations, folk games have only been held on the playground of the People's Committee of Gò Công Tây district, where there is ample space. On the afternoon of 15 December, folk games are held, such as pot-mashing, bag jumping, bamboo dancing, tug of war, pitching, darts (for skilful individuals only), etc., and people of all ages and genders participate. The winner receives a beautifully packaged gift and a badge.

The Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình may become more exciting and crowded, partly because of the Spring Fair that offers *Tết*¹⁶ consumer goods and services during the festival (14–18 December).¹⁷ At the trade fair, the booths are arranged in an orderly manner on the grounds of the Gò Công Tây District Stadium, making it very convenient for people to shop freely. Due to the development of the manufacturing economy and the diversification of the commodity market, the types and designs of commodities displayed at the fair have become more abundant (mainly to meet the needs of *Tết*), attracting buyers of different ages. Although Vĩnh Bình is a district town, it is still a relatively rural area with almost no large or modern commercial centre. This is why locals still need to visit and buy *Tết*-related products during the Kỳ Yên festival. The fair is also an opportunity for many local producers and traders in the area to display and sell local products. Many local self-employed traders and freelancers use these trade fair opportunities to make money and contribute to the festive atmosphere.

CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUE OF THE KỶ YÊN FESTIVAL IN VĨNH BÌNH

Communal temples are cultural and religious institutions that play an important role in rural areas. Traditionally, the temple was once the administrative agency and meeting point of the entire village, expressing the spirit of community unity and social order. Since the beginning of the French colonial period, communal temples no longer take centre stage in rural life as they once did. Since the Heritage Law was promulgated in 2001, rural communal temples have become a kind of cultural heritage, which contains and preserves many local traditional values called *thuần phong mỹ tục* (beautiful customs and worthy traditions) (see Sơn 1992, 1994).

The Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình is considered to be a cultural bridge established through the spiritual institutions to connect the divine world with humans, the past with the present and the people with themselves. Ms LTMT (a 48-year-old local trader) described it in this way:

The local Kỳ Yên festival, also known as the *Cầu an* festival, is held at the end of each lunar year. At this time, the villagers will offer sacrifices to the gods, burn incense respectfully to commemorate their ancestors, and pray for peace, good harvest, prosperity, and happiness (10 January 2017 interview).

First of all, the Kỳ Yên festival is an opportunity for people to express their gratitude to the guardian gods and their dedication to those ancestors and meritorious pioneers who have contributed to local development, thereby, showing the spirit of *ăn quả nhớ kẻ trồng cây* (when you drink water, think of the source). Regarding this point, Ms PTTT (a 35-year-old local teacher) said:

For locals like me, this is a contemporary collective commemoration of ancestors who dedicated their lives to land reclamation. People wish for a good harvest, prosperity, and happiness through the festival celebrations. For visitors from other places, festivals are opportunities for them to experience, communicate, shop, and have fun [...]. I think we need to keep this festival in order to pass it on to the next generation (14 January 2017 interview).

The Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình actually showcases the role of a “bridge” connecting tradition with the present and connecting various religious institutions. The festival connects and integrates followers of Buddhism (many important ceremonies are presided by monks), folk religions (the worship of Thiên Y Ana Goddess, *Tống ôn* ceremony, etc.), and ordinary people. Furthermore, the worship of Thiên Y Ana and related rituals during the Kỳ Yên festival reflects the connection of present life with the history of the migration to and the reclamation of Vĩnh Bình land centuries ago by ancestors who came from the central region of Vietnam.

The festival is also an opportunity to promote, maintain, and spread community cohesion and strengthen connections between individuals and groups. The local people of Vĩnh Bình and visiting tourists participate in the festival with the mind of *Có thờ có thiêng, có kiêng có lành!* (you’ll experience sacredness if you venerate the god(s), and you’ll enjoy protected comforts if you comply with sacred taboos) to satisfy their spiritual needs, engage in social communication, and enjoy entertainment. According to Ms

PTTT, all members of her family (including the elderly, adults, and children) participate in the Kỳ Yên festival. She said: “Those who are free will come to the temple. They may come to see the ceremonies, help prepare sacrifices, or participate in interesting activities in the courtyard and nearby places” (14 January 2017 interview).

Many people actively participate in festival activities. Ms PTTT is a typical example. She is a local teacher and was a member of the logistics team that prepared for the festival. Later, due to her busy schedule, she “left it to other young people” (14 January 2017 interview). In a different conversation, Ms LTMT, a 48-year-old local trader, noted that the festival “provides a place for communication and entertainment for all participants, locals and visitors from afar” and she stressed that this is “an all-inclusive festival” (10 January 2017 interview).

The Spring Fair activities directly promote the atmosphere of the Kỳ Yên festival, which offers an opportunity for people to be entertained and share happiness by engaging in individual and group activities. Mr TMQ (a 68-year-old member of the cult committee) noted that joy comes from the lion and dragon dances, folk games (bag jumping, bamboo dancing, tug of war, pitching, bingo performances, ritual procession, etc.), and other related activities (drama and art performances, fashion show, etc.). In the interview conducted on 13 January 2017, he stressed that these non-ritual activities attracted a large number of people to participate. Sharing this viewpoint, in the interview conducted on 10 January 2017, Ms LTMT described her own experience when attending the ritual procession: “When the procession groups pass by, people gather on both sides of the road. They cheer, applaud, and clap their hands. Many domestic and foreign tourists join the activities”. She also pointed out that not only was the town of Vĩnh Bình crowded and bustling during the festival, the surrounding area was also full of colourful flags, flowers, and crowds. Therefore, not only were traders able to earn income through commercial transactions, but service personnel and freelancers (serviced motorbike drivers, motorbike parking owners and workers, lottery ticket sellers, and others) had the highest earnings during the festival.

The Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình is a very popular cultural event in Gò Công Tây, which helps nourish local people’s sense of homeland, especially in terms of the development of the market economy and the current economic integration period. Mr NHR (a 35-year-old Vĩnh Bình-born lecturer at a university in Ho Chi Minh City) confessed that the festival has left a deep impression on him since he was a child. After growing up, he went to Ho Chi Minh City to study and work; however, he always remembers to return

to participate in this annual festival. He said: “I don’t remember how many times I went back to participate in the festival. Usually, I come back to participate every year, unless I am busy with unexpected work” (13 January 2017 interview).

The festival is also an opportunity for locals to modernise and further modify their local traditions, especially in relation to the ceremonies. Many of the creative activities and modernisations that occur during the festival (for example, modern art has also been added to ritual art performances, the festival is introduced and widely publicised on various social media platforms, social sectors are vibrant in joining the trade fairs, women actively participate in many ceremonies and festival projects, etc.) promote emerging cultures, which helps enrich the local tradition. This trend has happened in many places in Vietnam (see Lương and Trương 2012; Ngô 2012, etc.), which vividly demonstrates the inherent adaptability of public festivals in Vietnam.

While inventing new elements, the festival provides an opportunity for the cult committee and local communities to reduce or eliminate elements that are no longer relevant to the current era. Ms PTTT confirmed:

Compared with the past, the festival rituals are now simpler. The cumbersome rules and content are removed, and only important ceremonies and activities are performed. For example, in the past festivals, there was a ritual *Múa bóng rỗi*¹⁸ dance serving Thiên Y Ana Goddess, which has now been removed and replaced by beautiful folk dances. Regarding *Hát bội*¹⁹ performances, not every year. Not this year. It depends on the financial situation of the organising committee (14 January 2017 interview).

Ms PTTT stated that there were many reasons for simplification, including changes in spiritual needs and differences in tastes regarding cultural enjoyment. Economic development has changed local cultural institutions, and the needs of the people participating in rural public festivals have also changed. According to Ms PTTT: “In addition to participating in festivals, people also need to shop and entertain at the end of the year. This is a legitimate need of all people” (14 January 2017 interview). When Ms PTTT stated, “This is a legitimate need of all people”, the researchers refer to the Buddhist concept of material-economic factor in its philosophy (discussed above). The interaction between legitimate demands and legitimate commercial activities can vividly express the inherent existence of material-economic factors in communal festivals.

The researchers asked a member of the temple executive committee whether the changes that were made were the result of the anti-superstition movement during the post-war years. He denied the idea and confirmed that the entire ceremony was fully restored after the *Đổi mới* movement in 1986. Due to the actual needs of the organisers and participants in recent years, the committee simplified the rituals. He concluded that people are very busy with their work and/or business; therefore, the long and complicated ritual process is no longer suitable. The transformation is managed by the organisers. He also confirmed that the district government would not interfere with the ceremonial agenda, but it asked the committee to register the festival with the local authority. Obviously, the authors admit that the compromise between the temple festival organisers and participants was the main reason for the simplification of the ceremony, and such a simplification does not violate the core meanings of the ritual process and the entire festival.

Non-ritual activities have also become more concentrated than they had been in the past. According to Ms NTB (a 69-year-old local trader, interviewed on 14 January 2017), almost every corner of the town of Vĩnh Bình was busy and happy during past festivals. Every neighbourhood was constantly organising various folk games to serve the community. Since 1994, these folk games have been organised by the local government and held at the district stadium on 15 December. Since then, apart from trading activities, ritual procession and private food services, no public games have been held in the town streets. Elders, like Ms NTB, were a little disappointed. She understood that these public games in the streets were no longer suitable for the growing population of Vĩnh Bình. Conversely, traders and food service providers were happy since they could have more customers in concentrated quarters. However, by its nature, this business opportunity was not evenly distributed among local residents as it had been before. In the researchers' opinion, the district government is trying to exert influence on non-ceremonial activities outside the ritual space through centralised but separated quarters, such as sports games, leisure activities, commercial activities, catering services, and motorcycle parking lots. Furthermore, security measures, ritual processions, and related contests are emphasised to promote the festival atmosphere (as noted by Ms PTTT and Mr TMQ). Thus, it is possible to conclude that the district government has been very successful in cultivating people's trust through the festival activities. After achieving this goal, the district government does not aim to control the ritual agenda. There is a compromise in the distribution of "power" between the district government and the community. As described by Ngo and Nguyen (2021), the pre-modern Vietnamese

government used the communal temple, the village guardian gods, and the communal festival as a “extended hand” to deploy administrative and civilising functions at the grassroots level. However, after World War II, the last emperor of Vietnam abdicated, and this function ceased to exist. The local community represented by the decidedly ritual forces in the temple maintains its subjectivity in the ritual process and ritual space, while the district government fosters control over the accompanying activities in the non-ritual space.

MATERIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS SERVING AS THE CATALYSTS, MOTIVATION AND MEANS OF THE KỶ YÊN FESTIVAL IN VĨNH BÌNH

The researchers realise that the Spring Fair and trade fair basically play the role of catalysts, means, and motivation to attract people to the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình, thereby, enhancing the effectiveness of the festival. Compared to many Kỳ Yên festivals in the Mekong Delta where local trade fairs are organised, the festival activities in Vĩnh Bình are sponsored by higher-level governmental authorities (district level). These activities are supplementary to religious-related rituals, but they help attract participants from different areas. Ms LNN (a 41-year-old officer) said:

Since 1994, the local government has arranged many festival activities in the area of the district stadium to serve people. The end time of the Spring Fair is usually not fixed. According to the needs of festival visitors, the event may last until 22 December of the lunar calendar. The main purpose of this event is to create business opportunities for small businesses while allowing people to shop freely and enthusiastically participate in festival-related ceremonies and activities (15 January 2017 interview).

With a large number of participants, the organising committee must consider the rationality of the space and time arrangements for the events. Normally, communal temple festivals are held in mid-spring or mid-autumn; however, the one in Vĩnh Bình is special. In mid-December just after the harvest season, the locals have income and are ready to celebrate *Tết* (Lunar New Year). They have free time to participate in community events (festivals) and shop for *Tết*. The priority for locals is to pay homage to the guardian god(s), and then join the community to participate in festival activities and/or shopping and dining.

As for non-local visitors, they also visit temples during the festivals.²⁰ The demand for buying *Tết* items is real. Some garment factories invest locally. Workers receive salaries and extra year-end money to prepare for *Tết*. All non-ritual facilities and services are established and operate in a well-organised way. Furthermore, many Kỳ Yên activities (such as the *Rước Long đình* ceremony, ritual procession, the *Tống ôn* ceremony, etc.) are held in public places, which attracts the participation of many people in the community. Collective festival activities are mainly held in the afternoon/evening, when people have more time after a day of work or study. Figure 1 shows the spaces and categories of events throughout the festival.

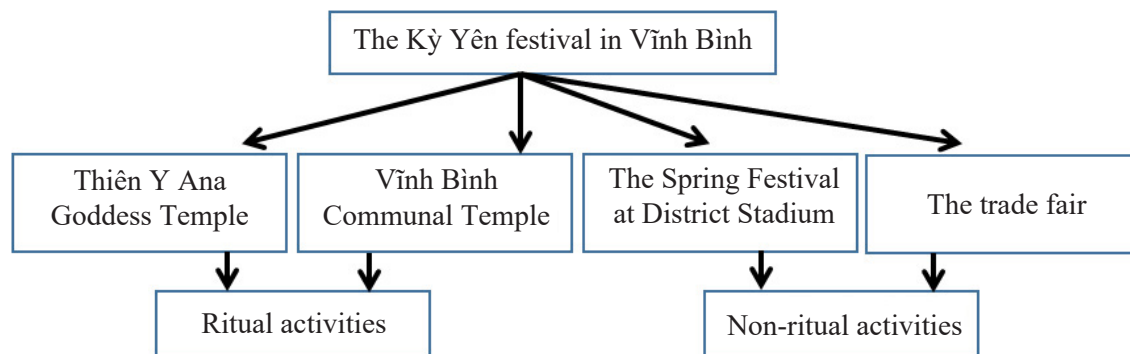


Figure 1: Structure of the festival space and activity categories.

In terms of space, the entire communal temple is arranged as a central ritual area, while Thiên Y Ana Temple is a sub-central one. Beyond these two ritual spaces, commercial booths are arranged to continuously connect the two places with the busy town centre. The Spring Fair is located farther from the temples where collective sports and folk games are held, and it takes up a lot of space in the district stadium. This arrangement is considered very reasonable because it does not violate the sacredness and normality of the main ritual spaces. During the ritual procession, almost the entire town of Vĩnh Bình becomes a large festival space. As long as the people who are participating in the Kỳ Yên festival can move around in the central area, they can find related activities that meet their various needs (spiritual needs, community communication, leisure, and shopping) at the same time. Through such a wide range of activities, the festival attracts people of all backgrounds and ages.

In summary, the researchers name the main ritual space as the core zone where the main ideas of the festival are performed in ritual practices, while the trade fair/Spring Fair quarters and the entire town serve as the embellished background that facilitates the ritual zone. The researchers also found that, unlike Brown's (2007) view,²¹ the ritual practices in the ritual area

have not significantly changed during the past 30 years, but the accompanying activities in the environmental area have recently been intensified. In this case study, it is the spiritual and material-economic factors of the entire ritual process that lead to the structured arrangement, not the relationship between idea and practice.

People with different functions and purposes at the festival held different views on the increase in the material-economic factors. Mr NVK (temple executive committee) mentioned this issue repeatedly in the interview with him. He expressed his dilemma with this issue. On the one hand, he was uncomfortable with the centralisation of non-ritual activities (concentrated sports games, trading activities, etc.), not because of the increase in the type and number of activities or the coexistence of material-economic factors in the festival. He was well aware that festivals must include non-ritual activities, and participants (pilgrims) might pursue both spiritual and non-spiritual values. On the other hand, the increasing popularity of the festival and the increase in mass participation have provided him and his colleagues with more energy to organise the festival. Ordinary participants did not share similar views because they could still come to the temple to worship the gods as they had before. Non-ritual activities did not prevent them from doing so now. The local authorities represented by Ms LNN seemed to be less concerned about the concentration of non-ritual activities and the increase in trade activities, except for the extent to which they tried to control these material-economic factors, not to violate the sacrificial activities in the temple and not to overwhelm the prestige of the temple ceremonies. She noted: “the temple ritual system is the soul of the entire festival” (15 January 2017 interview). Thus, the ritual activities are strictly protected from the governmental perspective. From the conversation with Ms LNN, the researchers learned that there are several reasons for the concentration of non-ritual activities and the increase in trade activities. Urbanisation, public safety, and the role of state management are the three basic reasons. In the context of rapid urbanisation and population increase, the streets of Vĩnh Bình have become crowded and are no longer suitable for street folk games and other community-based festival activities. The increased participation of local enterprises in non-ritual activities and ritual processions also require the local government to implement strict security measures. Furthermore, the Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple and its Kỳ Yên festival have been listed as a cultural heritage of the province, so the local authorities are fully aware of their responsibility to preserve and beautify the historical and cultural values of this heritage. Fortunately, this cultural

heritage title has played an important role in the protection and it can prevent excessive infiltration of material-economic activities in the ritual zone.

Except for a few unwelcome incidents (non-serious traffic accidents, unorganised garbage disposal, etc.), all the transaction activities and services are carried out under a moral base. Ms LNA (a 52-year-old self-employed trader) is one of the hundreds of contemporary street vendors in Vĩnh Bình during the festival. She and her 14-year-old daughter managed to move the sugarcane juice vending machine and more than a dozen low chairs from their home about 10 kilometres away to provide drinks for festival visitors. She was given a place outside the ritual space of the temple in which she was able to provide services to hundreds of customers a day. She paid a daily tax to the district government as regulated. When asked whether she would increase the cost of each cup of sugarcane juice, she answered without hesitation that she and other traders in the area did not do so because they were receiving “the grace of the [guardian] god” (*ơn phước thánh thần*). She also added that before the service started, she and her daughter had gone to the temple to bow in front of the guardian god, hoping that her business would be good; after the festival season, she would come back to the temple to repay “the grace of the god”. When the authors asked if anyone took this opportunity to sell at a high price, she quickly answered: “*Tội chết!*” (it’s a sin!). Ms LNA and other traders (almost all of whom are Buddhists) did not mention the concept of ethics in their activities; however, through their performance, the authors admit that healthy and ethical business transactions were executed in good faith during the holiday season. Instead, the concept, thanks for the [guardian] god’s blessing (*nhờ ơn thần thánh*), was mentioned repeatedly. The concept of repaying the god’s blessing (*tạ ơn thần thánh*) was also found among the pilgrims at the festival. Before and after the main ritual, many families brought cakes, tea, wine, fruit, and other sacrifices to “repay” the guardian god. They believed that the guardian god had supported their cause in the past year; therefore, they came to express their gratitude and continue to pray for god’s grace in the following year. Obviously, the intangible connection between non-ritual business and leisure activities has been appropriately added to ritual activities and governed by moral conceptions and sincerity driven by “the blessings of the [guardian] god”.

Moreover, from the researchers’ viewpoint, the local government’s investment in festival activities (Spring Fair, the trade fair, ritual procession, security measures, etc.) has brought forth important social and political values. Although in the conversation with the researchers, Ms LNN (local official) repeatedly emphasised the purpose of creating playgrounds for the

community and promoting local economic activities, this did not conceal the goal of cultivating and strengthening people's trust in local authorities. In fact, Ms LNN was very proud that the local authorities and the people of Vĩnh Bình could organise such a large-scale and diverse festival. In the interviews, many of the informants confirmed that the local authorities were successful in strengthening people's affiliation with the community and connecting people to their homeland (Vĩnh Bình) through the festival. Mr NHR and many others talked about the happy memories of the festival and the emotions it evokes in them. Truthfully, the district government uses local economic development and the significant increase in people's (spiritual and material) needs to invest in festivals and transform them into a form of social capital—as noted by Bourdieu (1977)—which is an important form of spiritual resource that can enhance the community's confidence in the local government.

To the researchers' delight, government investment does not interfere with the core ritual space and its inherent symbolic meaning; rather, it strengthens the attractiveness of the activities that take place in the environmental zone. Compared to similar festivals in the same area, the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình is particularly prominent in terms of the centralisation of non-ceremonial activities, which makes it increasingly attractive before the Lunar New Year. Historically, local authorities were used to imposing certain values or meanings on core ritual activities. This case study of Vĩnh Bình is different. Centralisation comes from a non-intrinsic factor, that is, the expansion of festival space, the diversification of non-ritual activities and the authorisation of local governments to influence local festivals in a reasonable way. This model of win-win cooperation between the community and local authorities can allow non-ritual activities to serve as the catalysts, driving force and means of a communal temple festival.

In Vĩnh Bình, the positive material-economic contribution reflects the vitality and practicality of the Kỳ Yên festival. However, if it is overused, these factors will become pragmatic, derailing the festival activities. Some residents of Vĩnh Bình, especially the elderly, cautioned that if there is no proper management and regulation measures, entertainment and shopping activities will increase and overshadow the temple ceremonies. Moreover, the extension of the Spring Fair, large-scale trade of uninspected products, and loose quality supervision during the Spring Fair are the primary focus of the organising committee and all sectors of society. According to the current performance of the Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình, the contribution of material-economic factors is very important. However, the value of these contributions is only temporary. Material-economic factors reflect the rhythm

of contemporary life. Therefore, when the living environment changes, the application of these factors must also change. For example, with rapid urbanisation and a prosperous commodity economy, the town of Vĩnh Bình will have enough large trade centres and supermarkets to gradually replace traditional markets. Until then, the current exhibition and festival organisation will not retain its value. This requires festival organisers and local authorities to recognise the need for changes, evoking the need to be more innovative in designing models and in organising the material-economic activities at the “outskirts” of the festival.

CONCLUSION

Material-economic factors are inherent elements of religious-related festival activities, including communal temple festivals. These factors play a role in creating the environment and they are a means of motivating the individuals and communities participating in the festival to uphold a more wholistic spiritual value. Material-economic factors include principles related to the living environment, which are affected by and reflect contemporary local socio-economic conditions. To master this principle, festival organisers must have exceptional talent and creativity in arranging, regulating, and managing the role and influence of material-economic factors during the festival.

The current Kỳ Yên festival in Vĩnh Bình is representative of a transformation process. The festival seizes the advantages of social development, promotes the cultural, educational, and social functions of communal temple institutions in the current period and promotes social progress. A series of non-ritual festival activities are designed and organised within the management framework; therefore, they are the catalysts, the driving force and the means for the main spiritual activities of the festival. The key to ensuring festival efficiency is the interaction between the ritual space and the entertainment space; thus, there must be a clear distinction between them. The ritual space and ritual activities must be at the centre of the entire festival. The Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple Kỳ Yên festival reflects the fact that rural communal temple institutions and related festivals can actively grasp the advantages of the development of the new era. In such a situation, the negotiation between local governments and communities is extremely useful to maintain the traditional soul of a village temple festival and further cultivate socio-economic and political aims in contemporary Vietnamese society.

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Participation was obtained through the informed consent of the respondents in accordance with procedures standard in social science research.

NOTES

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- ¹ The Grand Prayer Festival, a collective ceremony for villagers to pray for peace and prosperity.
- ² See Mai (1997: 2) and information provided by Mr NVH, a 44-year-old Gò Công Tây district official interviewed on 15 January 2017.
- ³ For the “sincerity” and “experience sharing” effects of the ritual, see Seligman and Weller (2012).
- ⁴ *trải nghiệm* or *nhịệm sinh*.
- ⁵ See Wang Gungwu’s ideas in Tu et al. (1992: 37).
- ⁶ Thiên Y Ana was originally an ethnic Cham goddess in central Vietnam. In the early stage of Vietnam’s southward expansion, she was adopted by the Vietnamese in the central region. During the late 17th century, the Vietnamese continued to migrate south. They took with them many elements of Viet-ised Cham culture, including the Goddess Thiên Y Ana. Early Vĩnh Bình villagers set up a temple to worship her and regarded the goddess as one of the spiritual symbols of the community. In the communal temple festival of Vĩnh Bình, certain rituals are held at Binah Temple.

- ⁷ The royal edict/seal serves as a “certificate” used by the monarchy to grant certain public temples and gods, implying that the villagers must abide by the dynasty laws (the orthopraxy mechanism) and express absolute loyalty to the king.
- ⁸ An anti-French hero (1820–1864).
- ⁹ The temple cult committee brought a bronze Trương Định statue from Ho Chi Minh City and set it up on the temple campus. In 1996, after some discussion, the committee moved the statue to the nearby Ông Hồ Temple (where it remains to this day).
- ¹⁰ Information provided orally by 58-year-old Mr NVK, a member of the Executive Committee of Vĩnh Bình Communal Temple, interviewed on 10 January 2017.
- ¹¹ All the schedules of the communal temple festivals are arranged in the lunar calendar; therefore, from now on, the researchers will no longer mention the term “lunar calendar”.
- ¹² The Kỳ Yên festival in southern villages is known as the largest communal festival of the year certified by the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945). It conveys the meaning of praying for peace and gratitude for the guardian gods.
- ¹³ Interview conducted on 15 January 2017 with 41-year-old Ms LNN, an officer of the Department of Culture and Information of Gò Công Tây District.
- ¹⁴ This is also called *long đình* or *bàn vong*, an incense altar, whose structure mimics the architecture of the Nguyễn Dynasty Temple, but on a small scale; it is placed on a palanquin carried by four people.
- ¹⁵ Notes from the interview conducted on 10 January 2017 with Mr NVK and from the interview conducted on 11 January 2017 with NPH, a 39-year-old member of the cult committee.
- ¹⁶ Vietnamese Lunar New Year.
- ¹⁷ The ending time of the trade fair is not fixed; it may vary from year to year.
- ¹⁸ A shaman dance with many skilled movements, usually performed by gay performers.
- ¹⁹ A Vietnamese ritual drama performance aiming at glorifying the grace of the gods and the merits of emperors and heroes.
- ²⁰ Summary of comments made by Mr NVK, interviewed on 10 January 2017.
- ²¹ Melissa Brown (2007) stated that there is always a flexible space between ideas and practices that facilitates changes in culture.

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