

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GODDESS LIEU HANH IN PHU VANG, THANH HOA PROVINCE

Nguyen Thi Que

Faculty of Social Science, Hong Duc University

Abstract. The Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh holds a paramount position in Vietnamese belief systems, particularly within the context of the Mother Goddess worship. She amalgamates elements from Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and indigenous goddess veneration to promote virtuous behavior, punish wrongdoers, vanquish adversaries, and safeguard the nation and its people across the regions she traversed. Employing a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, this article explores the enduring influence of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh in the locale of Phu Vang, situated in the Hoang Hoa district of Thanh Hoa province. Drawing upon empirical data collected in the region, this research unveils the historical roots of Phu Vang, a place of solemn worship for the Mother Goddess, with origins dating back to the 18th century. Additionally, the study spotlights the profound impact of the Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess on the local cultural heritage. According to legend, the Nguyen Dynasty's royal decree granted Dai Dien village the privilege of venerating the Mother Goddess. Simultaneously, the Phu Vang Festival, held on the anniversary of Mother Lieu's passing, vividly illustrates the role and influence of worshipping Mother Goddess on the spiritual life and collective consciousness of the people, thus commemorating the contributions and virtues of the Mother Goddess to this land”.

Keywords: Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh, legend, consecration, festival, Phu Vang.

1. Introduction

Lieu Hanh Goddess is a multifaceted spirit who manifests in both the mundane and spiritual aspects of Vietnamese life, exuding a mysterious and sacred aura. As the revered deity in the Mẫu Tam Phủ (Three Palace/ Three Realms) and Tú Phủ (Four Palace/Four Realms) religions, Lieu Hanh Goddess holds a profound influence on the lives of the Vietnamese people, particularly in the northern regions. In the hallowed land of Thanh Hoa, where Lieu Hanh Goddess underwent her third birth and attained sainthood, the Pho Cat Temple (Thạch Thành) - where the Goddess descended, and the Sòng Temple (Bỉm Sơn) – where the Goddess achieved sainthood, stand as the most sacred sites. Furthermore, Lieu Hanh Goddess is venerated in various temples, pagodas, and private

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Contact Nguyen Thi Que, e-mail address: nguyenthique@hdu.edu.vn

shrines across Thanh Hoa province. Among them, Phu Vang (Golden Temple) preserves a distinctive essence of the Lieu Hanh Goddess, vividly depicted in folklore and endorsed by the royal consecration of Khai Dinh King, who bestowed special honors upon the consecrated land dedicated to the worship of Lieu Hanh Goddess. Phu Vang also hosts an annual festival on the anniversary of the Lieu Hanh Goddess's passing, a commemoration of her virtues, fostering community cohesion through diverse spiritual activities.

Certainly, within the cultural interweaving and dissemination of narratives surrounding the Lieu Hanh Goddess, along with the practice of Mother Goddess worship, Thanh Hoa Province emerges as a pivotal player in the religious landscape of Nam Dinh - Thanh Hoa. The province boasts a network of sacred sites, encompassing temples, palaces, and shrines, intricately linked to festivities that celebrate and memorialize the revered Lieu Hanh Goddess, among which Phu Vang holds a notable place. Nevertheless, the "reputation" of Phu Vang is relatively modest. For that reason, there is a scarcity of collections delving into the legend of Lieu Hanh Goddess's imprint at Phu Vang. During our documentary investigation, we uncovered the reference to Dai Dien village (known as Ke Vang, or Vang Village), intricately tied to the book "Thanh Hoa Chu Than Luc", composed in the 15th year of Thanh Thai reign (1903). According to the book, Thanh Hoa has 48 worship places that designate Lieu Hanh as a Superior deity [1; p 442]. In Hoang Hoa district (or My Hoa), Dai Dien village stands out as the sole location that worships Lieu Hanh Goddess. In addition, based on our fieldwork at Phu Vang, we have yielded a wealth of valuable documents concerning Lieu Hanh Goddess, including additional legends about her. Notably, there are two decrees that were issued during the reign of King Khai Dinh, bestowing upon Dai Dien village the honor of worshiping the Lieu Hanh Goddess. Concerning the festival at Phu Vang, there is a notable absence of cultural perspective research examining the festival's scale and proceedings. There is only a little news on Hoang Hoa district's website reporting on the event. There is a scarcity of studies delving into the significance and impact of Mother Lieu Hanh at Phu Vang. The elevation of Lieu Hanh Goddess's status and authority is drawn from official documents, royal consecration, and legends (narratives). This amalgamation of information has created inspiration for us to write this paper.

By employing an interdisciplinary methodology, involving fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, this article seeks to underscore the influence of Lieu Hanh Goddess at Phu Vang across various cultural domains: encompassing the transmission and preservation of folk tales, royal consecration, festivals, and revered relics within the region.

2. Content

2.1. Overview of Phu Vang

As a coastal district located in the north of Thanh Hoa City, Hoang Hoa is an ancient region that has plenty of cultural and historical values. Every sea, mountain, and river in this area has transformed into a landscape of unspoiled and captivating beauty, drawing visitors and dignitaries to a halt and appreciate the scenery, engage in literary discussions, and echo the sentiment of "One inch of mountains, one inch of gold". This scholarly terrain also bears the imprints of accomplished individuals from various places.

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According to legend, Phu Vang (Hoang Xuan) is believed to be the location where Lieu Hanh Goddess once arrived to deliver the world.

Hoang Xuan Commune, formerly consisting of Hoang Xuan and Hoang Khanh Communes in Hoang Hoa District, Thanh Hoa Province, is captivating with the reverence of Mother Goddess worship. Within this enchanting locale, there is Phu So devoted to the veneration of the National Mother Ha Thi Cai, a revered figure credited with mobilizing communities, establishing Nghia Hung village, and aiding King Le Loi in military endeavors. After Le Loi's ascension to the throne and the establishment of his capital in Thang Long, he visited So village in Hoang Xuan Commune to invite her to the capital to serve her. In recognition of her significant contributions, King Le Loi posthumously honored her as the national mother during a ceremony of the Le dynasty. She remains a revered deity who has inspired the unwavering belief and admiration of the local populace. Moreover, the landscape of Hoang Xuan Commune later welcomed the addition of Phu Vang, also known as Phu Vang Linh Tu/Phu Vang temple, nestled on the mountain of Vang Village Pagoda in Dai Dien village (formerly known as Nhue Hoang, Ke Vang). This charming terrain, surrounded by mountains and rivers, seamlessly blends with nature. The temple is situated approximately 7 km from Road 1A. Dai Dien village has been documented in the Thanh Hoa divine book, confirming its status as a significant belief associated with Lieu Hanh, who held a revered position as a superior deity. According to the recollections of the elders, while the temple's establishment dates back a considerable time, the exact origin of the structure has been lost through the vicissitudes of history and the ravages of war.

Legend has it that Phu Vang was constructed in the 18th century on Chua Mountain in Vang village, "it has the same architectural design as Ba Trieu Temple in Hau Loc, and includes three main sections: The Front Hall, Middle Hall, and Back Hall, dedicated to worshiping the Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess. The temple's three gates face the Ma River in the West-Northwest direction, while its back rests against Vang Mountain. Each segment is separated by one yard, except for the space between the Middle Hall and the Back Hall, which spans two yards. The three gates are guarded by two imposing dharma guardians on each side, which are as tall as three individuals stacked atop one another, their navels as large as a bowl (In-depth interview with Mr. N.V.D, July 12, 2023). During a period of combating superstition, when people refrained from worshiping, the temple fell into neglect and decay. Later, villagers exploited the Chua Mountain, extracting stones from the entire foundation to construct house bases, causing landslides that led to the complete destruction of the temple. It only endured in memories, passed down through the words of elders. In 1986, while a family in the village was excavating for stones, they unexpectedly unearthed a splendid jackfruit wooden statue with a damaged leg. Examining its structure and ornamentation, it was presumed to be a maiden's statue. Confused, the people speculated that this might be a temple's worship item that had been destroyed and buried on the temple land (In-depth interview with Mr. N.V.D, July 12, 2023). Subsequently, villagers placed the statue on a brick pedestal for worship. However, the government at that time requested its removal, and the statue was transferred to the committee and subsequently lost. Between 1990 and 1995, after the statue was rediscovered on the old temple foundation, Ms. Nguyen Thi Ky, a local resident, along with fellow community members, pooled funds to construct a small temple on the hill.

The platform where the statue was found faces the Ma River. The temple lacks ornate decorations or other deities but attracts worshippers on the 1st day of lunar month (ngay Soc), with incense and fruit, tea to honor Lieu Hanh Goddess. Today, the temple is utilized for the worship of the Ba Thoai Goddess.

In 2011, the Hoang Xuan Commune Party Committee Resolution mandated the Commune People's Committee to strategize the development of the Phu Vang spiritual area within a hillside location, coinciding with the current government site. Also in the same year, the groundbreaking ceremony for the palace commenced, with local residents contributing funds and resources for its construction. By 2013, the government had completed the restoration of an 11,000 m² area, and the Phu Vang spiritual area has been operational since. Situated adjacent to a small temple where an ancient statue was discovered, the present Phu Vang faced the main road instead of the Ma River, a deviation that, according to local accounts, coincided with a series of unfortunate events in the commune that year. Consequently, a ceremony was organized by the village and commune to seek the blessings of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh for peace.

The current Phu Vang comprises three distinct structures: The Forbidden Hall, dedicated to the worship of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh and her two attendants who descended to Thanh Hoa; the Middle Palace, honoring the Goddess of Chin Song Son, the ally who supported Princess Lieu Hanh in her life-and-death battle with Tien Quan Thanh at Song Son; and the outermost palace, devoted to the Four Palaces community. In front of the temple grounds stands a statue of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, symbolizing the amalgamation of Buddha and Mother Goddess within the contemporary architecture of Mother Goddess worship.

Legends in the region still recount the origins of Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess, tracing back to the homeland of Nam Dinh and extending far and wide. The narrative in Phu Vang originates with the descent of the Jade Emperor's daughter to Earth, mirroring the Van Cat Goddess: "That is the Second Immortal Lord Quynh Nuong, who must have journeyed to Earth" [2; p.96]. Evolving through cycles of birth and transformation, the storyline ultimately brings the deity back to the earthly realm, bestowing blessings and averting disasters. A pivotal moment in this chain of legends revolves around the tale of Nguyen Hue leading his army northward to confront the Qing invaders. Pausing at the Tam Diep - Bien Son line in Thanh Hoa to bolster his forces, he sought sustenance not only from the Song Son Temple but also from the Phu Treo (Nga Son) and Phu Vang (Hoang Hoa) to worship the Mother Goddess. At Phu Vang, Nguyen Hue offered incense and paid his respects, leading to a significant dream where the Mother Goddess outlined a strategy for victory. Upon ascending the throne with the reign name Quang Trung, Nguyen Hue honored the Mother Goddess with the title "Che Thang Hoa Dieu Dai Vuong - First Mother Goddess". Consequently, the Phu Vang Temple has historically served as a spiritual haven for the Hoang Xuan community and attracted numerous visitors from the Bong junction vicinity, all coming to pay homage to the revered First Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh. In Phu Vang, Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh is revered as a heroic and supremely powerful spirit, yet remarkably approachable and unassuming, deeply embedded in the spiritual fabric of the people's lives. As the supreme being, the Mother continually blesses the villagers in this sacred locale.

Phu Vang, unlike the prominent Pho Cat Temple on the main street or Song Temple situated on Thien Ly Street, is positioned along the Ma River wharf. This bustling wharf serves as a hub for numerous boats engaged in active trade, facilitating the transshipment of various goods, including salt and fish from the Diem Pho area to Thach Thanh, Cam Thuy, and Hoa Binh. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in transporting commodities like areca nuts, betel leaves, rattan, bamboo, wood, and lath from the highlands to the lowlands. Consequently, Phu Vang's location proves to be a significant stage in the practice of worshiping Mother Lieu, contributing to a distinctive spiritual atmosphere with its unique beliefs in Mother Goddess worship. Currently, the Vang wharf is a designated stop along the Ma River cruise route, leading to the Han Temple and Co Bo Temple at the Bong junction, characterized by vast water waves—a symbolic representation of Thanh encompassing five districts, where the crowing of a rooster resonates across all five simultaneously.

2.2. The legend and consecration to worship Lieu Hanh Goddess at Phu Vang temple in Thanh Hoa

In the collective consciousness of folklore, Mother Lieu Hanh possesses the ability to transform into various forms, such as Mother Nine Insects and Mother Thuong Ngan. Lieu Hanh is a composite character embodying elements of fairies, goddesses, saints, and ordinary people, all infused with the essence of "filial piety". Drawing from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, she is described as having magical attributes, offering refuge, and harmonizing with the principles of goddess worship and the Mother Goddess in the nation's cultural heritage. Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh wields supernatural and distinctive powers, yet remains intimately connected to humanity, providing protection, psychological resolution, and guidance throughout one's current existence. Described as the guardian figure in the present life, Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess leaves her indelible mark everywhere, and the practice of worshiping figures like the Mothers of the Three Palaces-Four Palaces is likened to the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh religion, emphasizing life's significance over death. This perspective views happiness and prosperity as achievable in the present life rather than in the afterlife.

In Thanh Hoa, sincerity characterizes the worship of Princess Lieu Hanh, and tales about her legendary origins circulate widely. Identified as a celestial daughter who descended to Earth three times, she was first born into the Pham family, returned to heaven at 20, then reincarnated into the Le family, marrying into the Tran family and bearing two children. On her third incarnation, she sought to travel the mountains and waters, aid the king in battle, teach settlement practices to the people, and engage in literary and poetic discussions. Her varied activities include interactions at Tien Pagoda (Lang Son) and Tay Ho (Hanoi), collaborating with literary figures like Trang Bung - Phung Khac Khoan, and the baccalaureate surnames Ngo and Ly. From opening shops in Song Son, Pho Cat (Thanh Hoa), to selling goods and punishing wrongdoers at Deo Ngang, Princess Lieu Hanh's image portrays a woman of merit, tolerance, eloquence, and noble conduct, all while harboring a desire for freedom - a quintessential embodiment of the Vietnamese mother. This depiction not only reflects the prevailing ideology of the times but also echoes the universal yearning for freedom, earning admiration and respect from diverse corners of the world. With three recorded descending on earth of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh, occurring twice in Nam Dinh and once in Thanh Hoa (the exact

location, whether Pho Cat - the 2nd descending or Tay Mo - the 3rd descending, remains inconsistent in historical records), and as for her revelation as a goddess at Song Son, the local people hold profound reverence for her. She is regarded as their savior, believed to promote goodness, punish evildoers, bestow health and fortune, and answer prayers for children and peace. Historical events, such as Nguyen Hue's strategic pause at Ba Doi Pass during his journey to the North to recruit and train soldiers for the impending war in Thang Long, provide evidence supporting the circulation of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh legend in the region. The establishment of the Phu Vang followed the recognition of the Mother Goddess as a saint at Song Son. According to the legend of Mother Lieu, she unveiled her divine plan to ensure Nguyen Hue's victorious march, halting the Qing army and expelling them from the country. This particular branch of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh legend originated in Thanh Hoa, distinguishing it from other regions. Mother Lieu strategically orchestrated Nguyen Hue's swift ascent to power (as Quang Trung), leading to the triumphant defeat of foreign invaders. Folk stories about Lord Lieu Hanh, enriched with topical anecdotes, depict her as a practical prophet. In the Phu Vang area, the layers of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh stories are comprehensive, ranging from the earliest association with the divine genealogy of the Van Cat goddess Doan Thi Diem to later narratives following the Mother's earthly arrival in Thanh Hoa and the Song Son conflict between Lieu Hanh and Noi Dao Trang, which became an epiphany and blessing for Nguyen Hue - Quang Trung in their fight against foreign invaders.

While folk tradition asserts that King Quang Trung, upon his triumph, bestowed upon the Mother the title of Che Thang Hoa Dieu Dai Vuong - First Mother Goddess, Phu Vang does not possess records of this consecration. Conversely, based on the narrative of Kieu Oanh Mau and Tran Ham Tan, during the reign of King Le Than Tong, Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh was granted the title "the King Che Thang Hoa Dieu" [6, p.34]. Amidst the passage of time and shifts in historical dynasties, it becomes challenging to definitively attribute the bestowal of the title "Great King of Victory and Peace" upon Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh to a specific king. Nevertheless, future generations take pride in the Mother Goddess, solidifying Mother Lieu's esteemed position in the annals of Vietnamese feudal dynasties and the religious legacy of posterity. The consecrations serve as official administrative documents from the Nguyen court, acknowledging the role and authority of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh. Beyond safeguarding the nation and strategizing against adversaries, the Mother also imparts agricultural wisdom, offering guidance on mulberry cultivation, silkworm rearing, and trade. The influence of the Mother Goddess extends to the Ba Bong intersection, where residents thrive in mulberry cultivation and silkworm farming. The bustling trade facilitated by the two-way ferry at Vang Wharf exemplifies the enduring impact of the Mother Goddess in this region. the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh stands as the revered guardian of both agricultural and commercial communities.

During the recent fieldwork expedition to Phu Vang in April 2021, we obtained access to photographs of two royal decrees granted to Dai Dien village by Kings Khai Dinh, specifically the 2nd (1917) and 9th (1924) monarchs. These decrees pertained to the worship of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh and represented some of the final consecrations bestowed by the Vietnamese feudal court upon numerous deities, with a focus on Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess. This form of consecration falls into the category of deity consecration, encompassing historical figures who contributed to the nation, known

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as human gods, and deities revered in folk beliefs [7; p.11]. The contents of the consecration encompass the following elements:

Transcription:

Sắc Thành Hoa tỉnh, Mỹ Hòa huyện, Đại Diện thôn phุง sự Đệ nhất Thiên tiên
Thánh mẫu Lieu Hanh công chúa Thượng tôn thần. Hộ quốc tý dân, nǎm trú linh ứng. Tứ
kim phi ứng cảnh thừa cảnh mệnh, miến niệm thần hưu, trước phong vi: Trang vi Dực
bảo, Trung hưng, Thượng đẳng thần. Chuẩn kỳ phุง sự, thứ cơ thần kỳ tưống hưu bảo
ngã lê dân.

Khâm tai!

Khải Định nhị niên tam nguyệt thập bát nhật.

[Châu ấn]: Sắc mệnh chi bảo

Translation:

Conferring Dai Dien village in My Hoa district, Thanh Hoa province, to venerate the princess Lieu Hanh, Mother Goddess. The deity has rendered invaluable service to both the people and the nation, bearing numerous spiritual auspices. As of now, I have inherited a significant legacy, and acknowledging her unwavering support, I hereby decree *Trang vi Đức Bảo Trung hưng Thượng đặng thần/Tang Vi Duc Bao Trung Hung Supreme goddess*. Permission is granted to worship and express the aspiration that the Goddess will persist in safeguarding the people.

Please accept this with utmost reverence.

Sac menh chi bao/Golden royal seal, March 18, the 2nd year of Khai Dinh's reign (1917).

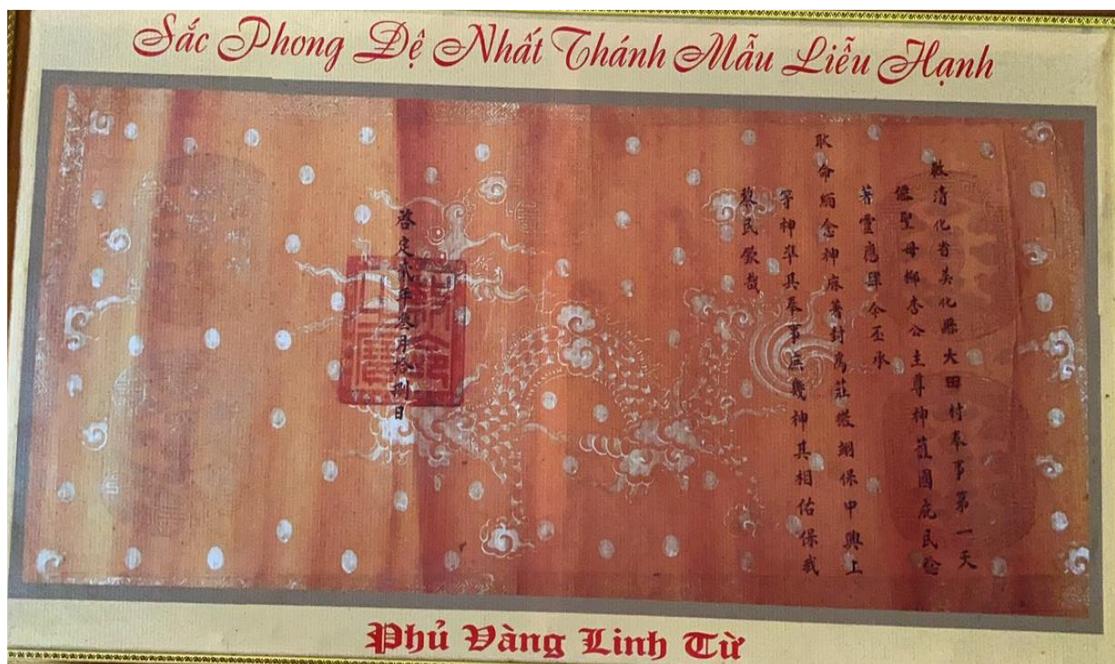


Fig. 1. The consecration of King Khai Dinh in 1917, which was bestowed upon Lieu Hanh Goddess in Phu Vang

(the photograph was captured by the author during a field trip in April 2021)

During this consecration, Lieu Hanh Goddess was bestowed the esteemed title of “Trang vi Duc Bao Trung Hung Superior God”. Concurrently, the king issued a decree urging the people to earnestly worship her, expressing the hope that Mother Goddess would persist in safeguarding the populace, fostering virtue, and thwarting evildoers.

Transcription:

Sắc Thanh Hoa tinh, Hoằng Hóa phủ, Đại Dien thôn tòng tiền phung sự nguyên tăng: Trang vi Dực bảo Trung hưng Đệ nhất Thiên tiên Thánh mẫu Lieu Hanh công chúa Thượng đẳng thần. Hộ quốc tự dân, nǎm trú linh ứng, tiết mông ban cấp sắc phong, chuẩn híra phung sự. Từ kim chính trị trẫm từ tuân đại khánh tiết, kinh ban bảo chiêu đàm ân, lễ long đăng trật, đặc chuẩn y cựu phung sự, dụng chí quốc khánh nhi thân tự diễn.

Khâm tai.

Khải Định cửu niên thất nguyệt nhị thập ngũ nhật.

[Châu án]: Sắc mệnh chi bảo

Translation:

I confer Dai Dien village, Hoang Hoa district, Thanh Hoa province according to the old custom of worshiping the originally conferred deity as: *Trang vi Dực Bảo Trung hưng Đệ nhất Thiên tiên Thánh mẫu Lieu Hanh công chúa Thượng đẳng thần*. This deity has played a vital role in safeguarding the country and its people, displaying numerous divine omens, and has been formally granted the right to be worshipped. As I now celebrate my 40th birthday, I express deep gratitude, commemorated with a solemn ceremony conducted with enhanced dignity. The special standards permit the continuation of worship in alignment with the nation's joy, documented in the ritual canon.

Please accept this with utmost reverence.

Sac menh chi bao Golden royal seal, July 25th, the 9th year of Khai Dinh's reign (1924).

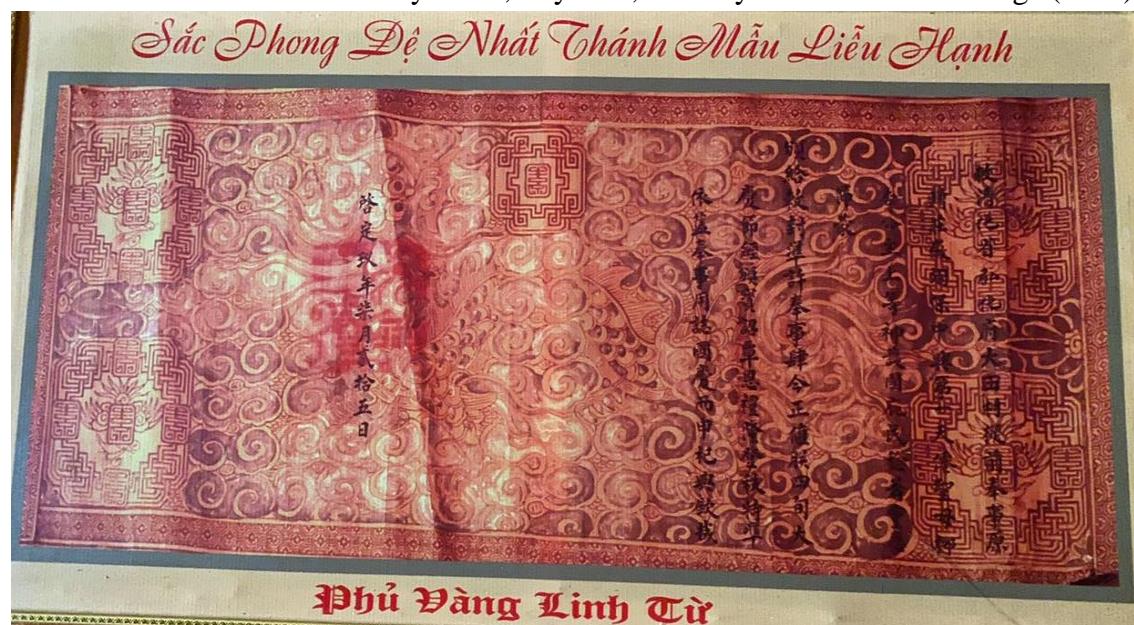


Fig. 2. The consecration of King Khai Dinh in 1924, which was bestowed upon Lieu Hanh Goddess in Phu Vang (the photograph was captured by the author during a field trip in April 2021)

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While neither consecration explicitly mentions the Phu Vang, both implicitly suggest that Dai Dien village (also known as Vang Village, the location of Phu Vang) in Hoang Hoa district reveres the First Heavenly Immortal, Princess Lieu Hanh. All titles bestowed upon Princess Lieu Hanh in the Nguyen Dynasty in Thanh Hoa typically include the trio of deities: Princess Lieu Hanh, Quynh Cung, and Quang Cung (the Mother's two attendants). However, in the unique case of Hoang Hoa, the bestowed title exclusively honors Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh as the “First Heavenly Immortal Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess”, setting it apart as a distinct and special tradition in the worship of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh. The consecration conducted in the 9th year of Khai Dinh (1924) served to reaffirm the significance and influence of the Mother Goddess, echoing the sentiments expressed in the 2nd Khai Dinh consecration of 1917. Simultaneously, it underscored the ongoing devotion to the worship of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh. This order was issued during King Khai Dinh's “four weeks of grand celebration”, specifically honoring Mother Lieu Hanh and her worship facility in Phu Vang, Hoang Hoa district, Thanh Hoa province. The distinctiveness of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh's consecration in Phu Vang adds to the diverse understanding of Mother Goddess worship and spiritual beliefs in Thanh Hoa.

The Lieu Hanh Goddess transcends the realms of folk literature and earthly existence, venturing into the domains of miracles, consecration, and the worship of the Vietnamese Mother Goddess. This phenomenon underscores the profound impact and far-reaching influence on the Vietnamese people, revealing the enduring significance of the Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess in their spiritual lives both in historical times and in the contemporary era. It is remarkable to witness a character whose influence spans literature and permeates the fabric of folk beliefs, showcasing a comprehensive impact on the collective consciousness. Moreover, the issuance of consecration and administrative documents by kings to regions venerating Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh serves as compelling evidence of her dominance about other concurrent beliefs and religions in Vietnam during that period. This occurred at a time when Confucianism maintained its societal governance role.

2.3. The Influence of the Goddess Lieu Hanh in Phu Vang Festival

Phu Vang Festival is observed across three events in January, March, and June, with the primary celebration occurring in March, specifically from the 1st to the 3rd. This significant occasion commemorates the death anniversary of Mother Lieu Hanh Goddess, serving as a testament to Phu Vang's devotion to Mother Lieu, whose roots lie in Phu Giay, Nam Dinh. In the Hoang Hoa region today, a traditional folk song persists:

*Còn trời, còn nước, còn non
Mùng ba rước Mẫu ta còn đi xem
Ai về nhẩn chí cùng em
Rủ nhau dắt díu đi xem hội Vàng.*

Translation:

*In the sky, in the water, and in the youth that remains
On the third day of the Mother's Day procession, we continue to witness it
Whoever returns, kindly send a message
Let's extend invitations to one another to attend the Phu Vang Festival together*

The Phu Vang Festival unfolds in two distinct phases. The Ceremony part encompasses a palanquin procession, an incense offering ceremony, and offerings and sacrifices from 11 cultural villages: Dai Dien (Vang village), Nghia Huong, Tra La, Nga Phu, Nga Phu 2, Tra Son, Xuan Phu, Huu Khanh, My Cau, Tan Khanh, Kenh Thon of Hoang Xuan commune. Participants come to the temple to offer incense and make offerings, marking the commencement of the Phu Vang festival with the resounding beat of drums. This sets the stage for various spiritual and cultural activities imbued with national identity. The palanquin procession, a paramount ritual in festivals, kicks off early in the morning at the cultural house of Dai Dien village. It concludes at the temple, where the ceremony unfolds. Led by the female priesthood team of Dai Dien village, the ceremony includes offering incense, fruit, incense, lamps, and other offerings, reading wishes, making wishes, and completing. Once Dai Dien village completes the procession and offerings, other villages follow suit in offering their tributes and incense at the temple. Tributes to the Mother Goddess typically consist of chicken sticky rice or pork sticky rice, along with incense, tea, fruits, candies, and fresh flowers. Villagers present these offerings to Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh with reverence, seeking her protection and blessings. In the collective consciousness, the Phu Vang festival has become a cherished tradition. Residents of Dai Dien village, as well as those from neighboring communes, eagerly come together to prepare offerings for the Mother Goddess Goddess. For them, the dwelling place of the Mother is not merely a grand palace or mansion, but a sacred space that harmonizes heaven and earth, promoting goodness and punishing evildoers. Following the palanquin procession and offerings, the ritual of practicing the Hau dong (attending seances), and *hat Chau Van* (Vietnamese ritual singing) to praise the merits of the Mother Goddess and the saints. The ritual of attending seances adheres to the traditional concept that August marks the anniversary of Father's death, and March marks the anniversary of Mother's death. Psychics, spiritual practitioners, and the community believe that performing the ritual on the anniversary of Mother Goddess's death brings good fortune for the entire year.

In comparison to festivals held at other temples and palaces dedicated to Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh in Thanh Hoa, the Phu Vang festival follows a comprehensive set of steps and rituals, albeit with a somewhat simplified execution. Unlike other temples and palaces, such as the Song Temple, the ritual performances at Phu Vang occur within the commune itself rather than at a distant location. Despite its proximity to the river wharf, the festival at Phu Vang does not include the customary water-carrying ritual observed at places like Dai Temple, Dragon Temple - Water Temple (Ha Trung), and Tan Giap Temple (Yen Dinh).

Following the ceremony, the festival unfolds with a variety of special programs and traditional games that showcase historical and cultural values. This serves the dual purpose of fulfilling the spiritual and cultural enjoyment of local residents, children away from home, and visitors from diverse locations, while also contributing to the growth of spiritual tourism in the commune. In 2018, the Vang station in Hoang Xuan became operational, emerging as a significant stop for tourists during their Ma River cruise from Hoang Long station to the Ba Bong intersection. This journey encompasses worship places and Mother Goddess ceremonies at various temples along the Ma River, forming part of the Three Palaces system. Annually, Hoang Xuan attracts numerous conscientious

tourists, both local and from outside the province, who come to offer incense and pay their respects at Phu Vang.

Phu Vang Festival has established itself as a cultural and spiritual tradition deeply ingrained in the local community. As the festival approaches, anticipation and excitement fill the hearts of the people, motivating them to come together for preparations and communal gatherings. The shared belief and hope in Mother Lieu's protection, along with wishes for health and fortune, are fervently embraced by all. According to an insightful interview with Ms. Nguyen Thi Hoa, a 70-year-old caretaker of Phu Vang Garden, participating in the festival and offering incense to the Mother Goddess symbolizes stability in health and an uplifted spirit. This sentiment extends even to those living far from home, who can partake in the blessings of the festival (In-depth interview on November 15th, 2023). On the first day of the lunar month, activities like offering incense at the temple, and taking care of trees, and weeding in the temple garden are sources of joy for the local residents. A resident who is in charge of the Phu Vang order, emphasizes the meaning, happiness, and health derived from such seemingly simple yet heartfelt tasks: "For more than half my life, I have been attached to this land and since the government came into operation, I have been here to look after the vehicles, protect, clean and plant trees. Although the job is simple, I and everyone else always find it meaningful, happy, and healthy" (In-depth interview with Mr. Nguyen Van Truong, 60 years old, in charge of Phu Vang order, November 15, 2023). Residents also share that families who settled on temple land faced insecurities in their lives. The challenges of migrating to a new place were mitigated by seeking the protection of the Mother Goddess through offering incense at the temple, fostering a sense of peace in their daily lives.

Phu Vang Festival has evolved into an integral cultural and spiritual event for the local population, commemorating the virtues of Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh who has protected the country and the community. The festival enriches cultural celebrations dedicated to the Mother Goddess in Thanh Hoa and beyond.

3. Conclusion

The Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh wields immeasurable power, emerging as the principal deity in the Mother Goddess Three Palace and Four Palace religion; profoundly influencing the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Thanh Hoa stands out as a distinctive region with Lieu Hanh Goddess, marking one of the origins of this folk belief following the significant event of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh "Descending at Pho Cat and attaining sainthood at Song Son". Throughout Thanh Hoa, the Mother Goddess descended in various locales, each possessing its unique legends and stories, yet unified in their commitment to safeguard the nation and its people. Consequently, the province boasts numerous worship sites that received royal recognition, evident in Pho Cat Temple (Thach Thanh district) and Phu Dai Temple (in Ha Trung district), holding a prestigious record at the Song Temple and strategically positioned along vital transportation routes and perilous regions. Although Phu Vang may not command a prime location like the Song Temple and Pho Cat Temple, it carries the indelible marks of the Mother Goddess through local legends and the consecrations in the 2nd and the 9th year of Khai Dinh reign (in 1917 and 1924). This has played a crucial role in affirming the Mother Goddess's position in Thanh Hoa as well as in the Tam Phu Mother Goddess worship system in

Vietnam. The sacredness and mystery imprints of the Mother Goddess Lieu Hanh at Phu Vang, encapsulated in legends, consecrations, worship relics, festivals, following with other customs, make it a revered site for spiritual admiration among locals and tourists, fostering activity of charity.

Note: The author emphasizes the preference to retain the original text (not transliteration) of the consecration transcription.

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