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## THE BELIEF IN THE PAPERMAKING ANCESTORS OF THE VIỆT PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE

**Abstract:** *In the past, Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh had many poonah-paper-making craft villages. However, at present, there is only Đồng Cao village (located in Bắc Ninh) which still produces poonah paper following the traditional handicraft method. Although the craft villages in Hà Nội no longer produce poonah paper, the worship of papermaking ancestors is still practiced by the communities every year at the communal houses in these villages. This belief expresses gratitude to the craft ancestors, manifested through various forms of ritual practices, of which the most important practice is the ceremony of the death anniversary of the craft ancestors. This ceremony exhibits traditional cultural values and aims to honor craft villages so that it should be preserved and passed down by craft villagers. This article utilized the perspective of religious anthropology to analyze the role and significance of ancestor worship in poonah-papermaking villages and to explain the phenomenon of why the annual ceremony of the death anniversary of the craft ancestors is still preserved by communities even when the production of poonah paper no longer exists there. This is a quite special phenomenon of ancestor worship of the Việt people in poonah-papermaking villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh at contemporary time.*

**Keywords:** Belief, ancestor worship, dó papermaking, Việt people, Hà Nội, Bắc Ninh

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## Introduction

The Poonah (dó) papermaking villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh have a community connection and share experiences with each other through conducting the practice of craft ancestor worship. The craft ancestor, also known as “bách nghệ tổ sư” (ancestor of hundred crafts), “thánh sư” (sacred master), “tổ sư” (ancestor), “tổ nghề” (craft ancestor), and more, is a person who taught the craft to villagers. After the demise, he/she is revered as a craft ancestor by the craftsmen and is worshiped at the village's communal houses or temples. The belief in worshiping craft ancestors of the poonah-papermaking villages such as An Cốc village (Hồng Minh commune, Phú Xuyên district), An Thái, Đông Xã, Đông Thọ, Hồ Khẩu villages (now belonging to Thụy Khuê street, Bưởi ward, Tây Hồ district, Hà Nội) and Đồng Cao, Dương Ô villages (Phong Khê ward, Bắc Ninh city, Bắc Ninh province) so far not only reflects the belief of the craftsmen in the craft ancestor but also asserts and honors the traditional craft of their villages within society. While the papermaking villages of the Việt people have similarities in the practice of craft ancestor worship, each village selects a day to commemorate the ancestors. Although the time of craft ancestor worship in these villages is different, they all share the common point of expressing the principle of “when you drink water, remember the source,” in this case, it means that you need to be grateful to the craft ancestor for teaching the craft that brings wellness to people and the community.

Regarding the topic of craft ancestor worship, there have been some publications, of which a significant work that includes many cultural values attracting interest from researchers is the book titled “*Nghề thủ công truyền thống Việt Nam và các vị tổ nghề*” (Traditional Vietnamese handicrafts and career ancestors) by Trần Quốc Vượng and Đỗ Thị Hảo (2014). In addition to the introduction to the history of the traditional handicraft development and some typical villages, this book presents 63 craft ancestors worshiped by craftsmen at relics, including one papermaking craft ancestor by the name of Mr. Thái Luân. The book states that An Cốc village worships Thái Luân as its craft ancestor and other Vietnamese ancestors during the days of the 9th and 10th of the first lunar month, which is the anniversary days for the craft ancestor left An Cốc for Thăng Long to teach the

papermaking craft (at Nghĩa Đô village – translator); and the villagers of Yên Hòa, Yên Thái, and Hồ Khẩu (Bưởi ward) take the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the third lunar month as the time to commemorate the craft ancestor because he left Nghĩa Đô village on this day [Trần Quốc Vượng, Đỗ Thị Hảo, 2014: 119-120]. This document shows that the belief of Việt people in craft ancestor worship has penetrated deeply into the consciousness of the craftsmen even when their craft villages no longer exist, they still worship their craft ancestors. Considering the same topic as such, the author Nguyễn Thị Thanh in the article entitled “Thờ cúng tổ nghề (Nghiên cứu trường hợp quận Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội)” (Worshiping craft ancestors - A case study of Hoàn Kiếm district, Hà Nội) published in the Journal of *Religious Studies*, No. 4 (154)/2016 emphasized the role played by craft ancestor worship in Hoàn Kiếm district through examination of seven craft ancestors (ancestor of dyeing, ancestor of goldsmithing, ancestor of embroidery, ancestor of leather shoes, ancestor of painting, ancestor of blacksmithing, ancestor of plastron collar) are worshiped at the communal houses in Hoàn Kiếm district [Nguyễn Thị Thanh, 2016: 96-103]. Another research as the doctoral thesis titled “*Tín ngưỡng thờ cúng tổ nghề ở quận Hoàn Kiếm - Truyền thống và biến đổi*” (The Craft Ancestor Worship in Hoàn Kiếm district - Tradition and Changes) by Ph.D. student Nguyễn Thị Thanh relies on the perspective of anthropology to point out that within the urban space of the old quarter of Hà Nội, over the changes in economic life and livelihood, the rituals of craft ancestor worship once closely associated with traditional crafts of the Hanoians have also undergone many changes [Nguyễn Thị Thanh, 2017]. In recent years, the author Vũ Hồng Thuật in the article “*Tín ngưỡng thờ cúng tổ nghề đan cỏ té xã Phú Túc, huyện Phú Xuyên, Hà Nội*” (Ancestor worship of the sedge weaving profession in Phú Túc commune, Phú Xuyên district, Hà Nội) published in the Journal of *Ethnology*, No. 5/2022 has pointed out that the role of career ancestor worship not only to express gratitude to the teacher of the craft but also to create a strong community cohesion of sedge weavers with each other through the worship of commemorating the career ancestor [Vũ Hồng Thuật, 2022: 48-49], etc. So far (2023), there has been no article that has systematically addressed the belief in craft ancestor worship in contemporary life. This article emphasizes the role of *dó* papermaking

ancestor worship as an indispensable part of the spiritual life of *dó* paper craftsmen in Hà Nội, even though they no longer produce this kind of paper, craft ancestor worship in these villages is still maintained annually at the village communal houses. The article also points out that the Đồng Cao papermaking village is still producing *dó* paper and industrial paper, but the worship of the craft ancestor is no longer communally practiced as it used to be but has changed to the private worship at home or the temples according to the individual's beliefs. The article is based on the results of field research and retrospective interviews with elderly papermakers in craft villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh between 2022 and 2023, applying an interdisciplinary research method, focusing on the approach of religious anthropology to analyze and explain the economic - cultural - social context that has impacted the practice of craft ancestor worship in craft villages in the past and present.

### **1. An overview of the *dó* papermaking craft of the Việt people**

China is the country that invented the papermaking technique and shortly after that, this technique spread to many countries, including Vietnam. So, the *dó* papermaking craft of Việt people existed a very long time ago. According to some documents, around the third century, China's paper craft spread to Giao Chỉ district [Trần Quốc Vượng, Đỗ Thị Hảo, 2014: 119]. The local people in Giao Chỉ subsequently produced a type of paper called agarwood (mật hương) paper that is white, durable, and fragrant. Around the year 284, Roman merchants bought tens of thousands of sheets of agarwood paper from the Giao Chỉ's people [Việt Báo, 2016].

The craft of making *dó* paper in An Cốc village has existed for a very long time and this village is considered the birthplace of the *dó* paper-making craft of Việt people in the Northern Delta. The products of this paper include many types such as *phuong* paper, bamboo paper, *khay* (tray) paper, *sắc* (decree) paper, approval paper, *hành ri* paper, and cardboard paper [Bùi Văn Vượng, 1998: 347]. During the Lý Dynasty, the ancestor of *dó* papermaking craft of An Cốc went to Thăng Long capital to teach this craft to the people of Yên Hòa, Yên Thái, Hồ Khâu, Đông Tho, Đông Xã villages (Buổi ward, Hà Nội). The *dó* papermaking craft in these villages flourished in the 15th century and was famous everywhere for its traditional papermaking

craft and was the pride of the Kẻ Bưởi people [Nguyễn Hữu Thúc, 1992: 151]. Additionally, in Hanoi, there is the Lại family in Nghè village (Nghĩa Đô, Cầu Giấy district), which is known for the craft of making *sắc* paper used for the king's bestowing decrees on saints and gods worshiped at the relics. Mr. Lại Phú T., who was born in 1953 in Nghĩa Đô village, Hà Nội, said: "The Lại family's papermaking craft has existed for nearly 500 years. In 1944, Emperor Bảo Đại stopped ordaining the gods every year as he had before, and the craft of making *sắc* paper has disappeared from 1944 until now. Meanwhile, in the case of Đồng Cao papermaking craft village, its villagers learned the craft from Yên Thái village and have sustained this craft for more than 800 years [Huy Hoàng, 2020].

From the results of field research, retrospective interviews with elder people in the mentioned *dó* papermaking villages, and published secondary sources, it is said that the raw materials for making *dó* paper are *dó* bark, *duróng* bark, and viscous water extracted from scobs of *mò* wood. These raw materials are available naturally in the mountainous provinces of northern Vietnam. This craft requires a lot of water, so most of the *dó* papermaking villages are located near rivers and lakes for convenience in soaking raw materials in water and filtering *dó* and *duróng* bark. To make a piece of paper, it is necessary to go through a procedure of more than 10 steps for raw material processing and techniques of making powder solution become paper sheets (*xeo* techniques). This is a traditional craft, passed down from generation to generation in a "father-to-son succession" style, so there are many secrets associated with the craft skills. In the past, *dó* paper products were widely used in social life, and the households consumed all the paper they had just produced. The period of 1924-1926 was the most prosperous time of Đồng Cao village's *dó* papermaking papermaking, in the village there were more than 300 papermaking households [Vũ Hồng Thuật, Vũ Thị Diệu, 2015: 75]. This has been compared by Pierre Gourou to "Village Industry," because crafts are mainly produced in the villages, right in the family [Pierre Gourou, 2017: 519].

Before the French colonialists invaded Vietnam, the production of *dó* papermaking villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh was very developed, because people bought *dó* paper to write family genealogies,

theogonies, precious genealogies, and calligraphy; print Tết paintings; make firecracker fuses and shells to burn at weddings, holidays; and making votive papers... so the consumer market is wide across the country. After invading our country (in 1858), the French colonialists brought industrial production techniques of papermaking to the North, so the *dó* paper consumption market was shrunk. After 1955, papermaking households in Yên Thái joined work to establish a cooperative by the name of Đông Hòa; Đông Thọ village was named Đông Thành Cooperative; Hồ Khẩu village was named Cộng Lực Cooperative; all three cooperatives are managed by Ba Đình district. The papermaking households in Yên Hòa village joined work to initiate the Dân Chủ Cooperative. In the cooperatives, papermaking households' products were rated equivalent to work points, and workers received food for their points every month. Ms. Lý Thị X. (born in 1954, Thụy Khuê Street) said: "I have been working in *xeo* paper stage since I was 13 years old and later became a member of the Công Lực Paper Cooperative. By 1994, four paper cooperatives including Đông Hòa, Đông Thành, Công Lực, and Dân Chủ were dissolved one after another, because the paper they produced had no place to be consumed, and that cooperatives' households had to switch to new forms of livelihood to push their income higher than traditional papermaking."

The reason why the *dó* paper products cannot be sold is that from 1993 onwards, the *dó* paper products of those mentioned cooperatives were mainly sold to villages of firecracker-making craft and domestic industrial firecracker factories. Due to people's carelessness in the process of producing, transporting, and using firecrackers, fires and explosions have occurred, causing deaths in many localities. According to a report by the Prime Minister, in 44/53 provinces and cities, just during the Giáp Tuất Lunar New Year holiday (1994), there were 728 accidents caused by firecrackers, killed 71 people, injured 765 people and cost about 20-30 billion VND [Prime Minister, 1994]. Therefore, the Prime Minister issued Directive No. 406-TTg dated August 8, 1994 *On banning the production, sale, and burning of firecrackers from January 1, 1995*, so firecracker-making villages no longer go to *dó* papermaking cooperatives to buy raw materials like before, the *dó* paper made by craft villages cannot be sold, people have to quit their job and switch to other jobs for livelihood.

Currently, in Đóng Cao village, there are still a few households producing *dó* paper to sell to Đóng Hò folk painting village, individuals, and state agencies (National Library, Central Archives Department I and II, Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies, museums, etc.) to copy the royal decrees of ordainment, deity legends, theogonies, village covenants, ...; each year this craft village sells more than 500,000 sheets of *dó* paper. Although the *dó* paper craft villages in Hanoi have been lost for nearly 30 years, the annual worship and commemorating rituals of the paper craft's ancestors are still maintained at the village communal house, demonstrating the principle of "drinking water, remember the source" because the ancestor has taught the craft and blessed a prosperous and happy life to the communities.

## 2. Sacred space for worshiping craft ancestor

In the Việt culture, sacred spaces (such as communal houses, pagodas, temples, palaces, temples of literature, and/or temples of Confucius, generally called relics) are places for worshiping Buddhas, saints, tutelary gods, predecessors, career ancestors those are associated with the spiritual life of the Việt people for many generations. These relics not only demonstrate the worshiping beliefs of the Việt people but are also the adhesive for consolidating the social communities among villagers, craft villages, and craft guilds together and they penetrate all aspects of human life. Sacredness is established when people form social relationships with objects, making them social agents [Alfred Gell, 1998: 18].

To commemorate the person who taught the craft, craft households discuss and agree to buy a common plot of land to build their own communal houses, and temples to worship their village's craft ancestors and set strict regulations on community cohesion in maintaining common worship of the craft ancestor with the desire for the craft development. The belief in worshiping the *dó* papermaking craft ancestor of the Việt people in the North has many different forms and levels, such as setting up altars at home, but most commonly, craft villages and craft guilds set up communal houses and temples to worship craft ancestor of their village or ward, many of whom are also honored as village tutelary gods [Nguyễn Thị Thanh, 2017: 1].

The relic classification profile of An Cốc village's communal house (2007) by the People's Committee of Hà Tây province (now Hà Nội) states: An Cốc village's communal house (also known as Thọ Vực village's communal house or Bơi village's communal house), besides the village's tutelary god, Chiêu Pháp Uy Linh Đại Vương - a general during the 18th Hùng King's reign, Thái Luân, who is a papermaking craft ancestor, is also worshipped as another tutelary god of the village. According to the elders, this village had the papermaking craft and provided paper for making dynasties' decrees of ordainment, ordaining decrees to villages' tutelary gods, and using them in other royal works. The papermaking craft ancestor has a real name Thái Luân Thị (or Thái Luân in short). He is the god who taught the papermaking craft to the An Cốc villagers. Once the papermaking craft has developed the reputation spread far and wide to Thăng Long capital. The king summoned him to the capital and taught *dó* papermaking craft to some villages around Thăng Long capital, including Yên Thái village, Yên Hòa, Hồ Khâu, Nghĩa Tân... Therefore, Mr. Thái Luân is honored by the papermakers in these villages as the craft ancestor, of which only An Cốc village honors him as the village's tutelary god, a blessing god and worshiped in the forbidden palace of the communal house [Hà Tây Department of Culture and Information, 2007: 5]. People believe that honoring the career ancestors as the tutelary god is a blessing for the whole village, so the worship must be done carefully and incense is smoked all year round. Mr. Hoàng Thái D. (born in 1954, An Cốc Thượng hamlet) said: "The elders in the village passed down the story that in the village's covenant there are regulations on the custom of worshiping craft ancestor. If business goes well and the economy is well off, villagers will buy buffaloes, cows, and pigs to sacrifice to the craft ancestor and organize worshiping the craft ancestor for three days; If the community has poor business, they will buy only a plate of sticky rice, a chicken, a bottle of wine, tea, tobacco or a tray of meal to offer to the craft ancestor, as long as it shows villagers' faith and respect for the craft ancestor. Therefore, every year An Cốc villagers dedicate offerings and express their commemoration to their craft ancestor at the communal house."

The results of retrospective interviews with the elders in the Management Board of An Cóc communal house show that their papermaking craft ancestors are both a human deity (originated from a human) and a god of blessing fortune, so they often listen to the prayers of *bách tính* (hundreds of families - translator), from then on, he blesses supporting to the craft community to develop. Based on the above concept, the people of An Cóc agreed to contribute money and workdays to build a large, beautiful, and spacious communal house and set out worship regulations according to the beliefs and customs of the villagers who are practicing *dó* papermaking craft in the local area.

For *dó* papermaking craft villages in Bưởi ward, Yên Hòa (Hà Nội), the space for worshiping craft ancestors is only in communal houses, temples, and temples of literature. The results of field research show that currently only in Đông Xã communal house (No. 444, Thụy Khuê Street) there is a divine tablet for papercraft ancestor inscribed in Sino characters (百藝紙) placed on the altar and behind the incense bowls. Visitors from everywhere come to the communal house to burn incense and worship the tutelary god, then they come to worship at the altar of the craft ancestor. In this communal house, the community co-worships their craft ancestor (along with a tutelary god-translator) at the gable to the left side of the main hall. Mr. Nguyen Van T. (born 1956, keeper of the communal house) said: "I have learned from the elders in the village that the village communal house is the place to formally worship the tutelary god who protects the whole village. Mr Thái Luân, the papermaking craft ancestor only taught the craft to a group of people in the village, so the community only co-worships him (as a sub-object - translator) at the communal house. From the past to present, we have maintained this custom of worshiping craft ancestors in this position at our village communal house."

In Ho Khau village, before 1955, the papercraft ancestor Thái Luân was worshiped in the temple of literature (*văn chi*) along with the Confucius worship. According to the customs of the Việt people, the temple of literature is a place to worship Confucius, wise predecessors, and academics, who are local glorious characters in *tổng* (old administrative unit but no longer in use, equivalent to several communes – translator), districts, villages, and communes. Mr. Bùi

Văn K. (born 1953, in Thụy Khuê) said: “The literature temple of Hồ Khẩu village located on an area of more than 50 square meters, built in the shape of a nail character (丁), in the harem area, Confucius is worshiped at the middle, on the left side is place to worship craft ancestor Thái Luân, the right for worshiping the village's predecessors and academicians during the feudal period. All the deities in the literature temple are written in Sino characters on the wooden tablet, placed on the throne altars, and there are also *hoành phi, câu đối* (horizontal and parallel sentences) that look very majestic. During the period from 1955 to 1965, the village's literature temple was used as a kindergarten, a meeting place, and the headquarters of the *dó* papermaking cooperative, so later the worshiped objects were damaged, and the temple collapsed and became ruined. Now the villagers of Hồ Khẩu practice worship to remember their craft ancestor at the communal house.”

Yên Thái village is famous for its *dó* paper making craft in the ancient capital of Thăng Long. Their worshiping the craft ancestor is carried out at Yên Thái temple (No. 449, Thụy Khuê Street). After 1995, the Yên Thái paper cooperative dissolved, and since then the papermaking households in this village have paid less attention to worshiping their craft ancestor. Currently, in the Yên Thái temple and communal house, there is no altar to worship craft ancestors. Every year at the communal house festival, in the worshiping oration, there are only some prayers mentioned to the craft ancestor Thái Luân.

Đồng Cao village (Bắc Ninh) worships its craft ancestor at the village temple. The village temple is a place to worship the earth god at the position in the first part of the village. Today, due to urbanization, Đồng Cao village has been arranged in the ward level, so the village temple is located in the center of the village, the space and landscape of the temple are narrower in comparison to before 1990. Every year, households of papermaking craft in Đồng Cao village worship their craft ancestor Thái Luân at the village temple on the 20th day of the 8th lunar month. In addition to the general offerings contributed by the whole community, each household also prepares its offerings and brings them to the temple to worship the craft ancestor with the hope that this craft will be favorable and developed. After 1995, because the Government issued Directive No.

406-TTg dated August 8, 1994, On Banning the production, sale, and burning of firecrackers, *dó* papermaking craft households switched to industrial paper production. Then these households often set up altars to worship the god of wealth and earth at home or companies, factories, and workshops, so gradually the worship of paper craft ancestors at village temples faded away. Field research in Đóng Cao village shows that currently, only a few households keep making *dó* paper to express their belief in the craft ancestor, when they have important events or New Year opening day of the craft paper business, they bring offerings to the temple, burn incense to worship the earth god and the craft ancestor Thái Luân. Villagers no longer maintain the communal worship of commemoration to their craft ancestor at the village temple as they did in 1990 back to the past.

From the results of retrospective interviews with seniors of *dó* papermaking at the above locations, we identify that the fixed “sacred space” of the craft village is not only a place to worship the craft ancestor but also a “place to return” where people always direct to on the day of commemorated worshiping the craft ancestor. For papermaking believers who always consider “sacred space” as the “holy land” and the place of “epiphany” and “sanctification” of their craft ancestor, although their villages (in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh) are no longer making *dó* paper, they still annually maintain commemoration worship to their craft ancestor. It not only means showing people’s gratitude to their craft ancestors for teaching the craft but also affirms the role of traditional careers in society and strong community cohesion in all aspects of life. This shows that the Việt people, in all social classes, express the strong religious sentiments that cover the whole social life.

### **3. The belief in paper craft ancestor**

The belief in the papercraft ancestor of Việt people in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh not only expresses gratitude to whom has passed down the craft which is expressed through many forms of ritual practices at relics on the *sóc* and *vọng* days (first and mid days of the lunar months - translator), holidays of the year, festivals, among which the commemorating ritual is considered the most important but also affirms the traditional cultural values of the craft village that are

handed down and preserved by the villagers. The Việt people in Northern Vietnam with eight *dó* papermaking villages (An Cốc, Yên Hòa, Hồ Khẩu, Đông Xã, Đông Thọ, Hồ Khẩu in Hà Nội; Đồng Cao, Dương Ô in Bắc Ninh) all practice commemorating worship for their craft ancestor. These craft villages all recognize Thái Luân as the papermaking craft ancestor.

An Cốc village is considered the place where the Việt's papermaking craft originated and in the middle of the Lý dynasty, the craft ancestor went to Thăng Long capital to teach the craft. Thus, An Cốc paper craft village has had a history of nearly a thousand years, so the craft ancestral worship here is very unique. According to the history of An Cốc village communal house relics and the telling stories of the village elders: An Cốc village communal house worships two paper craft ancestors. *Firstly*, Holy Master Thái Luân is worshiped by the community as the progenitor and the village Tutelary God. *Secondly*, a Việt craft ancestor from An Cốc village, after absorbing Chinese papermaking techniques, in the middle of the Lý dynasty, went to Thăng Long capital to teach the papermaking craft to some villages in Thăng Long capital, so such the villages became papermaking craft villages. From the results of retrospective interviews, the elders in An Cốc village and other papermaking villages in Bưởi ward all said that in the past, the village communal house worshiped two craft ancestors, including Mr. Thái Luân from China and a Việt craft ancestor. Unfortunately, no one in the village knows clearly about the Việt craft ancestor. The results of field research from the year 2000 up to now on the Việt people's *dó* and *sắc* papermaking craft and domestic and abroad secondary documents have not discovered any Việt ancestor of papermaking craft. We will continue to research this issue soon.

Even though the papermaking craft in Hà Nội was lost in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, every year, *dó* papermaking villages practice communal commemoration worship to the craft ancestor. In the minds of the Việt people in general and *dó* papermaking villages in particular, they always have the consciousness of "drinking water, remembering the source" and always remember the craft ancestors, so the community has agreed to practice forwarded worship to the craft ancestors at the communal houses. Ms. Lý Thị X. (born 1956, Thụy

Khuê Street) confided: “Although today we no longer make *dó* papers, the belief of annual worshiping the craft ancestors to express the commemoration at the village communal house in the form of ‘forwarded worship’ (*cúng vọng*). This is a spiritual cultural beauty that is always preserved, transmitted, inherited, and developed by the community.”

Particularly in An Cốc village (Hồng Minh commune, Phú Xuyên district), people practice the belief of worshiping the paper craft ancestors two times a year. The first occasion is on the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month, which is the anniversary of the Việt ancestor’s leaving for Thăng Long citadel to teach papermaking craft. The second occasion is on the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month, a ceremony is held to commemorate the merits of papermaking’s original ancestor – Holy Master Thái Luân, who taught papermaking techniques to An Cốc villagers. An Cốc village consists of two hamlets: An Cốc Thượng and An Cốc Hạ, who together participate in worshiping their craft ancestors. Previously this village had only one hamlet, but gradually the population increased, households were split up, the village scope was expanded and was established into two hamlets. An Cốc Thượng villagers followed Buddhism and folk beliefs, and many households of An Cốc Hạ were Catholic believers. In 1954, a number of An Cốc Hạ villagers migrated to the South, residing in Hô Nai town (Đồng Nai), a number of An Cốc Thượng households moved to settle instead of the left Catholics. So, currently, there are both Catholic and Buddhist households in An Cốc Hạ hamlets. Mr. Nguyễn Văn H. (born 1953) said: “My family used to make the *dó* paper, so I always commemorate the merits of our craft ancestors. In my family, my wife and children are Catholics, I am Buddhist and a believer in ancestor worship. Every year, I participate in the ceremony to worship our paper craft ancestors at the village communal house.”

According to the agreement between An Cốc Thượng and An Cốc Hạ hamlets, An Cốc Thượng is the host in the ceremony to commemorate the craft ancestors, An Cốc Hạ villagers participate as the guests or as volunteers. The purpose of the two hamlets is not only to maintain religious practices and festivals of worshiping craft ancestors but also to create a community solidarity of Catholics and Buddhists, respecting each other's freedom of belief and culture. The

officials and elders of An Cốc Hạ hamlet came to negotiate with the people of An Cốc Thượng hamlet and together organized the worshiping and commemoration ceremony to their craft ancestors, which was agreed upon by the communities of the two hamlets. Since then, the two hamlets have jointly organized festivals and worship to commemorate the papermaking craft ancestors at An Cốc communal house. On the day of worshiping the craft ancestors, there are rituals of offerings and *ăn đựng* (communal party of sharing one animal - translator). According to tradition, this year An Cốc Hạ villagers process the tutelary god's palanquin to An Cốc Thượng communal house to participate in the ritual of craft ancestor on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month, stays overnight, and then on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>, they process the tutelary god's palanquin returns to their communal house, ending the festival. In the next year, An Cốc Thượng villagers, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of lunar August, process palanquin of the craft ancestors to An Cốc Hạ communal house to invite the Tutelary God and stay overnight. On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>, the procession returns to the communal house for the craft ancestors' ceremony. In the year they organize *ăn đựng* in An Cốc Thượng hamlet, the elders prepare offerings to worship the craft ancestors including sweet soup, *dày* cakes, and betel, areca nuts, wine, flowers, fruits, incense and candles... On August 9 of the lunar calendar, the villagers prepared a large copper pot, put molasses in it, and let two unmarried young men hold mallets and stir well until the sticky rice and beans were cooked and dissolved evenly in the copper pot. Through the form of cooking sweet soup as an offering to the ancestors of the craft, people want to reenact and introduce the scene of boiling *dó* and making paper so that the younger generation would understand the history and significance of the festival associated with the craft village's tradition.

In addition, during the ceremony to worship the Việt craft ancestor on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of January, only An Cốc Thượng villagers dedicate offerings to the ancestor and, commemorate the day he moved from the village to Thăng Long capital to teach the craft and did not return. The name of the Việt craft ancestor is not clearly defined by villagers, there is also no recorded document on this ancestor. This ceremony is called by the villagers “thỉnh đúc ân sư” (inviting the favor holy

master – translator). In terms of customs and traditions of traditional handicraft villages of the Việt, households that “open up craft business” at the beginning of the year often hold ceremonies to worship the craft ancestors, Buddhas, and ancestors with the desire to continue their craft prosperously. Therefore, the nature of the ceremony on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of January of the lunar year is worship to pray to the ancestors to help craft families have favorable conditions, people's safety, and material prosperity. Approached from the perspective of religious anthropology and customs study, the core of the career ancestral worship is to affirm and honor the occupation of the village and the ward, so all ritual practices related to the ancestors are discussed and receive high consensus from the community. Thus, this ritual is preserved, transmitted, and practiced from generation to generation. Even when the craft villages no longer practice the craft, the communities still hold the career ancestor worship.

In Hồ Khâu village, papermaking households take the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar month as the forwarded worship to commemorate the craft ancestor (Thái Luân) at Hồ Khâu communal house (No. 374, Thụy Khuê street); Đông Xã village chooses the 16<sup>th</sup> day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> lunar month to hold a ceremony to worship the craft ancestor at Đông Xã communal house (No. 444 Thụy Khuê street),... In papermaking craft villages of the Việt in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh, although it is different in the choices of the day to worship ancestors, the scale of ritual practice, the official worship or forwarded worship in communal houses, etc.; they all show the strong heart of the people of which are grateful to the Thái Luân craft ancestor for his teaching to the villagers. Attending the ceremonies of worshiping the craft ancestors of the villages over the years (2000, 2014, 2022, 2023), we saw that in the ritual oration to the craft ancestors of the papermaking villages in Hà Nội, it was written: *Cung thỉnh đệ nhất thủy tổ Thánh sư Thái Luân đáo lai đàn lê thụ hưởng lê vật. Cung thỉnh đệ nhị tổ sư người Việt đồng thủy lai lâm hưởng thụ lê vật* (Inviting the First Holy Master Thái Luân come to the altar and enjoy the offerings; Inviting the Second Việt Master jointly to come and enjoy the offerings). From the results of field research, observations, participation, and in-depth interviews in *dó* papermaking villages, we recognize that only An Cốc

village worships the craft ancestors on par with the village's Tutelary God in the forbidden palace of the communal house and has communal ceremonies and festivals. At the communal house, the Management Board, on behalf of the community, organizes forwarded worship to commemorate the craft ancestors on the day chosen by the community. Offerings are a tray of foods, fruits, and votive offerings to the craft ancestors, similar to the tray of meals offered to ancestors of the Việt people on their death anniversaries.

Elderly villagers said that from 1954 to 1995, the worship of paper craft ancestors in *dó* paper villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh declined, due to the economic, cultural, and social condition of the country. The material and spiritual lives of people from urban to rural areas were facing many difficulties. The paper products could not be sold, and each workday point was equal to only 1kg of rice, so the papermaking cooperatives had to be dissolved; papermaking villages in Hà Nội in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were officially lost.

Like many other traditional handicraft villages of the Việt people in the Northern Delta, there is a need to restore the customs and tradition. Restoration of worshiping the Tutelary God in general and worshiping the ancestors of the *dó* paper craft, in particular, has gradually been restored.

In the case of An Cốc village, as early as 1990, Hồng Minh commune authorities actively discussed with the communities of An Cốc Thượng and An Cốc Hạ hamlets about restoring craft ancestor worship in a new form which is more appropriate with the modern society and meets the needs of the people. That works include restoring and repairing the communal house; rearranging deity tablets and incense bowls used in the worship of the tutelary god and craft ancestors in the forbidden palace of the communal house; adding worshiping items and palanquins; organizing a festival of worshiping the craft ancestors, holding palanquin procession around the village and from the village to the district center to attend the general festival of craft ancestor worshiping which is held by the People's Committee of Phú Xuyên district every five years to promote the craft village as well as customs and beliefs of traditional handicraft villagers. The negotiation and discussion that lasted for

about two years (1990-1991) did not achieve the desired results, because of the funding source for organizing the festival, purchasing worship items, and the forces participating in the procession from the village communal house to the Phú Xuyêñ district center; besides, in An Cốc Thượng hamlet, there is An Coc *giáo họ* (a part of parish, belonging to Tân Đô parish) who follow Catholicism, it would be seen that community relations between Catholics and non-Catholics are somewhat culturally and spiritually incomprehensible with each other. Furthermore, there is an opinion that since the craft of making *dó* paper has been lost, is it advisable to maintain belief practices and organize festivals to worship craft ancestors like before - when the village was still practicing the craft? The Catholics have a clear opinion of not participating in this worship, even though their families used to make *dó* paper because they always have faith in Jesus and Mother Mary. Thus, the festival of worshiping the craft ancestors could not be implemented as planned in 1992. In 1993, the government and representatives of organizations and groups of An Cốc Hạ and An Cốc Thượng hamlets continued to discuss the restoration of beliefs and commemorating worship to craft ancestors, and organizing a festival with processions around the village like before 1954. Initially, they gained the agreement to restore the beliefs and to practice worship of commemoration to the craft ancestors and hold the festival accordingly. In 1994, with the consensus of the community, An Cốc village held the restoration of the festival of traditional craft ancestral worship in a new form consistent with the conditions of contemporary society.

#### **4. Some changes in the belief in the papermaking craft ancestors**

After 1954, the North was completely liberated and entered a new period of socialist construction and transformation. Papercraft villages in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh were able to participate in papermaking cooperatives or handicraft cooperatives. Craft villages gradually lost the number of papermaking households and gradually lost their foothold. In the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all the paper craft villages in Hà Nội were lost. At this time, the ancestral worship facilities and relics were attributed to "superstition," many relics fell

into deterioration and disrepair; people's concepts and beliefs in the spiritual world declined; worship and festival activities were banned or weakly maintained, losing their sacredness and inherent cultural values [Nguyễn Thị Thanh, 2017: 90].

From 1984 to the present, policies on culture, religion, and belief have received renewed attention. And especially, since Ordinance No. 14-LCT/HDNN7, dated April 4, 1984, of the State Council on the *Protection and Use of historical, cultural relics and scenic spots*, the monuments were restored, festivals were rehabilitated, sacred spaces were recreated leading to the encouraging atmosphere in people's lives. As a result of this ordinance, many villages have lost their traditional craft but the beliefs of craft ancestors have been restored, preserved, kept, inherited, and developed to this day, including the worshiping craft ancestors in *dó* papermaking craft villages of the Việt people in Hà Nội.

After a period of restoring the worship of craft ancestors and organizing festivals, authorities at all levels became increasingly interested in preserving and promoting the cultural values of the worshiping craft ancestors, so they provided funding for restoring and repairing the communal house and compiling relic ranking records. Previously, in An Cốc communal house's forbidden palace, there were two altars and two incense bowls to worship the village's Tutelary God and the papermaking craft ancestor Thái Luân. After An Cốc village communal house was ranked as a provincial relic (2007), the communal house's Management Board left merely a throne and an incense bowl for both the Tutelary God and the craft ancestor; At the same time, two statues of male gods, made of jackfruit wood and red lacquer, were placed on both sides of the altar. Mr. Hoàng Văn D. said: "In 2007, the village communal house was repaired on a large scale to be classified as a provincial relic, two statues of male gods were brought to worship together in the forbidden palace. The statue on the left is Quan Văn (officer of literature), and the statue on the right is Quan Võ (officer of the military). These two statues have the function of spiritually protecting and supporting the Tutelary God and the craft ancestor in the communal house, with the hope that the villagers will be healthy and peaceful, their descendants in the village

will be successful and there is a good life for all the people which containing warmth, prosperity and happiness.”

From the perspective of religious anthropology, the fact that the An Cóc village community “merged” the craft ancestor divine tablet and the incense bowl into the same altar and worship together with the village's tutelary god shows officially “upgraded” and standardized the craft ancestors in the forbidden palace. Worshiping the two divine mandarins in the communal house as protectors means enhancing the sacredness of the tutelary god and the craft ancestors. Mr. Hoàng Thái D. said: “Right after the forbidden palace was repaired, the altar of the tutelary god and the craft ancestors was re-established, households in the village went to the communal house to burn incense on the *sóc*, *vọng* (first and fifteenth days in a lunar month), holidays and festivals of the year, and the number of people worshiping the craft ancestors increased. People consider the craft ancestors as a god of fortune, as the village's tutelary god who always protects and blesses the people to be safe, auspicious, lucky, prosperous, and happy, so many faithful people come to the communal house to burn incense and worship the tutelary god and the craft ancestors.”

In the past, when the craft village was still developing, the community held a very solemn ceremony to worship the craft's ancestors, lasting a whole week. Now it is only held for one day and the longest is three days (An Cóc village). The animals such as buffalo, cow, and pig were slaughtered for offerings of worship to the ancestors at the communal house and having the feast. Currently, the offerings are mainly pig head, sticky rice, chicken, and fruit, and still maintain the set of six offerings (incense, candles, water, tea, fruit, and food), besides, there is a palanquin procession, reading oration, and having a feast. The participants in the ceremony to worship the craft ancestors are not only the elderly but also middle-aged and young people, women, and people from outside the locality, all of which create a strong cohesion in a social community.

In the current context, maintaining the mentioned flexible practice of worshiping the papermaking craft ancestors is completely suitable for contemporary society, meeting the spiritual needs of both craftsmen and non-craftsmen. Whether the craft village still exists

(Đóng Cao village) or no longer practices the craft (former craft villages in Hà Nội), the former paper craftsmen always kept in mind that the ancestors not only taught the craft but were also virtuous ones who often exposes the epiphany and has a power of protecting, guarding, and bringing peace and luck to the villagers, so the community still maintains the custom of worshiping the craft ancestors. This shows that the Việt culture of worshiping craft ancestors has absorbed many different ideologies. This acculturation is based on the structure of the value system in which compassion and gratitude to those who taught the craft are the foundation, patriotism is the center of focus, community spirit is the dominant factor, and adaptation is an effective solution.

Flexibility and adaptability in practicing the ritual of worshiping the craft ancestor is a typical feature of the Việt people's traditional culture, it is not only shown in the craft villages and guilds in the outskirts of Thăng Long citadel but also appears in the countryside. Đóng Cao is a famous village of *dó* papermaking craft and industrial paper in Bắc Ninh, about 40km from the center of Hà Nội city. Due to its geographical location at the intersection of National Highway 1A (old) from Hà Nội to Lạng Sơn, during the process of contact and exchange with various customers, the households here tend to integrate and adapt to rise and develop very diverse forms of worshiping the papermaking craft ancestor in the village's relics and worshiping at home. Mr. Phạm Văn T. (born 1970, Đóng Cao, Bắc Ninh) said: "My family does not know what day the ceremony of commemorating the craft ancestor Thái Luân is, so we did not worship the craft ancestor on any specific day. However, on the first day of the year, there is a ritual of "opening the business," or on the first and fifteenth day of every lunar month, on holidays, or when depart to buy raw materials from far away places, my family always offers a ceremony to the Thái Luân craft ancestor at the village temple. I beg the craft ancestor to bless the development of the craft. First, I respect and gratitude the merits of the craft ancestor, and then I enjoy his blessings."

Although An Cốc village no longer produces paper, in the communal house, there is still worship of the craft ancestor as a tutelary god, so the Hồng Minh commune government has proactively discussed with the

village community about restoring the worship of the craft ancestor in a new form, which is suitable with modern society and meeting the needs of the people. That is, every year, on the occasion of the craft ancestor commemorating worship, there is an ancestor's palanquin procession around the village to promote the traditional craft village. During October 23-26, Phú Xuyêñ district holds an annual festival to promote traditional craft villages to honor and show gratitude to the craft ancestors who have the merit of teaching the craft to the people in the district, this new form instead of the previous form of worshiping the craft ancestors at the village's communal house. Currently, the belief in the papermaking craft ancestors in An Cóc village has brought many new cultural colors, it is no longer limited to the scope of the village but has expanded to the district level and synonymous with this issue is that the papercraft ancestors have been located to a new position on par with other villages' craft ancestors in the district. Since 2010, the government of the commune and village, and social organizations of Hòn Minh commune have officially "upgraded" and "standardized" the craft ancestors by practicing the ritual of worshiping the craft ancestors not only at the village level but also at the district level. The ritual and festival of worshiping the craft ancestors in Phú Xuyêñ district is organized by the District People's Committee and the Department of Culture and Sports including the worshiping the craft ancestors and honoring the craft villages and folk artisans.

### **Conclusion**

Along with the formation and development of traditional *dó* papermaking craft villages, spiritual cultural institutions were established to satisfy the spiritual and cultural needs of each craft village, by establishing relics for worshiping the craft ancestors. This belief always holds an important position in the life of the craft village, even if the craft is no longer practiced. The memory of the craft ancestors is still passed down, shining over time and integrating into contemporary life in many different forms to survive and develop. It can be seen that the belief in the papermaking craft ancestors not only plays a role in creating a spiritual connection between people in the same craft community but also creates social cohesion among people inside and outside the local areas. That cohesion is exhibited in

the form of sanctifying the papermaking craft ancestors with the functional role of the village's tutelary god, aiming to not only honor the merit of craft ancestors but also to share and help each other in production, business, trade, and cultural activities associated with the worship of the craft ancestors, as well as creates the cultural identity of the *dó* papermaking craft communities in Hà Nội and Bắc Ninh.

Honoring the craft ancestors in general and the paper craft ones, in particular, is a common behavior in the practice of the career ancestors' beliefs of the Việt people in our country. This behavior, in addition to praising skilled craftsmen, is also a way for people to show their gratitude to the craft ancestors, and to the predecessors who have contributed to building the craft village. This is also in line with the viewpoint that the deification of talented craftsmen and craft ancestors is a common feature of legends in many countries. In terms of meaning, it shows the people's desire to praise and glorify the fruits of labor, idealize them, and elevate them into beautiful models. In Vietnam, it has a different color, it is a noble expression of the tradition of "respecting teachers," "drinking water, remembering the source," "eating the fruit, remembering who planted the tree" [Kiều Thu Hoạch, 2006: 59], etc. with the pioneers who founded the craft and brought benefits to people and the communities./.

(Translated by Phạm Thị Thúy Chung)

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