

**ROLE OF ĐỒNG KHÁNH KING IN THE EXPANSION OF  
THE FOUR PALACES OF MOTHER GODDESSES WORSHIP**

***Abstract:** The worship of Mother Goddesses has experienced many historical vicissitudes, it has been associated with many anecdotes and faith in the Mother Goddesses. Since being recognized by Đồng Khánh King through the royal order at Huệ Nam Palace, as well as the supports of the aristocracy, officials, this folk belief has had a new feature. Since the reign of Đồng Khánh King, the worship of Mother Goddesses at the Huệ Nam Palace has lost its original folk purity and it became a royal ritual. In the process of developing the worship of Mother Goddesses in Huế, Đồng Khánh King played a great role, created a premise for Huế to become a center of Mother worship in the Centre of Vietnam.*

***Keywords:** Đồng Khánh King; Mother Goddesses worship; Huệ Nam Palace; Huế.*

**Introduction**

The Mother Goddesses worship in Thừa Thiên-Huế is a unique cultural, spiritual phenomenon in the Vietnamese polytheistic folk belief system. This belief has inherited the origin from the North and the cultural fusion of the ancient capital, or in other words, there was a transition from the folk belief to royal belief. In the process of its formation and development, the Mother Goddesses belief in Hue has had a spectacular ‘transformation’ with the participation of the Nguyen dynasty, especially since 1885, Đồng Khánh crowned and embellished, renamed Ngọc Trản temple to Huệ Nam palace. In order to understand the process of the Mother Goddesses belief in

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Hue, in this article, the author presents the development of the Mother Goddesses belief during the *Đông Khánh King* period. Thereby, it shed a light on new perceptions of King *Đông Khánh*'s roles in the development of this folk belief in Hue.

### 1. The restoration, embellishment, and renaming of *Ngọc Trản Temple* to *Hue Nam Palace of King Dong Khanh*

*Đông Khánh King*, his name *Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Biện*, also known as Prince *Chánh Mông*, was the ninth king of the *Nguyen Dynasty*. He was the eldest of Prince *Kiên Thái* or *Nguyễn Phúc Hồng Cai* and Ms. *Bùi Thị Thanh*. He was born on January 12, *Giáp Tý* year (19/12/1864), and was a brother of *Kiến Phúc King* and *Hàm Nghi King*. In 1865, at the age of two, Prince *Chánh Mông* was adopted by *Tu Duc King* and raised in the Citadel (*Đại nội*).



Portrait of *Đông Khánh King* <sup>1</sup>

*Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Lịch* crowned in 1884 (title *Hàm Nghi*). *Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Biện* was very worried of not being enthroned. He asked his mother to go to *Ngọc Trản temple* to pray for him to be king and was informed by Holy Mother *Thiên Y A Na* that he

would be crowned. Nguyễn Phúc Ưng Biện was succeeded to the throne after the event that King Hàm Nghi and his warriors attacked Hue Citadel. After the rebellion in 1885, King Hàm Nghi left his throne, established a resistance base against the French colonialists at Tân Sở (Quảng Trị). Therefore, the Hue court negotiated with the French to bring Nguyễn Phúc Ưng Biện to the throne, title Đồng Khánh.

It can be said that the throne of Đồng Khánh was just a puppet because all power was in the hands of the French administrators (Résident supérieur) and Governor. The impasse in the leadership of the country led the king and mandarins to put their faith in gods and supernatural forces to expect 'peace'. It manifested helplessness in facing the French colonial intervention. Stalemate and resignation led to Đồng Khánh King's attitude of reverence to the Mother Goddesses as Nguyễn Hữu Thông in the book 'Hải Cát - Đất và người' stated that "faced with imperial tragedies, the king almost entrusted his soul to the Mother Goddesses - an attitude to find his own peace"<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, after ascending the throne in 1886, King Đồng Khánh immediately rebuilt Ngọc Trản temple in a spacious manner, offered many offerings to the temple, and renamed the temple to Huệ Nam Palace (Huệ Nam Điện) to show gratitude to the Holy Mother Goddess (Thánh Mẫu), Huệ Nam means 'bestow grace to the Southern Country and its King' (*ban ân huệ cho nước Nam, vua nước Nam*).

*Đại Nam Thực Lục* referred to this event as follows: "To rename Ngọc Trản temple to Huệ Nam palace, when the king was in hiding, he used to go for a walk in that mountain. Whenever he went to the temple to pray, most of them were fulfilled. Later, the king wrote that: Ngọc Trản temple is really a beautiful mountain for the Goddess forever. The mountain shape looks like a lion drinking water from the river, it is a sacred place. The temple is the most sacred, saves people forever, brings eternal blessings, and helps the people keep the country. Therefore, it needs to rename

that temple to Huệ Nam palace in order to show the grace of the country. After that, the king ordered to make an inscription-board to be hung on the temple (4 sides carved dragon, the middle was engraved with big letters:”<sup>3</sup>

However, the inscription-board in Huệ Nam Palace at the present has been carved with the motif of ‘two dragons towards the moon’, painted with gold under the reign of Khải Định King after the restoration in 1925. “The restoration and recognition of the temple through historical periods of the Nguyen Dynasty led to the recitations of the holiness of Ngọc Trản temple with the image of the powerful Goddess”<sup>4</sup>.

In addition, the King also ordained the title for the Goddess Thiên Y A Na and the gods at Huệ Nam Palace after a ritual pray for rain<sup>5</sup>. “From the past until the present day, there was little rain, the mandarins sincerely prayed in many places but it did not rain, until the ritual took place at Huệ Nam Palace, the praying came true, thanks to divine powers. During the difficult times of the State, thanks to the help of the divine world, things could be resolved quickly, the Goddess and gods of Huệ Nam Palace preserved the country, helped people, however, have not ordained yet the title. To pay homage to the three goddesses worshiped above and the six gods below worshiped on the right of the temple, I (the king) would like to honor them”<sup>6</sup>.

*The three goddesses worshiped above as follows:*

1) Hoàng Huệ Phổ Tế Linh Bảo Diệu Thông Mặc Tướng Trang Huy Ngọc Trản **Thiên Y A Na** Diển Vương Phi Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Thượng đẳng thần<sup>7</sup> [The Mother Goddess of Heaven (Mẫu Thượng Thiên), worshiped in the middle of the sanctuary].

2) Trứ Linh Chương Ứng Mục Uyên Hoàng Bác Ưông Nhuận **Thủy Long Thánh Phi** Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Trung đẳng thần [The Mother Goddess of Water (Mẫu Thoải), worshiped on the left side of the Goddess Thiên Y A Na].

3) Diệu Phu Quảng Độ Linh Chương Ý Nhã **Anh Bình Sơn Trung Tiên** Phi Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Trung đẳng thân [The Mother Goddess of Mountain and Forest (Thượng Ngàn), worshiped on the right side of the Goddess Thiên Y A Na].

Quan Thánh Đế Quân (Guan Gong) was also worshiped on the right side of the main sanctuary.

In addition, the annual ritual at Huệ Nam Palace was ranged into the national ceremony of the court by King Đồng Khánh and identified himself as a ‘disciple’ of the Holy Mother. This is shown through the picture named “Âm Dương Huynh đệ thất thánh nghĩa hội”. In this worship picture, Đồng Khánh King was wearing a yellow shirt and holding a lotus flower.

The seven venerable gods as follows:

1) Tiên Cung Thông Minh Thượng Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng<sup>8</sup>.

2) Tiên Cung Linh Minh Đại Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng.

3) Thủy Tinh Lực Dũng Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng.

4) Thủy Tinh Uy Dũng Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng.

5) Sơn Tinh Quả Dũng Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng.

6) Sơn Tinh Vũ Dũng Tướng Quân Dực Bảo Trung Hưng<sup>9</sup>.

7) Đệ Thất Bảo Hà Đào Nguyên Tướng Quân Trung Hưng.

Later, there were seven gods in the divine system of the Mother Goddesses worship in Huế.



Worship picture of Âm dương huynh đệ Thất thánh nghĩa hội in Hòn Chén Palace (or Huệ Nam Palace)<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the content of this worship picture, in the preamble of Nghĩa Hội, Đồng Khánh King wrote that “In the year of Nhâm Ngọ (1885), I was sick, dreamed that six boys came and they said that they were at Ngọc Trản temple. In the past, Ngọc Trản temple was a Palace that I loved very much. The first thing was that I wanted to be healed, then enjoyed the blessings of my life to work together with the gods. Therefore, when I ascended the throne in the year of Ất Dậu, I was prepared to ordain the Palace of the gods on the higher status, respectfully worship the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na - the first child of the Heaven (Trời), and then gave Jade stele, the title of Thông Thiên Quận Chúa Minh Thượng Tướng Quân Thủy Công, the first elderly sister of mine; Worshiping the goddess named Mẫu Thượng Tôn - the second child of the Heaven, was given a Jade stele and honored as Linh Sơn Công Thông Đại Tướng Quân. On the right side, it dedicated to two gods (Nhị vị Tôn Ông), and behind this altar dedicated to Five goddesses (Ngũ vị Thánh Bà) included: Kim, Mộc, Thổ, Thủy, Hỏa. The Holy Mother (Thánh Mẫu) was worshiped in the middle; to worship the Holy Mother of water (Thủy Cung Thánh Mẫu). In addition, the union of the six gods and me (the king) became seven brothers to transmit one thing to help the hardships of the two worlds (the gods and the living [the king]) and comply with the filial piety. Therefore, when I dreamed for the third time, I told people to draw a picture according to my own feelings, the picture of the six brothers gathered around the king helped the next generations to understand the origin and boundless feelings of the gods. Therefore, I pray that the country will be in peace forever (The first year of Đồng Khánh, January 1st, 1886 lunar calendar)”<sup>11</sup>.

It can be said that the six gods that people in Huế respectfully call “Lục phủ/vị Tôn ông” were derived from this time. It is different from the North because believers of the Mother Goddesses belief in the Red River think that there are only Five gods in the sanctuary, including: Quan Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên,

Quan Đệ Nhị Giám Sát Thượng Ngàn, Quan Lớn Đệ Tam Thủy Phủ, Quan Lớn Đệ Tứ Khâm Sai và Quan Đệ Ngũ Tuần Tranh.

Thus, the embellishment, construction, and renaming of Ngọc Trản Temple to Huệ Nam palace showed the king's gratitude to Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na and the gods at Huệ Nam Palace. The change of name stemmed from the sacredness of this temple (the prayers of Đồng Khánh King before ascending the throne had become true). It led to a change in the nature and scale of the temple. It was a huge contribution to the later development of the Mother Goddesses belief, especially in the present period. Because Huệ Nam Palace is considered to be the big temple and ranked first in the system of the Mother Goddesses belief in Huế. The important ceremonies of the Mother Goddesses' believers often take place in this temple. In my opinion, without the contribution of Đồng Khánh King, it is just a small and normal temple like many other temples and even less important in the possession ceremony of the Mother from the Holy temple Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo<sup>12</sup> to Huệ Nam Palace and to Hải Cát<sup>13</sup> village.

It can be said that "As a result of historical contexts, especially during the reign of Đồng Khánh King (1885-1888), the worship of Mother Goddesses reached its peak, Huệ Nam Palace became the center of the Mother Goddesses worship and was recognized by the feudalism's government and people used to worship. Since, the ceremony of the Mother Goddess (lễ vía Mẫu) has been considered as the national ceremony by King Dong Khanh and Huệ Nam Palace has become the pilgrimage center of the Mother Goddesses worshippers"<sup>14</sup>.

## **2. Đồng Khánh King - who laid the foundation for rituals in Huệ Nam Palace Festival today.**

The Huế people often say that "the Father's death anniversary in July, the Mother's death anniversary in March" (Tháng Bảy giỗ Cha, tháng Ba giỗ Mẹ). It reflects the mind towards the origin, and it is the annual rituals of the Mother Goddesses practices for many

generations. The Mother's death anniversary in March is true, however, the Father's death anniversary in July is not accurate, it is exactly in August. Why the Father's death anniversary is taken place in July while it is organized in August in the North? It must base on the order of *Đông Khánh King* to rituals at *Huệ Nam Palace* to explain this matter. According to the imperial orders, there were two important ceremonies held at *Huệ Nam Palace* each year, called 'Two times in Spring and in Autumn' (*Xuân Thu nhị kỳ*) in February and July of the lunar calendar. This is the time when Heaven and the Earth meet in harmony (*trời đất giao hòa*), the universe reaches a state of prosperity so these rituals ranked on the national ceremonies. "The main ceremony of the Court is held on the February of the lunar calendar; and the ceremony, procession of temples, shrines and *Hải Cát* village are solemnly organized in July or in August depending on the will of the Goddess' intention in the ceremony organized in early July"<sup>15</sup>.

However, flood season often happened in August, so it was organized in July to facilitate the festival celebration and to pray for peace at *Hải Cát* village. Although it was called the father's death anniversary, the reality was not the same as the name, because of the image of Mother goddess *Thiên Y A Na* in the hearts of local residents as a Goddess who brought property and happiness for them. Therefore, the festival was also known as the Mother's death anniversary (*vía Mẹ*).

Later, the time of the festival organization was changed. The *Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo* congregation (formerly known as *Son Nam* congregation)<sup>16</sup> held a ceremony in March and July of the lunar calendar at *Huệ Nam Palace*. March was defined as the time when the universe reaches the peak of yang, then the Mother's death anniversary was a symbol of yin, it made yin and yang compatible. On the other hand, March was also the death anniversary of the Holy Mother *Vân Hương*, so believers homogenized the feast of the Mother. The feast of Mother goddess *Thiên Y A Na* was on April

17th of the lunar calendar, it was the day the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na came down at Huệ Nam Palace. The second ceremony at Huệ Nam Palace was in July and the procession to the communal temple of Hải Cát village.

The original festival of Huệ Nam Palace took place within the area of Hải Cát village, it was merely a festival of Hải Cát villagers and their Patron goddess of the village. The Patron Goddess of the Hải Cát village was the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na. Why did villagers there honor a goddess as a Patron god of the village? It was explained that as the foundation of the village and the miracle of the goddess in the residence through the relics of Ngọc Trản Temple, the goddess was honored by the Hải Cát residents as the Mother Goddess and a Patron goddess the village who support the village and the community there.

Thus, along with the worship of the goddess at Huệ Nam Palace, whether it was spontaneous or directed by the Court, Hải Cát villagers honored the goddess as the Holy Mother or the Great Mother - the Patron goddess of the village. They prayed for the residential life to be peaceful and happy. Since every Hải Cát villager has come to the Holy Mother to ask for protection or guidance when they met the difficulties in daily life. It is the reason why the current communal temple of Hai Cat has been a place to worship the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na like the Patron goddess of the village.

On the other hand, after being repaired by “the Nguyen Kings and assigned to the part of residents living adjacent to the management, the temple has more connected with the villagers in all aspects of life”<sup>17</sup>. The custodians of Huệ Nam Palace have been Hải Cát villagers and thus, Huệ Nam Palace has become a spiritual base that had close relationships with the other cultural institutions of the village. The worship of the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na at the communal temple of Hải Cát village has also become a specific custom expressing people’s expectation of the miraculous goddess

through the ritual of the procession of the Holy Mother from Huệ Nam Palace to Hải Cát village, which people solemnly call the Holy Mother's tour in Hai Cat village (*Mẫu tuần du làng Hải Cát*).

This is one of the main ceremonies in Huệ Nam Palace at present. On the days of the festival, every villager gets to dress in formal clothes, or in solemn costumes of the votive dance ritual, gathers in front of the yard of the communal temple to welcome the Holy Mother in the music sound of 'châu văn' and spiritual atmosphere.

In addition to recognizing the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na like the Patron goddess of the Hải Cát villagers, the communal temple's structure is also a shrine of the Mother goddesses worship. The main sanctuary of the communal temple is dedicated to the Three Mother goddesses (Tam vị Thánh Mẫu), an inscription board with four words: Mẫu Nghi Thiên Hạ has been hung in front of it, the next space is the altar of the seven gods (Thất Thánh) and the altar of Guan Gong (Quan Thánh Đế Quân). In the front of the sanctuary, people worship the Jade Emperor (Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế) and the Four Palaces. And in front of the yard, there are the altar of Heaven (Trung Thiên Đài) and the Palace of Water (Dinh Thủy Phủ) facing the main sanctuary. On the left side, there is the altar of the Five Holy Goddesses and the Goddess Forest and Mountain cave (động Thượng Ngàn), shrine of Cậu, the shrine of Cô. According to the architecture and the way of decoration, it can be confirmed that this is a Palace of the Mother goddesses and the Three Mother goddesses of Hải Cát villagers.

The traditional festival of Huệ Nam Palace is taken play during three days of the early seventh month of the lunar calendar, on the 8th, 9th, and 10th days. *The first day* is the time to gather dragon boats (băng án)<sup>18</sup> from the other temples to prepare the ceremony of the procession of the Holy Mother. On each dragon boat, there is an altar of the Holy Mother with the dragon palanquin. "The Holy Mother's palanquin is an embroidered palanquin carried by the

virgins dressed in colorful costumes, and the women carry the vases, betel tubes, teapots, jewelry boxes, flag, umbrellas, pillows, fans. Young men carry wooden weapons for worship. The procession is colorful and solemn”<sup>19</sup>. Then, the boats take the Holy Mother to Huệ Nam Palace to carry out rituals and holy services (the votive dance performance). *On the second day*, the festival’s executive committee organizes a procession of the Holy Mother from Huệ Nam Palace to Hải Cát village (with the role of the Patron goddess of the village). The Holy Mother is carried on the decorated dragon boats. The elders and dignitaries of the village stand at the wharf to welcome the Holy Mother’s delegation. At Hải Cát village wharf, in the sacred and bustling atmosphere, pilgrims join the procession to the yard of the temple. After this ceremony, the delegations park in front of the communal temple. The Holy services (the votive dance performance) are taken play the whole night. The next morning, villagers carry out the sacrifice to pray for national peace and the good things, blessings from the Holy Mother.

*On the third day*, the Mother’s Day ceremony is carried out at Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo temple at 352 Chi Lang Street, Hue City. During the days of the festival, rituals are offered at the boats. The singer team (cung vãn) and the mediums perform the votive dance rituals in a spatial axis shaped by Four Palaces: Thượng Thiên, Trung Thiên, Thượng Ngàn, and Thoải Phủ, there are votive dance sessions to congratulate the Holy Mother.

### **3. The religiosity of the Holy Mother created the ‘Domino effect’ from royalty to the popular class**

The picture of Đồng Khánh King worshiped at Ngung Hy Palace of Đồng Khánh mausoleum has had the following words: “I am a human from the Fairy realm, the second child of the Dragon Palace, on the Lantern Festival, I obeyed, sat in a jade carriage, wore a golden hat, reincarnated in the Noble Consort named Bội of the King Kiên Thái to give birth in life”<sup>20</sup>.

The recognition of the Holy Mother Thiên Y's miraculousness and patronage was not only happened during the reign of Đồng Khánh King, the Nguyen Lords, then Nguyen kings had believed in the Holy Mother's role. The first person received the Holy Mother's patronage was Lord Tiên Nguyễn Hoàng in the first step of exploring the land of Cochinchina (Đàng Trong). With the intention of establishing a new separated country in the land of "Ô châu", Lord Nguyễn Hoàng implemented a prudent and proactive policy in dealing with the Lê-Trịnh government. The method that Nguyen Hoang applied in his public security policy was spiritual strength from the indigenous gods to "show the support and approval of the indigenous gods towards Nguyễn Hoàng leadership"<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, after his death, he was revered as Hoàng Đồi by the people, standing in the ranks of Ten Quan Hoàng in the Mother Goddesses belief of the Vietnamese. The deity related to the 'destiny of Heaven' (mệnh Trời) mentioned by Nguyễn Hoàng was the Holy Mother Goddess Thiên Y A Na through the legend of "Goddess in red coat, blue pants" (Bà Mụ áo đỏ quần xanh). Then, during the reign of Nguyễn kings, such as Gia Long, Minh Mạng, Thiệu Trị, Tự Đức and Đồng Khánh, the temple of Holy Mother Goddess Thiên Y A Na was restored and appointed the royal decree (sắc phong thần).

Currently, Huế people still tell about the holiness/the sacredness and blessings of the Mother Goddess Thiên Y A Na in Hòn Chén temple. Folk tales was codified in the national history of the Nguyen dynasty as follows: The 5th year of Gia Long (1806), "People of three communes of Định Môn, Kim Ngọc, Cư Chính often attacked by tigers, set up a mandala to pray to the god of Ngọc Trản mountain. Since, people have been in peace"<sup>22</sup>. Minh Mạng King ordered to repair of Ngọc Trản Temple for two times in 1832 and 1834. After the reign of Minh Mạng King, the holiness and blessings the Goddess influenced Thiệu Trị King through the event of "golden spittoon" (chiếc ống nhổ bằng vàng).

The event is told as follows: “Once Thiệu Trị King along with Court ladies traveled upstream of the Perfume River (Hương) to Cư Chánh village, investigated the site to build his tomb. When passing Hòn Chén Palace, one of the Court ladies dropped the ‘golden spittoon’ into the deep water. The women regretted the ‘golden spittoon’, advised the king to pray to Thiên Y A Na. Although the king did not believe in the Mother Goddess’ holiness, he stood on the boat and prayed sarcastically, suddenly the golden spittoon slowly floated to the surface of the water. In response to the holiness, the king promised to have the temple repaired, however, he died before fulfillment of the promise”<sup>23</sup>.

The sacredness was increasingly circulated like that, which attracted the attention of the Nguyễn Court and especially Đồng Khánh King “was very afraid to the Goddess’ words that he would be king for 3 years”<sup>24</sup>.

Đồng Khánh King, when he was a prince, he used to go to Ngọc Trản temple to worship, pray to the Mother Goddess to succeed the Nguyễn dynasty, and asked the Mother Goddess when I would be satisfied. According to folk tales, the Mother Goddess predicted the right day of the coronation and the king would reign only for 3 years. The inscription-boards (hoành phi) and poems have hung in the temple, partly composed by Đồng Khánh King to praise the goddess’ merit, grace for protecting the throne and people. Obviously, the name Huệ Nam Palace derived from his intention. It can be confirmed the greater role of Đồng Khánh King in empowering the status of Ngọc Trản temple and the Holy Goddess Thiên Y A Na. He promoted the image of Huệ Nam Palace and Thiên Y A Na.

On the other hand, Đồng Khánh King created the effect of transmitting ‘Domino’ in the spiritual life of the royal family and the popular class. From princes, queens, royal relatives, court ladies, mandarins’ wives to a popular class of Huế, people built temples, shrines, Huệ Nam Palace, received the incense bowl of the

Holy Goddess to worship, became the Holy Goddess' sons and daughters<sup>25</sup>. It can be said that the Mother Goddess belief was formalized in this period, created a new motivation, attracted the participation of many classes in society.

The women of the royal family and the nobility in Huế during this period both went to the Buddhist temples and followed the Mother Goddess belief, for example, Phước Thọ Am (Khuong Ninh Các) was built under the reign of Minh Mạng Emperor in the 11th year (1830). First, it dedicated to Buddha, during the reign of Đồng Khánh King, the Holy Goddess Thiên Y A Na and the gods of the Mother Goddess belief were worshiped. In addition, the 'ladies' built the Mother Goddess temples next to the Buddhist temples, such as Ms. Lê Thị Phàm built "Tiên Nữ Palace" to worship the Mother Goddess behind Kim Quang pagoda under the reign of Đồng Khánh King. In the 7th year of Bảo Đại (1932), Đoan Huy Queen (Từ Cung) brought the Mother Goddess statue to worship and called Linh Tiêu Palace behind Viên Thông pagoda, or Mr. Thái Văn Toàn and his wife built a Mother Goddess palace called Huệ Ứng Điện Palace at Quy Thiện pagoda.

After the end of the Nguyen dynasty in 1945, all rituals and worship at Huệ Nam Palace and other temples were chaired by Mrs. Từ Cung (wife of Khải Định King) under the name of the congregation of Quý Tế, Huệ Nam Palace. After the end of the Nguyen dynasty in 1945, all rituals and worship at Huệ Nam Palace and other temples were chaired by Mrs. Từ Cung (wife of Khải Định King) under the name of the congregation of Quý Tế, Huệ Nam Palace. During this time, another acculturation occurred. During this time, another acculturation occurred. Ms. Từ Cung brought the goddess Vân Hương Thánh Mẫu (Liễu Hạnh Princess) to worship at Huệ Nam Palace. This is the harmony between the two Holy Mothers Goddesses at a palace. It created a new identity in the spiritual system of the Mothers Goddesses worship in Huế. The Three Realms (Tam Tòa Thánh Mẫu) in the North became the

Four Realm (Tứ Vương Mẫu) in Huế. Then, the Mothers Goddesses worship was maintained and developed by believers under an organization, called Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo and it has existed until this day. Some presidents of the congregation belonged to the aristocratic lineage, mandarins, Mr. Bửu Bành for example.

#### **4. “Royalization” the practices of the Mothers Goddesses belief**

The reparation, embellishment, renaming of Ngọc Trản temple to Huệ Nam Palace and bringing the rituals there into the royal hierarchy transformed the ‘folk’ belief to be ‘orthodox’ and ‘noble’. In other words, the worship of Mothers Goddesses in Huệ Nam Palace was no longer under the management of the people, it had the participation and administration of the court, headed by Đồng Khánh King. Rituals, sacrifices, and offerings at Huệ Nam Palace were fixed by the Court. “The temple has become an orthodox worshipping facility, has been recognized by the central feudal Court”<sup>26</sup>.

During this period, the practices of the Mothers Goddesses worship in Huế brought a new characteristic with the participation of the royal class. This characteristic has been preserved to this day, the votive dance ritual from the North has been transformed by this ‘noble’ characteristic. Therefore, the deity system, the votive dance sessions, and singing songs have also been changed to suit the participation of the mandarin and aristocratic classes of the capital. Thus, the Huế people have absorbed and adjusted in accordance with the purpose of Mothers Goddesses practices, which were no longer similar to the original in the North. They have specifically shown through the votive dance ritual and the performing arts of ‘chầu văn’ with the characteristics of Huế.

Thus, the Holy Mother Thiên Y Na in the Central region, or in Huế in particular, was not only the goddess of the Mothers Goddesses worshippers, but the goddess was also a lifesaver of the

aristocracy and mandarins. “It was also from these classes, with their roles and status, when they wholeheartedly followed the Holy Mother, they built their belief into a religion through correcting to scriptures, teachings; composing, adjusting ‘văn châu’, music ceremony, and building temples, palaces along with the ritual activities”<sup>27</sup>. However, the most important thing, the ‘taboos’ of Nguyen (before the year 1886) against witchcraft activities, ghost exorcisms, superstitious treatments such as the ash of burning incense has been deleted”<sup>28</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

It can be said that the Mothers Goddesses belief in Huế in the past and at the present has mixed and created a part of the cultural characteristic of people there since the reign of Đồng Khánh King. He humbled himself in front of the Holy Goddess Thiên Y A Na and recognized himself as a true destiny of the Goddess, incarnated to lower the world. In other words, the throne of Đồng Khánh King with the support and approval of the gods was a measure to win human hearts, to ensure the solidity of his ‘throne’. It was his belief and perturbation that led to Đồng Khánh’s activities to thanks to the Holy Goddess.

In the context the authority fell into the hands of the French and the king was considered as a ‘puppet’, received a salary of French, Đồng Khánh King realized that he just ‘had reputation, but no real authority’. On the other hand, his belief in the Holy Goddess Thiên Y A Na was considered as a sedative dose in order to increase strength to cope with the issues of the country (the dependence) at that time. The actions and thoughts of Đồng Khánh King towards the Holy Mother Thiên Y A Na created the foundation for the Mothers Goddesses belief in Hue to have sustainable development and cultural characteristics.

**Notes:**

- 1 Nguồn: <https://anhsontranduc.wordpress.com/2015/07/12/chan-dung-trang-phuc-cac-vua-trieu-nguyen-that-va-bia/>
- 2 Nguyễn Hữu Thông và Nhóm nghiên cứu biên soạn (2006), *Hải Cát - Đất và người*, (*Hải Cát- Land and inhabitants*), Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, p. 225.
- 3 Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (2007), *Đại Nam Thực Lục (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, bản dịch của Viện Sử học, tập 9, Nxb. Giáo dục, Hà Nội, p. 234.
- 4 Nguyễn Hữu Thông và Nhóm nghiên cứu biên soạn (2006), *Hải Cát - Đất và người* (*Hải Cát- Land and inhabitants*), Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, p. 154.
- 5 There was no rain for a long time in Hue, the officials went to pray to many temples and shrines, however, it did not bring results. Then, they came to Hue Nam Palace to pray, rain appeared the next day. In order to remember the sacredness of the Goddess at Hue Nam Palace, the king ordained the royal decree.
- 6 Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (2007), *Đại Nam Thực Lục (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, bản dịch của Viện Sử học, Tome 9, Nxb. Giáo dục, Hà Nội, p. 249.
- 7 It can be read the other way: Hoàng Huệ Phổ Tế Linh Bảo Diệu Thông Mặc Tướng Trang Huy Ngọc Trần Thiên Y A Na Diễn Ngọc Phi Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Thượng đẳng thần.
- 8 Dực Bảo Trung Hưng (翊保中興) The first appeared from the reign of Đồng Khánh king in the first year. The king said that the country is collapsing, now being revived again, it is contribution of gods so the Goddess is ordained the royal decree ‘Dực Bảo Trung Hưng’ (Helping and protecting the nation renaissance).
- 9 According to folk beliefs, the six great mandarins are: Quan Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên, Quan Đệ Nhị Thượng Thiên, Quan Đệ Nhị Giám sát Thượng Ngàn, Quan Đệ Tam Giám sát Thượng Thiên, Quan Đệ Ngũ Tuần Tranh và Quan Đệ Tam Thủy Phủ.
- 10 Nguồn: <https://phanxipang.wordpress.com/2011/07/22/dong-bong-voi-dien-hon-chen/>
- 11 Dẫn theo: *Hải Cát - Đất và người* (*Hải Cát- Land and inhabitants*) của Nguyễn Hữu Thông và Nhóm nghiên cứu biên soạn (2006), *ibid*, p. 156.
- 12 Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo temple is the headquarters of Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo congregation, was built in June in 1965.
- 13 Hải Cát Village, Hương Thọ Commune, Hương Trà District, Thừa Thiên - Huế Province.
- 14 Nguyễn Phước Bảo Đàn (2016), “Làng Hải Cát: Những biểu hiện trong mối quan hệ với nữ thần Thiên Y A Na” (Hải Cát Village Manifestations in relationship with the goddess Thiên Y A Na), trong *Nghiên cứu văn hóa dân gian Thừa Thiên-Huế - 25 năm một hành trình (1991-2016)*, Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, pp. 467-468.
- 15 Hà Xuân Liêm (2003), “Tin ngưỡng dân gian thờ Mẫu ở điện Huệ Nam (điện Hòn Chén) Huế” (The folk belief of the Mother goddesses in Huế Nam palace or Hòn Chén), *Huế xưa và nay*, No. 58, pp. 98-99.

- 16 Son Nam congregation is an association of the Mother goddesses worshipers migrated from Nam Định province along with migrations from the North. When arriving to the Central region, the members of the Association were in harmony with the worship of local gods and the Cham-Vietnamese spiritual culture, formed a new belief, the mark of 'Northern land' and the cultural characteristics of the Centre. The official activity in the Central region was started during the reign of Bảo Đại King, ordained the royal decree on 09/01/1945. Then, the association was renamed Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo Trung Việt on 19/9/1953, then it was renamed Thiên Tiên Thánh giáo Việt Nam on 27/9/1974.
- 17 Nguyễn Hữu Thông và Nhóm nghiên cứu biên soạn (2006), *Hải Cát - Đất và người (Hải Cát- Land and inhabitants)*, Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, p. 218.
- 18 Bằng án are dragon boats decorated with statues of the gods and the Holy Mother, they are considered as portable temples on the water.
- 19 Tôn Thất Bình (1997), *Huế - Lễ hội dân gian (Huế - Folk festivals)*, Hội Văn nghệ Thừa Thiên - Huế, p. 166.
- 20 Trần Đại Vinh (1995), *Tín ngưỡng dân gian Huế (Folk beliefs in Huế)*, Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, tr. 126.
- 21 Nguyễn Hữu Thông (2017), "Chính sách an dân từ niềm tin mộ Phật dưới thời các chúa Nguyễn" (Policy on welfare from the faith in Buddha during the reign of the Nguyen Lords), *Tạp san Liễu Quán*, No. 12, p. 28.
- 22 Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn (2001), *Đại Nam Thực Lục (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam)*, Tome 1, Nxb. Giáo dục, Hà Nội, p. 654.
- 23 Nguyễn Phước Bảo Đan (2016), Làng Hải Cát: Những biểu hiện trong mối quan hệ với nữ thần Thiên Y A Na (Hải Cát Village Manifestations in relationship with the goddess Thiên Y A Na), trong *Nghiên cứu văn hóa dân gian Thừa Thiên-Huế - 25 năm một hành trình (1991-2016)*, Nxb. Thuận Hóa, Huế, p. 465.
- 24 Tôn Thất Bình (1999), *Kể chuyện Chín chúa, Mười ba vua triều Nguyễn (Stories of the Nine Lords and Thirteen Kings of the Nguyen Dynasty)*, Nxb. Đà Nẵng, p. 115.
- 25 Hà Xuân Liêm (2003), "Tín ngưỡng dân gian thờ Mẫu ở điện Huệ Nam (điện Hòn Chén) Huế" (The folk belief of the Mother goddesses in Huệ Nam palace or Hòn Chén), *Huế xưa và nay*, No. 58, p. 97.
- 26 Nguyễn Hữu Thông và Nhóm nghiên cứu biên soạn (2006), *Hải Cát - Đất và người (Hải Cát- Land and inhabitants)*, ibid, p. 219.
- 27 Nguyễn Phước Bảo Đan, Tôn Nữ Khánh Trang (2015), Tín ngưỡng dân gian vùng Huế với vấn đề khai thác du lịch tâm linh (Nghiên cứu trường hợp tín ngưỡng thờ Mẫu) (Folk beliefs in Hue with the exploitation of spiritual tourism. A case study of Mother Goddesses worship), *Kỷ yếu Hội thảo Khoa học: Vấn đề di sản tôn giáo miền Trung*, Huế, p. 15.
- 28 Nguyễn Hữu Thông (2000), "Những đặc trưng của tín ngưỡng thờ Mẫu và Chư vị ở Huế" (Characteristics of the Mother Goddesses and gods worship in Huế), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 3, pp. 42-43.

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