

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF**PHAN THUY GIANG. *The reconstruction of Truong Ba Temple festival in Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province****Major: Cultural Studies**Code: 9 31 06 40*

Festivals are a widespread practice of spiritual cultural expression among communities worldwide, including in Vietnam. Traditional festivals primarily fulfill the needs for faith or communal cohesion. However, in contemporary times, the organization or reconstruction of festivals has been transformed to serve various purposes, including entertainment demands, fostering local identities, and mobilizing economic resources for the development. This dissertation examines the reconstruction of Truong Ba Temple festival in current contexts, providing insights into this phenomenon within a multi-ethnic cultural subregion.

The dissertation consists of five chapters. *Chapter 1 provides a literature review and theoretical foundations. Chapter 2 analyzes the Thanh Bong unit within the broader administrative system in Quang Ngai and its relation to Xuan Khuong village. Chapter 3 examines Truong Ba festival and relics from a historical perspective. Chapter 4 explores the process of restoring the relics and reconstructing Truong Ba temple Festival after the Đổi mới period. Chapter 5 discusses the reconstruction of Truong Ba temple festival from theoretical and practical perspectives.* Below are some of the dissertation's key findings.

Truong Ba temple is a place of worship dedicated to a goddess associated with numerous local legends. With a history

spanning over 200 years, it is located in Xuan Khuong village, bordering the Thanh Bong administrative unit, which was once the most dynamic center of East-West trade in Quang Ngai during the Medieval and Early Modern periods (now part of Tra Xuan town, Tra Bong district, Quang Ngai province). The goddess was first bestowed the title “*Ngọc Phi Thánh nữ nương nương*”. Later, she was officially granted the title “*Thiên Y A Na Diễn Ngọc Phi tôn thần*” by King Canh Thịnh. Under the reign of King Gia Long, she was conferred the honorary title “*Hàm Hoàng Quảng đại chí đức phổ bác hiển hoá Trang huy dục bảo Trung hưng Thượng đẳng thần*”. According to folk belief, the goddess not only protected the lives of the locals but also brought good fortune to regional trade. Drawing on retrospective data, the dissertation outlines the process of the spring and autumn festivals at various stages. Regarding their organization prior to 1945, there were notable differences in both participants and funding sources. The spring festival was primarily organized by the people of Xuan Khuong village, with financial support derived from the revenues generated through the cultivation of rice fields dedicated to the goddess (*Bà*). For the autumn festival, funding was provided by So Tuan ty (the Tax Department), primarily contributed by merchants.

Since the second half of the 20th century, following the destruction of Xuan Khuong village communal house during wartime, the human deities formerly worshipped there have been respectfully transferred and enshrined at Truong Ba Temple. As a result, the temple has gradually transformed

into a multi-deity place of worship. Today, Truong Ba Temple is believed to be the shrine dedicated to Princess Thai Duong, as mentioned in ancient texts. Due to numerous transformations over time, the original architectural form of the temple has not been preserved. Its present structure reflects multiple phases of restoration carried out from the late 20th to early 21st centuries.

Fieldwork data collected for this dissertation reveal that during the resistance war against the French colonialism, Truong Ba Temple deteriorated, and its associated festivals were temporarily suspended. During this period, Xuan Khuong village community, with support from the Saigon administration, initiated efforts to revive Truong Ba Temple festival. Between 1954 and 1959, the government of the Republic of Vietnam in Tra Bong district permitted Xuan Khuong village to restore Truong Ba Temple. The restoration focused on four main sections: The temple courtyard, the assembly hall, the front hall, and the main sanctuary. Inside the main sanctuary, six altars are evenly arranged along the four directions: East, West, South, and North. The main altar is located at the center of the sanctuary. The principal deity worshipped is a goddess, respectfully referred to as Bà (the Lady) by locals. On either side of the main sanctuary are altars dedicated to Chinese deities (Quan Thanh, Quan Binh, and Chau Thuonng) as well as Vietnamese figures, including Bui Ta Han and Mai Dinh Dong. A separate altar at the eastern gable end of the sanctuary is dedicated to the Tien hien (Earlier contributors) and Hau hien (Later contributors).

In 1959, Truong Ba Temple festival was revived with little deviation from its traditional form held before 1945. In 1971, due to the fact that parts of the temple deteriorated, the district chief of Tra

Bong authorized restoration. In retrospect, the efforts of the Saigon administration during the 1954–1975 period can be seen as proactive, thanks to which the spiritual traditions of Xuan Khuong village community was gradually re-established from disruptions.

After 1986, the Communist Party and the State of Vietnam launched reform policies, implementing measures to preserve and promote traditional cultural values. The restoration of Truong Ba Temple and the revival of its festival were carried out promptly. The renovation lasted for several years, undertaken in multiple phases, with contributions from various sectors of the society, and was largely completed by 2011. Truong Ba Temple festival was elevated to a district-level event. Over time, the festival gradually incorporated additional objectives, becoming increasingly institutionalized and politicized.

The dissertation argues that the re-establishment of Truong Ba Temple festival represents a re-creation that incorporates innovations in both its ritual (lễ) and festive (hội) components. The ritual is regarded as the core element - a stable and enduring foundation that remains relatively “static” - whereas the festive aspect is more flexible, allowing renewal and supplementation without altering the ritual’s essence. Modifications in the ritual domain have primarily involved offerings. Meanwhile, the festive dimension has been enriched with a range of artistic performances and sporting events, featuring the participation of diverse ethnic communities. It is precisely the ritual’s “static” nature that has enabled the festival to preserve its core essence, despite significant intervention of the state.

(continue to page 61)