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THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROCESSION OF THE MOTHER GODDESS AT THE Y LA MOTHER GODDESS TEMPLE IN TUYEN QUANG PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Festivals are forms of cultural events and community gatherings. Tuyen Quang province is known for hosting many festivals, including the procession of Mother Goddess at Y La Mother Goddess temple, located in Y La Ward, Tuyen Quang City. This festival is closely tied to the worship of the Mother Goddesses and holds significant cultural and economic significance, such as reflecting the spiritual life, preserving and developing local culture, and contributing to the local economy.

KEYWORDS: Significance, cultural, the procession of the Mother Goddess, Mother Goddess temple

1. INTRODUCTION

The procession of the Mother Goddess at the Y La Temple in Tuyen Quang bears common characteristics of Vietnamese festivals, which praise and honor individuals who have contributed to the country. In addition, the procession of the Mother Goddess at the Y La Temple also embodies the rich cultural heritage of Tuyen Quang. As a mountainous province in Northeastern Vietnam with a diverse population of ethnic minorities, Tuyen Quang has gone through various historical periods that have shaped its unique cultural traditions.

The distinct characteristics of Tuyen Quang's culture are further enriched by the combination of different cultural influences. For instance, the Vietnamese court culture (from the Lê Dynasty onwards, as many dynasties stationed their troops in Tuyen Quang) has merged with the mountainous culture. In the past, due to different conditions, people from Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, Hai Duong, and other provinces migrated to Tuyen Quang for settlement. Moreover, Tuyen Quang was known as a beautiful and prosperous region with convenient transportation by river and road, attracting settlers from Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Ha Giang, and other provinces hundreds of years ago.

Tuyen Quang witnessed the heroic fight of its people, including the Kinh, Tay, Dao, and Cao Lan ethnic groups, against the French colonial forces in the historic battles of 1884, as well as during the August Revolution in 1945, when it became the "capital of the resistance." Tuyen Quang also defeated the French army twice in 1947 and 1949 during the resistance against French colonialism.

Through the struggles for independence and nation-building, the people of Tuyen Quang have developed a precious cultural tradition of patriotism, fighting for and protecting their homeland, and diligent and creative labor.

Every year, the festival is held in Tuyen Quang province in general, and the procession of the Mother Goddess in particular, to commemorate the origins and honor those who have contributed to the nation, reflecting the cultural traditions of Tuyen Quang. In addition to the worship of the Mother Goddess, the Y La Temple festival also includes the worship of “Thổ Công” (the God of Earth), “Thành Hoàng làng” (the Village God), and other historical figures and victims in the locality, as well as rituals for rain and praying for a child. The procession of the Mother Goddess has a long history, and it is loved and participated in enthusiastically by the local people. It is a culmination of the Mother Goddess worship cultural activities of the villages and communities, and it holds deep humanitarian values.

The article delves into an in-depth exploration and interpretation of the cultural values of the procession of the Mother Goddess at Y La Mother Goddess temple, from various aspects including reflecting spiritual life, preserving and developing local culture, and promoting local economic development.

2. Cultural significance of the procession of the Mother Goddess at the Y La Mother Goddess temple

2.1. The significance reflects spiritual life

Located in the Northeastern region of the country, Tuyen Quang province is currently a mountainous province with multiple ethnic groups coexisting, including Kinh, Tay, Cao Lan, San Chi, Dao, Mong, and others. Through the process of historical transformations, each ethnic group living on this land has created a diverse yet unified cultural region. This is evidenced by the coexistence and cultural exchange among different ethnic groups, between local residents and migrants from other regions, as they have worked, created art, and interacted strongly. This has bestowed upon Tuyen Quang province invaluable cultural values.

Spiritual life is a strong bond that connects the community. In Tuyen Quang province, as well as in other provinces across the country, the worship of the Mother Goddess is a belief in the worship of deities. The Mother Goddess temple is a place for worshipping the Mother Goddess, other gods and has become a gathering place for the community.

The procession of the Mother Goddess, which takes place twice a year, has become a tradition. This ceremony serves as a reminder for people to remember the merits of the Mother Goddess and to honor her. From the anniversary of the ancestors' death to the anniversary of the Mother Goddess's death, people from Y La, even if they are far away from their hometown, still remember the date and return to their hometown to participate in the festival. This deep-rooted tradition is ingrained in the

subconscious of every resident of Tuyen Quang. People who currently live in the Tuyen Quang area arrange their work schedules to await and participate in the procession of the Mother Goddess. Each resident in this area is conscious of their role in the community. Regardless of their responsibilities during the festival, people make efforts to fulfil the tasks assigned to them. Even those who do not directly participate in the procession or the preparations at the Mother Goddess temple still clean their homes and streets, and set up ancestral altars for their families. Once the ancestral altars are set up, these families always have someone to take care of the altar and wait for the procession to pass by. Throughout the roads and streets in Tuyen Quang city, the festival atmosphere is always vibrant, with clean and beautiful streets awaiting the festival. The festive spirit is not only present in Tuyen Quang, but also resonates in the hearts of those who have moved away from their hometowns to live in other provinces. They establish Tuyen Quang hometown associations to support each other in life, especially during festive occasions, when they return to their hometown together. This reflects the strong sense of community and camaraderie among the people, highlighting the importance of "people from the same village" in their emotional lives. During the days of the procession of the Mother Goddess, no matter how busy they are, every villager makes arrangements to attend their village's festival and considers it a source of pride to return to their roots. During our research, we met Ms. Nguyen Thi Hoang Yen and Mr. Vu Manh Truong (43 Tran Nhan Tong, Bui Thi Xuan Ward, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi), who shared: "Although my family has settled in Hanoi for a long time, every year during the procession of Mother Goddess, I bring my whole family back to the village early to participate in the event, to meet our extended family and neighbors, and for our children and grandchildren to know their ancestral roots." Similarly, the family of Mr. Cu Van Bon (Ha Dong, Hanoi) expressed: "Every year, we look forward to the procession of Mother Goddess to return to our village, to contribute our efforts to the "work in the Mother Goddess temple" and to lighten our hearts." Even those who are far away from Y La can miss many other big festivals, but they can never miss the "hit" of their village's festival. That is because of the great spiritual values of the procession of Mother Goddess.

The procession of Y La Mother Goddess is a religious, cultural and historical festival.

Y La Mother Goddess temple, the place to worship the Mother Goddess with the legends of Princess Phuong Dung, created a sacred space. Over many years, people in this area have built a worship space which has been sanctified to worship the god known as Princess Phuong Dung. In the process of sanctification, the legendary stories have woven many mysterious tales around Princess Phuong Dung (and Princess Ngoc Lan), enhancing the vividness, enigma, and sacredness of these two characters in the minds of the people. For example, the epitaph of Hiep Thuan temple said: During the service of Emperor Minh Menh to quell the rebellion, General Le Van Duc entered the temple to pray and won the battle. For instance, in the 14th year of King Minh Menh's reign (1833), when the country was facing turmoil due to a prisoner of war, the people brought the idol to a dry and clean place. After one night, a high mound of land emerged, and the ruler and the people considered it sacred, leading to the establishment of a temple to worship the Mother Goddess. Since then, "the

Mother Goddess has been credited with making significant contributions to the nation and the state, diligently protecting the people, instilling ingenuity in them, commanding reverence and awe from those who stand in front of the temple, encouraging virtuous behavior, and punishing the wicked, all by the grace of the goddess..." [10;16]. The Mother Goddess temple has evolved into a prominent religious center in Y La, particularly during the anniversaries commemorating the death of the Mother Goddess. The procession of the Mother Goddess draws participation from the entire community, encompassing diverse ethnicities, all looking to the Mother Goddess with the belief that they will receive her grace.

The Mother Goddess temple is the main place to worship the Mother Goddess. But this temple also worships the King, both the Little Girl and the Little Boy. Therefore, the worship of the Mother Goddesses is also family-oriented. Thus, it can be seen that the belief in the Mother Goddess worship is very close to the ancestor worship of our people. The content of the procession of the Mother Goddess is to celebrate the day of the Mother Goddess consecration. That is also very close to the Vietnamese ancestors worshipping.

The ceremonies and performances during the festivals of the people demonstrate their sincere reverence and supplications to the divine. The rituals of worship, ceremonies, and processions of the Mother Goddess all show a sense of solemnity towards the sacred spirits in the festival. The tradition of changing new clothes for the Mother Goddess is an essential activity in the belief and religion of the Vietnamese people when it comes to statues of Buddha or gods. This has become a fixed cultural feature in the consciousness of the Vietnamese people: wearing new clothes for the new year. Offering and paying homage to the deities before the day of the procession of the Mother Goddess signifies the reverence towards the divine spirits.

The procession of the Mother Goddess also carries the characteristics of agricultural rituals. Most of the offerings for the Mother Goddess are products of the rice agriculture. The five-color sticky rice dishes, cakes, boiled chickens, roasted pigs... are shared among the people during the festival for nourishment and prosperity, and also packed as gifts for those who live far from home, for distant visitors as a blessing. The veneration of the Mother Goddess reflects the religious aspirations of the people of Tuyên Quang, who consider the Mother Goddess as the mother of the village. The procession of the Mother Goddess also encompasses the beliefs of abundance in fertility and the prosperity of production and favorable development of the harvest season. Starting from the ceremony of changing clothes for the Mother Goddess, when the old clothes of the Mother Goddess are replaced with new ones, people share among themselves small pieces of the old clothes with different wishes. Among them, there are those who are struggling with infertility, hoping that they will conceive a child this year with the belief in the power of the Mother Goddess.

2.2. The significance of preserving and developing local culture

The festival of Mother Goddess in Y La celebrates the virtues of Saint Mother and how she has helped the country and its people live in peace and happiness. This festival reminds the younger generations of their roots, uphold high moral values, and preserve the traditions of the Vietnamese people. The Mother Goddess temple has become an important place for educating the love for the village and the country in Tuyen Quang. The procession of the Mother Goddess belongs to the community of the village and attracts people from all walks of life to participate. The procession meets the needs of bonding individuals in society into a united and cohesive community. The participation in the festival is enthusiastic and sincere. Therefore, the festival is an occasion for people to come closer together and showcase the strength of the community.

Before and during the festival, according to the assignments of the organizing committee, everyone has their tasks and responsibilities, which they take very seriously. It is also a psychological factor that attracts those who are part of the ceremonial team. In that position, they feel a special honor bestowed upon them and they stand in a different position from their usual days. People who participate in the procession of the Mother Goddess are in a state of inner peace and tranquility, and even more so, they are moved by the aesthetics of the event. When coming to the festival, people leave behind their daily tasks and business, and focus their hearts and minds on the Mother Goddess, praying for themselves and their loved ones for good health and blessings.

The time when people participate in the festival is a time when they are not constrained by survival needs, not dominated by personal obligations or material demands. They are completely free, liberated from everyday worries. With a calm mind and a soaring soul, they seek out the festival. Therefore, the procession of the Mother Goddess has become a spiritual need in human life. It meets the pressing demands of individuals. This need is the driving force behind their participation in the festival. When a need arises, humans are compelled to act in order to satisfy that need. The need to participate in the festival is one of the increasing demands to satisfy spiritual needs, self-improvement, and self-affirmation.

The procession of the Mother Goddess at Y La Temple brings about freedom, equality, and democracy. During the festival days, the people of Y La do not discriminate between people of the Kinh ethnic group or minority ethnic groups such as Tay, Dao, Cao Lan; they do not discriminate based on social status or occupation. Everyone is free to watch the procession, and those who wish to pass through the palanquin of the Mother Goddess to seek blessings can join the queue to witness the procession. When the procession of the Mother Goddess returns to the temple, there is a feast for good fortune, and everyone present receives the blessings of the Mother Goddess equally. In the procession of the Mother Goddess at Y La temple, the boundaries among the people are blurred. They become more connected and friendly with each other when participating in the "work in the Mother Goddess temple" and the tasks of the village. From there, the people become more united and bonded. This is the beautiful value of the procession of the Mother Goddess. The procession of

the Mother Goddess directs people towards the past in the present and towards the future. It affirms and reminds the people to live in unity to be part of the renewal of the national identity.

Tourists voluntarily participate in the procession with sincerity and solemnity, expressing their belief in the Mother Goddess, her protection and salvation for the unfortunate, and her blessings and good fortune for everyone. From the territorial and economic exchanges to the religious unity in worshipping the Mother Goddess, the community becomes more tightly knit and forms a solid, unified and harmonious block during the procession. This creates the strength of the people. The tradition of remembering our roots is clearly manifested in the procession of the Mother Goddess. The procession reenacts the legend of Princess Phuong Dung and Princess Ngoc Lan, as well as the miracles they performed for the people, which have been documented in various sources. This helps the younger generation today understand the sacrifices of their ancestors and take pride in the cultural traditions of their homeland and country. Especially in the hustle and bustle of modern life, people have few opportunities to return to their national cultural heritage and history. Therefore, for modern people, participating in the procession of the Mother Goddess and immersing themselves in the community has become an urgent need. In the procession, everyone is immersed in the sacred atmosphere, and the boundaries of social status are blurred. The sense of self is merged into the collective, and everyone shares the same enthusiasm. The procession of the Mother Goddess allows the local people to enjoy the cultural values created by themselves and their community. In the procession, there are many rituals. Maybe in the ceremony, the people carrying the palanquin and those in the procession are the spectators, in the procession, they are the people carrying the flag, carrying the palanquin – the main roles. Others may be young men and women who are not married yet, participating as flower bearers, drum bearers, or gong bearers, and in the following years, when they get married, they will no longer have these roles and become spectators. In this way, in the festive atmosphere, there is no distance or boundary between the audience and the characters with their roles.

The legends of Princess Phuong Dung and Princess Ngoc Lan, as part of the nation's history, bear the cultural traces of folk worship of the Mother Goddess that have been passed down from person to person, from generation to generation. The procession of the Mother Goddess is a manifestation of the rich cultural activities of the people. Drawing from the content of legends and the characters in mythology and historical records, the festival demonstrates reverence and remembrance with patriotic devotion to the country and its people. Thanks to the Mother Goddess procession, the people preserve and develop the mythical spirit of the Mother Goddess in their community's cultural life.

The procession of Mother Goddess is the cradle and repository of various forms of culture. In the festival, in addition to the solemn rituals, there are also lively performances. Folk games such as the sack race, pot-breaking, bamboo jacks, and mandarian square capturing (a traditional Vietnamese board game) are creative products of human ingenuity that have been passed down through generations. Over time, these products have become more refined and adapted to the modern era. As

a result, the cultural identity of the village and the inter-village culture are created through the festival, contributing to the cultural heritage of Tuyen land in particular and Vietnam in general.

The procession of Mother Goddess is a unique cultural product that meets the spiritual needs of people. Moreover, the procession of Mother Goddess serves as a measure to evaluate the moral values of individuals and guides them towards beauty, love for their homeland and country, and national pride. The moral values of individuals are demonstrated in the preparation for the procession, where the spirit and responsibility of all participants are held in the highest regard. Throughout the procession, which spans over 4 kilometers, there is no pushing or shoving, despite the saying "as crowded as a festival." This is because the procession is a spiritual event, and everyone participates with discipline and self-awareness. The ritualistic dances and offering of incense and flowers exude a sense of courtly elegance. The fan dances, lion dances, and other performances are accompanied by vibrant sounds, creating a hymn that praises love for the homeland, country, and national pride. The traditional dances and performances, such as the "sênh tiên" dance and "hát châu văn" (a form of Vietnamese folk opera), showcase the folk culture of the region. The religious, ceremonial, and performance activities in the procession of Mother Goddess not only reenact the lives of our ancestors, but also preserve and safeguard the national cultural heritage. The form and content of the procession of Mother Goddess fully reflect the material and spiritual life of the people in Tuyen Quang. Furthermore, the procession of Mother Goddess has a profound impact on the entire community in Tuyen Quang, contributing to the preservation of the national culture within the hearts and souls of the people.

The procession of the Mother Goddess is a grand cultural performance that encapsulates the noble cultural values of the nation. It serves as a precious source of cultural heritage preservation. Through the procession, we can see the bond between people in Tuyen Quang, not only because they live in the same territory and are subject to the same legal regulations, but also because of their shared spiritual world and pursuit of positive cultural values.

2.3. The significance of local economic development

The procession of the Mother Goddess not only brings significance to the spiritual life of the people but also creates economic value, contributing to the development of the economy and society of Tuyen Quang.

Legend and history books record the two princesses of the Hung King's reign, which have shown regional cultural characteristics and contributed to the introduction and promotion of traditional culture and culinary culture of Tuyen Quang. Through the procession of the Mother Goddesses, the unique customs and habits of Tuyen Quang are preserved and developed. In recent years, the exploitation of traditional festivals is considered a valuable resource of Tuyen Quang tourism industry. Along with other festivals in Tuyen Quang, the procession of the Mother Goddess brings a

great source of revenue for tourism activities. Not only that, the festival itself also creates job opportunities for people in Tuyen Quang through festival services (although only seasonal).

Over time, along with protecting, preserving and promoting traditional values in history, the procession of the Mother Goddess has been captivating, appealing, and become a demand and aspiration of the people that need to be fulfilled and satisfied throughout all eras. The essence of the festival is the synthesis and high-level abstraction of the material and spiritual lives of the people in society at each stage of history.

3. CONCLUSION

The procession of the Mother Goddess at Y La Temple in Tuyen Quang province holds a significant position in the lives of the people of Tuyen Quang in particular, and the people of Vietnam in general. The festival combines the mythologized character of the Mother Goddess, who is worshiped by the people, with the theatricalization of life in legends. Therefore, the festival deeply influences the cultural life of the people.

The procession of the Mother Goddess also has economic value for the people of Tuyen Quang. Combining tourism and festival, the procession of the Mother Goddess has become a product of Tuyen Quang's tourism industry, contributing to the socio-economic development of the province.

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