

## INFLUENCE OF VOTIVE DANCE IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE VIETNAMESE IN LAM DONG

**Abstract:** *Votive dance (to mount the medium or going into trance) is the most important ritual in practicing the mother goddess belief of the Vietnamese. It is a kind of performing art including music, invocation songs, dance, costume, props. It contains many cultural and historical values of the Vietnamese. This ritual has had certain effects in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Despite the same origin, the worship of Mother Goddesses in general and the votive dance in particular have differences depend on each region. This article focuses on the characteristics of votive dance rituals of the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng province, the positive effects as well as some limitations of this ritual for a part of the Vietnamese people there.*

**Keywords:** *Influence; votive dance; the Vietnamese; Lâm Đồng.*

### Introduction

Nguyễn Duy Hinh, in the article with the title *Lên đồng* published in the Cultural Heritage review (Tạp chí Di sản Văn hóa), stated that “Votive dance (lên đồng) is a pathological phenomenon originated from the subconscious. It is an abnormal phenomenon of a person in which the state of consciousness cannot control behavior and language. It is only available with some special people who have ‘vocation to mount the medium’(căn đồng)”<sup>1</sup>.

Ngô Đức Thịnh in a monograph *Votive dance- Journey of the deities and status* (Lên đồng - Hành trình của thần linh và thân phận) commented that: “Votive dance is not an independent belief

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but it is only a typical ritual of the worship of Mother Goddesses attached to the Three Palaces, the Four Palaces (Đạo Mẫu Tam phủ, Tứ phủ). The phenomenon of votive dance is actually the medium's incarnation of the deities of the Four Palaces to cure diseases, pray for health, fortune, luck"<sup>2</sup>. Frank Proschan remarked that "Votive dance or serving the shadows (hầu bóng) is a diverse form of performance. It is a combination of ritual and theater, music and lyric, costumes and customs, dance and incarnation"<sup>3</sup>.

After the event *Practices of the worship of Mother Goddesses attached to the Three Palaces, the Four Palaces of the Vietnamese* was recognized as intangible cultural heritage on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, the worship of Mother Goddesses' activities across the country in general and Lâm Đồng in particular have had many positive changes. It has received attention of all levels of government. At present, the worship of Mother Goddesses in general, votive dance in particular have had influence on the spiritual life of a part of Vietnamese residents in Lâm Đồng.

### **1. Some characteristics of votive dance ritual in Lâm Đồng**

In the early twentieth century, the worship of Mother Goddesses appeared on the Lang Biang plateau along with the process of settling villages of Vietnamese people. Despite being of the same origin as the worship of Mother Goddesses in the northern delta, the worship of Mother Goddesses in general and votive dance ritual in particular in this land have certain characteristics:

*Firstly*, with the characteristics of a "multi-origin" community, the elements of Vietnamese folklore in Lâm Đồng are also very diverse. Thus, there are two forms of votive dance such as the Northern type (hầu Bắc) and the Central type (hầu hội/hầu Huế) in the religious activities of the worship of Mother Goddesses. Each ritual has certain characteristics: *The Northern rite* (Hầu Bắc) in Lâm Đồng is performed by the mediums (thanh đồng) originated from the North and conducted according to traditional ritual of the

Northern regions such as: Nam Định, Hà Nội. Each session is performed by a medium with incarnation of different deities and spirits from the highest deity to the last ones, it means from three Mother Goddesses to Quan Lớn (mandarins), Châu, Ông Hoàng, Cô and Cậu (young boys and girls), Ông Hổ or Ông Lốt (not many medium perform this incarnation). *The Central rite* (Hầu hội) is performed by the mediums originated from the Center and conducted according to traditional ritual of the Central region such as Huế. Many mediums also participate in a rite of the Central type. Sessions are done according to the realms such as Thượng Thiên (upper level in the sky), Trung Thiên (medium level in the sky), Thượng Ngàn (mountain and forest), Thoải phủ (water). The number of assistants who help the medium during a session is usually less than the northern rite. The emergence and development of these two forms of worshipping the Mother Goddesses and votive dance have created a diversity in the spiritual and cultural life, met the needs of spiritual cultural activities of a part of the Vietnamese people in Lâm Đồng.

*Secondly*, compared to the Northern Delta region, although there are two forms of votive dance in Lâm Đồng but they are votive dance of worshipping the Mother Goddesses (*lên đồng Mẫu*), it means incarnation of the Mother Goddesses (Thánh Mẫu) and the deities of the Three Palaces, the Four Palaces in order to pray for health, luck, fortune. Currently, there aren't votive dance rituals to worship Trần saints (Đức Thánh Trần) with the forms of exorcising evil spirits like some temples of the North.

Although the majority of the worshipping places in Lâm Đồng had the altar of Trần saints, however, the votive dance rituals represent the Trần saints' merits, talents, and the way of working, etc. We have not witnessed any ritual with the forms of exorcising evil spirits like the mediums who worship the Trần saints in the North.

*Thirdly*, although the votive dance rituals follow the Northern style, the rituals in Lâm Đồng are different. For example, in the

cutting of the predestination ceremony (nghỉ lễ cắt tiền duyên): In the North, the the mediums often perform in the incarnation of the great mandarin Tuần Tranh (Quan Lớn Tuần Tranh) because according to the popular concept, Quan Đệ Ngũ (or Quan Tuần Tranh) is a saint that can “communicate three worlds: Heaven, Earth, Water” with the ability to exorcise evil spirits, demons, cut of the predestination, pray for love, pray for career. Therefore, the saint is capable of cutting of the predestination for the followers. In addition to the ability to “communicate the three worlds” with the magic, super powers as mentioned above, the cause of the Quan Đệ Ngũ Tuần Tranh has ability to cut of the predestination related to a injustice of his earthly life<sup>4</sup>.

However, the votive dance rituals in Lâm Đồng from 2004 to present, the mediums have not performed the ritual of cutting of the predestination for their customers through the incarnation of Quan Lớn Tuần Tranh; This work has been done through different incarnation (usually the incarnation of the saint that is in accordance with them (having vocation- có căn). For example, Mrs. L- a medium, the owner of Cô Đôi temple (Đức Trọng district)- has predestination with Cô Đôi, in other words, she can “get fortune” of Cô Đôi so she performs the incarnation of this saint to cut of the predestination for her customers. Through discussion with us, the mediums who perform the ritual of cutting of the predestination said that: the worship of the Mother Goddesses (the Three Palaces, the Four Palaces) in Lâm Đồng is just the worship from afar (thờ vọng); Accordingly, the worship of the great mandarin Tuần Tranh is also the worship from afar. Therefore, the mediums perform the ritual of cutting of the predestination for their customers through the incarnation of the saint in accordance with them because they believe that by doing so, their magic power will reach the highest level and the cutting will be effective (Source: An in-depth interview with a female medium named NTL, 65 years old, Đức Trọng).

*Fourthly*, despite the existence of the Central style of the votive dance, the incarnation of this type in Lam Dong is little different. For example, it is the incarnation of the great mandarin Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên (Quan Lớn Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên). “In Huế, the mediums only perform the incarnation of the great mandarin Đệ Nhất in a great ritual; they usually perform the incarnation of the great mandarin Đệ Nhị (Quan Lớn Đệ Nhị) in the normal rituals” (Source: An in-depth interview with a young female medium named H.T.Đ, 60 years old, Đà Lạt). In fact, all the votive dance rituals which were performed by the mediums who came from Huế or the Centre in Lâm Đồng that we have attended in recent years, there was the incarnation of the great mandarin Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên (Quan Lớn Đệ Nhất Thượng Thiên) whether they were great rituals or normal rituals.

*Fifthly*, although the mediums are considered as children of the Saints, they are also divided into two groups: *the fortune-telling group* (đồng bói) and *the worshipping group* (đồng thờ) who do the holy work such as performing the votive dance ritual, worshipping, and do some other spiritual works. *The fortune-telling group* is divided into two groups: a group has to establish their own Temple/Palace (phủ), a group has to perform votive dance to become mediums.

At present, in Lâm Đồng, the majority of mediums came from Huế or the Centre belong to the worshipping group, they don't have worshipping temples or Palaces. They only perform the votive dance rituals at the temples or Palaces. In contrast, a large number of fortune-teller mediums are the Vietnamese from the North (over 50% of the total number of mediums). The fortune-teller mediums mainly live in Đức Trọng, Đà Lạt, Lâm Hà.

## **2. The impact of the votive dance ritual on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng**

### ***2.1. The impact on the mediums***

### 2.1.1. *The positive impact*

*Firstly, the votive dance is considered as a method of treatment, it helps to cure psychological and physiological disorders*

Like many other mediums in the country, people often believe that someone becomes a medium depend on the god's selection, they are considered as having "vocation" (căn đồng). Through surveys and in-depth interviews of the mediums there, we found that most of them went through periods of unusual illness, madness, even fatal disease but the cause of the disease was unknown. Most of them have been treated for many times but they have not recovered (this phenomenon is often called "punishment" (cơ đày). Finally, these patients had to come to "the Mother Goddesses temple" (cửa Mẫu) to pray. The mediums of these temples often say that they have a "vocation". In order to end the situation, they will be instructed by the predecessor. Before becoming a real medium, these people have to perform votive dance for the first time, build a Palace (*trình đồng mở phủ*)<sup>5</sup>.

A medium named L.T.K.D (Mê Linh commune, Lâm Hà) is an example. Ms. D was born in 1959, her hometown in Vĩnh Phúc, she and her family migrated to Lâm Hà in 1989. After a few years of settling in the new place, her family's business of cultivating industrial crops was quite good. However, from 1997 to 2001, Ms. D was ill. "I was punished by the saints 30 days of a month, my body was suddenly pale and cold like a corpse. During this period, I went to many places for treatment, it could not recover, the cause of the disease was unknown and people thought that I pretended to be sick to escape from hard work" (An in-depth interview with a female medium named LTKD, 58 years old, Lâm Hà, Lâm Đồng).

During this period, many fortune-teller mediums said that Ms. D had "vocation" to be a medium (căn đồng) and had to perform votive dance to cure the illness. At the end of 2001, Ms. D was given an incense bow by a medium and then she performed votive

dance, built a Palace. “After the votive dance ritual, opening the Palace, my health got better. However, due to difficult economic conditions, I could not perform the votive dance ritual for many years. So my illness continued. Even on the first day of the Lunar New Year in 2015, I was in hospital emergency because of the serious illness. By 2016, my family rebuild the Palace, I began to perform the votive dance rituals more regularly (from 2 to 3 times or more for a year). Since 2016, Ms. D’s health has improved, she has not been weak like the time of punishment, her family economy has also been better with customers who buy joss paper”. (An in-depth interview with a female medium named LTKD, 58 years old, Lâm Hà, Lâm Đồng).

A medium named C.T.H, Đà Lạt is an other example. “I was a trader at the Đà Lạt night market in 2000, my business was “high profits”, but in 2010, I felt abnormal symptoms such as sick, like eating glass, my business has declined, I sometimes wandered. This punishment lasted nearly 4 years. At the end of 2013, the saints punished me, they made me run away from home for exactly 100 days. After that, they showed me go to Đức Trọng, come to Bảo Hà temple (Nguyễn Đình Chiểu- Liên Nghĩa). Finally, I was helped by a medium of the Đ.X.Q temple to open a Palace in 2014, I was cured” (An in-depth interview with a female medium named C.T.H, 55 years old, Đà Lạt). In February 2017, after the votive dance ritual to finish the three-year period to be a medium, Ms. H began to perform private votive dance ritual. Currently, her husband and son are involved in this religious activity. Her second son also performed votive dance, build a Palace and to become a musicians (singers and instrumentalists/ cung văn) to serve his mother’s votive dance session. In order to improve performance, Ms. H also sent her son to Hanoi to learn professional musicians.

A medium named P.V.O, Cát Tiên Town, Cát Tiên District was “punished” to be mad before performing votive dance ritual. Through the story of Mr. P.V.O, we know that he was born in

1976, Giao Thủy, Nam Định, migrated to Cát Tiên. “From the age of 26, 27 years old; I often had crazy expressions, lost consciousness, screamed all night long. I was treated in Sài Gòn, Hà Nội and many other places but it could not find out the cause of the disease. Finally, I had a dream, the deities helped me to find a medium in Hà Nội, to perform votive dance, build a Palace. Since 2007, I have often performed many votive dance sessions a year on the birthday and deathday anniversary of the saints or as order of customers” (An in-depth interview of a male medium, named PVO, 42 years old, Cát Tiên). At present, the temple owned by P.V.O is one of typical worship facilities of practice of worship of Mother Goddesses in Cát Tiên district.

A medium named L.T.B.T is an another case in Đà Lạt. She was born in 1995, graduated from Đà Lạt Vocational College, and currently works as an operator for a taxi company in the city. According to her mother narration, when the medium was 10 years old, she accompanied her mother to attend a votive dance ritual at Bảo Hương Linh Từ Temple (No.7B, Trần Phú street- this temple was demolished in 2008 after the death of Nguyễn Văn Hanh, the medium of the temple) and a medium said that she had to perform the votive dance session (ra đồng/trình đồng) to serve the deities at the age of 19. Since she was 15 years old to the first votive dance session (November 26, 2016, Lunar Calendar), L.T.B.T was often ill with unexplained illness, suffered from insomnia or had very strange dreams; her parents took her to many doctors but they said that she was not sick. In the last two years, she and her family member visited many fortune-tellers in many places like Lâm Hà, Đà Têh. The fortune-tellers said that she had “vocation” of Four Palaces so she had to perform the votive dance. Her mother decided organized a votive dance session for her at *Linh Bửu* temple, Đà Lạt. Before the opening ceremony, Ms. LTBT was strange, tired and seemingly unconscious (even though she was a student). On October 26, 2016 (the Lunar Calendar), we had the opportunity to

attend the official votive dance session Ms. LTBT at Linh Bửu Temple and was really surprised by her vivacity, dynamism.

Through some of the aforementioned examples, before becoming a medium, he or she often experienced psychological, physiological disorders and was called “punishment”. However, through the votive dance ritual with the impact of factors such as sound, music, lyrics, dancing, alcohol these people’s illness were cured. Because “It is in that environment of self-transformation that the hidden unconsciousness of humanbeings is awakened, the repressions is liberated, it helps these people to be more balanced, overcome the deviant behavior and reintegrate into the community”<sup>6</sup>.

As a result of a punishment by the deities, some people “forced” to become a medium is a fact that has been happening in Lâm Đồng today. However, when becoming a medium, they expect to perform a new votive dance session or participate in the other medium’s rituals. “Being a child of the Saints (a medium), if he/she does not perform a new votive dance session to serve the Mother Goddesses, he/she will feel ill” (An in-depth interview with a female medium named L.T.L, 45 years old, Bảo Lộc).

*Second, the votive dance helps the women to transform their role of power in the spiritual and social environment*

So far, there have not been any specific studies on the number and percentage of male and female medium in localities as well as nationwide. However, from 2004 to present, through surveys and interviews with the mediums in Lâm Đồng, we found that the number of female medium accounted for the majority, about 70%. Therefore, it can be said that the worship of the Mother Goddesses and the votive dance as a cultural form associated with women.

Women have been considered to be frail. Although the process of fighting for equality between men and women has achieved certain results, in reality, women are suffering from disadvantages,

injustice, and even domestic violence. Therefore, participation in the practice of Mother Goddesses worship, especially the ritual of votive dance, allow women to enter the world of saints- a “spiritual society”. In that world, they transformed themselves into the Goddesses with the power to protect people, to become the Great Mandarins with great victories. They may freely display the dignity and power in the incarnation of the Great Mandarins; friendliness, playfulness, freedom, harmony with their followers when performing the votive dance session. In addition, the incarnation of the Saints, the Great Mandarins helps the women mediums to transform their role, power in family and community.

In the ceremonies that I have attended in Lâm Đồng from 2004 to present, I have personally witnessed many transformations of status and power among many couples. It is noteworthy that the votive dance ritual was hold on September 10, 2017 (July 20 of the lunar calendar) of a medium named C.T.H in *Vân Hương Linh Từ* (Linh Giác ancient Buddhist temple), Đông Tĩnh hamlet, ward 8, Đà Lạt. During the votive dance ritual, the incarnation of the Great Mandarins in particular, C.T.H has always been solemn, even bossy towards the men who involved in the ritual. The medium- with majestic appearance- called a man to kneel in front of her, then she judged, even scolded and told him many things. The man with a pretty fierce face obeyed her. I wondered “Why is this man called by the Great Mandarin, and what the Great Mandarin was talking about?”. Finally, I knew that the man was the medium’s husband. People who participated in the ritual also told me that he used to gamble, drink alcohol, hit his wife, even to be bossy. Perhaps in the incarnation of the Great Mandarin, the medium had a chance to “teach” her husband.

In another the votive dance ritual was hold in *Quang Hòa Điện* in Di Linh district, on October 5, 2017 (August 16 of the lunar calendar). In the incarnation of the Great Mandarin, a medium named N.T.L shouted loudly at family members for errors in arranging worship at

the temple. Then, she called a man (about 40 years old, named T.V.B - her husband) to kneel in front of her and scolded him for his bad behavior towards family members. Finally, she told him what to do next. During the prostration in front of the Great Mandarin, T.V.B promised to follow the Great Mandarin's teachings.

*Thirdly, the votive dance helps the mediums have the opportunity to live to their real gender*

The concept of *đồng bóng* is often used to refer to mediums. In fact, female or male mediums often have different personalities than ordinary people. The male mediums usually have a high-pitched voice, soft limbs, very skillful dancing, like makeup or wearing colorful colors. The female mediums usually have a loud voice, drink alcohol, smoking. The mediums are often called "bị bóng".

A medium named Đ.V.H, was born in 1977, owner a Palace in Liên Hà commune, Lâm Hà District as an example. According to Mr. N.V.T (father of the medium), since a young age, he was good at singing, dancing, arranging flowers, his voice was high-pitched like a girl, his voice like a girl. At the age of 13, he was punished (cơ đày). Every night, he was often talking when he was sleeping (he was taught by deities). In 1995, after being dreamed by the deities, Mr. Đ.V.H held a ceremony to perform votive dance, build a palace at a temple in Văn Điển, Hà Nội and became a medium.

A medium named L.T.L, 45 years old, lived in Bảo Lộc. Ms. L performed votive dance for the first time since June, 1998 (Lunar calendar). It is 20 years ago. Like the other mediums, she passed an unusual illness for many years. After being cured by the mediums, she performed votive dance, built a palace. Then, her illness was completely cured. Since 2006, I has contacted with her when I conducted surveys for my master's thesis. She said that she has predestination of the saint named Cậu Bé Đồi Ngang- a male saint who has a playful and mischievous personality like a child-. In the daily life, Ms. L is also a very happy, active. Her personality is similar to a boy.

A medium named N.T.N, 62 years old, Nam Hà commune, Nam Ban Town, Lâm Hà District is another example. Although she is a female medium, she has predestination of the Great Mandarins, she has a loud voice so she is considered to be androgynous.

Currently, the percentage of male medium with predestination of “goddesses” accounts for over 80% in Lâm Đồng. The percentage of female medium with predestination of male gods accounts for about 50%. During the votive dance ritual with the incarnation of goddesses, the Great Mandarin, the mediums have the opportunity to show their hidden characters.

### *2.1.2. The negative impact*

*Firstly, as a result of the earthly profit, some people have performed a votive dance ritual, built a palace, these activities become a profession to have income*

Lâm Đồng, as well as the whole country, does not have any specific regulations on the total cost of a votive dance ritual. However, the mediums and followers said that it costs about from 15 to 30 million Vietnam Đồng for a common votive dance ritual (on the birth or death days of the Goddesses of the Four Palaces), and it costs about from 60 to 100 million Vietnam Đồng for a great votive dance ritual such as *performing votive dance ritual for the first time, opening a palace (lễ trình đồng mở phủ), repayment for the Four Palaces ritual (lễ trả nợ Tứ phủ), Requiem for the ancestor ritual (lễ phả độ gia tiên)*.

Some mediums have abuse of religion and beliefs with tricks such as telling the followers that they have the predestination to be a medium (căn đồng) (the followers who always get marriage late, have failure in business, poor health, experience instability in life...), or raising the price of the votive dance ritual. Thus, the number of people who participated in the activities of Mother goddesses worship has increased and the cost for the votive dance ritual has risen.

Therefore, the income of some mediums who take advantage of the worship of Mother goddesses has been increasing. This situation has led many people who “excited” with the tendency to become a medium in order to have opportunities to increase income. In fact, there are many cases that the whole family participates in the worship of Mother Goddesses such as the father who is a mystery-man, the mother who works as a medium, children who plays musical instruments and a group of relatives, disciples who participates in the production of votive papers to serve customers. The customers just need to pay the total cost and come to the place to organize the ritual at the scheduled time, the works for ritual have been done by the medium and her/his crew.

*Secondly, some people without the predestination to be a medium still perform the votive dance ritual for the first time, open a palace*

In recent years, the opening and objective views of the Party and the State on the affairs of religion and belief have led to the expansion of the worship of Mother goddesses. In addition, the economic development is also one of the causes led to the increase of votive dance rituals and palaces.

Although it is not common, the phenomenon of some people who without the predestination to be a medium performing votive dance ritual, opening a palace has appeared in the religious life of the worship of Mother goddesses in Lâm Đồng. In this case, the person who needs to perform votive dance ritual for the first time and open a palace must pay a large amount of money (about 60-100 million Vietnam Đồng) to the medium-teacher (đồng thầy). It is not a small amount of income for the average GDP of our country today<sup>7</sup>.

Why do some people are willing to spend a large amount of money to perform the ritual while it is not really needed (those without madness, illness)? In my opinion, there are two main reasons for this situation as follows:

*First*, some people show off their wealth through the votive dance ritual. As a result of the good economic conditions of a part of the population as well as the expansion of the worship of Mother goddesses' activities, some people without the predestination to be a medium still perform the votive dance ritual. This situation usually occurs in some rich people. They often come to worship and ask for blessings at the Mother goddesses' temples and attend the votive dance rituals. The attraction of the music, costumes, transformation of power gradually stimulates the demand for the votive dance ritual of these people. Like the Buddhists who offered to build temples, some rich people (even though without the predestination to be a medium) like performing the votive dance ritual in order to bestow/give fortune to other mediums and attendees, as well as a "donation"<sup>8</sup> (giọt dầu) for the palace where they perform.

However, each votive dance session is not merely to give a gift, it also helps the medium to exercise their power as saints, bestow a gift for attendees, this action helps increase the feeling of excitement. Currently, the rich people often pay about hundreds of millions Vietnam Đồng for a votive dance ritual. Some of them are also proud of expensive votive dance ritual, even they consider it as a social status. In Lâm Đồng at present, there is no votive dance ritual to show off and show the wealth as mentioned above.

*Second*, performing the votive dance ritual in order to have deity's blessing (with merchants)

The mediums of this group are often traders. They also believe that trading depends on "fortune/ predestined" (*lộc/duyên*) and "fortune/ predestined" sometimes depends on serving the deity (performing the votive dance ritual).

A female medium named N.T.L in village 1, Gia Lâm commune, Lâm Hà, Lâm Đồng, was born in Hà Nội, in 1977, she and her husband and children migrated to Lâm Hà. She was the owner of a limited company specializing in the production of fertilizers to supply the market in the district. She did not have unusual illness

like the others. A few years ago, her family's business was declined, and every time she went to the temples or palaces, she felt happier and seemed to have a "predestined" relationship with Buddha, Saints. Thus, in 2015, Ms. N.T.L performed the votive dance for the first time and build a palace by using thesecond floor of her house with an area of about 70m<sup>2</sup> as a place of worship. Since the worship of the Mother Goddess' activities at the temple of the medium N.T.L have taken place regularly on many main occasions as well as in the death aniversary of the Saints. She said that she does not have a "vocation" like the other mediums, but she performs the votive dance ritual and built a palace with the hope that the business would be fortunate.

The case a male medium named Đ.Q.H in Tân Hà, Lâm Hà also showed the impacts of a market economy to perform the votive dance ritual and build a palace. Mr. Đ.Q.H was born in 1977, in Tân Hà, Lâm Hà. He is the owner of a small business specializing in passion fruit juice production. The business is generally good, in recent years, he has been involved in gambling, so his family's economy has declined. His wife has the predestination tobe a medium (căn đồng). Although he has not a "vocation", after getting suggestions from his wife and some family members who used to attend the worship of the Mother Goddesses' activities, Mr. Đ.Q.H decided to perform the votive dance ritual for the first time in *Đệ Nhị Thượng Ngàn Lâm* temple (Hiệp Thanh, Đức Trọng) on 16 September 2017 (according to the lunar calendar) with the hope that his business would be fortunate.

## ***2.2. The impact on the followers***

### ***2.2.1. The positive impact***

*First: Having confidence in life because of the protection of saints*

Exception for people who have the predestination tobe a medium, have to perform the votive dance ritual and build a palace

as mentioned above, the majority of those who have participated in the worship of the Mother Goddesses' activities were often those who had difficulties in life and unhappiness in marriage, failed business. They came to pray for blessing and protection from the saints of the Three Palace and the Four Palace (Tam phủ, Tứ phủ).

According to popular belief, every saint in the Three Palace and the Four Palace has certain abilities to support people in different fields. For example, if believers want to have a business fortune, they will ask for blessing in the incarnation of Châu Đệ Nhị; If believers want to have a successful career, they will ask for blessing in the incarnation of Ông Hoàng Mười; If believers want to cut the predestined relationship, they will ask for blessing in the incarnation of Quan Đệ Ngũ Tuần Tranh. Therefore, a part of the Vietnamese people in Dalat have participated in the worship of the Mother Goddesses at the temples of the Central form, especially the votive dance ritual to pray for health, fortune, luck. Whenever in each incarnation of the saint, the believers and the attendees often offered offerings (putting money on small plates offer to the saints) with their pray. The certification of the saints in every votive dance ritual is a "guarantee" led the confidence of the attendees for a brighter future.

*Secondly: Helping a part of the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng to have awareness and gratefulness to the saints who have contributed to the country*

In addition to the legendary heroic female martyrs, the system of saints in the Three Palace and the Four Palace also has historical figures such as Hưng Đạo Đại Vương Trần Quốc Tuấn, or some deities have been associated with historical figures such as Ông Hoàng Bảy<sup>9</sup>, Ông Hoàng Mười<sup>10</sup>...

By describing the typical actions and gestures of legendary and historical figures, the votive dance ritual has revived the ancient characters. Therefore, Trần Hưng Đạo is not only a historical figure, he has been revived in the incarnation. Through the

incarnation of the votive dance ritual with costumes and props such as swords, flags, etc., the believers and the attendees can imagine the victory of the Saints for the nation. It helps them to be proud of the nation's tradition, to aware of their role and responsibilities.

*Third: Helping to understand and love the material and spiritual values of the nation such as national costumes*

There is the incarnation of many saints in a votive dance ritual; Each saint has different costumes (royal metaphor). The royal court dresses are no longer exist in daily life today. Therefore, when watching the votive dance ritual, people can see the costumes of the noble and the mandarins. Although the costumes of the votive dance ritual are not exactly the same as the costumes of the mandarins in the past, they also show the creativity of artisans. The patterns are printed on these clothes affirmed the traditional embroidery art of Vietnam.

In fact, the Saints of the Four Palace derived from ethnic minorities such as Dao, Tày, Nùng, Mường, etc., have been accounted for a large number. Through costumes such as black dresses, silver bracelets, scarves or headscarves with colors, patterns (they are similar to the costumes of the ethnic minorities), the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng can imagine the traditional costumes of some ethnic minorities in the North of Vietnam- the costumes even are no longer using today due to the “Vietnamization” process.

Thus, through a votive dance ritual, a part of the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng can know how the costumes in particular and the culture in general of the ethnic minorities are perceived by the neighboring ethnic groups. Frank Proshan commented that “the votive dance ritual has created a kind of ‘folk ethnography’- where the male mediums and the female mediums expressed their ideas about how the ethnic people perceive, dress and behave. Like the professional ethnographers, the mediums have observed the clothing and behavior of neighboring peoples, then they introduced some aspects or elements of them for others to admire...”<sup>11</sup>.

### 2.2.2. *The negative impact*

In Lâm Đồng at present, beside the positive impacts, the votive dance ritual has some negative impacts. A part of Vietnamese people who blindly believe in this ritual, especially the baseless and irresponsible statements of some fortune-tellers or mediums, they have spent a lot of money on performing the votive dance ritual, building a Palace, cutting of the predestination, repayment for the Four Palace.

Besides, as the result of the prosperous economic conditions and the faith of being blessed by the saints when performing the votive dance ritual, so some rich people, even without the predestination to be a medium, also perform the ritual. This situation has led to the loss of its traditional values.

### **Conclusion**

Currently, the worship of the Mother Goddesses in general and the votive dance ritual in particular have played an important role in the spiritual life of a part the Vietnamese in Lâm Đồng.

This research has some comments as follows:

The votive dance ritual has had impacts on the mediums and believers who are considered as having the predestination to be a medium. *The positive effects*, the votive dance ritual has been considered as a therapy that can help them treat psychophysical, physiological disorders and reintegrate into the community. In addition, this ritual also helps the mediums, especially the female mediums transform their roles, power in the spiritual and social environment. It helps them to gain balance in life and social roles. At present, the situation of androgyny of the medium has increased. Therefore, through performing the votive dance ritual, the mediums have a opportunity to live with their true gender. *The negative effects*, the votive dance ritual has created some unexpected effects on the mediums and believers who have the predestination to be a medium. For the worldly benefits, some people performed the votive dance ritual, built a Palace in order to earn money (the worship's activities

has become a career). Even some people without the predestination to be a medium still perform the votive dance ritual and build a Palace that led to disorder in this worship. For believers, the activities of the votive dance ritual have also led to influences such as bringing faith and peace in life because of the protection of saints (helping them to have awareness and gratitude to the Saints who have merit to the country as well as understanding and appreciating the traditional material and spiritual values of the nation. Besides, a part of Vietnamese people in Lâm Đồng have blindly believed in this ritual, they have become the victims of many mediums.

The provincial authorities need have educational measures to raise the awareness of the mediums and the believers in order to preserve and promote values of the worship of the Mother Goddesses in general, the votive dance in particular in Lâm Đồng. In addition, it should have sanctions against some mediums who abuse the worship, lead a malign influence to the cultural and historical values of the votive dance.

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#### NOTES:

- 1 Nguyễn Duy Hinh (2004), “Lên đồng” (The votive dance), *Di sản Văn hóa*, số 7: 70.
- 2 Ngô Đức Thịnh (2007), *Lên đồng - Hành trình của thần linh và thân phận*, (The votive dance- Journey of the deity and background), Publisher. Trẻ, Hồ Chí Minh City: 7.
- 3 Frank Proschan (2004), “Lên đồng (hầu bóng)- Kho tàng sống của di sản văn hóa Việt Nam” (The votive dance- Living treasure of Vietnam’s cultural heritage). Bài in trong sách *Đạo Mẫu và các hình thức shaman trong các tộc người ở Việt Nam và Châu Á* (The worship of the Mother Goddesses and forms of shaman among ethnic groups in Vietnam and Asia). Publisher. Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội: 267.
- 4 The legend about the deity that: He was the fifth son of Bát Hải Động Đình King. He descended under the reign of Hùng Định Vương in a family in Ninh Giang (Hải Dương). He had many great merits, so he was ordained a duke. He fell in love with a beautiful young woman at his hometown who was the concubine of a mandarin there (he did not know she was married). Until the mandarin knew, falsely accused him of seducing his wife. Tuần Tranh was unjust and exiled at Kì Cùng, Lạng Sơn where he committed suicide to prove his innocence. During the reign of Thục Phán An Dương

Vương, the king gathered boats to fight Triệu Đà at the river bank of Tranh river, but the boats could not pass, there was a storm in the middle of the stream. The king invited the village elders to come and set up a Mandala, praying, the waves immediately quieted down, moreover, the soldiers won in the battlefield. Remembering the merit, the King exculpated him and bestowed him as Giáo Long Hầu. Later, he also incarnated the holy spirit, helped the people kill demons, and eliminated all those who harmed the people. <http://mantico.hatvan.vn/ngu-vi-ton-quan/quan-lon-de-ngu-tuan-tranh.html> (Truy cập ngày 15/10/2018).

- 5 *Lễ trình đồng mở phủ* (perform the votive dance ritual, build a Palace): people who have the predestination to be a medium have to perform the votive dance ritual and build a Palace. After the first votive dance ritual, they can build a Palace and become a medium.
- 6 Ngô Đức Thịnh (2007), *ibid*: 193.
- 7 Vietnam's GDP per capita in 2016 was 48.6 million Đồng (<https://vov.vn/kinh-te/gdp-ca-nuoc-nam-2016-tang-621-581415.vov>. Accessed 16/10/2018). In 2017, Vietnam's GDP per capita was 53,5 million Đồng (<https://vtv.vn/kinh-te/gdp-viet-nam-nam-2017-vuot-du-bao-lap-dinh-trong-hon-nua-thap-ky-qua-20171227152801342.htm>. Accessed 16/10/2018).
- 8 *Giọt dầu* is a sum of money donated by believers to temples or religious establishments.
- 9 The legend about the mandarin Hoàng Bấy at Bảo Hà temple, Lào Cai: "During the Lê dynasty, the year Cảnh Hưng (1740-1786) the region of Quy Hóa consists of Châu Thủy Vĩ and Châu Văn Bàn (Lào Cai) was always invaded by invaders in the North, people were killed. In this context, General Nguyễn Hoàng Bấy was assigned by the Court to fight the enemy in the border areas. His army went along the Red River to liberate Châu Văn Bàn and establish Bảo Hà as a large base. In an unequal battle with the enemy, he bravely sacrificed, his body drifted along the Red River to Bảo Hà. People in the area buried his body and built a temple here to remember his great merit". <http://idptravel.com/tin-tuc/den-bao-ha-va-su-tich-ong-hoang-bay-122.html>. Accessed 16/10/2018.
- 10 He was considered Lê Khôi, a talented general, a Lê Lợi's grandson and follower who fought during ten years of resistance against the Ming army. Thus, Mr. Hoàng Mười was praised by the people of Nghệ An as a Holy ("Đức thánh minh"), was a Mandarin in the Worship of Mother Goddesses of the Three Palace and the Four Palace in Vietnam.
- 11 Frank Proschan (2004), *Sđd*: 273.

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4. Nguyễn Duy Hình (2004), “Lên đồng” (The votive dance), *Di sản Văn hóa*, số 7.
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