

# Recovery and Transformation of Tutelary God Belief at Present in Kiến Thụy District, Hải Phòng City

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the characteristics of the process of restoration and transformation of Tutelary God beliefs in three localities in Kiến Thụy district, Hải Phòng city from the period of Đổi mới (Renovation) (1986) up to now. They are: Đại Trà village in Đông Phương commune, Hòa Liễu village in Thuận Thiên commune, and Kim Sơn village in Tân Trào commune. The restoration and transformation took place in the general context of beliefs and religions in Vietnam; hence, they share common characteristics of beliefs and rituals of worshipping the Tutelary god in the Northern Delta region. At the same time, each locality has its own peculiarities of history and culture; hence, the Tutelary god beliefs have different characteristics in terms of religious consciousness, sacred space, and the community rituals. Essentially, the authors of this article argue that this restoration and transformation reflects the efforts of relevant participants to adapt the tradition of Tutelary god worship for the contemporary political, economic, and social context.

**Keywords:** Tutelary god belief, worshipping the village Tutelary god, restoration of rituals, transformation, Kiến Thụy (Hải Phòng).

**Subject classification:** Religious studies

## 1. Introduction

The words “Tutelary god” are derived from Chinese culture which refers to the guardian god of the citadel. In Vietnam, this term refers to the village deity who was previously worshipped by the people, then ordained by the feudal dynasties as the Tutelary god, representing the king who oversees the village inhabitants (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 2004, p.57). The cult of the Tutelary god is a universal practice, related to the change in use of the communal house, to the organisational structure of the village, and the legal institutions of the state. In addition to the locality and standards, this type of worship also shows the unique characteristics of the people, history, geography, economy, and culture in each of the three areas.

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In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of history, war, and macro-cultural policies, Tutelary god worship in Vietnam was interrupted and various aspects ceased to exist, both materially and spiritually. Many forms of belief and the practice of worshipping the Tutelary god were discontinued for a long time; lots of worship facilities (communal houses, temples, shrines, etc.) were destroyed, degraded, reduced in size, and converted for other uses. After 1986, especially following the promulgation of the Politburo's Resolution No.24/NQ-TW (1990) "On strengthening the religious work in the new situation" and the Ordinance on Belief and Religion (2004), religious life in Vietnam experienced a strong revival; the facilities of worship (relics), rituals, and festivals in the localities were quickly restored. Worship of the Tutelary god was no longer obsessed with superstition, and it became one of the important tasks in preserving and promoting the "cultural identity" of Vietnam, serving the development of the country. The restoration of beliefs and rituals of worshipping the Tutelary god arose on the basis of the existence of worshipping relics, historical documents, people's religious experiences, religious fervour of the worshipping community, and local authority acumen for managing and implementing the common goal of the cultural development strategy.

Kiến Thụy is a district located to the southeast of Hải Phòng city. It borders the sea and its terrain is diverse with alternating midlands and mountains, and plains interspersed with rivers. "From early times, Kiến Thụy was recognised as a place of residence and reclaimed land of ancient Vietnamese inhabitants; it is famous for being the Dương Kinh centre of the Mạc Dynasty (1527-1592) with architectural, cultural, and historical works". Historically, Kiến Thụy district has many unique customs, practices, rituals, and festivals. According to the statistics of the district Culture and Information Office, as of 2021 the district had 112 relics including: 49 pagodas, 30 communal houses, 27 shrines, and six temples, of which 48 structures are classed as relics (11 national-level, 37 city-level, three national treasures, and one intangible cultural heritage) (Lương Văn Hy & Trương Huyền Chi, 2012, p.91). Apart from the communal houses, there are also a number of shrines and temples designated as places for worshipping the Tutelary god, plus many festivals are held associated with such worship. The process of the folk religion revival, including the Tutelary god belief in Kiến Thụy district, took place in the general context of the Đổi mới. This localised restoration and transformation shares characteristics of the restoration and transformation of the Tutelary god belief in the Northern Delta region during the past three to four decades, as well as features associated with the living space, livelihoods, and the process of modernisation and urbanisation in the district. From the preliminary survey, the authors consider Kiến Thụy district an appropriate location to conduct research on the Tutelary god belief in the contemporary context, although there is a lack of in-depth academic research on Tutelary god worship in the coastal region and, particularly in relation to the Mạc Dynasty.

This article focuses on analysing and generalising the basic characteristics of the process of restoration and development of the Tutelary god belief in three villages in Kiến Thụy district: Đại Trà, Hòa Liễu, and Kim Sơn. In Đại Trà and Kim Sơn villages, the Tutelary god belief was restored on the basis of the sanctuary compartments and the remains of the former

communal houses. Meanwhile, the temple and the communal house for worshipping the Tutelary god in Hòa Liễu village were completely destroyed and now their restoration takes place within the boundary of the village pagoda. These three particular villages were selected for this survey because they are typical for restoration and have different characteristics in the Tutelary god belief, contributing to shaping the current development of this form of belief. Given the COVID-19 pandemic was a real obstacle to the actual observation of ritual practice and festival organisation, the authors have also combined the field data (the anniversary of Tutelary god Trần Quốc Thi at Đại Trà communal house from 2021) with notes obtained from secondary documents, festival videos posted by locals on social media, combined with data from in-depth and retrospective interviews and group discussions, during their fieldwork carried out between 2020 and 2021. In this article, the Tutelary god belief is understood as a belief expressed through ritual practices directed at the supposedly supernatural force called the Tutelary god. This belief can be observed through worshipping the deity (the Tutelary god) in the sacred places of the village, usually communal houses or shrines/temples. This belief in Kiến Thụy district manifests itself in the worship of the deity believed to have the power to protect the village, and is associated with activities to commemorate important dates related to the origin and the dates of birth and death of the particular deity, in the form of rituals performed at places of worship, making offerings, giving remembrance, recognising merit, and often holding community festivals. This “cult” is also accompanied by the practice of “*tục hèm*” - customs that show reverence for the deity. This worship expresses the feelings of “respect” and “fear” of the inhabitants towards the deity, both in remembrance and gratitude, seeking to appease the deity in order to avoid punishment and to ask for help.

## **2. Approaching Tutelary god belief in Kiến Thụy, Hải Phòng**

The authors have approached and analysed the revival and transformation of the Tutelary god belief in Kiến Thụy district on the theoretical basis of village studies and the practice of folk religion in the context of *Đổi mới*. In the wider context, in Southeast Asia, under the pressure of modernisation, many researchers have shown that people turn to religion as a way to find security and an identity (Eric H., 1983, p. 204), to meet a desire to gain authority (Lê Trung Vũ, et al., 2014, p.15) and legitimise beliefs (Oscar S., 2010, p.412), or to apply solutions to cultural crises and social conflicts (Shaun K. M., 2002, p.1). The recovery and development of religion and belief in general in Vietnam since 1986 has been partly explained by the changes in all areas of life stemming from the *Đổi mới* process of the Communist Party of Vietnam in economics and politics, the development of technology - communications, and the impact of external trends such as cultural, religious, and economic globalisation. It is worth noting that studies have shown that religious practice is increasingly being chosen by people as a pragmatic solution to everyday concerns, such as: travelling safely, avoiding chronic illnesses, overcoming personal or family crises, gaining power and

expressing one's voice, and seeking help or luck in making a living (Pham Quynh Phuong, 2009; Laurel K., et al., 2012; Paul R. K., 2003; Nguyen Thi Hien, 2008; John K., 1999; Charles F. K., et al., 1994). Laurel Kendall et al., when examining the representativeness of certain forms of "popular religion" in Vietnam, stated that "popular religion provides a vehicle for engagement that is protected when people enter the market with many risks and instability" (Kristen W. E., 2001, p.26).

Looking at the motives and purposes that have led to the revival of Tutelary god belief in Vietnam, it can be seen that these statements are quite appropriate and they have a practical basis. In the context of the market economy, when gaps in spiritual life appear, people revert to exploring the worshipping tradition where they were born and grew up for answers to their feelings of mental insecurity, of being socially marginalised, broken family and community bonds, etc.

But restoring the so-called tradition does not easily meet the new demands of real life. Therefore, the supposed restoration here is actually the equivalent of transformation or reinvention. There are many grounds for talking about the attempts to reinvent tradition and form new ones that have taken place in Vietnam especially in the context of *Đổi mới*. Cultural festivals, life-cycle ceremonies - especially weddings and funerals - are "standardised" in the sense of rewriting the "script", both according to the requirements of new cultural programmes advocated by the state and in terms of economic ability and the wishes of the people. That process has stripped away many details that are considered unsound customs, outdated and wasteful, and generally no longer relevant. After a while, a new ritual takes shape which gradually becomes the norm. This is when one can talk about reinventing tradition.

Reinventing tradition can be viewed as a process involving many different activities, while witnessing the presence of key participants such as the state, local communities, intellectuals in general, and scientists in particular. When John Kleinen researched changes that took place in Tó village, Thanh Trì district, Hà Nội from a socio-cultural perspective, he demonstrated a "restructuring of rural traditions" in which "invented traditions" played a leading role. He proposed another way to put it, the "restructuring of local culture" in which the old and new elements together constitute a new kind of local discourse (Fred R. V. D M., 1986, p.11). Another study by Kirsten W. Endres analysed and evaluated the cultural and ritual reform in Vietnam (1986) through the example of the communal house and showed that different factors found common voices in the process of ritual restoration and practice (John K., 1999, p.88). Researcher Shaun Malarney, through many years of field work in Thịnh Liệt commune, Thanh Trì district, Hà Nội, has shown the effects of factors according to diverse categories (male, female, old, young, party members, farmers, intellectuals, and so on) in recreating and redefining rituals and culture, especially funerals and religious practices in the community. He also clarified their role in assisting people to cope with existential worries brought about by modern times (Reuter, et al., 2012). Taking the same approach, Lương Văn Hy and Trương Huyền Chi, through studying the life of the village festival and more specifically that of Hoài Thị village, Tiên Du district, Bắc Ninh

province, showed that there was a common behaviour between “renovating and reinventing the community ritual space” and “recreating and reinventing rituals in communal houses and pagodas”. They basically argue that (i) tradition reinvention is a continuous process, with creativity but also with principles and socio-cultural laws that few people question to modify or recreate because they are accepted as an obvious part of village life; (ii) the tradition reinventing process is the result of negotiation between many different factors and to varying degrees and scopes; and (iii) the negotiation process at the community level does not always follow a certain pattern (Đỗ Quang Hưng, 2011). Thus, the two authors conclude that “tradition, as a deliberate selection of dynamic sources, has played a leading role in the construction of the past linking it with the present, and thus creating the future” (Đỗ Quang Hưng, 2011, p.273).

Some Vietnamese cultural experts also make more multi-dimensional contributions to understanding the nature of traditional cultural revival, especially through the study of the restoration of rituals and festivals together with the space for such events. As a result, some concepts such as “ritual scripting”, “festival theatricalisation”, “heritage of relics”, etc., have become popular not only with academia but also with the public. Nguyễn Thị Phương Châu, in a study on Đồng Kỵ village, Bắc Ninh province, wrote: “Renovation and construction in the village relic complex is probably the most problematic. The look of the monument changes a lot after each repair or renewal. No matter how much attention is paid to restoring the original status of a traditional monument, the subjective factors of people today interfere with the inevitable imprint of the times” (Nguyễn Thị Phương Châu, 2010, p.497). Lê Hồng Lý meanwhile outlined three trends in restoring traditional festivals in Vietnam: “Restoring the original (as one remembers, one understands); reconstruction with further development; and restoration is just an excuse as it is almost completely renewed” (Vũ Tự Lập, 1998, pp.112-116). Hoàng Văn Chung, in his survey on transforming sacred spaces (worshipping establishments of folk beliefs) in the Red River Delta, proposed a process called reconfiguration of sacred space composed of three main types of activities: restoration, upgrading, and new construction. The observable result of this still ongoing process is a reconstruction of both the external interface, the lateral structure, and of the function and meaning of sacred spaces (Hoàng Văn Chung, 2021).

The common point made in the above-mentioned studies shows that the rapid transformation of the living context clearly creates concerns, i.e., new pressures on people, especially psychological ones. To overcome these pressures, different strategies will be employed, but mentally recreating traditional culture and rituals and the physical space for those ceremonies are of the popular ways. In the process, they both rediscovered the value and meaning of cultural traditions, and sought to integrate new functions and meanings into it, to match the demands of life today. Based on these theoretical discussions, the authors delve deeper into, and clarify, the case of the restoration and transformation of Tutelary god belief in Kiến Thụy district, uncovering the changes that have taken place, and focusing attention on discovering the causes, motives, and factors that play an important role in creating those changes.

### 3. Tutelary god in religious consciousness of community

Like most relics of the Kinh people worshipping the Tutelary god in the Northern Delta, the system of gods worshipped in the communal houses, shrines, and temples in Kiến Thụy district consists of more than one god, or includes the presence of other gods through the form of worship coordination or “worship from a distance”.

In Đại Trà communal house, the number of gods is upwards of several dozen, of which Chu Xích Công and Trần Quốc Thi are the two main ones (Tutelary gods) who have a profound influence on the religious life of the community. The remaining historical records held at Đại Trà communal house, which are relatively complete with 24 ordinations<sup>1</sup>, a copy of the *Ngọc phả cổ lục* (recording the background and behaviour of the Tutelary god Chu Xích Công<sup>2</sup>), a list of stories about the gods and goddesses of the École française d'Extrême-Orient, the Đại Trà village's reformatory convention held in 1935<sup>3</sup>, the remaining artefacts (such as votive tablets, altars, parallel sentences, etc.), have all provided information about the communal house and the gods worshipped here. The information from the community and the content of the present discussion has also shown many classes of gods revered and worshipped by the Đại Trà villagers: from gods with clear origins and backgrounds to vague gods with unknown biographies and behaviours; from human deities (for example Grand Prince Trần Hưng Đạo, Hồng Ninh, and Lê Quý Phi) to nature deities (e.g. *Thiên thần* (Celestial gods) - *Thiên Quan tôn thần* (Celestial official), *Sơn thần* (God of Mountain) such as: *Cao Sơn*, *Bạch Hổ* (White Tiger), *Hải thần* (God of Sea) - *Nam Hải* (South Sea); from the deity who protects the community (Tutelary gods Chu Xích Công and Trần Quốc Thi) to the ancestors of the village clans (the ten meritorious officials<sup>4</sup> who followed Chu Xích Công to defeat the Champa invaders); and from *hậu thần* (those who have been seen as god recently) to fallen heroes. In Hòa Liễu village, the traditional model of worshipping the Tutelary god and deities collapsed after 1945 when these relics were destroyed. Of the village community religious relics only the temple remains. This was originally a place to worship the Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn (wife of King Mạc Đăng Dung) - who was credited with having pagodas built, establishing hamlets,

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<sup>1</sup> The ordinations dating from the Vĩnh Khánh (1730), Cảnh Hưng (1784), Quang Trung (1790), Cảnh Thịnh (1793) periods to Tự Đức, Khải Định, Đồng Khánh, Thành Thái, Duy Tân periods of the Nguyễn Dynasty.

<sup>2</sup> The book *Ngọc phả cổ lục* (*Old Records of Genealogical History*) of Đại Trà commune was recorded in Tự Đức's reign (1860). Contents of records of the biography, the behaviors, the process of ordination, rituals of worshipping the God Chu Xích Công; and at the last of the book, there is noted the dated, the compiler, and the copyist.

<sup>3</sup> The *Đại Trà's Village Regulation* (1935) archived by the Institute of Social Sciences Information has the content written in Vietnamese alphabet script, the last part (date, signature) was written in Sino characters.

<sup>4</sup> Legend has it that ten ancestors of the clans in Đại Trà village followed Chu Xích Công to fight the enemy, including: Lê Công Minh, Lê Công Tự, Lê Công Cán, Phạm Công Trung, Phạm Công Trí, Phạm Công Hanh, Phạm Công Hinh, Trần Công Đoàn, Nguyễn Công Viên, and Đào Công Lễ.

and helping Hòa Liễu villagers to live peacefully<sup>5</sup>. The legend about her and surviving relics (such as stone steles, worshipping statues, and historical documents) provide a relatively clear biography of her and her character, especially relating to the Integrity Oath (i.e., *Minh thệ* in Vietnamese) ceremony. During the restoration of the vestiges, the relic relating to the Tutelary god is the worshipping hat (and worshipping statue) brought by people to the temple for worship in the right side of the vestibule. The disappearance of most documents relating to the Tutelary god and the lengthy interruption of worshipping rituals has blurred the people's memory about the Tutelary god. According to Mr Phạm Đăng Khoa, an intellectual in the village, Hòa Liễu village's Tutelary god is "*Bản Thổ Thiên Quan Đại Vương Tước Phong Mục Rục Tứ Kim Chính Thận Thượng Đẳng Linh Thần*". According to the citation written in Sino script in the Nguyễn Dynasty, the Tutelary god of the village is *Thiên Quan Đương Cảnh Thành Hoàng* (Celestial official, Tutelary god of this village). Currently, the Hòa Liễu villagers refer to him as the *Thiên Quan* (celestial official) or *Thiên Quang* (celestial light).

In Kim Sơn village, the records about the gods and goddesses have long since been lost. The memory of the Tutelary god has faded away, many elements of folk legends have been added, making it even harder to authenticate. The village is located in the alluvial land of the Văn Úc and Đa Độ rivers with more than 600 years of history (KSPC & MC for Building Kim Sơn Cultural Village, 2005). The flow of alluvial addition takes place continuously, resulting in the Kim Sơn boundary moving further inland. According to the inhabitants, the village Tutelary god is the meritorious official who reclaimed land from the sea, founded the village, and taught the inhabitants the profession of salt making. The custom of calling "*diêm*" (i.e., salt) with the meaning of respecting the Tutelary god and the salt making industry of the village originated here. The disappearance of historical documents has led to inconsistencies in the god's name. The history book of Kim Sơn village records the god as *Đông Hải Đại Vương Thần hoàng Thiên Quan* (Lord of East Sea, Tutelary god and Celestial official) Vũ Muối. However, current records of relics and discussions refers to the Tutelary god as the god of *Mũ Muối* (i.e., Salt Hat) and the *Hũ Muối* (i.e., Salt Jar)<sup>6</sup>. Research on places where General Đoàn Thượng is worshipped by descendants of the Đoàn clan confirmed that Kim Sơn communal house worships *Đông Hải Đại Vương* (i.e., Lord of East Sea)

<sup>5</sup> Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn is the wife of King Mạc Đăng Dung. She established this village, recruited people, spent money to buy fields, and called many aristocracies to contribute to the construction of Hòa Liễu pagoda. In the book *Kiến Thủy xưa và nay (Kiến Thủy - Past and Present)*, her name is Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn. There is another legend that Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn and Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn are two sisters, one is worshiped in Hòa Liễu and the other is worshiped in Trà Phương, so these two villages have a good relationship with each other (according to Mr Phạm Đăng Khoa).

<sup>6</sup> In the *Dossier of National-level Relic Artifacts of Kim Sơn's Communal House*, it is recorded as Lord of South Sea, Tutelary god (God of Salt Hat); in the book *History of Kim Sơn Village*, it is recorded as the name Lord of East Sea, Celestial official, and Tutelary god Vũ Muối; in the present oration document by Vietnamese alphabet script, his name is Vũ Muối; local people call him the God of Salt Jar.

Đoàn Thượng (Thomas R. & Alexander H., 2012). Currently, despite the name inconsistency, the belief in worshipping the Tutelary god in Kim Son village is still followed and developed based on the “ritual tradition” towards the god that provides protective supervision for the community over time. In fact, the way to call “Tutelary god”, “Tutelary god of village”, “Tutelary god who is worshiped in this village”, “Celestial official”... is the way to identify the village guardian deity commonly found in many places today. When documentation about a deity being worshipped is missing it clouds the memory; therefore, the above designations emphasise the deity's ownership and his ability to inspire in the community (on-site).

Notably, among the objects worshipped at the three above-mentioned relics, there are a number of historical figures associated with the Mạc Dynasty of the Kinh Dương area, including: God Hồng Ninh, said to be King Mạc Mục Tông himself, alias Mạc Mậu Hợp (1560-1593 who reigned from 1562 to 1592); Grand Commandant (Thái úy - 太尉) Trung Quốc Công and Thái Kính Phi were husband and wife, meritorious officials in the Mạc Dynasty; Nguyễn Như Quế from Đại Trà village (Đại Trà communal house); and the Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn (mentioned previously) (Hòa Liễu Temple). In addition, some gods are associated with the sea-oriented mind of the coastal community here, such as: *Nam Hải Trung Đẳng Thần* (meaning 南海中當神 - Nanhai zhong dang shen - Middle-ranking God of South Sea) (Đại Trà communal house), and *Đông Hải Đại Vương Thiên Quan* (Lord of East Sea, Celestial official) Vũ Muối (Kim Son communal house). On the other hand, temples dedicated to the Tutelary gods in these three localities also clearly show integration (adding new elements) and exclusion (old elements fading away). In Đại Trà village, when renovating the communal house (1992-1993), villagers brought in a tablet to worship Confucius for the middle altar, they also added an altar to worship President Hồ Chí Minh (on the right) and one for “Your country appreciates your sacrifice” dedicated to worshipping fallen heroes and martyrs. Later on, the altar to worship President Hồ Chí Minh was no longer maintained and only a bust was placed in the hall of the community house. In today's discussions about Đại Trà and Kim Son villages, heroes and martyrs, ancestors of families, patron saints, and “*hậu thần*” (i.e., local people with merit are worshiped with the village gods) are the objects of ritual coordination, something that the ancient discourses did not mention or clarify. This “new addition” has brought about unity based on the principle of respect and fairness: all gods, ancestors, and people with meritorious services are worshipped. Therefore, all families, no matter how many family members, must perform the “responsibility” of worshipping the Tutelary gods/deities in the community.

It is easy to see that the inspiration of the Tutelary god (understood as the “ability” of the gods to intervene in the destiny of each individual and community in these localities) is often expressed in the two aspects of blessing or disaster. Nowadays, worshipping the Tutelary god is symbiotic with what people need in life, so it tends to be more pragmatic. Because of this, the god's role also changes to meet the new need that has arisen. In Đại Trà and Kim Son villages, their Tutelary gods from having discovered the villages, supported the king fight the enemy, and helped the people settle down and live in peace, gradually have assumed the role of almighty gods, who helps the village “inhabitants get whatever they



want” of urban residents (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 2007, p.37). Meanwhile, in Hòa Liễu village, the function and influence of the Tutelary gods has declined. Once the “supreme” god - the governor of the village temple - is now regarded just as one of the “arbiters” to ensure the fairness and inspiration of the oath in the Integrity Oath ceremony. The historical figure of Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn gradually holds an important position in the people's consciousness, being worshipped as a guardian deity - “the village Tutelary goddess” (Luong Văn Hy & Trương Huyền Chi, 2012, p.91).

In addition, the concept of “cause and effect” emphasises that the results of worshipping the Tutelary god have “personalised” behaviour. Those who have gained achievements in business, in their studies and examinations, those in good health, and who have good luck, etc., try to offer thanks the gods for their good blessings through making offerings and contributing funds for renovation and construction work in communal houses/temples. Those who are unlucky or unsuccessful, who encounter disasters, illness, business losses, etc., find a way to “present modest offerings” and ask the Tutelary god to forgive all their acts of desecration hoping that “disaster” does not befall them again. Therefore, contributing to the renovation of relics and organising festivals is completely voluntary, attracting resources in these localities under the strategy of “socialisation” to restore traditional culture. In addition, the relationship of “*cộng cảm*” and “*cộng mệnh*” (meaning that individuals in the community can share their destiny and sympathise with one another) (Ngô Minh Khiêm, 2021, p.112) - which arises from the common bond of fate determined by the earth’s position, the direction the communal house faces, and Tutelary god worship - continues to be the driving force creating a strong connection between people living in or having their homeland in Đại Trà, Hòa Liễu, and Kim Sơn villages. In the communities surveyed by the authors, there are spaces for worshipping other objects believed to have supernatural powers, such as God (the Catholic church in Kim Sơn), Buddha (including the Vietnamese Mother Goddess), a member of the royal family of the Mạc Dynasty, President Hồ Chí Minh, and the Tiger god in pagodas and temples outside the villages. However, worshipping the Tutelary god is still the focus of community ritual activities. On major holidays almost every family visits the village communal house to worship and pray for protection, and ask for blessings and support of the Tutelary god and other deities.

#### 4. Reinvention of space to worship Tutelary god

Before 1945, Tutelary god worship took place at shrines or communal houses belonging to the community's worshipping work according to the institution of the feudal state, which was the focus in the spiritual life of the village. In Đại Trà village, the worshipping space for the Tutelary god was originally a small shrine built on the foundations of “sacred land under the South Heaven”, where Chu Xích Công chose to settle down and “go to heaven”<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> According to *Ngọc phả cổ lục* (*Old Records of Genealogical History*) from the relic of Đại Trà communal house.

Later, the shrine was developed into a full blown communal house, with three sanctuary compartments, five grand halls with large ironwood columns, a well tiled roof, a building decorated with carved motifs, fine patterns and green stone steps<sup>8</sup>. In Hòa Liễu village, the Tutelary god is worshipped in the temple and communal house. While the temple is the place where the god resides, the communal house is where the ritual activities and the annual Integrity Oath ceremony takes place. In Kim Son village, the worship of the Tutelary god initially took place in Đượng communal house, dating back to “the end of the Later Lê Dynasty” (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 2007, p.280). As the population growth increased, the residential area was expanded, people also built the Đoài communal house and carried incense from the Đượng communal house to the Đoài communal house for worshipping rituals. In 1922, a major restoration of both communal houses was carried out in Chinese character ding “丁” style architecture. Inside the communal house are five vestibules and sanctuary compartments made of ironwood, a surrounding plywood wall and a wooden floor (KSPC & MC for Building Kim Son Cultural Village, 2005, pp.7-8). In 1946, to meet the requirements of the resistance war against the French, the Kim Son villagers dismantled the Đoài communal house in its entirety and the five vestibules of the Đượng communal house; they moved votive tablets and items for the worshipping the Tutelary god from the Đoài communal house to the three sanctuary compartments of the Đượng communal house for joint worship rituals. When the anti-Japanese movement to save Vietnam really gained momentum, the Đượng communal house became a centre of revolutionary activity, from where the Việt Minh's Committee for National Liberation was established (on 12 July 1945) - the first revolutionary government organisation of Kiến An province and the northern coastal region. In 1950, the sanctuary compartment of the communal house was renovated and refurbished (Hải Phòng Museum, 2007).

For decades following the August Revolution in 1945, rituals and festivals were considered idealistic and superstitious, a waste of time and money, and incompatible with development and scientific progress. Tutelary god worship in Đại Trà and Kim Son villages was performed in moderation, while in Hòa Liễu village it was completely abolished. The village public architectural structures were considered “remnants” of the old regime, they were seriously encroached upon and desecrated. Đại Trà communal house was to take on a secular administrative function, some worshipping items were destroyed while the rest had to be sent to the pagoda and villagers’ ancestral halls (宗祠). Kim Son communal house became the base of revolutionary activities with historical and political significance. Meanwhile, Hòa Liễu communal house and temple were destroyed following which the sacred spaces were used for residential land (as in the case of the communal house), and with the temple only the old foundations remained. This situation lasted until the party and state adopted the new viewpoints and policies of Đổi mới. Worship and ritual facilities were then positively revalued. Communal houses and temples in the localities the authors surveyed have been restored and renovated, firstly by the people, and then with the government support.

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<sup>8</sup> Documents recorded by Mr Bùi Thành Các, kept at the relic of Đại Trà communal house.

The state and the locality were in agreement about the process for restoring relics in Đại Trà, Hòa Liễu, and Kim Sơn villages. The state's policy was to pave the way, while the locality determined the outcome. The villagers, particularly the elderly contingent, had deep yearnings to restore the communal house. This "elite" group still retained their customs and rituals, and traditional religious experiences. Under the guidance and permission of the authorities at all levels, inhabitants in the three villages mobilised "local resources" nonstop, which they referred to as "donations". They collected documents and sought to prove the value of the place of worship in all aspects (such as historical, cultural, artistic, and architectural), proving the biography, behaviour, and inspiration of the god being worshipped, and the social significance of a local community ritual. Their purpose was to obtain state recognition. As a result, the three above relics (relic clusters) were assessed and then recognised by the state at the national level based on their existing values: Kim Sơn communal house was ranked a historical revolutionary relic (in 1986); Đại Trà communal house was ranked as an architectural and artistic monument as part of the pagoda and communal house relic cluster of Đại Trà village (in 1993); and Hòa Liễu temple was ranked a historical cultural relic for the Hòa Liễu temple - pagoda complex (1993). The state's recognition and ranking activity for relics legitimises worship facilities by the state, used as the basis for giving relics, rituals, and festivals heritage status later on.

In Đại Trà village in the early 1990s, a group of elderly people repeatedly applied to the government for permission to be allowed to take over and resume worshipping the Tutelary god in the old communal house. On New Year's Eve of the Year of Water Monkey (1992), after cleaning, repairing, and rearranging all worshipping items and practicing rituals, the Tutelary god worship ceremony was held. The atmosphere was sacred and poignant. In 1994, the five great pavilions of Đại Trà communal house were rebuilt; the initial funding came from contributions made by all local people and those far from their home village. On 12 March 1995, the solemn inauguration ceremony of Đại Trà communal house was held by the People's Committee of Đông Phương commune<sup>9</sup>. In the years that followed many items in the communal house continued to be renovated and constructed. In particular in 2013, with VND 300 million from the People's Committee of Hải Phòng City and the reciprocal money contributed by the people of Đại Trà village, auxiliary works were carried out (including logistics and sports areas, toilets, walling and garden miniatures), making the communal house more spacious and comfortable. The total area of Đại Trà communal house currently covers 2,065m<sup>2</sup>, a part of which has been allocated by the local government for building a cultural house for the village.

Nowadays, in Hòa Liễu village, only Hòa Liễu temple<sup>10</sup> and Thiên Phúc pagoda remain in the same area, which is the place where the reinstated the Integrity Oath ceremony is organised.

<sup>9</sup> Documents recorded by Mr Bùi Thành Các, kept at the relic of Đại Trà communal house.

<sup>10</sup> The relief of Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn is embossed, and the stele behind it is written that *Vân Tiên động tối linh từ* (Heaven Fairy Cave Supreme Sacred Temple). The authors Chu Xuân Giao and Phan Lan Hương (2012) called Hòa Liễu Temple's name is Heaven Fairy Cave Supreme Sacred Temple.

This cluster of relics is located outside the residential area, southwest of Thuận Thiên commune, adjacent to An Thái commune (An Lão district), facing south overlooking the fields of Cỗ Trai village (the native village of the King Mạc Đăng Dung (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 2007, p.101). The overall look of the relic is different from the traditional architecture of the northern plains, and it is easy to imagine that this is the structure of “*Tiền Phật Hậu Thánh*” (Buddha in the front and God at the back); however, in fact they are two separate works. Hòa Liễu temple is based on a Chinese character “二” styled architectural structure, consisting of two parallel wooden buildings (a front hall/worship hall and a sanctuary compartment). The front hall has a horizontal lacquered plaque engraved with the Sino characters 淳風美俗 (i.e., *Thuần phong mỹ tục* - pure customs and fine traditions) which King Tự Đức conferred on Hòa Liễu village in recognition of the villagers’ good traditions and refined customs. Below this is the incense table; the space on the left is the stele house containing eight stone steles; and the right space is the altar for worship of the Tutelary god. The sanctuary compartment consists of a room and two wings where the dragon-engraved incense table and a relief statue of the Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn are located; immediately above is a horizontal lacquered board engraved with the Sino characters - 碧桃王母 (*Bích Đào vương mẫu* - Queen Mother of Peach Blossom), which was donated in the Year of Fire Rooster (1933) during the reign of King Bảo Đại, praising her merits<sup>11</sup>. Outside the temple, a small incense burning house has just been erected for burning incense and votive papers during festivals. There is a stone pillar in front of the communal house yard, which is said to have come from Kình Chủ mountain in Kinh Môn district, Hải Dương province brought here by Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn for the temple and pagoda construction (Lê Hồng Lý, 2018, pp.49-51). Currently, the Hòa Liễu villagers call the stone pillar *Cột đá minh thể* (Integrity Oath stone pillar) or *Cột đá thông thiên* (celestial stone pillar), symbolising “compassion” and the connection between humans and gods.

In 1990, renovation started on Kim Sơn communal house in order to prevent deterioration as well as construction work as part of the campus. In 2005, the communal house foundations were raised to 0.7m to avoid flooding, and the bonsai tree area was also refurbished and improved. In 2018, the Hải Phòng city authorities provided some funding for anti-leakage and anti-termite work. However, the narrow sanctuary compartment (150m<sup>2</sup>) was not large enough to meet the needs of worship rituals, and many auxiliary items and landscaping were still in a bad condition. Faced with such a situation, in 2019 the Kim Sơn Communal House Relic Management Board, in conjunction with the Council of Clan, and the Elderly Association of the village, organised a campaign to mobilise the locals and native villagers who had moved way to contribute funds for the construction and renovation of the relics, namely building five new worship pavilions, and rebuilding the stele house, walls, and campus. More than VND 1.5 billion was raised, partly to meet the basic

<sup>11</sup> In *A Summary of Temple - Pagoda Relics in Hòa Liễu Village, Thuận Thiên Commune, Kiến Thụy District, Hải Phòng City - National-level Historic Site* records that the temple has a San (三) style structure consisting of three buildings: the front and middle halls and the sanctuary compartment.

needs of construction and renovation work<sup>12</sup>. The problem arose because Kim Son communal house is a national-level relic; hence, construction and renovation work required the approval of many levels of government, going through numerous administrative procedures. The accumulation of funds to buy materials and hire manpower was relatively complete, but the process of building the pavilions was interrupted and not completed until 2021.

In general, the structure and architecture of the three monuments are now under the general planning of the locality, and are related to other religious and cultural works. In Đại Trà village, the village cultural house was built right next to the communal house, becoming a place for community activities and an auxiliary space for rituals held in the communal house. In Kim Son, the cultural house and the house of family heads were built separately outside the communal house, along with the communal pond in front, a relatively spacious area was created - both a route for people and a playground for the ball-wrestling festival (a ball made of banana root played by two teams in a muddy field, which team brings the ball more times to the post (a hole in the field) is the winner. This will be mentioned in more detail later on in this article). In Hòa Liễu village, the temple is located next to the village pagoda, sharing the same entrance gate, forming a unified cluster of relics. In Đại Trà and Kim Son villages, the restoration process of worshipping the Tutelary god has many advantages because relatively adequate worshipping space and relics are still maintained. Meanwhile, in Hòa Liễu village, the government and people were unable to restore the previous communal house/temple, so the Integrity Oath ceremony is now held in an integrated manner in the present Hòa Liễu temple - pagoda complex.

With social development, on the one hand people in these localities, have a desire to retain the “ancient majesty” of the communal house/temple. In addition to rebuilding the communal house in the old architectural style and rearranging relics, there is also a focus on the elements of “*hồi cố, phỏng cổ*” (retrospective and ancient style). In Đại Trà village, only two out of 11 couplets are excerpts from a poem in the book *Ngọc phá cổ lục*, the remaining nine sentences were prepared by some of the village elders<sup>13</sup> during the communal house rebuilding (1993). In Hòa Liễu village, in addition to two horizontal lacquered boards, which are relics from the Nguyễn Dynasty, the currently existing couplets were written and restored by the elderly during the temple’s rebuilding. In Kim Son village, the new couplets in the sanctuary compartment are written in Nôm script to create synchronisation. People also continually strive to continue making local relics more monumental, in order to meet current aesthetic needs and tastes. In Đại Trà and Kim Son villages, ancillary areas such as kitchens, warehouses, play areas, communal ponds and yards, campuses, and walls have also been built and painted. Meanwhile, the Management Board of Temple - Pagoda Relics and the Elderly Association in Hòa Liễu village are still trying to raise funds from the community to be able to build and renovate the temple in the near future.

<sup>12</sup> This information provided in an in-depth interview with a 70-year-old Kim Son villager.

<sup>13</sup> These elders are Mr Bùi Thành Các, Mr Nguyễn Văn Tạo, Mr Nguyễn Văn Hy and Mr Phạm Văn Hùng.

## 5. Restoration and reinvention of community's ritual of worshipping Tutelary god

In the past, rituals related to the village relics were often regulated in antecedents, rules or other codes of conduct and taboos according to village conventions. The process of reinventing traditional rituals after Đổi mới took place actively in the localities. The ritual process and the festival script were formulated on the basis of the traditions and customs of the past and adoption of new additions to ensure the historical requirements, perceptions and tastes of the local people. In particular, the festivals should “meet the wish for prosperity of the whole community” (Đình Công Vĩ, 1998, p.50).

In the period from 1992 to 1994, the worshipping rituals at Đại Trà village communal house were restored in a simplified way, without holding consecration and blessing ceremonies. On 13 January (lunar calendar) - the birthday, and 20 October (lunar calendar) - the sanctification date of Tutelary god Chu Xích Công - only worshipping rituals, not festivals, were organised. Meanwhile, the Firecracker festival (4 January of the lunar calendar) and the death anniversary of Tutelary god Trần Quốc Thi (4 September of the lunar calendar), were held on a large scale, with the reinstatement of the village festival. In particular, the “acceptance ceremony” was solemnly held on 13 February 1993 (lunar calendar) to receive the certificate of recognition of the National-level Artistic Architectural Relic, much to the joy of the local people. It then became an annual celebration with the rituals of offering incense and reading scriptures. The Firecracker festival - a famous festival of the Kiến Thụy region to commemorate the victory of Tutelary god Chu Xích Công - was quickly resurrected and reorganised on 4 January (lunar calendar). Techniques for making explosives, rolling and decorating firecrackers, the process of the firecracker procession, firecracker offerings and firecracker competition, were organised according to the continuing customs. During those three years, there was a bustling festive atmosphere throughout the villages in the early days of spring. The spirit of peace among the former Đại Trà villages (consisting Đại Trà, Phong Cầu, Đức Phong, and Lạng Côn) was restored: “the villagers organise a firecracker procession around their respective villages which they bring to the communal house which is filled with an exciting atmosphere” (Trịnh Minh Hiền, 2011, p.119). However, on 1 January 1995 Directive No.406/TTg of the Prime Minister issued on 8 August 1994 came into effect which banned the production, trading, and burning of firecrackers, and once again the Firecracker festival could not be held. The model of paper firecrackers, agreed by the Relics Management Board and the Elderly Association, placed at the altar in the central part of the communal house, became a sacred symbol to “remind future generations of the traditional memories left by their ancestors”<sup>14</sup>.

Until now, the elderly generation in Đại Trà village has always wished to be able to hold the procession and make offerings of model firecrackers in order to revive the tradition, preserve the local identity, and increase the New Year excitement. The “negotiation” between the people and the government has been ongoing for many years, but this proposal has not

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Document of Cultural and Historical Relic of Đại Trà Long Communal House*, by Mr Bùi Thành Các, kept at Đại Trà communal house.

been accepted due to concerns that the firecracker festival will incite people, especially the young, to start setting off firecrackers again, causing insecurity, disorder, and endangering health and life. The death anniversary date of Tutelary god Trần Quốc Thi (4 September of the lunar calendar) has been combined with the village festival. In fact, the selection of a god, said to be a general/prince consort under the Trần Dynasty, and who was credited with governing and developing the historical Đại Trà site in place of the human god of Chinese origin in the contemporary socio-political situation, is a decision reflecting the flexibility and sensitivity of the locality, quickly receiving the state's support. On the village festival day, the ritual activities (the announcement, the main worship ceremony, the offering of worship items, etc.) and the incense offering ceremony are the focal point. Each year, the Relics Management Board creatively pays due attention to cultural, sports, and artistic activities. This is in order to attract people and create a happy festival atmosphere. For the organising committee, the success of the festival is the mobilisation of religious consciousness and the response of the people in all activities related to the communal house and the Tutelary god.

In Hòa Liễu village, during the period from 1945 to the 1990s, the Tutelary god worshipping ceremony was no longer held, and the Integrity Oath ceremony was also postponed. In 1993, the Hòa Liễu temple and pagoda relic complex was recognised by the state as a national-level historical and cultural relic. Afterwards, the festival of Hòa Liễu temple and pagoda was restored and subsequently held annually. Realising the unique values of the Integrity Oath ceremony, the elders, represented by Mr Phạm Đăng Khoa, were determined to revive this ritual. However, there were many difficulties. On the one hand, it was necessary to collect and piece together historical documents and recall events; on the other hand, it was essential to disseminate them for people to understand the tradition and meaning of the ceremony, while at the same time convincing the government to agree. As a result, after many years, the elders were able to rewrite the village convention (based on Hòa Liễu village reformative convention in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with additions and amendments to suit the current reality) and redesign the process of the Integrity Oath ceremony. In 2002, the latter was restored; however, instead of taking place on 24 December (lunar calendar) as pre-1945, it was integrated and organised into the traditional festival of the Hòa Liễu temple - pagoda (also known as the Spring festival) held as the main event on 14 January of the lunar calendar. The festival organising board, in addition to the participation of representatives of the government, local departments, and the Management Board of the Communal House - Pagoda Relics, also included the Buddhist group in charge of logistics and financial accounts. According to the Spring festival programme in the Year of Fire Monkey (2004), the ceremony was organised as follows: on the afternoon of 13 January, the organisers prepared a grand opening ceremony, cleaned joss statues at the temple, and performed the early spring worship ritual at the pagoda; on the morning of 14 January, the Integrity Oath ceremony was held at the temple; on 16 January, the *lễ tế giã* (farewell ceremony) was performed at the temple and *cúng Mông Sơn thí thực - Chân tế* (the Mengshan

(蒙山)<sup>15</sup> rite to offering food - Relief rite) at the pagoda. Activities such as offering incense, arts and sporting events, etc., took place throughout the festival period.

In 2017, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism included the Integrity Oath ceremony on the List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage. The ceremony to receive and honour the Certificate for the Integrity Oath inclusion on the List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>16</sup> in Hòa Liễu village, was held on the main festival day in 2018. This certificate was placed in a glass frame, and carried on a dragon palanquin, in a procession with banners, drums, gongs, and eight weapons, moving from the People's Committee of Thuận Thiên commune to Hòa Liễu temple. It continued to be “sanctifying” through offering incense rituals to the Grand Empress Dowager Vũ Thị Ngọc Toàn, the Tutelary god and other gods in the temple. In the authors' opinion, this activity reflects the “traditional creativity” in Hòa Liễu village, recalling the ordination welcoming ceremony held in the past, and expressing the need for “*quan phương hóa*” (conferred honoured localisation by the state) from both the state and the local government. In the context that corruption has become a serious problem in Vietnam today, the Integrity Oath ceremony carries a special social and cultural significance. Belief in the cult of a person expressed in the sacred space and time of the Integrity Oath ceremony conveyed the community's core values of honesty, fairness, and freedom from corruption to the people. The echo of the Integrity Oath ceremony helps to inspire and contribute to re-establishing the symbolic values of the Hòa Liễu village community. According to Chu Xuân Giao and Phan Lan Hương (2012), “the Integrity Oath ceremony of the past expresses today's wishes and aspirations”.

In Kim Sơn village, the festival of worshipping the Tutelary god takes place annually on 18 December of the lunar calendar. It is called the “opening ceremony of the communal house”, “opening” for the important ritual series of the village. Usually, the Tutelary god worshipping ceremony is performed by 11 priests who sit on the Board of Priests, complete with costumes, music, orations, and certain items, abiding by strict procedures. This is followed by an incense offering ceremony by villagers and visitors. After this day, preparations for the ball-wrestling festival are quickly completed. The ceremony to notify the Tutelary god of “out with the old and in with the new” is held on New Year's Eve. Everyone takes time to visit the communal house to offer incense and ask for the Tutelary god's blessing for a peaceful and favourable new year. An important highlight in Kim Sơn village festival is the popular northern ball-wrestling festival. This originated from the farmers' “pray for water” belief when they asked for a balance of rain and wind. It then crystallised the spirit of the nation's struggle. Legend has it that the Kim Sơn village ball-

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<sup>15</sup> This rite was written in the scriptures by Master Bùdòng (i.e, Master Ganlu) in Song Dynasty, lived in Meng mountain (i.e, Mengshan), Mingshan district, Ya'an prefecture, Shichuan province. Therefore, this ritual is named after the mountain, which is Mengshan - editor's note.

<sup>16</sup> According to Decision No.1852/QĐ-BVHTTDL dated 8 May 2017 of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism on the release of the List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage, Phase XVIII. The *Minh thệ* (Integrity Oath) ceremony is No.204 in this list.



wrestling festival originated from activities carried out during military training and physical exercise of soldiers under the command of General Phạm Ngũ Lão when troops were stationed in the village. It was then held annually at the beginning of the new year in association with the communal house and the ritual ceremony of worshipping the Tutelary god. It thus became a traditional cultural activity. In particular, the ball used in the ball-wrestling festival in Kim Sơn village is made from the tuber root of a banana tree weighing more than 20kg, hewn into a smooth sphere with a diameter of more than 30cm, the outside of which is wrapped in coloured paper, and decorated with the four sacred animals (i.e., the dragon, qilin, turtle, and phoenix).

After 1945 the Kim Sơn ball-wrestling festival was postponed for a long time. In 1997, it was brought back, associated with the goal of building a “pilot cultural village” in Tân Trào commune, Hải Phòng city. As usual, the Kim Sơn village ball-wrestling festival is held every three years (on 6 January of lunar calendar), and the next year “praying for fish” festival with the *Sủ vàng* fish (Bronze croaker) procession in Ngọc Tĩnh village (10 January of lunar calendar) will be organised, and next year the *Chạy đá* festival (searching for the sacred stone in the pond) - *Ông Bò* pig procession festival in Kỳ Sơn village (9 to 10 January of lunar calendar). About three months before the festival, the decision to organise the festival programme was approved. The festival organising committee was established to be in charge of the administration and assigning the festival operations (with the Standing Vice Chairman of the People’s Committee of Tân Trào commune as the head and representatives of agencies and departments of Kiến Thụy district, Tân Trào commune, Kim Sơn village as members). In the process of developing the festival rundown, a number of factors were adjusted, such as: shortening the duration of the ceremony, reducing cumbersome procedures, and adding contemporary elements such as: the flag dance ceremony, the dragon dance, a model paper ball procession (containing balloons to be released at the opening of the festival) in order to create a happy and lively atmosphere. In addition, the rules of the game also changed to create more excitement and attract a larger number of attendees. Three ball-wrestling teams representing three *giáp* (i.e., Đương - Nam - Bắc) - each team consisting of five strong wrestlers - participated in a three-round competition, each lasting 15 minutes, under the supervision of an umpire. After each round, the teams had a 10 minute rest, handing the festival ground over to the dragon and flag dances. The first team to move the ball from the main ball hole to the secondary hole having the most strength, dexterity, and ability is declared the winner. For many years, the results were calculated according to the total number of points, and no team won outright. In the last round, the teams often tried to push the ball into the communal pond with the concept of “bathing the ball” in order to bring the whole village good luck. The sound of drums and lively music, together with the noise of media speakers broadcasting a commentary on the match, the cultural history, and socio-economic achievements of the locality in the current period, etc., created a great festival atmosphere. Participants felt their presence within the common roots with a sense of pride. Regarding the 2020

festival, Hải Phòng Newspaper in collaboration with VNPT Hải Phòng donated the prize money, which inspired the teams to compete.

During the ball-wrestling festival, the ceremony of “sanctifying” the ball was strictly adhered to, with the ball procession going from the communal house to the yard, then the celebrant and priest dropping the ball into the pit, after which the start of the contest is declared. All explanations for the outcome of the match were related to the sacred world, to the future of the villagers, to the process of adjusting the rules of the game to satisfy the needs of the entire community. Many stories about the epiphany of the village Tutelary god continue to be circulated in Kim Sơn, including an event held in the 2013 festival. When Hải Phòng Radio and Television Station filmed the ball-wrestling festival, television waves were disconnected, and filming was not possible. Only when the chairman of Tân Trào commune, along with the celebrant, returned to the communal house to burn incense and pray to the Tutelary god, could the film crew continue with their work.

In summary, the process of restoring the ritual of worshipping the Tutelary god and the traditional festivals of Đại Trà, Kim Sơn, and Hòa Liễu villages are associated with the common goal of the programme to build a “Cultural Village” in Kiến Thụy district. The results of the restoration are regarded as a combination of factors as the “driving forces” created by the community, the state, local authorities, and scientists; however, the media’s role should also be emphasised. In fact, the authors found that the media (Hải Phòng Newspaper, Hải Phòng Radio and Television Station, Vietnam News Agency, VTV, VOV, etc.) has contributed to the dissemination and promotion of documents, identifying values, contributing to the conservation and development of Tutelary god belief, as well as cultural heritages in the three villages.

In addition, the role of the bloodline community in the process of restoring community rituals and festivals in the three above-mentioned villages is always emphasised. According to legend, in Đại Trà village, the ancestors of ten original clans were the ten generals who followed the Tutelary god of the village to fight against foreign invaders. Therefore, worshipping the Tutelary god is both a ritual to commemorate the deity who protects the community and also a means to remember the ancestors of the clan. In Kim Sơn village, the *giáp* was formed on the basis of the residential area and blood relationship of 24 original clans. Family beliefs are preserved and developed with institutions of the ancestral temple/worship hall and popular annual ancestral/clan rituals. The Council of Family Heads in the village is an organisation representing the clans involved in deciding the general affairs of the village. The outcome of every “village meeting” is the result of the “meeting of family heads”. The contribution of funds for repairing the communal house and the offerings for the Tutelary god ceremony all bear the outstanding imprint of the community clans. The drum beat of the early Spring festival echoes the sound of drums of the clans in the village, symbolically reminiscent of their roots, resonating with the sacred solidarity and strength of the whole village.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

The revival and transformation of Tutelary god beliefs associated with the context of religious revival in Vietnam since Đổi mới took place in terms of beliefs, worship facilities, ritual practices, and the worship community. In Đại Trà, Hòa Liễu, and Kim Sơn villages, the process of recovering the Tutelary god belief reflects the change in religious consciousness, spiritual needs, and methods of community cohesion. In general, the Tutelary god beliefs in these three localities, besides preserving the elements of identity and tradition, also show new elements to suit different living conditions. These can be observed in the following main points: (i) the relics of communal houses and temples were restored, more items were built, old and new artefacts were combined for decoration, and more ritual spaces were created for the community's increasing needs of participation; (ii) the model of management of relics and traditional ritual/festival activities is based on a combination of the state and the people; (iii) the festival script has been standardised in terms of the opening programme, the participants and the actual ceremony, with adjustments made to shorten the length and process, and to simplify the items and worship offerings. While the *rituals* associated with the worshipped Tutelary god are usually conducted with the utmost effort to comply with the *worship traditions*, other elements belonging to the *festival* part such as folk games and sports competitions, art performances, and many other elements, are adjusted with new additions; (iv) technology, such as sound, lighting and decoration, is incorporated; (v) media participation has facilitated the organisation of the ceremony/festival, attracting a large number of local people and promoting it more widely to tourists/visitors from all over the world.

Inhabitants in the three villages of Đại Trà, Hòa Liễu, and Kim Sơn (except for a small number of Catholics) still maintain a polytheistic mentality, taking ancestor worship, Buddha and god worship as the foundation. The process of restoring Tutelary god beliefs in these three localities is connected with other religious belief traditions, and contributing to the sustainability and cohesion of the community, preserving the inherited cultural heritages, towards the common development of the village. In Đại Trà and Kim Sơn villages, the relationship of the village clans has been stable over time, which is an important factor in preserving and developing the Tutelary god belief. Economically, the potential of families and clans is of great significance in mobilising socialised funds for relic restoration. Spiritually, the development of ancestor worship rituals of the clans is one of the important prerequisites for the revival of community rituals of these villages.

Finally, the authors would like to emphasise some features of the restoration and transformation of the Tutelary god belief in Kiến Thụy district. These processes take place at different levels, achieving different results because they depend on the specific capacity of local intellectuals and elites in connecting ideas, mobilising resources, and winning over local authority cooperation and approval. At the same time, the process of restoration and transformation of beliefs has a clear sensitivity concerning the sense of conveying political

messages (setting an example, promoting the anti-corruption movement, encouraging chivalry to protect the Fatherland, emphasising historical-revolutionary traditions, and so on) to participants and spectators. After all, the processes of modernisation and urbanisation that have been taking place aggressively in these localities is not a threat, but rather a positive agent for the resurgence, and thus the future, of Tutelary god beliefs.

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