

ANNUSKA DERKS AND CAO THẢO HƯƠNG

Heritage as a Space of Possibility: Transformation, Commodification, and Belonging at Đông Công Temple in Yên Bái, Vietnam

Situated on the banks of the Red River, surrounded by lush green trees and a picturesque mountain panorama, Đông Công Temple in Văn Yên District, Yên Bái Province, evokes images of times past. The temple has a long history, though the main hall is of recent origin—and not only the temple's structures but also its ceremonies, functions, management, deities, and devotees have changed considerably over time. In this article, we explore these changes and their relation to heritagization processes. We recount how Đông Công Temple transformed during the past three decades from a site of rubble into a popular religious and spiritual destination, attracting tens of thousands of visitors annually for its festivals, spirit medium ceremonies, and prayers to the Mother Goddess of the Mountains and Forests [Mẫu Thượng Ngàn]. We analyze how these transformations relate to provincial politics of heritagization and development, the resurgence and invention of religious and spiritual practices, and the creation of inequalities in wealth and ethnicity. Our analysis thus complements the article by Đỗ Thị Thu Hà and Phạm Đăng Xuân Hương (this special issue), which traces the competing uses and meanings of this temple throughout its long history.

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Our focus on the processes and consequences of change at Đông Công Temple aligns with Laurajane Smith's view of heritage as "a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present."¹ As we will see, these acts and engagements have political and economic implications. Oscar Salemink aptly observes that the heritage label "does not only facilitate commoditization and commercialization of heritage sites, objects and practices, but lends itself to various forms of appropriation and dispossession as well."² In this respect, the case of Đông Công Temple resembles situations that have been observed in other parts of Vietnam, where heritagization has led to a booming spiritual economy,³ a spectacularization of ceremonies and events, increased state involvement, and a marginalization of the local ethnic community—in this case, the Tày Khao, who are generally regarded as the founders of the temple. However, these processes are not uncontested at the local level. Based on ethnographic research conducted during recurrent field trips between 2022 and 2025,⁴ we analyze the evolving and sometimes conflicting interests and affinities of both state and nonstate and local and nonlocal actors in relation to Đông Công Temple and examine how these plural senses of belonging are accompanied by a self-conscious cultural and spiritual (re)formulation.⁵

Hence, while heritagization discourses and processes are adopted and implemented, they remain fluid, thus crafting heritage into what we refer to as a *space of possibility*. By conceptualizing Đông Công Temple as such a space, we emphasize how both its physical space and structures and its meanings are continually shaped by diverse actors, each interpreting its past and imagining its future—without overlooking the unequal and uncertain outcomes of these processes.⁶ We are particularly interested in the diverse ways in which different actors perceive and respond to the temple's potential, as well as the "converging forces and conflicting values" that shape Đông Công's past, present, and future as a heritage site.⁷

From Rubble to Historic Relic

What is now known as Đông Công Temple used to be a small shrine taken care of by the Hà and Hoàng lineages of the local Tày Khao ethnic group. With time, it developed into a more formalized temple structure as local

deities became integrated into Vietnamese religious practices and the pantheon of the national heroes. Over the past three decades it has gained widespread recognition as an important site for the worship of the Mother Goddess and her husband and son.⁸

To speak of *the* Mother Goddess of Đông Cuông is somewhat misleading, as this deity goes by different names, and different legends recount her celestial and human origins.⁹ In local legends, the Mother Goddess, or *gia-me* in Tày Khao, is associated with the Water Goddess who was the wife of the Water God, named Pua Nguak in Tày Khao or Đức Ông in Vietnamese. In the legend recorded by the eighteenth-century chronicler Lê Quý Đôn,¹⁰ she is associated with the Princess Đông Quang, who was the wife of the Water God at Ngọc Thập Temple (Phú Thọ Province). But she is also known as Lê Thị Kiểm, the wife of a local Tày Khao person who played a heroic role in the resistance against the military campaigns of the Mongol-Yuan invaders in the thirteenth century. Moreover, many Kinh (Việt) people consider her to be the Mother Goddess of the Mountains and Forests, referred to as Mẫu Thượng Ngàn within the Mother Goddess religion [Đạo Mẫu], also known as the Four Palace Religion [Đạo Tứ Phủ].¹¹

As a result of these different historical and spiritual associations, the site has gained a reputation as an important site of worship far beyond the region. Local elderly people recounted that Kinh pilgrims and mediums from “the lower areas” had been visiting the temple to worship the Mother Goddess and practice spirit possession rituals [*hầu đồng*] long before they were born. They described how Kinh people also made important contributions to the upgrading of the site. For example, in 1924, a Kinh businesswoman donated money to build a brick temple for the Mother Goddess and buy ironwood to repair the temple of her husband, Đức Ông, on the other side of the river.

In the 1960s and 1970s, increasingly more Kinh people migrated to the region under the socialist state’s policy of developing the country’s mountainous areas, many of them finding work at the Thác Bà Hydroelectric Power Plant. This influenced the demographics of Đông Cuông Commune, with several Kinh families taking up residence close to the temple. At the time, however, little was left of the temple structure. As pointed out in the introduction to this special issue, the North Vietnamese state’s efforts to

counter superstition resulted in the prohibition of various religious practices and the systematic destruction of related religious sites.¹² Đông Cuông Temple was also affected, as Mr. Hàn,¹³ whose family had moved to Đông Cuông in the 1960s, remembered:

During the years of fighting against America, when Mr. Duẩn was in power, he issued Decree 214 to counter superstition. The temple had fallen into decay and could not be repaired. Due to the floods, the columns collapsed. So the local government decided to dismantle the temple. . . . The healthy pillars were cut and the wood was used to make items for the cooperative. The ones that were eaten by worms were used to pave the road for the transport of supplies.

Despite religious restrictions, worshiping practices continued secretly. Before the big altar and sanctuary were taken down, the relics were brought to the house of the Tày Khao temple keeper and spiritual leader [*ông mo*], where ceremonies were performed in a more simplified form, at nighttime and by “sacrificing goats instead of buffalos.” Not only local Tày Khao, but also Kinh pilgrims continued to come to Đông Cuông and hold ceremonies at the site of the demolished temple. An elderly resident remembered how he would observe Kinh people making offerings as he herded buffaloes on the overgrown temple grounds. With a grin, he added: “I would then sneak in and steal it [offerings]. I was still a kid at the time.”

With the lifting of the restrictions on religion following the Đổi Mới [Renovation] reforms, various initiatives to rebuild the temple emerged. However, rebuilding Đông Cuông as a site of worship was not a straightforward process. Mr. Hàn,¹⁴ who had been involved in the rebuilding process, explained:

The elders in Đông Cuông mobilized everyone and asked the commune for permission to rebuild the temple. Yet the commune did not allow it. A temporary bamboo structure had already been set up by the local community. In 1992, one person donated 1,925,000 VNĐ. At that time, it was a lot of money. Materials were bought in Hà Nội and sent to us. We then built the foundation to support a two-meter-high structure. But the district-level government did not allow it and sent people to cut down the pillars [of the temple].

Local authorities still considered the temple to be a site for practicing superstition and therefore insisted on enforcing measures to ensure compliance with the prohibition against worshiping at the site. Yet members of the

local community, both Tày Khao and Kinh, did not give up. Elderly residents told us how they continued their struggle for permission to rebuild the temple by seeking the support of historical and cultural experts. With the help of a local Kinh medium, a small delegation traveled to Hà Nội to meet with history professor Trần Quốc Vượng and cultural studies professor Trần Lâm Biền. The two experts visited Đông Cuông in 1993 to talk to local authorities and find evidence for the historical significance of the temple. On the basis of their findings, they wrote a letter to the chairman of the National Assembly and provincial authorities, stating that the Goddess of Đông Cuông and her temple “marked an important development in the history of the formation of the nation” due to their role in the resistance against the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century. They argued that Đông Cuông should therefore be recognized as a “Temple of the National Guards” [Đền Thần Vệ Quốc]. This narrative was used to formulate the official request to the provincial People’s Committee for permission to rebuild the temple, which was granted in 1995. Five years later, Đông Cuông was granted provincial-level protection. In 2004, it was designated as a provincial and municipal heritage site, and in 2009, it was recognized as a national heritage site.¹⁵

Transformation and Heritagization

The 2001 Law on Cultural Heritage stipulates that the criteria for historical-cultural heritage depend on explicit national concerns, such as important events in national history, national heroes, or “famous symbolic persons having influence on the course of national history.”¹⁶ The document prepared for Đông Cuông’s recognition as a heritage site therefore exclusively focused on the temple’s role in the history of victories against foreign invaders.¹⁷ It included long genealogies of local heroes from the ethnic Tày Khao group, particularly those from the Hà lineage whose descendants served as the main guardians of the temple. Notably absent, however, were any references to the rituals associated with the legends of the Water God or the cosmology of the Tày Khao people. Nor was there mention of the role of spirit medium ceremonies [*hầu đồng*] in the worship of the Mother Goddess of Đông Cuông. This omission demonstrates how the recognition of a national heritage site depends on what Smith refers to as an “authorized

heritage discourse.”¹⁸ Saleminck points out how this discourse in Vietnam has led to “selective cultural preservation,” where state narratives surrounding “nation,” “identity,” and “unity” play a central role in determining what is considered worthy of revival and preservation.¹⁹

While the 1990s saw a resurgence of religious sites, practices, and festivals following the Đổi Mới reforms, not everything was sanctioned. The worship of the Mother Goddess with its spirit possession rituals [*hầu đồng*] continued to be officially labeled as superstitious practices. As Philip Taylor has suggested, this might be related to the fact that *hầu đồng* practices do not adhere to standardized forms or fixed locations, making them more difficult for the state to control.²⁰ However, perceptions of *hầu đồng* began to shift in the 2010s. Growing popular engagement with and academic interest in spirit mediumship and the Mother Goddess religion contributed to a broader recognition of the historical-cultural significance and indigenous roots of *hầu đồng* rituals.²¹ No longer dismissed as obsolete superstition, Mother Goddess worship came to be recognized as “one of the oldest religious traditions of Vietnam”—worthy of preservation.²² It was even incorporated into Vietnam’s cultural diplomacy strategy, aimed at preserving and promoting traditions. In December 2016, the practice of worshipping the Mother Goddess of the Three Realms was added to the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This shift in perception from superstition to heritage effectively illustrates how the criteria for preservation evolve over time.

While this shift may be viewed as a significant step toward restoring and safeguarding cultural identity and spiritual traditions, Kirsten Endres cautions that it could also lead to a standardization and essentialization of spirit mediumship, along with increased state control.²³ In the case of Đồng Công, local state authorities saw in UNESCO’s recognition of practices related to the beliefs in the Mother Goddess new possibilities for the development of the temple and its ritual economy, hence their commitment to establishing the temple as a major site for the worship of the Mother Goddess. With financial contributions from individuals and companies across forty-six provinces, the temple underwent significant restoration and enhancement. Mr. Hàn explained that this started with a complete “dismantling of all the concrete down to the foundation, removing all the rebar, and then re-pouring



IMAGE 1: The renovated main hall of Đông Công Temple. Photo by Annuska Derks, 2022.

the foundation,” followed by the rebuilding of the temple with huge wooden pillars and a hallway adorned with decorated stone pillars. In October 2020, the renovated temple was inaugurated. The result was a remarkable transformation from a small, whitewashed brick structure into an impressive wooden temple embellished with gold decorations. One of our interlocutors commented, “the temple resembles a museum,” while another noted, “every time [the temple] is renovated, it gets bigger and bigger.”

However, while the temple’s transformation has elicited a sense of awe and pride in some, it also risks alienating others. Mrs. Duyên, a Tày Khao shaman, who is in charge of the ritual dance performances [*xòe*] during major festivals, observed:

In the past, Đông Công Temple was a sacred place worshipping Mẫu Thượng Ngàn. It used to be an old, poor temple. But later, with the government and many visitors paying more attention, the temple has been expanded, made more spacious, and looks better every day. The people are okay with that, but honestly, it’s not like before anymore. The changes are too much. . . . It’s no longer the people’s temple, it’s now the government’s temple.

Mr. Nam, an elderly Tày Khao man, lamented:

Now this temple is a national temple, not the people's. . . . Now it belongs to people above, from the province, the district. It's all theirs. That's it! It belongs to the province. It is no longer ours. But it is still called Đông Cuông Temple.

These remarks are consistent with Saleminck's observation of heritagization processes in other parts of Vietnam, where "localized interest groups seek recognition from the political center for their site of remembrance, worship or of ritual practice as historical or cultural monument" and in the process are being "marginalized from their heritage."²⁴ Đông Cuông Temple, which has for generations been cared for by local Tày Khao temple keepers and has been rebuilt several times through the initiatives of both Tày Khao and Kinh people devoted to the Mother Goddess, is now under state control. Management has shifted from local religious leaders, village elders, and volunteers to the Department of Culture of Văn Yên District People's Committee. The People's Committee employs a total of nineteen individuals, including cleaners, guards, cooks, treasurers, and the retired primary school director, who oversees all activities and schedules the *hầu đồng* sessions. The primary school director proudly informed us that everything is meticulously controlled: Donations are counted in the presence of the management board and deposited into a bank account; all expenses—even for a broom—must be accounted for; and a dozen security cameras are directly linked to the mobile phones of several temple employees as well as members of the People's Committee.

Yet, despite Mr. Nam's sorrow that the temple "is no longer ours," he conceded that "the rituals that are held twice a year, whether you like it or not, depend on Đông Cuông. It's the village elders who are responsible. . . . We all have to follow them. That's it!" This reflects anthropologist Hoàng Cầm's argument that despite external interventions in local practices and management, heritagization initiatives in Vietnam also provide local actors "new justifications for negotiation" and "claims of authority over their own religious traditions and cultural identities."²⁵ Thus, while state intervention introduces new controls, the power dynamics between state and nonstate, local and nonlocal actors remain fluid, fostering continual redefinition of the site and its potentialities. This is particularly evident in the development of the spiritual economy.

Development of the Spiritual Economy

When one regards the restoration of cultural traditions [*truyền thống văn hóa*], there is no investment, or just a little. Now the main focus is on the spiritual economy [*kinh tế tâm linh*]. Their main goal is to get more people to go to the festivals and gain a lot of merit, but they pay little attention to customs and traditions.

Mr. Hàn expressed his regret about the decline of traditional activities at the temple. He blamed the provincial authorities for being solely focused on attracting more visitors and turning Đông Cuông Temple into a site for the development of the spiritual economy.

This interplay between religion, heritage, and the economy is not unique to Đông Cuông. Scholars have documented how communities increasingly turn to spiritual figures—ancestors, heroes, and deities—for protection and prosperity amid the uncertainties of a growing market economy. As wealth and opportunities for religious expression have increased, so too have investments in religious sites and rituals, spawning new markets for religious objects and related services.²⁶ Recognizing this trend, the Vietnamese state has actively leveraged heritage as both a nation-building tool and an economic driver.

To enable Đông Cuông to effectively play a role in local economic development, enhancing accessibility was an essential first step. Prior to the 1990s, the temple stood as a modest structure on the bank of the Red River, surrounded by cornfields and paddies. Visitors faced significant obstacles: A bumpy dirt road littered with cow dung and overgrown vegetation served as the only approach. Mediums traveling from other regions typically arrived by boat or, more commonly, took the train to Trái Hút station, about seven kilometers from the temple, before completing the journey on foot. Many hired porters to carry their belongings, which typically included substantial amounts of equipment for the *hầu đồng* rituals, such as clothing, offerings, and votive papers.

The temple's growing prominence triggered infrastructure upgrades. Provincial authorities constructed a gravel road in 1996, paved it with concrete in 2000, and widened it and upgraded it to asphalt in 2011. With the completion of the Hà Nội–Lào Cai Highway in 2014, travel times for visitors

from other provinces were significantly reduced. The latest infrastructural project involved the restoration of the temple gate, which was inaugurated in 2024, giving it a “more monumental” appearance. These developments have yielded dramatic results. Văn Yên district officials now estimate that three hundred thousand visitors from different parts of the country come to Đồng Công Temple annually, with sixty thousand to seventy thousand during festival times. And, as they told us, their goal is to increase these numbers even further.

Yet roads alone are not enough to pave the way for development. Since 2021, several policies have been implemented to “introduce and promote Yên Bái Province’s attractive tourist attractions and unique tourism products, aiming to draw both domestic and international tourists, create livelihoods for local residents, and contribute to economic development.”²⁷ The provincial tourism development plan defined four key tourist areas that will be enhanced based on the resources and products of each locality. Đồng Công is included in the fourth tourist area, which encompasses Trấn Yên and Văn Yên Districts. The temple is recognized as one of the primary historical sites along the Red River, alongside Nhượng Sơn and Bảo Hà Temples located further upstream. A goal of the plan is to promote tours to these historical and cultural landmarks while developing “artistic performance activities and traditional folk games for visitors to experience.” By expanding worship spaces and organizing various competitions and performances, this tourism development strategy effectively fosters what Lê Hồng Lý calls “heritage spectacularization” [*hoành tráng hóa di sản*]—a term that aptly captures recent developments at Đồng Công.²⁸

During a 2022 meeting with Văn Yên district authorities, the head of the culture department proudly told us that “Văn Yên is on top of everything: the biggest area, the most inhabitants, the best-known temple, and the best cinnamon.” He further outlined the goal of meeting the national program’s criteria for building a new countryside by 2024,²⁹ with a focus on developing tourism, advancing digital transformation and creating happiness for all. While this is not the space to assess whether these ambitious goals have been met, district authorities are clearly keen on enhancing Đồng Công Temple’s attractiveness and improving local lives and livelihoods. To attract tourists, they have taken various initiatives to promote the two major temple

festivals—the New Year Festival in spring and the New Rice Festival in autumn—by introducing new events and leveraging opportunities provided by heritage titles. Moreover, they also sought to link spiritual tourism to the state’s rural economic development initiative, the so-called OCOP (One Commune, One Product) program.³⁰

One strategy to attract visitors is to increase the number of organized events. For instance, just five months after UNESCO recognized the Vietnamese practice of worshipping the Mother Goddess as a representative intangible cultural heritage in December 2016, Văn Yên district authorities organized the first *hầu đồng* festival. During the event, mediums performed their rituals in designated time slots and received a certificate upon completion. As a local official noted, the certificate could serve “as the legal basis for later recognition as a master [*nghệ nhân*],” indicating that he viewed the *hầu đồng* festival not only as relevant for promoting “traditional beliefs” but also for providing credentials for practitioners. Additionally, since the festival attracted mediums and their followers from across the country, the local government seized the opportunity to promote Văn Yên cinnamon, a local agricultural specialty. They hosted a cinnamon fair in the parking lot at the entrance of the temple road, where local producers and traders displayed various products made from Văn Yên cinnamon thereby seeking to create synergies between the ritual and the surrounding area’s agricultural economy.

The *hầu đồng* festival has become an annual event, attracting hundreds of mediums, artists, and other visitors to Đông Cuông to honor the Mother Goddess Mẫu Thượng Ngàn. In 2020, local authorities decided to combine the *hầu đồng* festival with the Cơm Mới [New Rice] Festival, celebrated at the beginning of the ninth lunar month. This festival holds special significance for the local Tày Khao people, who offer green rice stalks and sacrifice a black buffalo to express their gratitude to the gods and Goddess for their protection and blessings throughout the farming year. By combining this local festival with a Goddess worship festival, Văn Yên People’s Committee sought to create “diversified activities for visitors nationwide to experience original local cultures” and achieve “a breakthrough in local spiritual tourism, contributing to the provincial socioeconomic development.”³¹

In October 2023, three events were held at the same time: the Cơm Mới Festival, the *hầu đồng* festival and, as a new addition, a *chầu văn* singing competition. *Hát chầu văn* is a form of trance singing that typically accompanies *hầu đồng* ceremonies to support mediums in receiving spirits. During the festival, singers from across the country performed on a stage set up on the temple grounds, while a jury led by renowned *chầu văn* musicians evaluated their performances. The famous *chầu văn* singer Phạm Văn Ty performed during the festival's main evening as part of a spectacular show featuring dance and music performances, speeches, elaborate decorations, and special lighting effects. The show attracted thousands of visitors from near and far and concluded with the ritual slaughter of a black buffalo and a *hầu đồng* performance by Ngọc Anh, a well-known spirit medium from Hà Nội.

Another new element added to the 2023 Cơm Mới Festival focused on promoting OCOP products of the region. Much to the dismay of various local people we spoke with, district authorities decided to replace the traditional rice pounding competition with a parade of local produce.³² Each village in the commune was called upon to prepare a palanquin displaying a specialty product, such as rice-based foods, bamboo shoots, or chicken. In the morning after the main ceremony, the products were showcased by a procession of local people dressed in ethnic Tày Khao attire walking from the *nhà văn hóa* [house of culture] to the temple, where a group of Tày Khao women performed the ritual *xòe* dance and the *ông mo* conducted the ritual prayers for the Mother Goddess. Given that this component of the festival mainly attracted local Tày Khao people, questions remain about how effectively such promotion of OCOP products reaches wider audiences.

Even more spectacular than the Cơm Mới Festival is the Đông Cuông New Year Festival, renowned for its white buffalo sacrifice and the procession carrying the Mother Goddess to her husband's shrine across the river. Previously held every three years, district authorities upgraded the Mother Goddess procession to an annual event to boost tourism. Drawing tens of thousands of people seeking new year blessings, the festival's popularity prompted district authorities to submit an application to include the Đông Cuông festival in the national intangible cultural heritage list. Recognition was granted in January 2023.³³ This achievement was celebrated on a large scale during the New Year Festival a month later, featuring a procession, *xòe*



IMAGE 2: Procession of local specialty products during the Cơm Mới Festival. Photo by Annuska Derks, 2023.

dance, music performances, high dignitaries, and thousands of spectators. In his speech at the event, Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism Nguyễn Văn Hùng praised the provincial project “to promote the value of Đồng Công Temple Festival” and emphasized the connection between heritage preservation and socioeconomic and tourism development.³⁴

Some tangible results of this development are visible along the newly reconstructed road leading to the temple where guest houses, food stalls, and shops selling ceremonial items, clothes, and beauty treatments line the route. About a dozen guest houses and more than twenty restaurants and food stalls are located near the entrance of Đồng Công Temple. During our many research trips to the area, we would always stay at the guest houses of Mrs. Mai, the daughter of Mr. Hàn. She and her husband first built a wooden house on stilts along the road to the temple in 2010 to serve guests. During the many meals we shared, she told us how she would work from morning to night during the festive season, butchering dozens of chickens and preparing hundreds of bowls of noodle soup. What began as



IMAGE 3: Pilgrims pulling a heavily loaded cart of offerings to the temple. Photo by Cao Thảo Hương, 2023.

a simple stilt-house guest operation grew into a three-story business funded by festival earnings.

While still maintaining their farm, growing rice, and raising ducks, chickens, and water buffaloes, the family has diversified: Mrs. Mai's husband has become a singer in a local *chầu văn* group, their eldest son works as a security guard at the temple, her youngest son is learning Chữ Nho (the vernacular version of Chinese script) to become a ritual performer [*thầy cúng*] and write letters [*viết sớ*] to the deities for pilgrims, and her daughter-in-law assists her in preparing meals and offering trays for pilgrims. Mrs. Mai's sister also operates a shop, while her brother-in-law owns a minibus and provides transport services for tourists. Mrs. Mai's family exemplifies the community's diverse forms of involvement in the spiritual economy. By now, nearly every house in Đông Công seems to cater to the needs of pilgrims, and consequently, an increasing number of people have found employment in the service sector. Additionally, to support local produce, a permanent Văn Yên OCOP stall has been established on the temple grounds.

Although there are opportunities for many households to diversify, most of these businesses are owned by Kinh families, highlighting inequities in the benefits of this emerging spiritual economy. Đông Cuông thus presents a heritage paradox: While official recognition aims to preserve the site and local traditions, elements of renewal are constantly added to adapt to economic opportunities and moral standards. And while the initiatives to promote the temple as an “impressive spiritual tourism destination” have led to an increasing number of visitors spending on accommodations, meals, ceremonies, and offerings, creating diverse opportunities for local economic development, the rewards remain profoundly unevenly distributed.³⁵

Competing Claims and Pluriversal Belongings

Honestly, there’s nothing good for the local people. I’m telling the truth: Only visitors from afar benefit. As for the Tày people, they get nothing at all. Even the villagers living around the temple get nothing, absolutely nothing. Now the temple is managed by the district and the province. . . . It used to truly belong to the people here, but now they have lost everything. They have no rights at all, honestly.

Mrs. Duyên was quite outspoken about who benefits from the recent developments at Đông Cuông Temple. Amid the temple renovations, the spectacularization of its major festivals, its rising popularity among devotees far beyond the region, and the booming spiritual economy, local Tày Khao have become increasingly marginalized. Several other interlocutors pointed out that the temple was mainly a village affair in the past: “There were not as many majority [Kinh] people as there are now. . . . The old people are not there anymore; they are all new people.”

Nonetheless, performances of major rituals are still conducted by the Tày Khao temple keeper, or the *ông mo*.³⁶ The current temple keeper—a descendant of the Hà lineage—is widely respected as a central figure in maintaining Đông Cuông’s traditions and rituals. A Kinh official from the local People’s Committee confided to us that the *ông mo* possesses special powers to communicate with the Mother Goddess. During our first field trip to Đông Cuông in September 2022, we learned that provincial authorities even sought his spiritual intervention for political purposes. After days of heavy rain threatened to disrupt Vice President Đặng Thị Ngọc Thịnh’s visit, the

president of the provincial People's Committee called the *ông mo* to ask him to pray to the Mother Goddess for the rain to stop. When we met him the next day, he explained that he had gone to the temple that evening to worship, without going into detail about how—and indeed, the rain had stopped.

Besides the *ông mo*, several others claim a special spiritual connection to the Mother Goddess of Đông Cuông. One such figure is Mr. Thanh, who has long been dedicated to preserving Đông Cuông's religious and historical values. Mr. Thanh and his wife migrated to Đông Cuông in the 1960s, settling near the temple gate. Although neither Mr. Thanh nor his wife practiced the worship of the Four Palaces of the Mother Goddess, they became interested in it when they noticed that Kinh people continued to come to the site even after the temple's dismantling. Since there was no place to worship, Mr. Thanh placed an incense bowl at the base of a tree. Over time, he and his wife started providing services to visitors to the temple.³⁷ Through his close connections with Kinh mediums and their Mother Goddess practices, Mr. Thanh eventually embraced mediumship himself. In the late 1980s, he performed the *trình đồng* ceremony, marking his initiation as a Kinh medium and deepening his connection with the temple. He was also instrumental in mobilizing Kinh mediums from across the region to seek support for official recognition and reconstruction of the temple. His contributions extended to donating a large plot of land to facilitate the temple's expansion.

With time, Mr. Thanh and his family have become deeply involved in the life of the temple. His wife became the first ritual *chầu văn* singer in Đông Cuông, performing at her husband's ceremonies as well as for other *hầu đồng* practitioners. One of their sons followed in her footsteps, while the other assisted with the family's accommodation and restaurant business. Since 2015, the family has also produced votive objects. As Mr. Thanh explained, "the mediums had to bring these objects from Hà Nội, and when they arrived, they often found that [the votive objects] were dented or torn during the journey." Mr. Thanh decided it would be better to make the objects in Đông Cuông "so the mediums wouldn't have to worry about the objects getting damaged during transport."³⁸

Mr. Thanh and his family have undeniably benefited from the booming spiritual economy. What matters most to him, however, is his strong

spiritual connection to the site. Many Kinh visitors consider him to be the “favorite child” of the Mother Goddess, and local Tày Khao acknowledge his contributions to the temple. This recognition was vividly demonstrated during the 2023 New Year Festival, when the Tày Khao shaman—possessed by the Water God (the Mother Goddess’s husband)—summoned Mr. Thanh forward to receive the deity’s praise for his contributions to the temple.

As the popularity of Đông Công Temple grows, so does the number of people—particularly Kinh mediums—claiming a special connection to its Mother Goddess. Mediums from other provinces regularly visit the temple to worship the Mother Goddess and engage in *hầu đồng* performances, often making substantial contributions to the temple’s development. Medium Đại, for example, maintains that his connection with Đông Công goes back to a previous life. Though he works for a state agency in Hà Nội in his regular life, he considers Đông Công his true home. Twenty years ago, when he began his journey as a medium, Mẫu Thượng Ngàn appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to “serve her.” In honor of his special connection with Đông Công, Medium Đại took the lead in providing the white buffalo for the 2024 New Year Festival. He explained:

One can only offer a buffalo when there is a predestined relationship, a grace bestowed by the Goddess. If she does not provide it, how could I offer it? . . . [For me] the very pure motive is to contribute to making the festival and worship at the Mother Goddess temple a good year. . . . If you make offerings to the Mother Goddess with the thought “Now I offer you a buffalo, I ask you to give me one hundred buffaloes in return,” that is not right; it is not pure. Whenever we worship, it must come from a pure motive.

By claiming a special relationship with the deity and pure motivations for his contributions to the temple, Medium Đại asserts his entitlement to offer this precious animal for the sacrificial ceremony. However, the involvement of Kinh people in offering buffaloes has become an issue of contention. In former times, the buffalo was provided by and shared among local villagers. The *ông mo* would visit nearby villages about a month before the New Year Festival to select a large, strong, white buffalo, which would then be kept in the temple grounds until the day of the festival. At midnight, the animal would be ritually slaughtered as an offering to the Mother Goddess, and its meat—imbued with *lộc* [fortune]—would be distributed among the

community. However, as local residents now lament, the influx of affluent Kinh donors and the festival's growing popularity mean that, as Mr. Hàn asserted, "mainly those who contributed to the construction of the new temple and the officials who attend [the ceremony] receive *lộc* at the temple, while local people are no longer served."

Not only the sharing but also the killing of the buffalo has become controversial. Until a few years ago, the buffalo was hung from the jackfruit tree in front of the temple, struggling and rotating about its axis until its demise, ultimately coming to rest in a position that faced the Goddess with its front legs bowed in deference. According to the Tày Khao, the white buffalo symbolizes the water monster, and its submission to the Mother Goddess represents her control over the wild and harmful forces of nature—a favorable omen for a good harvest in the coming year. However, a video of this hanging ritual posted online sparked moral outrage over the "cruel nature of the ritual," prompting Vietnam-based animal rights campaigners to condemn such traditional practices as "no longer appropriate to be held as part of any festival in our civilized society."³⁹ Under pressure, the Ministry of Culture banned the practice. A district official explained that the buffalo is now killed by electric shock, despite the wishes of the "ethnic minority people" to continue the hanging ritual.

As a sacred site honoring Tày Khao deities, national heroes, and the Mother Goddess of the Mountains and Forests, Đông Công Temple holds spiritual, economic, and moral significance for diverse individuals and groups, creating both opportunities and conflicts of interest. Critical studies on heritagization in Vietnam reveal how political processes shape struggles over access, authority, and benefits. In the case of Đông Công, these struggles manifest not only in heritage recognition and benefits from the ritual economy, but also in the race to contribute. Significant contributions to the development of religious heritage serve to confer power and reinforce individual status. By funding the temple's reconstruction, donating land, or providing the buffalo for the sacrifice ceremony, practitioners aim to demonstrate their affinity with the deity and their sense of belonging to the temple and its community. Their sense of belonging is further strengthened in the process: the more one contributes, the greater their voice in the



IMAGE 4: Dressed in ceremonial robes, a medium performs at the *hầu đồng* festival while being observed members of the jury. Photo by Annuska Derks, 2023.

community and in state management, and the stronger their connection to the deities and the heritage site.

Hence, even when local people claim that “the temple is no longer ours,” it does not necessarily mean, as Roszko also observed in her analysis of

religion and nation-building in Vietnam, that the state holds final authority in the symbolic sphere.⁴⁰ In the case of Đông Công Temple, the local Tày Khao community, Kinh mediums, and various actors from the private sector and civil society actively shape the site and its practices, resulting in competing claims and pluriversal belongings. And these plural forms of belonging are also contested. When describing how she and other local Tày Khao have been sidelined in many aspects of the temple's ritual life, Mrs. Duyên asserted that many Kinh mediums do not genuinely understand the temple's history and cosmology: "The problem is that the sacredness of the Mother Goddess has been overly exploited. They buy gods and sell spirits [*mua thần bán thánh*]. . . . They use spirituality to make money." It is a critical voice that resonates.

The Spirits Are Talking Back

When Typhoon Yagi struck northern Vietnam in early September 2024, Đông Công, like many areas in the region, suffered major damage. The rising waters of the Red River flooded rice and crop fields, triggered landslides, and inundated the temple itself. Two weeks before the Cơm Mới Festival, the residents of Đông Công were still cleaning up the mud left behind as the waters receded. Recognizing that this would be a difficult year for the people of Đông Công, local authorities decided to scale back the Cơm Mới Festival. They canceled the performance night and procession of OCOP products, retaining only the ceremonial procedures. However, these ceremonies took an unexpected turn when the Tày Khao shaman became possessed by the Water God Pua Nguak while performing the traditional *xòe* dance to honor the Mother Goddess. As she led the dance troupe toward the buffalo sacrifice, she suddenly fell ill, vomited, and collapsed to the ground. She then started crawling from the temple courtyard up the steps into the main hall toward the Mother Goddess altar at the back of the temple. There, she began puffing on Vietnamese tobacco pipes [*thuốc Lào*] and three cigarettes simultaneously. With her eyes widened in rage, she shook her thighs and beat her chest. Speaking in a mix of Tày Khao and Kinh, she conveyed the Water God's dissatisfaction and anger over the altered rituals, which had prevented the Mother Goddess from visiting her husband. Earlier that year, the Water God had warned the shaman that "this year will be completely lost." Now he

cautioned: “Be as in the past, [or otherwise] the rain will not be favorable, the wind will not be harmonious.” The Tày Khao people who were present pressed their palms together and bowed to the Mother Goddess. The *ông mo* addressed the deity, explaining that “times [*thời thế*] are not like they used to be. . . . We descendants really want to follow [your way].” Mr. Nam added: “But we must [also] follow society [*xã hội*] . . . the country [*đất nước*] governs it, so we must follow.” Mrs. Tâm confirmed: “Times change. . . . We must follow the party [*đảng*], the collective [*tập thể*], and the state [*nhà nước*].”⁴¹

This apology to the deities could easily be read as validating critiques of heritagization—its tendencies toward appropriation, commodification, alienation, and fetishization of heritage status.⁴² Yet the persistence of Tày Khao elders in maintaining traditions and rituals, the deep attachment of Kinh spirit mediums, and the ways in which the spirits “talk back” indicate that there is more at stake. As we have shown in this article, processes of heritagization and transformation have fostered new layers of meaning for relics; new hierarchies among spirits, deities, and heroes; new religious practices; and also new economic and political opportunities. Diverse actors—state and nonstate, local and nonlocal—have mobilized heritage discourses, framing them as significant, traditional, and rooted. While all seem to agree that Đông Công Temple needs to be cared for, protected, and invested in, their approaches—and their consequences—not only differ widely, but also evolve over time. Heritage, then, may refer to the past, but it is never automatically, directly, or passively inherited from the past.⁴³ Rather, as Karlström asserts, it is “created in the present and continuously changing.”⁴⁴

Sites like Đông Công Temple epitomize heritage’s dynamic and multifaceted nature. Far from static, the temple has become an arena where diverse, often contradictory struggles unfold. While Đông Công Temple is marketed as both a site for tourism development and a hub of the expanding spiritual economy, its heritage designation simultaneously fuels narratives of national identity, revives and creates religious practices, fosters plural forms of belonging, and mediates authority over traditions and rituals. In this light, Đông Công Temple is actively constructed as a space of multiple possibilities based on varying interpretations of its past and imaginations of its future. Heritage here resists single narratives—it is perpetually negotiated

and redefined. Thus, Đông Công Temple illuminates the tensions and synergies between heritage and development, revealing a relationship characterized less by linear progress than by the navigation of evolving interests and contested meanings.

ANNUSKA DERKS is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.

CAO THẢO HƯƠNG is a PhD student at the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hà Nội.

ABSTRACT

During the past three decades, Đông Công Temple in Yên Bái has transformed from a small bamboo shrine into a major religious complex, attracting tens of thousands annually for festivals, lên đồng rituals, and Mother Goddess [Mẫu Thượng Ngàn] worship. This paper examines the temple's transformations through the lens of provincial heritagization and development policies, the revival and invention of religious practices, and increasing ethnic and wealth inequalities. While heritagization processes drive commodification and marginalization, they are also dynamic, creating what we refer to as a space of possibility.

KEYWORDS: *Heritagization, transformation, ethnicity, inequality, contestation, Đông Công Temple*

Notes

1. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2.
2. Oscar Salemink, "Anthropologies of Cultural Heritage," in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Anthropology*, ed. L. Pedersen and L. Cliggett (SAGE Publications, 2021), 424.
3. We use the term "spiritual economy" to refer to the economic implications of the heritagization of Đông Công Temple. It includes the various ways in which the temple and its rituals have become sources of economic value, particularly through tourism and the exchange of goods and services, as well as the ways in which the spiritual realm is invoked to deal with insecurities in the market economy and to accumulate material wealth.

4. Fieldwork was conducted in multiple phases between 2021 and 2025, allowing for the establishment of sustained engagement with key research participants. This article primarily draws on data generated through participant observation and semi-structured and conversational interviews with commune officials, temple staff, religious and cultural experts, local residents, pilgrims, and local business operators (owners of guest houses, restaurants, and shops and manufacturers of votive objects). While most of the data stems from collaborative fieldwork—carried out both outside and during festival periods—additional insights were obtained through individual field trips. Notably, the second author, Cao Thảo Hương, who is conducting her PhD research on Đồng Công Temple, played a more active role in these supplementary fieldwork activities.
5. Sarah Lyon and E. Christian Wells, “Ethnographies of Global Tourism: Cultural Heritage, Economic Encounters, and the Redefinition of Impact,” in *Global Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Economic Encounters*, ed. Sarah Lyon and E. Christian Wells (Altamira Press, 2012), 1–20.
6. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991).
7. Tim Winter and Patrick Daly, “Heritage in Asia: Converging Forces, Conflicting Values,” in *Routledge Handbook of Heritage in Asia*, ed. Patrick Daly and Tim Winter (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–35.
8. Nguyễn Đức Dũng, “Đền Đồng Công - Một điểm khởi đầu của tục thờ nữ thần Việt” [Đồng Công Temple: A Starting Point of the Vietnamese Goddess Worship Custom], *Tạp Chí Di Sản Văn Hóa* [Cultural Heritage] 3 (2006): 77–80; Hồ Văn Thái, *Đền, chùa, đình ở tỉnh Yên Bái* [Temples, Pagodas, and Communal Houses in Yên Bái Province] (Yên Bái: Nhà Xuất Bản Yên Bái, 2003); Hoàng Thanh Thi, *Đồng Công đất thiêng đất lành* [Đồng Công: Sacred and Fertile Land] (Tôn Giáo, 2011).
9. See also Đỗ Thị Thu Hà and Phạm Đặng Xuân Hương, “Identity Politics and Social Navigation over Time: A Historical Perspective on Competing Heritage Practices in Đồng Công, Vietnam,” this special issue.
10. Lê Quý Đôn, *Kiến văn tiểu lục, Lê Quý Đôn tuyển tập - Tập 5* [Lê Quý Đôn’s Collected Works: Volume 5] (Hà Nội: Giáo Dục Việt Nam, 2009), 317.
11. The Mother Goddess religion [Đạo Mẫu], or Four Palace Religion [Đạo Tứ Phủ], entails the worship of the Mother Goddesses associated with the four domains, or palaces: Heaven, Earth, Water, and Forest. While scholars debate whether it constitutes a religion with a clearly defined belief system, a central feature is “the practice of ritual possession, called *hầu đồng* (a medium’s service), *hầu bóng* (serving the [deities’] shadows), or *lên đồng*, mounting the medium.” Kirsten W. Endres, *Performing the Divine: Mediums, Markets and Modernity in Urban Vietnam* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2011), 13.

12. Peter Bille Larsen and Hoàng Cẩm, "Introduction: Interrogating Heritage and Development in Contemporary Vietnam," this special issue.
13. Some names and identifying details in this article have been changed to protect privacy.
14. All personal names used in this paper are pseudonyms to protect the identities of the individuals involved.
15. See also Decision No. 36/QĐUB, issued on April 5, 2000, by the People's Committee of Yên Bái Province, on the protection of the historical and cultural heritage site of Đông Cuông Temple, Đông Cuông Commune, Văn Yên District, Yên Bái Province; Decision No. 701/2004/QĐ-UB, issued on December 20, 2004, by the People's Committee of Yên Bái Province, to issue the Certificate of Provincial and Municipal Heritage Classification to Đông Cuông Temple; and Decision No. 296/QĐ-BVHTTDL, issued on January 22, 2009, by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, to issue the Certificate of National Heritage Classification to Đông Cuông Temple.
16. Roszko, Edyta, "From Spiritual Homes to National Shrines: Religious Traditions and Nation-Building in Vietnam," *East Asia* 29 (2012): 32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-011-9156-x>.
17. Lý lịch di tích đền Đông Cuông – xã Đông Cuông – huyện Văn Yên – tỉnh Yên Bái" [Heritage Dossier of Đông Cuông Temple—Đông Cuông Commune—Văn Yên District—Yên Bái Province], written by Lý Kim Khoa, December 2008. Besides the Mongol invaders, the document also mentions the French.
18. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 11.
19. Oscar Salemink, "Embodying the Nation: Mediumship, Ritual, and the National Imagination," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 3 (2008): 261–290.
20. Philip Taylor, *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2007), 37.
21. Ngô Đức Thịnh, *Đạo Mẫu Việt Nam* [Vietnamese Mother Goddess Worship] (Hà Nội: Thế Giới, 2012); Nguyễn Ngọc Mai, *Nghi lễ lên đồng – Lịch sử và giá trị* [*Lên Đồng Ritual: History and Values*] (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa, 2013); Barley Norton, *Songs for the Spirits: Music and Mediums in Modern Vietnam* (University of Illinois Press, 2009); Pham Quynh Phuong, *Hero and Deity: Tran Hung Dao and The Resurgence of Popular Religion in Vietnam* (Mekong Press, 2005).
22. Karen Fjelstad and Nguyen Thi Hien, eds., *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2006), 7.
23. Endres, *Performing the Divine*.
24. Oscar Salemink, "Appropriating Culture: The Politics of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Vietnam," in *State, Society and the Market in Contemporary*

- Vietnam, ed. Hue-Tam Ho Tai and Mark Sidel (London: Routledge, 2013), 158–180.
25. Hoàng Cầm, “‘We Know Only Our *Po Then Luang*’: Heritagization, Religious Inculturation, and Resistance in Post-Đổi Mới Vietnam,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 18, no. 2 (2023): 305.
 26. Endres, *Performing the Divine*; Ngô Đức Thịnh, *Đạo Mẫu Việt Nam*; Lê Hồng Lý, “Praying for Profit: The Cult of the Lady of the Treasury (Bà Chúa Kho),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2007): 493–513; Lê Hồng Lý, *Sự tác động của kinh tế thị trường vào lễ hội tín ngưỡng* [The Impact of The Market Economy on Ritual Festivals] (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 2008); Saleminck, “Embodying the Nation”; Philip Taylor, *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* (University of Hawai’i Press, 2004); Laurell Kendall, “Gods, Gifts, Markets, and Superstition: Spirited Consumption from Korea to Vietnam,” in *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 103–120.
 27. Yên Bái Provincial People’s Committee, *Kế hoạch phát triển du lịch tỉnh Yên Bái năm 2021*, 23/KH-UBND [Plan for “Tourism Development in Yen Bai Province in 2021”] (signed on January 28, 2021).
 28. Lê Hồng Lý, ed. *Điều tra thực trạng các di sản văn hóa phi vật thể Việt Nam được UNESCO vinh danh* [Investigating the Current Status of Vietnam’s Intangible Cultural Heritages Honored by UNESCO] (Hà Nội: Institute of Cultural Studies, 2018), 354.
 29. The National Target Program for New Rural Development [*nông thôn mới*] was launched in 2010 and aims to improve the socioeconomic, environmental, and spiritual life of people in Vietnam’s rural areas by upgrading infrastructure, modernizing agricultural production, and improving living standards.
 30. In an effort to boost Vietnam’s rural economy and promote local products, the country initiated the One Commune, One Product (OCOP) program in 2018. The program encourages communes to identify a product unique to their locality and enhance its value and quality, ultimately aiming to increase incomes and improve living standards. The OCOP concept was inspired by Japan’s One Village, One Product program and Thailand’s One Tambon, One Product program. FAO, “One Commune One Product in Viet Nam,” Regional Knowledge Platform on One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) in Asia and the Pacific, August 1, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/one-country-one-priority-product/asia-pacific/good-practices/detail/one-commune-one-product-in-viet-nam/en>.
 31. “Festival Honouring Vietnamese Traditional Ritual Celebrated in Yen Bai,” *Việt Nam News*, October 27, 2020, <https://vietnamnews.vn/life-style/803877/festival-honouring-vietnamese-traditional-ritual-celebrated-in-yen-bai.html>.

32. As a festival honoring the new rice harvest, one of the main elements consists of a competition among surrounding villages in dehulling newly harvested green rice by rhythmically pounding the kernels with mortars on a long board in groups of five. The pounded rice is subsequently offered to the Mother Goddess and shared among the people.
33. The National Heritage Council initially rejected the application, claiming that its primary focus on the cultural elements related to the worship of the Mother Goddess was “too Kinh” and neglected significant aspects of Tày Khao culture. The application thus had to be revised to better address these concerns. This reflects a shift in the authorized heritage discourse since the 2000s and a growing awareness of the need to acknowledge the ritual space, symbols, and cosmology of local communities in heritage claims; see Hoàng Cầm, “We Know Only Our *Po Then Luang*.”
34. “Dong Cuong Temple Festival Recognised as National Intangible Cultural Heritage,” *VietnamPlus*, February 2, 2024, <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/dong-cuong-temple-festival-recognised-as-national-intangible-cultural-heritage-post265405.vnp>.
35. Thu Trang, “Dong Cuong Temple – Impressive Spiritual Tourism Destination,” *Yên Bái Online*, February 18, 2024, https://en.baoyenbai.com.vn/15/81597/D111ng_Cu111ng_Temple__Impressive_spiritual_tourism_destinati111n.aspx.
36. See also Đỗ and Phạm, “Identity Politics.”
37. In the late 1980s, the couple began providing meals for visitors to Đông Cuông, starting modestly by spreading mats on the floor to allow them to share a meal and rest. Gradually they upgraded their facilities, purchasing tables and chairs, and in 1995 they began building a guesthouse to accommodate visitors. In 2009, they officially registered their guesthouse in accordance with state regulations, allowing them to host foreign guests as well. In the meantime, they have added another building and expanded their restaurant, enabling them to accommodate up to one hundred people during festival times.
38. Mr. Thanh’s daughter-in-law went to the lowlands to learn the craft of making votive objects and helped set up a business producing a range of votive objects, from paper hats for the male deities and colorful replicas of the Mother Goddess’s female servants to life-size horses and elephants. She was even asked by the local People’s Committee to teach the craft to others in the district, and now ten families are involved in the production of votive objects.
39. See “Videos of Buffalo Hanged to Death in Vietnamese Ritual Cause Outrage,” *Tuoi Tre News*, February 7, 2017, <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/lifestyle/20170207/videos-of-buffalo-hanged-to-death-in-vietnamese-ritual-cause-outrage/26848.html>; “Yên Bái Officials Under Fire After Videos of Buffalo-Hanging Ritual

- Surface,” *Saigoneer*, February 8, 2017, <https://saigoneer.com/vietnam-news/9239-yen-bai-officials-under-fire-after-videos-of-buffalo-hanging-ritual-surface>.
40. Roszko, “From Spiritual Homes to National Shrines,” 27.
 41. Field observation by Cao Thảo Hương, October 5, 2024. The event is also mentioned in the contributions of Peter Bille Larsen and Hoàng Cẩm as well as Đỗ Thị Thu Hà and Phạm Đăng Xuân Hương within this special issue.
 42. Salemink, “Anthropologies of Cultural Heritage”; Thomas M. Schmitt, “The Commodification of World Heritage: A Marxist Introduction,” in *50 Years World Heritage Convention: Shared Responsibility—Conflict and Reconciliation*, ed. Marie-Theres Albert, Roland Bernecker, Claire Cave, Anca Claudia Prodan, and Matthias Ripp (Heritage Studies, Springer, 2022), 377–390.
 43. Birgit Meyer and Marleen de Witte, “Heritage and the Sacred: Introduction,” *Material Religion* 9, no. 3 (2013): 276.
 44. Karlström, Anna, “Spirits and the Everchanging Heritage,” *Material Religion* 9, no. 3 (2013): 398.