



DE-SANCTIFICATION IN FOLK BELIEFS OF CENTRAL VIETNAM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TAOISM-RELATED RITUALS AND MAGIC

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Abstract: This article examines the nature and dynamics of de-sanctification in Central Vietnamese folk beliefs through certain rituals and magic practices related to Taoism. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study investigates the de-sanctification of worship, purification of impurities, and dissolution of spiritual relationships with supernatural forces to gain insights into the nature and dynamics of the sacred within the Central region's folk beliefs. This article highlights that the essence of the sacred is grounded in the relationship between physical or human forms and supernatural forces, and that de-sanctification is the act of changing or dissolving social links in folk religious beliefs. Through analyzing the rituals and magic involved, the article not only showcases the influence of Taoism in folk beliefs but also reveals their social function and role in providing spiritual security for the Vietnamese people in the Central region.

Keywords. de-sanctification, sacred, ritual, magic, Central Vietnam's folk beliefs

1. Introduction

Sacredness (*cái thiêng*) is inherently one of the central aspects of religious belief, it is also an important factor that governs the content and forms of folk belief practices. The diverse expression of the sacred (*tính thiêng*) in the folk beliefs of the Central region is an attractive research object but has not been studied by many scholars. Before Renovation Era (*Đổi Mới*-1986), the topic of research on the sacred received little attention as it was considered superstitious. However, in recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in sacred practices due to their social function and their role in preserving traditional cultural heritage. There has been a more open discussion about spiritual stories related to the sacred, such as agency, divine punishment, the use of amulets, and the concept of predestined marriage from a previous life. The recognition of the role of the sacred in creating spiritual security, and contributing to the protection of cultural heritage has also been emphasized.

The open view of the sacred has led to a debate about its dynamics and nature. Some questions have been raised, such as whether sacredness is temporary or immutable, default or circulating, and whether there is any interaction between the divine and human. This scholarly controversy has prompted the current study to shed more light on the nature and dynamics of the sacred in central Vietnamese folk beliefs. This article demonstrates how the sacred is attributed, upheld, and nullified through ritual and magical practices that deal with the social connections between matter or individuals and supernatural forces. De-sanctification (*giải thiêng*), which is the act of removing something's sacred status, plays a crucial role in dissolving social bonds based on traditional norms and agreements. It contributes to the individual's mental security against the unsettling effects of the situation.

2. Literature review

The understanding of the sacred has undergone significant changes in the field of ethnology and anthropology. Evolutionists such as Tylor (1891) and Frazer (1980) viewed the belief in the soul being present in inanimate objects as a misinterpretation of the natural world. In contrast, Eliade (1963) emphasized the experience of the sacred as a central aspect that unifies all religions. He introduced the concept of hierophanies, which refers to patterns of the divine that exist in the profane world.

Similarly, Durkheim argued that the real characteristic of religious beliefs and rituals is not the element of the supernatural but rather the concept of the sacred (Pals, 1996). The study of the sacred in material aspects of anthropology has introduced a new perspective on religious practices. Materiality is not placed in a dualistic relationship with social relations, but instead, it is considered as social materiality (Dale, 2005). Matter is conceptualized as a combination of material and immaterial components (Reimer et al., 2011). In this article, matter is not just the physical "stuff" used in religious practices but also the relatively authoritative ideas about status, worth, and power of things, bodies, places, and other forms of religion (Meyer et al., 2010:209-10).

Religious studies on the sacred in Vietnam also brought many new discoveries about the relationship between humans and the sacred. Nguyen Duy Hinh places the sacred in relation to the mundane in the Sacred -the Profane relationship models on three levels, going from direct personal perception to perception through mediators such as from clergy to the founder of a religion (Nguyen Duy Hinh, 2005). Based on common understanding of animated statues, it is widely recognized that specific ceremonies can transform otherwise ordinary items into objects of sacred significance (Lauren Kendall, 2008). Sacredness, if observed in ritual and magical practices, can bring about the intended effects (Vu Hong Thuat, 2008). On the contrary,

committing a sacred act such as offending ancestors, misbehaving with gods, stealing worship items can have health and life consequences (Nguyen Thi Hien, 2010). The sacredness is changed when there is a change in the natural environment or the social environment of the community (Nguyen Cong Thao, 2008).

3. Theoretical Perspectives

This article aims to deepen our understanding of the nature and dynamics of the sacred by analyzing two theoretical perspectives: Mircea Eliade's theoretical view of the sacred and Alfred Gell's agency theory. In Eliade's view, the sacred is a fundamental aspect of one's religious experience. From the perspective of religious phenomena, the sacred is opposed to the profane, and he ranks "the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and the secular life" (Eliade, 1958:1). The divine represents the realm of the transcendent and the divine (Eliade, 1957, 1958). Eliade argues that the divine is associated with rituals and practices that help establish the individual connection with the sacred and divine realms, and at the same time providing a sense of order and security in a world of chaos and uncertainty.

Complementing the simplification of the complex relationships between sacred and secular and the diverse manifestations of sacredness in different ethnic groups and cultures in Eliade's theory. This article is also based on Alfred Gell's theoretical view of the sacred and the agency. He argued that the sacred is created when people form social relationships with objects that make them social agents (Gell, 1998:18). This social relationship is a form of 'religious belief' because it creates forms of the sacredness of things, it is considered 'agents' in particular social situations, capable of affecting people's lives. Gell's core view of agency is a culturally prescribed framework for thinking about causation (Gell, 1998). The aforementioned theoretical perspectives underpin the author's argument, outlining a methodology for comprehending the rituals and magical practices linked to Taoism in the folk traditions of Central Vietnam. This approach seeks to shed light on the intricacies and significance of the sacred within the broader global context, which is marked by pervasive secularization and a multitude of uncertainties.

4. Research Methodology

The ethnographic fieldwork has been carried out in Da Nang and Thua Thien Hue since 2018 to the present to collect data for the research article. A qualitative approach was selected because the author identifies some advantages in researching the sacred through religious experience, emotions and viewpoints. The process of fieldwork mainly focuses on the practice of rituals and magic in De-sanctification of religious material forms and neutralize spiritual

links with supernatural forces. The researcher used participant observations and in-depth interviews to enhance the accuracy in collecting data for the research. These methods show advantages in religious and magic research in two study sites because the author has had many years of building rapport and has established a good relationship with the informants here. The establishment of a good relationship in the field of research has positively affected the outcome of the research as the author could participate in practicing rituals and magic with various individuals and the community. In order to deepen the perspective of the sacred, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews were conducted with some individuals chosen in some representative groups: fishermen, small business owners, retired people, people who look after religious buildings, magicians... and so on. Through stories of sacredness and agency gathered from individuals and social groups, the article expresses the people's point of view regarding the dynamics of sacredness in their magic and religious practices. Claims made about the dynamic of the sacred in the article are mainly based on the perspective and spiritual experience of the research objects towards the spaces, phenomena, holy entities and sacred practices. In addition, the article's discussion also refers to documents and resources on religion, magic, sacredness and agency by many other authors.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 A sanctified tradition in Central Vietnamese folk beliefs

The sacred plays a central role in religious and magical practices and holds a significant place in folk beliefs in Central Vietnam. The Vietnamese people have a profound religious consciousness that intricately weaves practical manifestations into their understanding of the sacred (Cadiere, 1992:1). According to Cardiere, the concept of sacredness is interpreted as the dwelling place of the divine or as a location where mysterious events frequently occur (Cadiere, 2015: 293). The interpretation presented by Cardiere aligns with Elidea's view that the sacred is often linked to specific places imbued with the power and presence of the divine. These places serve as focal points for religious practices and experiences where the existence of a force, spirit, or supernatural entity is perceived. Such perceptions can occur in a space, object, artifact, or even within a person. In Central Vietnamese folk beliefs, the sacred is linked with temples, shrines, and objects of worship such as incense bowls, tablets, and statues. It is also associated with states of being rebuked by the gods or pursued by spirits, which adds to the sense of mystery and power associated with these places and objects.

The folk beliefs of the Central region of Vietnam are characterized by animist worship, deity worship, and ancestor worship, which represent a primitive religious tradition and also a fusion with other major religions, most notably Taoism (Cadire, 2015; Tran Dai Vinh, 1995). The

sacredness in these beliefs reflects the diversity of practices of worship, rituals, and magic. From a material-religious perspective, Vietnamese folk beliefs in the Central region are closely linked with sacred material forms. Pels recognized the complexity in the religious material structure, arguing that matter is not a simple entity and that the cultural structure of matter is a relational structure (Pels, 2008).

The sanctification of the world in the folk beliefs of the Central region is evident through the spiritual relationship with heaven, earth, and other natural or human entities. The attribution of sacredness to material elements has become increasingly apparent in Vietnamese folk beliefs as they incorporate more divine images embodying the entities and natural phenomena of Taoism. This complexity in the religious material structure, along with the fusion of different religious traditions, highlights the diversity and richness of Vietnamese folk beliefs in the Central region.

Heaven reveals itself as an inexhaustible, transcendent, and sacred entity, which evokes religious ideas (Mircea Eliade, 1958). From an early age, Vietnamese people in Central Vietnam have believed in and worshipped Trời, and spiritual practices with God are closely linked to their daily lives. Troi is considered a close and understanding god, and expressions such as "Heaven has eyes" (*Trời có mắt*), "Heaven fights" (*Trời đánh*), and actions like "bowing to Heaven" (*lạy Trời*), worshipping Heaven (*cúng Trời*), and calling to Heaven (*kêu Trời*) are quite common in popular beliefs. Under the influence of Taoism, the image of the original Troi was visualized as the Jade Emperor (*Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế*) in folk beliefs, the Jade Emperor Father (*Đức cha Ngọc Hoàng*) in Mother Goddess religion, or "Đức Chí Tôn" in Caodaism. Heaven is a sacred space because it is the residence of the holy fairies. The spatial layers of the sky, the directions and the stars were also sacred to become gods governing destiny. Therefore, divine images such as Tứ Tượng, Tây Cung Vương Mẫu, Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ, Bắc Đẩu, etc. are very revered in the folk beliefs of Central Vietnam.

Similar to the sacredization of Heaven, the Earth was considered as the Primordial Mother and then further concretized as the title of Khai Hoàng Hậu Thổ Tôn Thần (開皇后土尊神) in folk beliefs. The sanctification of the Earth continued to take place at specific levels with earth deities such as Thổ Địa Long Mạch Tôn Thần (土地龙脉尊神), Phúc Đức Thổ Địa Chánh Thần (福德土地正神), Thổ Công (土公), or Thành Hoàng (城隍).

The process of sanctifying the natural world takes place from the abstract to the concrete. Five Elements (*Ngũ Hành*), originally a philosophical concept, and then became embodied in the form of fairies named Kim Mộc Thủy Hỏa Thổ Ngũ Hành Tiên Nương (金木水火土五行仙娘). In the Five Elements god system, Fire (*Hoả*) and Water (*Thủy*) have proven to be the most commonly worshiped material elements. Water is sacred to Bà Thủy or Thủy Đức Thánh Phi (水

德聖妃). Similarly, Vietnamese people have supernaturalized fire under two faces: the male god for the kitchen and the goddess as "*Bà Hỏa*," the embodiment of the burning fire (Cadiere, 2015). The goddess of fire (*Bà Hỏa*) is widely worshiped at the community level, as is the God of Kitchen (*ông Táo*) or Đông Trù Tư Mệnh Táo Phủ Thần Quân (東廚司命灶府神君), a Taoist deity present in most family worship spaces in Central Vietnam.

The sanctification of natural fields reflects the behavior between humans and nature to protect and maintain standards and values (Nguyen Cong Thao, 2008). Specific geographical entities such as rivers, seas, mountains, whales, ancient trees, and rocks are also venerated as deities such as Hà Bá, Thủy Thần, Sơn Thần, and Nam Hải, as well as gods of trees, stone, and landmarks. Natural phenomena such as wind, rain, and thunder also become objects of the process of sanctifying the world with deep and reverent religious consciousness.

Similarly, social material forms are sanctified to visualize the divine and fulfill spiritual purposes. Paintings, statues, religious artifacts, amulets, and associations with supernatural forces are sanctified through rituals or magical practices that establish spiritual states based on human intentions. This sanctification of matter reinforces a sense of extraordinary, super-sensory presence that emerges through a complex assemblage of acting and sensing humans (Meyer, 2015: 167). In Central Vietnam, this sanctification is often done through the rituals of sanctifying the statue (*khai quang điểm nhãn/ hô thần nhập tượng*), sacralize (*làm phép/ làm thiêng*), the ritual of inviting a deity or spirit to enter a statue or tablet (*an vị*) etc. "Through appropriate procedures, the statue body becomes the body casing of a socially present god, spirit, buddha, or nat." (Laurel Kendall, 2021: 6)

In terms of religious symbolism and practice, it is undeniable that the influence of Taoism on the world tradition of sanctification in folk beliefs in Central Vietnam is apparent. This is due to the similarity and integration of religious beliefs regarding all things. During this interaction, folk beliefs incorporated specific Taoist deities to illustrate their early religious beliefs. The fusion of divine images is also involved in borrowing Taoist rituals and other forms of magic, including desacralization rituals and purification magic.

5.2 The nature and forms of de-sanctification

Worship is the process of establishing a sacred relationship, the act of "maintained and cared for as part of an interdependent relationship between the object and the practitioner" (Meyer, 2015: 167). De-sanctification is a method of strengthening, adjusting, or dissolving spiritual relationships on a periodic or irregular basis. Therefore, the de-sanctification in folk beliefs in the Central region also takes place in a periodic or non-periodic form. Traditional de-sanctification practices and the need to break spiritual bonds are the primary driving forces

behind the practice of ritual de-sanctification or purification. Whatever the motivation, ritual and de-sanctification are all about managing spiritual bonds to provide mental security to the subject.

5.2.1 *De-sanctification as a cycle of exchanging material forms*

In Central Vietnam, it is customary for the Vietnamese people to periodically replace religious paintings and statues in accordance with a specific time cycle. When these images are replaced, the old ones are either burned (*hoá*) or sent (*tiễn*) to a de-sanctification site within the community. This practice is particularly evident in the worship of several Taoist gods such as Tây Cung Vương Mẫu, Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ, Tiên Sư, and Táo Quân. The periodic renewal of these images and statues is a widely-observed custom of worship among the Vietnamese in the Central region.

The kitchen is an important space for the Vietnamese people in the Central region, where they worship the kitchen king or *Định Phúc Táo Quân*, the head god of all the household gods (*đệ nhất gia chi chủ*) specializing in the management of cooking; at the same time monitor the merits, manage the life, consider the happiness of each family member. The de-sanctification of the idol worshipping *Táo Quân* is associated with the concept that this god will go to heaven at the end of the year to report to the Jade Emperor about all the good and bad deeds of the owner. The statue of the three kitchen gods will be deified on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month by the ceremony to send *Táo Quân* to heaven (*thiên đình*). Worshipped statues and a few offerings were brought and placed at the base of an old tree, a fork in the road, a river wharf... A homeowner in Dong Da market in Da Nang shared with us his vows when he brought the kitchen god statue to the temple, seeking to appease the sacred spirits at a temple located on the banks of the Han River. He said, *"I respectfully kowtow to the Táo Quân; today, my family burns incense, offers flowers, and makes small offerings. Our faith is respectful as we see you off to Heaven and pray for your blessings to bring peace and prosperity to my family"*. After the ceremony, the owner's concern with the old statue of the kitchen god is no longer there, instead a new statue of the god *Táo Quân* will be replaced by a ceremony to welcome the kitchen god back at the end of the year.

In some areas of Central Vietnam, women begin to worship their destiny god at the time of their marriage or childbirth in order to seek protection for their health, reproductive ability, and life. Similar to the kitchen god, the choice of deity to worship depends on each person's destiny. Some may choose to worship paintings of the goddess Tây Cung Vương Mẫu or Cửu Thiên Huyền Nữ, who are commonly referred to as Bà Bốn Mạng or Bà. Every year on the 9th day of the first lunar month, which is the Memorial day (*ngày vía*) of these deities, paintings

dedicated to the protection of women's lives are burned and replaced. When a woman turns 60, the ritual of worshipping these deities concludes with a ceremony called *Lễ Ra Lão* or *Lễ Thành*.

According to folk beliefs, the practice of replacing old religious images and statues with new ones through burning or sending them to a de-sanctification site demonstrates respect and welcomes new blessings from the gods. This practice of de-sanctification is closely linked to the idea that purity is a crucial attribute of the gods, and that those who worship them must maintain this purity. Therefore, removing sacred objects for worship is often viewed as a way to keep them clean, reflecting the belief that "worshipping pictures are like hats, old clothes must be changed, and if they are clean, then the gods will come." The cyclical de-sanctification rituals have become a recurring pattern in traditional worship practices. As Mustafa Emirbayer (1998:975) notes, in this tradition, "social actors relationally engage with those preexisting patterns or schemas."

With this religious consciousness, de-sanctification in worship is a form of exchanging worshipping materials in order to strengthen the sacred through maintaining cleanliness and purity. Periodic de-sanctification of worship items is an act of showing reverence and re-establishing a spiritual relationship with the gods. According to Eliade, humans repeat the periodic cycle of de-sanctification as they "symbolically participate in the annihilation and re-creation of the world." Ritual purifications hold more than a mere symbolic purification, as they also annul the sins and faults of the individual and the community as a whole, consuming them as if by fire (Eliade, 1963:78-79). De-sanctification practices reflect the belief that maintaining cleanliness and purity is essential in worshipping the gods, and cyclical de-sanctification rituals serve to strengthen the sacredness of the relationship between humans and the divine. These practices are deeply ingrained in traditional worship, and reflect the social and cultural patterns and schemas that shape the beliefs and behaviors of worshipers.

The routine of periodic de-sanctification preserves and rotates the sacredness, while in non-periodic de-sanctification rituals, the sacredness may be lost. Some types of amulets are deconsecrated because their miracles have changed or they have become damaged (Vu Hong Thuat, 2008). Other protective materials, such as talismans, are made sacred by the shaman and preserved and used by the owner until they become damaged or ineffective. The sacredness of the talisman will be lost due to changes over time and exposure to unclean environments. Talismans will be renewed after a period of use, and they can have a temporary or long-term effect.

During the fishing ceremony of the fishing community in the estuary of Da Nang, an order to bring down the whale god's pen is valid for about three days. It is attached to the celebrant's vestments to protect them from devil attacks. When the ceremony ends, this

talisman is burned. Similarly, the Lỗ Ban amulet (*bùa Lỗ Ban*) hanging on the roof is removed and burned by the owner after three years of use. After desacralize ritual, a new amulet can be obtained to protect the home.

Other forms of sacred matter have longer-lasting effects, such as cinnabar, realgar, and others. Taoist folk in the Central region frequently use these substances to protect graves, houses, and create amulets. The effects of these forms of magic can last from a few years to several decades.

Thus, the sacred can circulate or disappear along with states of matter. If sacredness is associated with the presence or residence of a supernatural force, then the conversion of religious material form is merely a change in the external appearance. As long as the spiritual connection between man and the divine remains intact, the sacredness still exists. However, if the sacred is associated with the presence of a divine force within matter itself, then it is temporal. As a result, sacredness can change or disappear over time or with the transformation of things. Forms of de-sanctification by term reflect people's concept and behavior towards sacred material forms. They either maintain or neutralize spiritual links with objects in the circulation of matter.

5.2.2 *De-sanctification: dissolving social links*

In addition to periodic de-sanctification rituals, other non-periodic rituals are also performed to dissolve social links between humans and supernatural forces. These may include de-sanctification rituals to end the worship of a god or cutting off attachments to spirits or other supernatural entities.

The concept of the sacred has a dual nature, being both "sacred" and "polluted" in terms of both psychology and values, as described by Mircea Eliade (1948, 2018: 42-43). In the folk beliefs of the Central region, simple forms of de-sanctification include the purification of unclean forms, known as "*giải phong long*" and "*tây uê*" in folklore. Impurity and external magic are considered to be harbingers of bad luck.

"*Phong long tử*" is a type of impurity that is believed to be pursued by an infant's soul, resulting in various negative outcomes. Remedying this impurity requires magical practices or rituals, known as "*giải phong long*" or "*tống phong long*". People infected with "*phong long tử*" may experience persistent misfortunes, business failure, theft, loss of property, or conflicts with others. Unlike typical impurities, "*phong long tử*" is a challenging form of impurity to purify. As a result, people from the Central region of Vietnam frequently seek out the services of a ritual master to perform a neutralizing ritual.

One example of a magical ritual is the dispelling the "*phong long tử*" of fishermen in the estuary of Da Nang. The ritual involves constructing a small raft model using banana leaf petioles, which is decorated with offerings, incense, and rice balls. The ritual master determines that the spirit's gender is female and places nine incense sticks and nine rice balls on the banana raft model, corresponding to the traditional concept of women's astral bodies. The banana raft model is then taken from the ceremonial location to the beach while reciting an invocation that invites and entices the spirit:

"Oh, three souls and nine senses, named and unnamed little souls. Little Lady. You have lost your parents, now follow the nanny, the nanny will find them for you".

After each recitation, a handful of rice is scattered along the path. Upon reaching the beach, the procession stops in front of a temple and prays to the deity, requesting assistance in finding the missing parents. The banana raft model is then placed on the sand, and a closed circle is drawn around it to trap the spirit. Finally, the ritual master quickly departs using another way. By practicing such rituals and magic, this family believes that having cut off the attachment of the infant's soul.

At a more complex level, certain social bonds may be pre-existing or created by forces of formidable power, making it challenging to desacralize that state. Those affected by such conditions may experience sickness, mental illness, or significant difficulties in their daily lives. Rituals such as curing yin illness (*chữa bệnh âm*), severing a previous life's marital ties (*cắt duyên âm/cắt tiên duyên*), and exorcising ghosts (*trừ tà*) are forms of de-sanctification that aim to neutralize these social connections. During the de-sanctification ritual, Taoist shamans utilize their own magical powers and the aid of gods to remove the clinging state of a soul or other power from a person.

Ms. Ngoc is a person who has often encountered difficulties in love. She has gone through many broken relationships and encountered with a broken marriage two years ago. Her family went to see a fortune teller, Taoist Dien, who told them that she was possessed by a spirit who had a predestined relationship with her from her previous life, and that it was refusing to let her fall in love or marry someone else. To ensure a favorable future in her love life, it was necessary to perform the ritual of severing the marital ties from a previous life (*Cắt duyên âm*). In November 2022, on the occasion of the spirit summoning ritual to the grave of her mother, her family invited Taoist to perform "*Cắt duyên âm*" ritual. During the ritual, a person claiming to be "*Đức Ông- returning to the earthly world to help hundreds of families*" entered the spirit of Taoist Dien and began to administer the ritual. "*Đức Ông*" made a spell to call the male soul who had been pursuing Ngoc for a long time into a doll using the ritual of calling the soul into the statue, and named that soul Prince (*Thái Tử*). Ms. Ngoc had to blacken her face with

ashes from the bottom of cooking pots, and make her hair messy to become ugly. The two red threads represent the main subject's love affair being interwoven with that of the spirit. The shaman held the two threads up high and negotiated with the spirit. The "Cắt duyên âm" ritual is a journey of negotiation with the soul, and Đức Ông repeated his argument many times, saying:

"Prince, I implore you not to hold onto Ms. Ngoc, for in her past life, she led a virtuous existence, and thus she is now reborn in her current form. You, on the other hand, did not uphold virtuous conduct, and thus you exist as a mere soul without a physical presence. During the night, you find yourself seated by the river, occasionally on the shore, and sometimes on the porch, gazing upon your invisible self illuminated by the faint moonlight. Yet, the dimness of the moonlight obscures your true identity, so you don't know who you are. Now I tell you, you are a Prince with many concubines, and many beautiful women are waiting for you. Please accept my request and give up your love for Ms. Ngoc, so that she can be free and successful in earthly life, have a successful career, enjoy peace, and happiness".

After more than an hour of negotiation and begging, until the 17th time, the two red threads finally separated, indicating that the Prince had agreed to release Ms. Ngoc. The ritual was continued by consecrating a female doll, symbolizing the surrogate mistress who would marry the Prince. The shaman tied the red thread to the hands of the two dolls and presented an offering of betel nut and wine in front of the tablets of Ông Tơ and Bà Nguyệt (the gods of matchmaking) to organize the wedding ritual for the two dolls. Offerings for two souls including a house of votive paper, rice, salt, votive money, and real money, all of which are sent to a temple near the coast. The souls of the Prince and his wife will be on this beach and no longer follow that woman. After the ritual, Ms Ngoc will not leave the house for 3 days to complete the ritual process, and cut a predestined relationship with a previous life lover that has followed her for 33 years.

Thus, the sacred interpretation reflects the worldview of the relationship between people, matter, god, and soul in the Central folk beliefs. At its simplest level, de-sanctification, as a form of purification, is based on the principle of removal and replacement. Impure or old elements are removed and replaced with pure ones. At a more complex level, de-sanctification involves the transformation of social connections between people and objects, gods, or spirits. It is the transference of the state of sacredness from one context to another.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored the nature and dynamics of the sacred by examining the practice of de-sanctification through ritual and magic. The concept of the sacred in Central Vietnamese folk beliefs is expressed in a multitude of ways through individual and communal religious

beliefs, as well as influences from Taoist ritual and magical traditions. It is a dual concept that can be an attribute of the divine that requires transformation or strengthening, or it can be considered a contaminant that needs to be purged. The sacred can be an element that is either absorbed or removed from a material object or person.

This study has clarified that the sacred is essentially relational and that de-sanctification is a process that involves restructuring or dissolving the social links between people and spiritual or material forms. The sacred possesses agency and has the ability to adapt and change in response to transitional states in different cultural contexts. It can change or disappear depending on the states of matter, but it can also be maintained and strengthened through the social connections between subject and object. The effect of this fulfillment is judged, felt, and evaluated according to religious consciousness and purpose. It is this intention that governs agents' actions, which are caused by their intentions and not by the physical laws of the cosmos (Gell, 1998: 16).

Furthermore, de-sanctification is motivated not only by traditional norms and agreements but also by individual spiritual motivations and the subject's mental security against the insecure effects of the situation. This study has also highlighted the role of de-sanctification in promoting mental security by allowing individuals to establish a sense of stability and control over their environment by designating certain objects or places as sacred or secular.

In conclusion, this article has provided insight into the multifaceted nature of the sacred through the practice of de-sanctification. By shedding light on its dynamic and relational aspects, this study has contributed to a better understanding of the sacred's transformative power and its role in promoting mental security. The sacred is a fluid and adaptable concept that can be either a source of strength or impurity, depending on the context. Thus, understanding the dynamics of the sacred and its transformative power is crucial for navigating the boundary between the sacred and the impure.

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