

FOLK BELIEFS, RELIGIONS AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN MODERN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY:  
A CASE STUDY OF PERFUME TEMPLE FESTIVAL.



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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ชวน หวาง : ความเชื่อพื้นบ้าน ศาสนา และการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมในสังคม  
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วิทยานิพนธ์นี้นำเสนอการวิเคราะห์ความเชื่อพื้นบ้านและการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมใน  
สังคมเวียดนามสมัยใหม่จากกรณีศึกษาเทศกาลวัดเฮือง เป็นที่สันนิษฐานกันว่าความเชื่อพื้นบ้าน  
และคติชนดั้งเดิมเป็นพื้นฐานด้านจิตวิญญาณของคนเวียดนามในปัจจุบัน จากการศึกษาวิจัยพบว่  
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ผสมผสานเข้ากับความเชื่อและวัฒนธรรมดั้งเดิมของคนเวียดนาม ซึ่งการผสมผสานทางความเชื่อนี้  
ได้นำมาซึ่งความมั่นคงและความเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกันในสังคมเวียดนามสมัยใหม่ เทศกาลวัดเฮืองซึ่ง  
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เวียดนามและชาวต่างประเทศที่มาเยี่ยมเยือนวัดเฮืองเพื่อไหว้พระขอพรและเที่ยวชมธรรมชาติ  
ดังนั้น เทศกาลวัดเฮืองจึงมีศักยภาพในการพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวเชิงวัฒนธรรมซึ่งมีการผสมผสาน  
ต้นทุนทางวัฒนธรรมทั้งที่จับต้องได้และจับต้องไม่ได้เข้ากับการจัดการการท่องเที่ยวสมัยใหม่

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Xuan Wang : FOLK BELIEFS, RELIGIONS AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN MODERN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF PERFUME TEMPLE FESTIVAL.. Advisor: Assoc. Prof. MONTIRA RATO, Ph.D.

This thesis presents an analysis of the folk beliefs and cultural tourism in modern Vietnam through a case study of the Perfume Temple Festival. It is presumed that folk beliefs and traditional folklore have always constituted the spiritual foundation of Vietnamese people in present day society. It is found that the introduction of religions from outside Vietnam does not affect traditional folk beliefs. These religious beliefs have been integrated into Vietnamese beliefs and traditional culture. This integration contributes to the stability and harmony of modern Vietnamese society. The Perfume Temple Festival, as one of the biggest national temple festivals, embodies elements of folk beliefs, religions, ancient architectural relics and folk art. It can be concluded that the Perfume Temple is a Buddhist temple with a combination of various elements of folk beliefs and Confucian culture. The Perfume Temple festival also plays an important role in the economic development of local community. Located with pleasant scenery, the Perfume Temple is ideal for boating, worshipping Buddha and participating in various activities during the temple festival. It offers distinctive enjoyment to local and foreign tourists who visit the temple for blessings and sightseeing. Thus, the Perfume Temple festival has a potential to address the modern cultural tourism by combining both tangible and intangible cultural resources to modern tourism management.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies      Student's Signature .....

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Xuan Wang



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By surveying the respondents about whether they would like to re-visit the Perfume Temple in the future, 83% expressed their wish to do so while 17% thought they probably might return. This suggests that the Perfume Temple has left a good memory for many tourists, and, despite the high mountains and long routes, there are still many who are willing to come back again. However, it was noted that most positive answers for re-visiting the temple were from the Vietnamese visitors rather than foreign tourists. ....	
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Folklore refers to the living culture created, enjoyed and inherited by the general public in a country or ethnic group. Once established, folklore serves as a fundamental force regulating the behaviours, language and psychology of people (Jingwen, 1998). To know and understand a culture, if knowledge and study of its folklore is neglected, it would lead to a deficiency in cultural studies, thereby depriving them of a sense of integrity and relevance. Folk traditions and folk beliefs constitute an important part of folklore studies. Folklore covers the traditional creations of primitive and civilised ethnic groups, as well as folk beliefs, customs and performances (Valk & Ülo, 2021). Charlotte Sophia Bume, a British scholar, suggests that it is not the construction techniques of bridges or houses that draw the attention of folklorists, but the rituals during said construction along with the social life of the users of the buildings (Bume, 1995).

Today, Southeast Asia boasts of an ancient civilization and mysterious culture. In modern and contemporary times, Western colonisers had progressively controlled all Southeast Asia except Thailand. Thus, with the end of the colonisation, no country in the region became a replica of other countries and regions in the world; instead, they formed a regional culture of Southeast Asia with similarities as well as diversities. The folk culture constitutes an important part of the cultural treasures of the Southeast Asian countries, and each country has its own unique folk customs and folk beliefs.

The Vietnamese folklore, with its unique characteristics, incorporates the national spirit and life skills established by the Vietnamese people during their long historical development. The folk culture features not only its own ancient and unique

connotations, but also the same origin as its counterparts in the region. Vietnam boasts of a long history, and the Vietnamese folklore has unique characteristics according to the nature, geography and customs of the country. It covers a wide range of fields, such as festival folklore, folk beliefs and folk arts. The traditional Vietnamese temple festival represents one of the most distinctive folk cultures, which reflects the social life and historical outlook of Vietnam and shows the daily life and psychological state of various ethnic groups. The festival also showcases various traditional Vietnamese folk arts. Tuân Ánh (1992), a Vietnamese scholar, suggests that folk beliefs are closely linked to traditional Vietnamese temple festivals, customs, practices and rituals. Therefore, the study of traditional temple festivals is inseparable when one studies folk beliefs.

Folk beliefs reflect the wishes of the minds of human beings, and are closely associated with the traditional temple festivals, habits, customs and rituals in Vietnam. The country is dominated by agriculture and worship of natural phenomena related to agriculture, which the Vietnamese consider to be supernaturally sacred with mysterious power. It can be said that figures worshiped in the temples are representatives of the different beliefs pinned on them. Each ethnic group within Vietnam has its own beliefs that are closely intertwined with their life, economy and spirituality. The folk beliefs of Vietnam are based on the relationship between people and nature, as well as between people and society. They include many aspects that are expressed through beliefs in ancestors, nature, the Mother Goddess, the Town God, etc.

This thesis emphasises on the representative beliefs of Mother and Town God in Vietnam. Mother Faith represents a noble spiritual and cultural value of the

Vietnamese people, the essence of which was extracted during a long historical process (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2004). The Mother Goddess is present not only in the courts, temples, mansions, temples and halls in Vietnam, but also in the hearts and minds of the people. The faith in the Town God is one of the most common folk beliefs in Vietnam; it has a long historical origin and a deep social foundation. Vietnam is characterised by multiple ethnicities and religions. Besides folk beliefs, foreign religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity have also been accepted. They have integrated into each other and can be adapted to specific historical environmental conditions at each stage (Thích Đạo Quang, 2016). This is reflected in the Perfume Temple and the temple festival.

The Perfume Temple carries a special status in the hearts of Vietnamese people. Built on the mountains, this ancient temple complex is considered a sacred Buddhist site by the Vietnamese people. Many activities related to the Perfume Temple and various other temples – including special Buddhist activities and activities of local Vietnamese folk-related religious beliefs – are distinct from other temple festivals. At Thiên Trù Temple and Perfume Cave of the Perfume Temple, the Goddess of Mercy (Arya Avalokiteshvara) is also worshiped; therefore, it is necessary to explore the historical origin of the Perfume Temple and Buddhism.

Upon its introduction to Vietnam, Buddhism has been integrated into the local beliefs, traditions and culture of the Vietnamese, giving shape to the unique characteristics of Vietnamese Buddhism. Moreover, the association between the Goddess of Mercy and Perfume Temple is even more intense, as people come from far and wide to make pilgrimages to the Goddess of Mercy in Perfume Cave (Crimeen, 2021). The same is reflected the devotion of Vietnamese people to the Goddess of Mercy. Therefore, the

discussion in conjunction with the worship of the Goddess of Mercy in Vietnam also provides an important source for the in-depth study of the Perfume Temple in this thesis.

The temple festivals In Vietnam are closely associated with local customs, folk beliefs and rituals, and an exploration of the forms and positive elements of these festivals will enable a more in-depth study of folk beliefs and religions for use in cultural tourism. Nowadays, there are still diverse temple festival events held across Vietnam. Based on the statistics of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, there are tens of thousands of temple festivals of varying sizes held all over Vietnam every year. In this thesis, the Perfume Temple Festival, which has a relatively large scale and influence, and is extremely unique, is selected as a typical case for analysis and study. Each temple at the Perfume Temple – a Buddhist holy land – features unique characteristics with different architectural styles and culture values. Not only does the Perfume Temple have a great number of pilgrims, the Perfume Mountain, where the Perfume Temple is located, also has a picturesque scenery, making it an excellent example of the combination of a traditional temple festival, folk beliefs and cultural tourism.

In the era of globalisation, facing the challenges of alien cultures and the protection of traditional cultural diversity, especially the protection of traditional folk beliefs, has become increasingly important and significant. Finding ways to integrate local beliefs so they coexist with foreign religions is also a new issue today. With the rapid economic development in Vietnam, cultural tourism has become a briskly developing industry. In this regard, this thesis aims to promote the development of traditional folklore resources for the modern society by studying the Perfume Temple Festival

and folk religious beliefs. Based on the analysis of the traditional folklore culture of Vietnam, this thesis also discusses the cultural tourism represented by the Perfume Temple and proposes suggestions for its development, which is expected to provide a reference for better developing cultural tourism in Vietnam and the world. Currently, studies on the impact of temple festivals and folk religions and beliefs on modern Vietnamese society and cultural tourism are relatively rare, and the author believes that this is a comparatively gaping area of research in this respect; therefore, it is hoped that this study will provide reference and information to promote better integration of folk culture and modern cultural tourism.

## 1.2 Research Questions

- (1) What is the role of folk beliefs and religions in modern Vietnamese society?
- (2) How can folk beliefs and the Perfume Temple Festival play a greater role in promoting cultural tourism?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

- (1) To study folk beliefs and religions in modern Vietnam through the development of the Perfume Temple in Vietnam.
- (2) To study how folk beliefs and religions promote cultural tourism in Vietnam.

## 1.4 Keywords

Vietnam, Perfume Temple Festival, Vietnamese Folklore, Vietnamese Folk Beliefs, Cultural Tourism

## 1.5 Literature Review

### 1.5.1 Folklore

Zhong Jingwen, a leading early scholar of folklore in China, pointed out in *Introduction to Folklore* that the Chinese expression of ‘folklore’ as a specialised disciplinary term is a phonetic translation of the English word ‘folklore’. The term

was first coined by the British scholar William Thoms in 1846 and became an international term for the discipline. As stated in *Definitions of Folklore* by Valk and Ülo (2021), folklore includes the traditional creations of primitive and civilised peoples. These have been made possible with the use of sounds and words in texts and proses, and also through folk beliefs, customs and performances (Valk & Ülo, 2021).

As an emerging discipline, folklore, represented by The Brothers Grimm, originated in Germany at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As to the understanding of the concept of folklore, the British scholar Bume (1995) proposed the spiritual culture theory in *Handbook of Folklore*, in which he argued that it is not the construction techniques of bridges or houses that draw the attention of folklorists, but the rituals during construction and the social life of the users of the buildings (Bume, 1995).

A survey of the concept of folklore will help us understand the important role of temple festivals and folk beliefs in Vietnamese society.

#### ***1.5.1.1 Folklore of Vietnam***

In the *ASEAN Folklore*, Yu Yizhong suggested that the folklores of Vietnam involve multiple fields such as annual festival folklore, handicraft folklore, food and costume folklore, folk art, life rituals and folk beliefs. The traditional temple festival is one of the most characteristic one among folk traditions (Yizhong, 2012). According to the *Ancient Customs* by the Vietnamese scholar Tuan Anh, folk beliefs are intimately associated with traditional Vietnamese temples, customs and rituals, and the study of traditional temples is inseparable from temples and folk beliefs. Folk beliefs have also emerged from the perceptions of the people in their daily lives; they reflect the wishes of the human mind, which are embodied and linked to customs through traditional temple festivals in Vietnam (Tuan Anh, 2005).



### 1.5.2 The Formation of Traditional Temple Festivals

Traditional temple festivals represent one of the most distinctive cultures in Vietnamese folklore, as suggested by Vietnamese author Nguyễn Chí Bền in *Traditional Culture and Folklore of Vietnam*. In Vietnam, the relationship between temple festivals and villages serves as an indispensable factor in social life, and temple festivals are precisely the places and opportunities to satisfy people's spiritual demands (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). Đinh Gia Khánh, a Vietnamese scholar, believed that temple festivals were the focal time of social life, and elaborated on the cultural significance to local temple festivals and foreign religions, as well as to local beliefs and temple festivals (Đinh Gia Khánh, 1989). As pointed out by Tuân Ánh in *Traditional Customs-Temple Fairs*, temple festivals are termed 'lễ hội' in Vietnamese, where 'lễ' refers to rituals for the purpose of thanksgiving and praying, and 'hội' refers to various recreational activities performed together by people (Tuân Ánh, 1992). In *Catch the Perfume Temple Festival*, Trần Đăng Hưng describes the origin of the Perfume Temple Festival (Trần Đăng Hưng, 2009). These studies are of great importance to the understanding of Vietnamese temple festivals.

### 1.5.3 Characteristics of Folk Beliefs in Vietnam

The characteristics of the folk beliefs in Vietnam can be generalised into several aspects, one of them is worship of nature. The second is the characteristic of highlighting femininity, i.e., Mother Worship. The third is ancestor worship (Nguyễn Thị Chính, 2019). For studies on Mother Goddess beliefs, Giovagnoli and Vân (2020) discussed in *Origin of Worshipping the Mother Goddess* that people in Vietnam have associated Mother Goddess with natural and cosmic phenomena (Giovagnoli & Vũ Hồng Vân, 2020). James J. Preston analysed the formation and characteristics of mother worship in *Mother Worship. The Virgin and Goddess of Vietnam* by Vũ Ngọc

Khánh (2002), as well as *The Mother Way of Vietnam* written by Ngô Đức Thịnh, as follows: in Vietnam, all conducted in-depth analyses on the Mother Worship. Further, as pointed out by Nguyễn Chí Bền, the Town God is like an invisible force that influences elements such as folk temples as well as folk architecture (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012).

#### 1.5.4 Temples and Pagodas in Perfume Temple

As introduced by Phạm Đức Hiếu, the cluster of the Perfume Temple Remains includes the entire cluster of Perfume Mountain township in Huyện Mỹ Đức, including mountains, streams, villages, temples and caves, most of which were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Trần Đăng Hưng introduced the architectural history and significance of the main shrines and caves, such as the Presentation shrine of the Perfume Temple (Trần Đăng Hưng, 2009). Nguyễn Đức Bằng and Phạm Đức Hiếu also elaborated on the Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave) which mentioned that the cave contains a green rocks statue of Avalokitesvara carved in 1778–1802 (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013). According to Phan Huy Chú's *Description of the institutions of all dynasties* (Lịch triều hiến chương loại Chí), Perfume Cave was accessible only after climbing over the overlapping mountains and entering the deep part of the mountains. The cave was considered to be the most beautiful in the South Sea (Phan Huy Chú, 2005). The presentations and studies of these scholars have provided useful references for in-depth fieldwork on the Perfume Temple and the study of temple cultural tourism for this thesis.

#### 1.5.5 Buddhism, Confucianism and Folk Beliefs

Vietnam first shaped its native folk beliefs based on development history, geography and culture, which were shaped by the relationship between human beings and nature. Worship and offering to the Mother Goddess, Town God and ancestors are identified

as folk beliefs (Vũ Ngọc Khánh, 2001). In particular, the Mother Belief has a special significance for the Vietnamese.

The Perfume Temple is a holy place of Buddhism; therefore, the study of this ancient temple will necessarily involve the exploration of Buddhism. The Vietnamese author Thích Đạo Quang proposed in *Outline of Buddhist Philosophy* that Buddhism exhibited a trend of localisation after its introduction to Vietnam and was integrated into the beliefs, traditions and cultures of the Vietnamese. In *Vietnamese Buddhist Thought*, Nguyễn Duy Hinh from Vietnam discussed the basic characteristics of folk nature and unity of Vietnamese Buddhism; similarly, Nguyễn Lăng (2010) proposed the characteristics of Buddhism and other religions. Nguyễn Thị Chính pointed out that the integration of Buddhism and folk beliefs in Vietnam has been reflected in multiple aspects. In *History of Perfume Temple*, Nguyễn Đức Bằng (2007) explained the origins of Buddhism at the Perfume Temple, which serves as a very useful reference for understanding the historical origins of Buddhism at the Perfume Temple. Crimeen and Fletcher (2021) not only introduced the Perfume Cave but also mentioned that people pray to and worship Avalokitesvara in the Perfume Cave (Crimeen, 2021). The Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) and Perfume Cave at the Perfume Temple are dedicated to Avalokitesvara, demonstrating that worshipping Avalokitesvara is an important custom among the Vietnamese people. In *Studies on Avalokitesvara Belief in Vietnam*, Thích Quảng Đức proposed that in the sixteenth century, people worshiped the South Sea Avalokitesvara, and discussed the customs of Vietnamese people to worship Avalokitesvara. In *A Study on the Reasons of Avalokitesvara belief*, Trịnh Tiểu Quân (2001) suggested the main reasons why the Avalokitesvara Belief was widely accepted by the Vietnamese. Phạm Đức Hiếu also

discussed the reasons why people worship Avalokitesvara at the Perfume Temple and the origin of the belief in Avalokitesvara. Through these studies, it is possible to deepen the understanding of the reasons for the rooting of the belief in Avalokitesvara in Vietnam.

Confucianism was introduced to Vietnam as early as in the Qin Dynasty. Liu Zhi, in *Diffusion and Integration of Confucianism in Vietnam*, proposed that the integrated Vietnamese Confucianism was no longer a simple replica of Chinese Confucian culture, but featured its own distinctive characteristics. Nguyễn Văn Chính believed that Confucianism has a strong influence on the folk belief of ancestor worship (Nguyễn Văn Chính, 2010). Furthermore, according to the traditional consciousness of Confucianism, carrying on the family line is the greatest filial respect to ancestors (Chen Lin, 2019).

#### 1.5.6 Perfume Temple and Cultural Tourism

Currently, there are relatively few studies on cultural tourism in foreign countries; however, scholars in Asia and Southeast Asia have attached importance to the Perfume Temple. *A Study on Tourism of Perfume Temple Festival in Mỹ Đức District, Hanoi City* by Vũ Thị Hoài Châu from Vietnam is a valid literature for the analysis of tourism of the Perfume Temple (Vũ Thị Hoài Châu, 2014). However, the article focuses on the factors influencing temple festival tourism, experiences of temple festival tourism, as well as approaches to promote the development of visitor market and tourism products; it doesn't, however, cover the aspects of the association of temple festivals of the Perfume Temple with religious and folk beliefs, as well as the impact on cultural tourism thereof. Tao Haichao suggested that the cultural tourism industry has contributed a lot to the economic development of Vietnam. The diversity

of cultural tourism precisely adapts to the diversity of motivations of tourists (Tao Haichao, 2020).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism is the discovery and experience of the tangible and intangible cultural attractions of destinations (UNWTO, 2018). The cultural elements embedded in the temple festivals can be divided into ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ parts (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). The development of cultural tourism is precisely promoted through the combination of ‘tangible’ cultural resources and ‘intangible’ spiritual culture. The Perfume Temple not only features various temple buildings, it also focuses on various rituals of worshipping ancestors, that are all valuable ‘intangible’ tourism resources (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013). Just as Ngô Dương Đức Thịnh expressed, ‘The cultural value of temple festivals is shared life and shared feeling’ (Ngô Đức Thịnh, 2012).

The ‘intangible’ resources of cultural tourism are also reflected in the distinctive culture embedded in the folk art performed at the temple festivals. Many of the folk arts originated from traditional temple festivals and the content of these performances is solemn and sacred (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). The Perfume Temple Festival has featured the folk-art performance of Hát chèo and other cultural plays since ancient times (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013). The *Reappearance of World Geography-Vietnam*, written by Huang Taixiang from Taiwan, analysed the strong folklore in Hát chèo, a traditional Vietnamese art (Huang Taixiang, 2010).

## 1.6 Conceptual Framework

### 1.6.1 Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, a term enjoying great popularity, is also a brand-new term widely discussed in recent years. Cultural tourism is closely associated with the definition of the word culture. Understanding culture will be conducive to understanding cultural

tourism. The first classical definition of culture was proposed by Tylor (1871); it covers a wide range of fields and it is still widely used by social science researchers. He believed that culture ‘includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morality, laws, customs and other abilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of society’ (Bennett, 2015). Culture can be manifested in either tangible or intangible form, be of political and symbolic nature, or be used to present our daily lives.

According to Littrell (1997), culture may be considered as something that consists of what people think, what they do and what they produce. Therefore, it consists of processes and the products thereof. By viewing culture in this way, cultural tourism is not only about visiting sites and monuments, which is usually the ‘traditional’ view of cultural tourism, but also about the consumption of the way of life in the areas visited. Consequently, cultural tourism may be defined as ‘the movement of people from their regular place of residence to a cultural attraction for the purpose of acquiring new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural demands’ (Richards, 1996).

Printed in 2013, *The Routledge Handbook of Cultural Tourism* is one of the first works offering extensive insights into the cultural tourism perspectives. It examined the concept of cultural tourism from several perspectives and presented three key messages (Smith & Richards, 2013). Bonink (1992, in Richards, 1996) reviewed the existing definitions of cultural tourism and proposed two major approaches, with the former being more technical and focusing on the types of cultural tourism attractions and the number of cultural tourists, while the latter focusing on the motivations and activities of cultural tourists. In *Tourism: Principles, Practices and Philosophies*, McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) argued that cultural tourism covers ‘all aspects of

travel in which tourists can learn about the history and heritage of others, or about their contemporary lifestyles or ideas' (McIntosh, R.W. & Goeldner, R., 1986).

The definition of cultural tourism reflects the diversity and breadth of cultural tourism research. Richards proposed in *What is Cultural Tourism?* that since the definition of cultural tourism depends on the perspective adopted and the purposes thereof, one cannot adopt only one universal definition. With the improvement of education, the level of 'cultural capital' or cultural competence of the society has also increased. This suggests that more people will be able to understand and appreciate the culture presented in 'high-level' cultural sites such as museums, theatres and opera houses (Richards, 2003). Richards (2018) asserted that the definition of cultural tourism by the UNWTO is a narrow one to assist in understanding and measuring cultural tourism, and, therefore, recommended a completely new one. The new definition from UNWTO states that cultural tourism refers to 'a tourism activity in which visitors are essentially motivated to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products of the destination. These attractions/products address a series of distinctive physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of society, covering art and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and living culture, as well as their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.' (UNWTO, 2018).

In *Cultural Tourism from an Academic Perspective*, Frank and Medarić (Tina Orel Frank, Zorana Medarić, 2018) discussed that tourism plays a predominant role in the global economy and described the decisive basis for participating in tourism. Nguyễn Phương Hồng (2020) stated that cultural tourism also includes tourism activities with

religious culture as the main motivation. People hope to find spiritual balance and confidence in the future, thereby making cultural tourism into a new tourism model for people to find spiritual support and reliance (Nguyễn Phương Hồng, 2020).

The study of the concept of cultural tourism has provided useful Information for this thesis to further analyse the tourism resources of the Perfume Temple Festival and to further develop the cultural tourist attractions of folk religious beliefs represented by the Perfume Temple in a more effective manner.

#### 1.6.2 Concept of Religion

In *The Concept of Religion*, American scholar Schilbrack (2022) proposed that religion is a cultural phenomenon emerging from the development of human society to a certain historical stage, and that it belongs to a special ideology of society. The primary functions of religion are to eliminate suffering and anxiety, inspire people with hope, instil peace of mind, and contribute to the correction of the hearts and minds of the world in terms of the willingness between good and evil; the aim is to establish ethics and morality, and even to initiate social introspection and adjust the trend of public opinion, among other positive values. Religion is a deity over everything, and it should be worshiped and baptised. The most important part of religious practices is the cultivation of virtues, such as the notion that one should seek repentance when he/she has done something wrong (Schilbrack, 2022). Petrosyan (2000) proposed that religion is closely associated with people's livelihoods – from food, clothing, housing and transportation to plants and the environment – and it can be argued that religious experiences can safeguard our environment and that personal religious practices are required if we want to live on a sustainable planet (Petrosyan, 2000).



The *Religions Secularization and the Politics* by Jeff Haynes asserted that religion is a social phenomenon, a form of human social consciousness, a social consciousness about supra-earthly and supernatural forces, as well as the behaviour resulting in the expression of belief and worship thereof, and a social and cultural system that integrates and normalises and institutionalises such consciousness and behaviours. The term religion, which is ‘religare’ or ‘religio’ in Latin, refers to the connection between humans and God or the worship of God. In the course of historical development and in the context of different cultures, different ethnic groups around the world have assigned different meanings to religion; thus, various religious beliefs have emerged. These have emerged as religious concepts in a broad sense (Haynes, 1997). As a socialised existence, religion features four elements – the idea or thought of religion, feelings or experience, behaviour or activity, and organisation or institution (Durkheim, 1968).

### 1.6.3 Folk Beliefs

Belief is a social and historical phenomenon; its emergence, existence and evolution are closely associated with the history of human development. Belief is a part of the social consciousness that reflects the existence of society and accepts the laws of social existence, as well as the faith of human beings against the existence or rescue of some supernatural force (Nguyễn Thị Chính, 2019). Đặng Văn Nghiêm (1998), who was a professor, argued that belief is a kind of faith that humans believe in and apply to explain the world with the aim of conferring a sense of safety on themselves and people. The faith also presents the values of living and the significance of permanent life (Đặng Văn Nghiêm, 1998).

As for the concept of folk belief, Vũ Ngọc Khánh (2001) believes that it is generated by people's perceptual understanding in daily life. For any ethnic groups, folk beliefs originated from primitive beliefs or religions, which gradually emerged in primitive societies and included the conceptions of an ethnic group about the supernatural world around them (Vũ Ngọc Khánh, 2001). In the existence and development of society, human beings have invented beliefs as well as different ideas about beliefs. According to the *Ethnic Dictionary* written by Mai Thanh Hải, the belief is interpreted as the envy of people supernatural and mysterious power, which manifests itself in the form of 'Heaven', 'Buddha', 'Lord', 'Holy', 'God' or unreal, mysterious, invisible power that directly affects the spiritual life of people, which they believe to be real and make sacrifices to ((Mai Thanh Hải, 2002:56). In the academic community, the term 'folk belief' has different names in different countries and regions. In Europe and the United States, it is often referred to as 'Popular Religion' or 'Folk Religion'. In Japan and China, it is called 'folk belief'. In Vietnam, belief is also known as 'traditional belief' or 'folk belief'. Belief is inseparable from religion; folk belief is the belief of an ethnic group within a certain geographical area, and all the manifestations of the belief are the subjects created by relying on historical background, geography, economy, culture and society. Folk belief is commonly understood according to the folk as faith and envy (Nguyễn Thị Chính, 2019). It has progressively developed with people's lives and aims to satisfy the economic, social and cultural demands of human beings.

### 1.7 Hypothesis

Folklore is an important part of human culture. With its unique characteristics, Vietnamese folklore contains the national spirit formed in the long-term historical

development of the nation; folk beliefs and religions are one of the most distinctive aspects of Vietnamese culture. Folk beliefs and religions are closely linked with temple festivals. In this thesis, through the study of the development of the Perfume Temple Festival, it is assumed that folk beliefs and religions have always been the spiritual foundation of modern Vietnamese society. The Perfume Temple Festival, the extensively popular folk activity, is the embodiment of comprehensive elements such as folk belief, religions, ancient architectural relics, folk art and cultural values. The festival is also in line with the growth of cultural tourism in Vietnam. Meanwhile, the influence and promotion of folk beliefs and religions has enabled the Perfume Temple to become a popular destination of cultural tourism in Vietnam.

### 1.8 Research Methodology

This study employs a combined approach of document research and fieldwork to investigate research data on traditional temple festivals, folk beliefs and religions in Vietnam. It focuses on analysing the research literature on the Perfume Temple Festival, which is intended to illustrate the influence and interrelationship between folk culture and folk religious beliefs. This is to study the influence of folk religious beliefs represented by the Perfume Temple Festival for the Vietnamese society as well as the significance to cultural tourism thereof.

This thesis integrates document research with quantitative research methods based on field observations, questionnaires and interviews with the stakeholders of the temple festivals such as tourists and villagers.

#### 1.8.1 Document Research

This study primarily incorporates a variety of literature sources, including historical books, journal articles, research reports, web resources, guides and handbook information. It also integrates elaboration of comparative analyses based on previous

studies. These materials are employed to study the folk traditions and religious beliefs in Vietnam by taking the example of the Perfume Temple. The study and analysis of literature and data are expected to provide a detailed theoretical basis for this thesis, thereby laying a solid foundation for the study of the influence of folk religious beliefs on the Vietnamese people and exploring the value of these traditional folk cultures in modern society along with the significance of cultural tourism.

### 1.8.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork and interviews were performed at the Perfume Temple in Vietnam. The data and information acquired from the fieldwork and interviews are summarised and analysed as follows:

#### *1.8.2.1 Field Observation*

A fieldwork survey was performed to understand the distribution of the cluster of the Perfume Temple – along with its main characteristics and architectural features – to observe how offerings are practiced in the temples, what deities are worshiped and how visitors perform worships and sacrifices. Observation was made regarding the composition of visitors to the Perfume Temple, the activities they attend and the ways in which locals operate temple merchandise to obtain valuable field information.

#### *1.8.2.2 Questionnaire*

A questionnaire survey was performed on a total of 100 people visiting the Perfume Temple to understand their background, the activities they come to attend at the Perfume Temple, the wishes they pray for, what aspects of the Perfume Temple they are interested in, and whether they would like to revisit it. The results of these surveys are summarised and analysed to reach appropriate conclusions. This survey was performed with the aim of identifying whether visitors to the temple are mainly

Buddhists or of diverse beliefs. For example, a question that can be asked is: What is the appeal of the Perfume Temple and what cultural elements interest modern visitors?

#### *1.8.2.3 Interviews*

A total of 10 Vietnamese tourists from different backgrounds and local people living near the Perfume Temple were selected for in-depth interviews. This was to study their purposes and impressions of visiting the Perfume Temple, and to gather their views on and suggestions for future tourism with regards to the Perfume Temple. The interview questions were designed to include three major categories and five sub-categories of questions. These included: the significance of the Perfume Temple to the visitors in terms of spiritual and economic aspects, and the impact of the Perfume Temple Festival, i.e., which elements of it they like, what are the positive impacts, which situations they dislike and what are the negative impacts, etc. This will enable a deeper understanding of the impact of Perfume Temple on visitors and the improvements and efforts required to better develop cultural tourism here in the future.

#### *1.8.2.4 Understanding the Management of Temple Festival*

The survey enabled an understanding of the management of the Perfume Temple Festival and who would be responsible for the restoration and maintenance of the temple cluster. The Perfume Temple is a large temple complex. Therefore, the management of this place is also of concern for the development of cultural tourism.

### *1.9 Research Significance*

1.9.1 This thesis can be a reference for the study of Vietnamese folk beliefs, religions and cultural tourism.

1.9.2 The findings of this study can be applied to promote better integration of folk beliefs with religious and cultural tourism.

While most of the previous studies focused on the excavation of inherent traditional culture of temple festivals and folk beliefs, this study tries to draw a connection between folk beliefs and cultural tourism. Thus, this thesis will provide a reference and example for the integration of folk beliefs, religions and cultural tourism.



## Chapter 2: The Perfume Temple Festival in Vietnam

### 2.1 Overview of Perfume Temple Festival

The Perfume Temple (Vietnamese: Chùa Hương), situated in Mỹ Đức District of Hanoi, is one of the main attractions in north Vietnam as it is one of the largest national temple festivals in the country. The festival is held from the sixth day of the first lunar month to the end of March every year, and since it lasts for three months, visitors can comfortably choose the time they wish to visit. Furthermore, the Perfume Temple is located 70 kilometres west of Hanoi, which is deemed a perfect location. The festival attracts many tourists from within Vietnam as well as from abroad, comprising mostly those who wish to visit and learn about the culture, customs and beliefs of the Vietnamese. The Perfume Temple Festival has become a unique brand in the northern part of Vietnam and has been regarded as the largest spiritual temple festival in Vietnam since ancient times. Thousands of Buddhist believers attend the festival every year, which is a very significant advantage in the development of tourism as there are many other temple festivals that are still on the difficult route of building their own brands. Furthermore, the site of the Temple Festival at Perfume Temple is endowed by nature with gorgeous green hills and enchanting waters, which, in conjunction with the stunning architecture and temples, create the unique charm of the festival.

The Perfume Temple Festival is a popular cultural event; its significance lies in the fact that it can effectively spread national cultural values. As Buddhism adapts to local culture and integrates into local life, the festival has become an event that satisfies the indispensable spiritual demands of the people. The Perfume Temple

Festival has become a form of cultural life, an approach to effectively popularise the cultural values of an ethnic group and a means to publicise the intangible cultural heritage of the nation. The Temple Fair does not only satisfy the spiritual demands of the people, but is also a place where people can retrieve their roots and preserve their national culture and traditions. In the modern society, under the increasingly stressful circumstances of life, temple fairs have created a relaxed and joyful cultural atmosphere and several communication opportunities for people; they are conducive to alleviating the mental stress of people, enhancing group cohesion and maintaining unity. With regard to the values of temple festivals, Đinh Gia Khánh believed that they are organised for honouring ancestors and holding regular annual rituals to commemorate the same, which is a unique feature of Vietnamese culture and reflects the powerful spiritual strength of the Vietnamese. These worship and ritual activities are beneficial to the cultivation of patriotic spirit and national pride, thereby enabling a closer tie between the people of the north and the south. The Perfume Temple Festival is not only a traditional cultural form coupled with the celebration of Buddhism, the high density of people and an infinitely wide space across time, it has become the top temple festival of joy in the southern part.

In recent years, the Perfume Temple Festival has also received support from the national and local governments, and the conditions of physical facilities of the Temple have been significantly improved. The Perfume Mountain Scenic Sites and Relics Management Committee has been specially established, bringing significant improvement to the physical facility conditions of the Perfume Temple. During the Temple Festival, 12 additional shuttle buses run between Hanoi and Perfume Mountain every day, so as to bring convenience to visitors. If visitors do not travel to



the Perfume Temple during the Temple Festival, there are various public transportation buses to the Temple. This helps provide the convenience of visitors. In terms of transportation technology infrastructure, waterways and highways have also been renovated simultaneously, with the construction of new two-lane roads and the upgrading of traffic roads to the Perfume Temple. Investment has been made in the construction of internal roads in the Perfume Temple area as well as inspection and maintenance of the cable car system to ensure the safety of visitors. Reasonable arrangements have also been made for billboards and signage so that they do not interfere with the natural landscapes. All traffic systems, road signs, and directional boards from Hanoi to Yen Stream have also been repaired and maintained, and the sizes of signboards, billboards and vending signs have been standardized. During the 3-month Temple Festival, the Perfume Temple is open from 6:00 am to 9:00 pm. The number of ferry boats on Yen stream has increased to 5,000, however, it is still not enough to satisfy the demands of visitors during the weekends. On ordinary days not during the Temple Festival, the open time varies according to the seasons, the number of visitors is also relatively small, and the number of ferry boats is also reduced significantly.

To promote and introduce the history of the Perfume Temple to numerous visitors, the Organizing Committee of the Perfume Temple selects a theme for the Temple Festival each year and develops plans appropriate to the theme. For example, in 2018, an event with the theme "Perfume Temple: The Beauty of Vietnamese Traditions" was held, and a kirin dance and a male dance performed by senior citizens were also organized at the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda. There was also an exhibition introducing the photo works with the theme "Meditation in the Sun". Furthermore, various artistic

performances with strong traditional cultural characteristics such as singing Hát chèo, lion and dragon dances, animal freeing ceremonies, dragon boat races, human chess, etc. are organized with an aim to preserve the traditional wealth of the ancestors and guide visitors to return to their origin of the ethnicity and the cultural values of their ancestors. The Perfume Temple has been promoted as a popular tourist attraction among many tourism groups, and tourist promotions with the message "Escaping from the bustling city to the largest pagoda complex in Vietnam, the Perfume Temple Pagoda, where you can enjoy the breathtaking natural scenery along the river while encountering the historical pagoda face to face" are readily available in Hanoi. In recent years, the Perfume Temple has received great attention from authorities at all levels, from the central to the local level. In the City Tourism Development Plan and Vision of Hanoi for 2030, the Perfume Temple Festival and the Perfume Mountains Landscapes have been recognized as one of the national tourist attractions and key national investment projects.

## 2.2 History of Perfume Temple Festival

The Perfume Temple is a huge cluster of Buddhist temples and shrines built in the Perfume Mountains. The Ministry of Culture (former) included it in the List of Special Historical Sites. The Perfume Temple Remains area consists of several temples and caves with Buddhist cultural characteristics, as well as several shrines dedicated to the Town God and the offering table of folk beliefs. Since Emperor Lê Thánh Tông (1460–1497) visited the Temple on his second tour to the south, and built a thatched temple on Perfume Mountain, it became a sacred place for Buddhist devotees to worship the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Subsequently, the site was further restored so future generations could worship there. In 1687, the Monk

Trần Đạo Viên Quang came here and rebuilt Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) and the statue of Buddha, and contributed to the revitalisation of Buddhism in the Perfume Mountains (Trần Đăng Hưng, 2009). He organised the Buddhists to hold a celebration of the birth of Avalokitesvara on the nineteenth day of the second lunar month every year. This made the area a blessed place as it received spiritual blessings (Dengxiong, 2009). In the history of Vietnam, a total of 12 emperors had participated in the Perfume Temple Festival. The 11 emperors in succession after King Le Thanh Ton always devoted themselves to the development of the Perfume Temple and the popularisation of Buddhist Dharma. As a result, the Perfume Mountain area and its temples have developed on a large scale (Son Nam, 2023). Trịnh Sâm was the founder of the Perfume Temple Festival and since then, every year when spring comes, tourists from all over the world come to the temple festival with the number increasing every year. The Grand Temple Festival, however, was not officially opened until 1896. By 1947, there had been nine generations of masters presiding here in succession.

The wars launched by France and the United States caused damages to the temples here. Both the gate and the bell tower of Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) were destroyed. The bell tower was reconstructed in 1986 and the gate was reconstructed in 1994. Following the recovery of peace, under the leadership of governments at all levels and the concerted efforts of the people, the Perfume Temple was restored and rebuilt, and has developed and grown since then.

Due to the efforts of the previous generations and through history and the cultural connotations bestowed upon it, people have begun to enjoy the wonderful scenery of the mysterious and beautiful mountains and streams of Perfume Mountains. The

Perfume Temple, a huge Buddhist temple and shrine cluster, attracted a large number of pilgrims whose standard greeting was 'Amitabha' (Sieu & Thien, 1995). The Vietnamese people have the tradition of worshipping the gods and ancestors during the New Year festival. For some Vietnamese, their greatest wish in life is to offer incense at the Perfume Temple. Thus, there is a constant flow of visitors from all over Vietnam to attend the temple festival. Historically, on the sixth day of the first lunar month every year, the Perfume Temple would hold an opening forest ceremony at the Presentation shrine (Đền Trình), which is also the opening ceremony of the Perfume Temple Festival; this custom is still maintained today.

### 2.3 Temple Festivals and Folk Beliefs

There have been numerous folk legends about the establishment of the Perfume Temple, which is the place where Avalokitesvara cultivated the path of attainment in the Buddhist language. The Bodhisattva was incarnated as Princess Miu Sin, also known as the Third Princess. The Third Princess is the princess of King Miaozhuang of Xinglin Kingdom. King Miaozhuang loved his daughter very much, however, the Third Princess refused to promise him a son-in-law, instead, she was determined to cultivate herself as a Buddhist, and King Miaozhuang was outraged and sent someone to kill his daughter. Upon knowing this, the Jade Emperor dispatched a deity to disguise as a fierce tiger to save the Third Princess and send her to the Perfume Mountains. Perfume Cave, also known as Buddha Nunnery, is the very place where the Third Princess was settled. It is said that the footprints of the Third Princess are still imprinted on the rock to this day. The place where the Third Princess bathed and cleansed herself from the worldly dust was the natural clear pond of the Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda and the Clearing Unjust Charges' Stream flowing in front of

the cave entrance. Following nine years of spiritual cultivation, the Third Princess was finally enlightened as the Avalokitesvara. Upon achieving successful enlightenment, the Third Princess did not ascend to heaven but stayed on earth to save the suffering and to eliminate evils. The legend about the Third Princess spread quickly throughout the locality, and reached the ears of Zen masters and practitioners, who all arrived here in search of a place of purification. In the reign of Lê Thánh Tông, three emperors visited this place and converted to Buddhism in the hope of attaining the Buddhist enlightenment. During the day, they chanted and sat in meditation at the Perfume Cave, and at night they went to the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda to sleep and rest. Since then, the Perfume has been called the Inner Pagoda and the Heavenly Kitchen Pagoda has been called the Outer Pagoda, and later on people collectively referred to the two pagodas as the Perfume Temple or "Perfume Pagoda". The Perfume Temple is a place full of fragrance, indicating that it was once a place where the Bodhisattva was cultivating, and the Heavenly Kitchen Pagoda means the kitchen in heaven. Therefore, to visit the Temple Festival of the Perfume Temple is to worship at the Perfume - Heavenly area of the Perfume Mountains.

The Perfume Temple is one of the clusters of cultural and religious sites of special significance in Vietnam, with both Buddhist activities and Vietnamese folk religious beliefs. This is different from other temple festivals ((Do Phuong Quynh, 1995). Vietnam is an agriculture-based country. The Vietnamese people have relied on rice cultivation since ancient times, so they worship the natural phenomena related to agriculture, which are considered to be supernaturally sacred with mysterious power. Folk temple festivals became the ideal spiritual environment to enable the Vietnamese to be in a position to perform solemn rituals dedicated to the transcendent gods and

goddesses they believed in and who influenced their lives. This represents the ancient agricultural beliefs as well as ancestral and multiple ritual beliefs, which are the basic belief elements of the ancient traditional temple festivals (Nguyễn Thị Chính, 2019).

Whenever it comes to folk temple festivals, it is necessary to talk about faith as, without it, a temple festival is not possible. The figures worshiped are all closely related to and representatives of different beliefs pinned on them; they are also among the greatest and the most dominant factors hidden in the traditional temple festivals (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). It is impossible to mention traditional temple festivals without mentioning the people and beliefs that are worshiped. The figures worshiped are different in different regions. In terms of beliefs, it could be a goddess, a Town God or a God of Bliss. The process of historicization and deification of the worshiped figures is closely associated with the regional landscapes, relics and shrines where the figures are worshiped. The process of historicization and deification takes place to varying extents in various cultural regions. With the development of the society, folk beliefs have been changing in the modern times; however, their contents and expressions have still been preserved. The religious beliefs are presented in all Vietnamese temple festivals, no matter when and where they are held; the main purpose is to request the gods, goddesses and ancestors to bless people with happiness, peace and prosperity, thereby presenting a strong sense of trust in the gods and goddesses. Even in the modern technological era, the enthusiasm of such folk beliefs has not faded and, to date, the temple festivals of folk beliefs have also received the attention of the government.

Every traditional temple festival today is the result of a long process of cultural evolution. Nguyễn Chí Bền suggested that the evolution of temple festivals in

Vietnam can be divided into three stages. The first stage is the initial and Chinese vassal state period, where Chinese cultural influence on Vietnamese folklore can be seen. The second stage is the monarchical and colonial period by France; the evolution of this culture brought new elements to the temple culture. The third stage, from 1945 to the present, refers to the synchronous development of traditional temple festivals with the Vietnamese economy, especially during the period of dramatic development of cultural communication. Here, it is seen the impact of cultural evolution on traditional culture is different from that of previous stages (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). In the awareness of every Vietnamese, if the banyan tree, the well and the courtyard are considered as intimate companions accompanying them from childhood to old age, the temple festival is a cultural element that is both intimate and sacred, strong and intimate, as well as a comprehensive manifestation of social elements such as folk beliefs, religions and folk arts. Meanwhile, the rituals in traditional temple festivals have a strong relationship with legends and relics. In the long history, such elements existing in the relics and temples represent an integral part.

The Vietnamese people have long traditions of religious activities which are closely associated with their life, economy and spirituality, and which have been formed in the relationship among people or between people and nature. The temple festivals that have approached the people are not, as some think, focusing on trivial issues. On no account should we pay special respect to the historic objects because they are relics of the imperial families, and on no account should we despise the customary objects because they are minor gadgets; in fact, we should pay attention to the lives of the ordinary people who make up the majority of the population by paying attention to the structure of their daily lives, to the relationships among people and the manners in

which they handle each other as experiences and lessons can be drawn from history. We are living in an era of peace but with complicated and ever-changing social relations, and we should enable every ordinary person, not just leaders and elites, to take in the historical lessons they require from a historical atmosphere that they feel familiar and intimate with. We attend to each small village as much as we do to the large cities, to its internal working mechanism as well as its connection to the outside world; we attend to each person as much as we do to each social group, to their joys and sorrows. Therefore, in this regard, temple festivals and folk beliefs are one of the most important elements reflecting the civil society life of the people, and they are inseparable from the economic and cultural life of the people in the society. Therefore, they flourish to this day, and we should explore, inherit and promote such valuable folk cultural heritage more and better for modern society.

Vietnam has shaped its native folk beliefs based on its history, geography and culture. The basic spirit of folk beliefs in Vietnam lies in the fact that people worship gods and goddesses not only for their personal peace and happiness, but also to enable abundant harvests in agricultural production. Therefore, in addition to seeing prosperity and satisfying spiritual demands, folk beliefs also give people confidence and determination. Agricultural production requires a collective community where people depend on each other to produce and live within the community. The traditional beliefs of Vietnamese people were shaped by this characteristic, and these folk beliefs have been well reflected in the Perfume Temple Festival.





The Perfume Line is the main line of the Perfume Temple, it includes: ① Yen Stream (Suối Yên), ② Presentation Shrine (Đền Trình), ③ Thanh Son Temple (chùa Thanh Sơn), ④ Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda), ⑤ Fairy Temple (chùa Tiên), ⑥ Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda (Giải Oan Pagoda), ⑦ Door Temple (đền cửa), and ⑧ Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave). Tourists mainly take this route as because it has the most concentrated features.

The main route to reach the Perfume Temple is to take a small ferry to reach the foot of Perfume Mountain through Yen stream, which is the main road to enter Perfume Mountain. Yen stream (Photos 1–2), encircling the mountains, is like a maiden with a scarf, winding through the mountains to form a real yet dreamlike ink painting hidden in the mundane world. Yen stream has a length of nearly four kilometres and flows through farmlands and other areas. Yen stream is framed on both sides by overlapping and interesting mountains, which were named according to their shapes by the ancients, and when one sits on a boat and follows the stream, he/she can enjoy all kinds of beautiful scenery. The ferry terminal is the assembly point for tourists entering the Perfume Temple. The visitors ride a small boat down the Yen stream to enter the fairyland. After leaving the ferry port, you will first come to the Presentation shrine

**Photo 1**

*Yen stream*

**Photo 2**

*Yen stream in the evening*



Presentation shrine is a historical and cultural site in the Perfume Mountain Scenic Area. This shrine is dedicated to the God of the Mountain where the forest mountain opening ceremony is held solemnly on the sixth day of the first lunar month. The ceremony was originally an agricultural ceremony in which the ancient Vietnamese expressed their gratitude to the God of Mountain for good luck, good weather, good health and protection from disasters. Nowadays, the mountain opening ceremony has been given a new meaning equivalent to the opening of the temple festival. As a result of geographical changes, the site of the Presentation shrine (Đền Trình) in Perfume Mountains, previously dedicated to the Town God of the local village, has become the Presentation shrine (Đền Trình) of the Perfume Temple, where the opening ceremony of the temple festival is held every year on the sixth day of the first lunar month; the dragon dance is also held here. Presentation shrine was built to enshrine one of the generals under King Xiong (Hùng Vương).

The Presentation shrine was burned down twice during the French colonial wars and was rebuilt and restored after the recovery of peace. In 1962, it was listed as a national historical site by the Ministry of Information and Culture of Vietnam. After entering

the gate of the Perfume Temple (Photo 3), the first thing in sight is the Presentation shrine (Photo 4).

**Photo 3**

*The Perfume Temple Gate (Behind is Presentation shrine)*



**Photo 4**

*Presentation shrine*



Thanh Son temple, built in 1860, is a very picturesque site with its back against a mountain; it faces a mound and river (Photo 5). In this area, there are two small caves with some stone instruments that make wonderful natural musical sounds when played. It is said that families with no children often visit Thanh Son temple to pray for the early birth of a child.

**Photo 5***Thanh Son temple*

Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) is also named Chùa Ngoài. It was built during the reign of Lê Thánh Tông (1460–1497). It was just a small grass nunnery at the beginning. As legend goes, Emperor Lê Thánh Tông named this valley ‘Heaven Kitchen’ after he and his soldiers rested there during their second tour to the south. Later, three monks came here to practice and build a Buddhist temple. In 1687, Trần Đạo viên Quang came here to practice religious doctrine; he rebuilt and named it the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda. Nowadays, there have been great changes in Heaven Kitchen Pagoda. The former mountain path has been turned into a beautiful avenue of pilgrimage with 130 steps, with two spacious paths going up and down the mountain on both sides and a concrete ramp in the middle for the disabled to travel on wheelchairs to worship the Buddha. The Heaven Kitchen Pagoda is spacious and solemn, with unique architecture and a harmonious layout. In the pagoda, there are the Hall of Three Treasures, the Front Hall, the Hall of Ancestor Worship, the Mother Goddess Hall dedicated to the Mother Goddess, guest rooms, storage rooms, etc. There are sufficient living facilities for hundreds of visitors to spend the night to rest and worship the Buddha. It is one of the most renowned temples in Vietnam from ancient times to the present. The Heaven Kitchen Pagoda has undergone several

generations of presidency and suffered damages from colonisers three times. With the contributions of tourists and the support of the government, the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda has been built, renovated and improved to the stunning building hidden in the forest of the Perfume Mountain it is today. The last restoration took place in the 1980s. Inside the temple is a statue of the South Sea Goddess of Mercy. Heaven Kitchen Pagoda has now become the centre of the Perfume Temple Scenic Area. There are also several stone monuments with various base shapes, including the most famous one, the ‘Heaven Kitchen Monument’, which is beautifully carved and dates back to 1688, the seventh year under the reign of Emperor Zhenghe. The stone monument is placed in the Monument Room along the path into the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda; it records the various renovations of Heaven Kitchen Pagoda and the Perfume Temple by Trần Đạo Viên Quang.

It is evident from Heaven Kitchen Pagoda that this is a cluster of temples where multiple elements of Buddhism, Mother Worship (Mother Goddess Hall), ancestor worship and Confucian culture coexist. The Perfume Pagoda is the main hall of the pagoda (Photo 6) dedicated to Avalokitesvara (Photo 7), and next to it is the Mother Goddess Hall, which is inscribed with the inscription, ‘a motherly model of the nation’ (Photo 8). There is also the Hall of Ancestor Worship dedicated to the God of Heaven and inscribed with ‘Sức mạnh thần’ or the power of God (Photo 9).

**Photo 6**

*Heaven Kitchen Pagoda*

**Photo 7**

*Avalokitesvara Enshrined in Heaven Kitchen Pagoda*



**Photo 8***Mother Goddess Hall***Photo 9***Hall of Ancestor Worship*

Fairy temple, located on top of Fairy Mountain next to Heaven Kitchen Pagoda, is a scenic cave with many stunning stalactites of various shapes that sound like bells, gongs and wooden knocker when played.

The Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda (Giãi Oan Pagoda) is located between Heaven Kitchen Pagoda and Perfume Cave (Huong Tich Cave). According to legend, when Goddess of Mercy was practicing at the Perfume Cave, she passed by the Clearing

Unjust Charges' Pagoda and bathed here to cleanse herself from dust and eliminate the injustice in the world. There are two small caves on both sides of the pagoda; the right side is the Sutra Cave and the left side is the Buddha's Tracks Temple. There is also a small well called the Natural Blue Pond Well (Thiên Nhiên Thanh Trì), where many visitors make offerings (Photo 10) and wash their hands. The pagoda features poetic landscapes (Photo 11) and elegant and tranquil natural surroundings. The cool water of the Clear Pond well makes visitors forget their worldly sorrows.

**Photo 10**

*Well in Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda*



**Photo 11**

*Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda*



Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave) is located in the centre of the Perfume Temple cluster which is the innermost location of the inner temple of the Perfume Temple. The Perfume Mountain has an altitude of more than 900 meters and the road to ascend the Perfume Cave is really tough and rugged, seemingly testing the hearts of people. Fortunately, a cable car (Photo 12) has been built to reach the top of the mountain; however, it is still necessary to climb a little further to reach the entrance of the cave, and then walk down 120 steps from the entrance to reach the centre. Looking from a



distance, the Perfume Cave resembles the mouth of a giant dragon holding a pearl. The gate of the cave is wide and the cave is deep. On the wall to the left of the gate of the cave are five large Chinese characters inscribed by Prince Trịnh Sâm, 'The First Cave of Southern Heaven' (Photo 13). When descending the steps into the cave, the scenery is fantastic and dexterous, as if it were a magical work of God. This is a huge stalactite cave that has been developed over a long period of time, and the mysterious and solemn scenery is heart-warming and shocking. Inside the cave are numerous statues, including a statue of Avalokitesvara chiselled in green stone, as well as statues of deities, arhats and various other figures (Photo 14). The cave is filled with worshipers and devotees from all over Vietnam who bring fruits and cakes for offerings and prayers. The Buddha Stage is crowded with pilgrims who make pilgrimages to Avalokitesvara and various deities (Photo 15), and the Perfume Cave demonstrates the fusion of Buddhist and folk beliefs here.

Inside the cave, there are several wondrous landscapes created by naturally formed stalactites and stalagmites (Photo 16). The ancient people named the stalactites according to their shapes as Golden Tree, Silver Tree, Buffalo, Girl Hill, Young Master Hill, Breast Milk Hill, etc. Many pilgrims pray to the stalactites for blessings, among which there are stalactites that can be prayed for the birth of a child. Some stalactites have become smooth from being rubbed by visitors over the years. All are masterpieces of nature. According to legend, Perfume Cave is the place where Avalokitesvara descended to perform a miracle. For centuries, people have believed that this cave has magical powers, and Perfume Cave has become well-known and attracted an increasing number of devotees (Photo 17). It can be said that this

underground dragon cave has contributed to the position of the Perfume Temple in the hearts of Vietnamese people today.

**Photo 12**

**Photo 13**

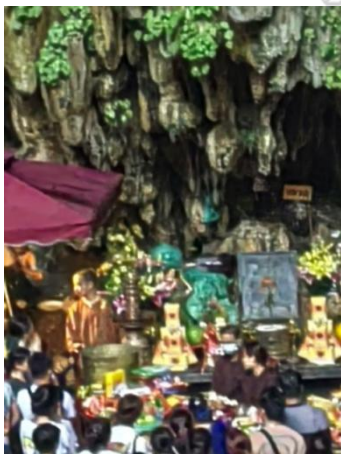
*Cable Car Ascending the Mountain*    *Perfume Cave Entrance-The First Cave of Southern Heaven*



**Photo 14**

**Photo 15**

*Various deities being worshiped*    *Pilgrimage to Avalokitesvara and Other Deities*



**Photo 16** *Stalactites in Perfume Cave*    **Photo 17** *Flow of Pilgrims*



In both the Tianchu Temple and Perfume Cave of the Perfume Temple Complex, Avalokitesvara is enshrined and people make devotional pilgrimages to Avalokitesvara. Therefore, the exploration of the beliefs of Avalokitesvara in Vietnam may provide an important reference for this thesis to study the Perfume Temple in depth.

### 3.2 Integration of Folk Beliefs, Buddhism and Confucianism at Perfume Temple

It is evident from the architecture of the temple and the various deities enshrined in the temple that the Perfume Temple has incorporated various folk religious beliefs. Due to historical reasons, many religions concurrently exist in Vietnam. During the period of the Li and Chen Dynasties (Lý-Trần Dynastie), Buddhism occupied a dominant position that lasted for three or four centuries. From the time of Le Thanh Ton, Confucianism gained increasing status until it became the orthodox ideology of Vietnam. Besides these, Christianity and Catholicism also exist; however, while these foreign religions coexist, Vietnamese people still retain their native beliefs, i.e., Vietnamese folk beliefs. This is still evident at the Perfume Temple, which is a Buddhist holy place.

### 3.2.1 Folk beliefs

The folk beliefs are fully reflected in the statues of the gods worshiped in the Town God at the Presentation shrine, the Mother Goddess Hall at the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) and the Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave). Especially, the Mother Goddess Hall at the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda was exquisitely built with various flower spikes for blessings hanging in front of the entrance (Photo 18), and the plaque of 'A Motherly Model of the Nation' in the hall is striking and generous, reflecting the high importance of the folk faith of the Mother Goddess to the Temple and the status of the Mother Goddess in the hearts of the Vietnamese people.

The expression "A Motherly Model of the Nation" was actually taken from ancient China. It is often depicted that the "Empress" or "Mother of the Nation" is a motherly, generous and generous person who cares for and educates her people to maintain the harmony and stability of the kingdom and society. As the emperor is regarded as the son of heaven, just like the father of the people, the empress is naturally regarded as the mother of the people, and should perform the rituals prescribed for motherhood and be kind to the people. The expression "be a motherly model of the nation" was taken from the Chinese Book of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, which refers to the fact that a mother's actions and manners can serve as a role model for all women in the world, and can serve as an example for all mothers in the world. In the Chinese history, there was one empress who really practiced the principle of "be a motherly model of the nation", and it was the Empress under the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang, the Founding Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, who loved the people like children, and showed mercy by insisting that she would not be treated by the Imperial Doctors when she was seriously ill. She knew the temperament of the Emperor and once the



Imperial Doctors failed to cure herself, the Emperor would kill the Imperial Doctors. The Empress would rather let herself die of illness than to incriminate others, and she was well deserving of the title of "be a motherly model of the nation". Motherly Virtue refers to the model of human motherhood, so Motherly Virtue and Great Love is to care for all the people of the world with the love like a mother. The presence of the term in the Mother Temple of the Perfume Temple also indicates the deep influence of Chinese culture on Vietnamese folk beliefs.

**Photo 18** *Mother Goddess Hall Building*



The Mother Goddess Worship is a widespread folk belief in Vietnam. The Vietnamese have a tradition of believing in the Goddess, which is associated with the spiritual life of the people who have long been engaged in agricultural farming as their basic economic activity, thereby generating a belief in nature which takes the form of worshipping various gods and attaching importance to the belief in the Goddess. In Vietnam, more than 70 goddesses can be listed. The belief in the Mother Goddess is called ‘Cúng Mẫu’ by the Vietnamese. Back in the old days, the Mother Goddess Worship was generally confined to the realm of worship and belief in natural ecology (Vũ Ngọc Khánh, 2002). In the natural ecological environment of agriculture, the ancient Vietnamese people gradually developed the concept of mutual suppression

and mutual generation of yin and yang, with the oriental philosophy of ‘unity of man and god’. Therefore, the mountains, rivers, water and fire in nature were worshiped as deities, and all of them were believed to be created by the female ‘Mother’ who was humanised by ‘Yin’. Based on this understanding, ‘Mother’ naturally became the ‘Mother Goddess’ who created all things in the universe in their minds. This explains the social basis for the belief in the Mother Goddess at the early stage for the Vietnamese as well as the historical root of the belief in the Mother Goddess in the transformation of Vietnamese society from an agricultural to an industrial society.

The Mother Goddess Worship in Vietnam was developed on the basis of the Goddess Worship, and the ‘Three Worlds and Four Worlds’ can be regarded as the perfect development of the belief in Mother Goddess. In folklore, the Mother Goddess is the supreme deity who has been reincarnated as the four Mother Goddesses of Heaven, Earth, Water and Mountains, and is in charge of all things in the world. Generally, the Mother Goddess is enshrined with other deities in spacious palaces and temples, as well as in various family altars. The sacrifice and nurturing of mothers have always been engraved in the hearts of Vietnamese people; therefore, Mother Worship is an expression of ‘gratitude for the source of benefit’.

Mother Goddess Worship has been adapted to social changes with the development of the times. Nowadays, this belief has been widely practiced in Vietnamese communities throughout Vietnam and overseas. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has listed Mother Goddess Worship as an intangible cultural heritage in 2016 (Anh, 2016). It demonstrates that belief in Mother Goddess has been recognised by the world. With regard to the belief in Mother Goddess, regardless of whether one understands it through research or just by

plain understanding, this belief implies a sense of closeness to people and also shows that values and traditional culture are united and crystallised in this belief.

During my study tour in Vietnam, I visited the Women's Museum in Hanoi (Photo 19) and viewed the introduction of belief in Mother Goddess (Photo 20) as well as the Mother Goddess worshipped by people in Vietnamese families (Photo 21); I was able to truly sense the special place of belief in Mother Goddess in the hearts of Vietnamese people.

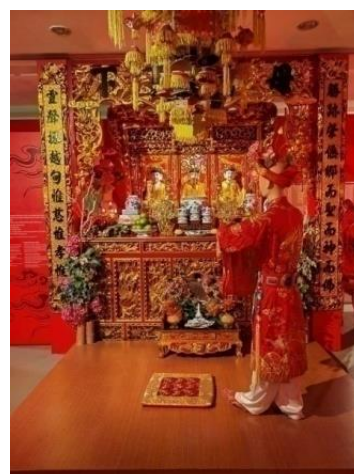
**Photo 19** *Women's Museum*



**Photo 20**

**Photo 21**

Introduction in the Women's Museum *Mother Goddess Worshipped by Families*



By believing in Mother Worship, people acquire a profound sense of comfort and compassion, and they seem to be more affectionate and understanding. Therefore, the Mother Worship is present everywhere, not only in the courts, temples, mansions, temples and halls of Vietnam, but also deep in people's hearts and in their lives. The Mother Worship conveys the Vietnamese philosophy of yearning for happiness and conquering nature, which is also the condition for maintaining the social and cultural environment in the historical and contemporary times.

The belief in Town God also has a deep social foundation in Vietnam. Since ancient times, Vietnam has maintained a relatively stable commune in each village and community due to the unlimited worship of the inhabitants of Town God, indicating that the belief in Town God has played an important role in advancing the development of Vietnamese village and community history. The belief in Town God has played a positive role in uniting the people, instructing them to 'remember their ancestors without forgetting them', and thereby forming a folk custom of simplicity and virtue. The Presentation shrine (Đền Trình) of the Perfume Temple in Vietnam was previously for the Town God of the local village, which has become the temple to hold the opening ceremony of the Temple Festival (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013).

Vietnam is characterised by multiple ethnicities and religions. Besides local folk beliefs, foreign religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity have also been accepted. Over the past 2,000 years, i.e., since Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, many material and cultural relics have been inherited. The Perfume Temple is an important sacred Buddhist site in the hearts of the Vietnamese people, and has been a popular temple since ancient times even though the only way to access the temple is by rowing a boat. Therefore, in addition to the investigation and study of the



tangible cultural tourism resources, such as the landscape and pagodas of the Perfume Temple, it is also necessary to examine the intangible tourism resources here, including the influence of Buddhism, Confucianism and folk beliefs regarding the Perfume Temple, as well as the relationships thereof.

### 3.2.2 Buddhism

Buddhism originated in ancient India 2,500 years ago; however, following its slow decline in ancient India, it developed rapidly and flourished overseas to Central Asia – China, Japan, etc. – as well as to South Asia – Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.. Buddhism thus became an international religion. The teachings of Buddha are superior in righteousness yet simple, thereby satisfying the spiritual demands of a wide range of creatures. Even German scientist Albert Einstein believed that Buddhism is a science which addresses the nature of things as they really are. While science refers to studying the laws of interaction between and among things, Buddhism has long been studying the laws of interaction between the mind and things and between the mind and mind (Thích Đạo Quang, 2016). In the second century AD, Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam from the north following Chinese officials and merchants, and was well accepted and developed by the Vietnamese, with famous Zen masters gradually emerging in the country. In other words, Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam by the Indians and the Chinese. During the Lý-Trần Dynasties, Buddhism was highly revered by rulers and common people alike, and many temples were built. The construction of the Perfume Temple Buddhism cluster was first started in the fifteenth century during the reign of Lê Thánh Tông, when the construction of the inner temple began to enshrine statues of Buddha and Avalokitesvara (Nguyễn Đức Báng, 2007).

After Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, Buddhism with Vietnamese characteristics was formed as reflected in, first of all, the integration of Buddhism and folk beliefs. Due to geographical, natural, cultural and political conditions, while Buddhism was spreading and developing in Vietnam, it became an integrated entity in which the customs and beliefs of a culture were fused with primitive Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism. This integrity oriented the direction of the development and evolution of Vietnamese Buddhism, and formed the Vietnamese culture (Nguyễn Lãng, 2010). Rural life has always dominated the social life of Vietnam; therefore, the people imagined a life that relied on the blessings of the deities, formed their own beliefs in their spiritual life, and simultaneously readily accepted foreign religions that could satisfy their spiritual demands.

After Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, especially in the northern temples, in addition to the statues of Buddha and Avalokitesvara, statues of gods, saints and Mother Goddesses of folk beliefs, Zen masters, ancestors and meritorious officials of the country were also worshiped. Prior to the influence of Buddhism, the most common deities believed in by ancient Vietnamese were the deities of natural phenomena, such as clouds, rain, thunder and lightning, which were worshiped in shrines and temples. After Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, the four gods of Cloud, Rain, Thunder and Lightning were 'Buddhized' by the influence of Chinese characters; they were worshiped in the temples and became the 'Four Buddhas'. The 'Four Buddhas' clearly reflect the integration of Buddhism and folk beliefs. The four gods of cloud, rain, thunder and lightning have become Dharma Cloud Buddha, Dharma Rain Buddha, Dharma Thunder Buddha and Dharma Lightning Buddha. When facing difficulties, Vietnamese people often use the expression 'beg the Buddha

and beg the sky’ or ‘worship the sky and worship the Buddha’ (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 2008). All of these present a fusion of Buddhist and folk beliefs. This feature has also been fully reflected at the Perfume Temple where Buddhas and Avalokitesvara are worshiped in the Buddhist temples while folk beliefs worship the sacred and holy mothers in the clan temples. In some cases, both Buddha and various deities are enshrined in the same temple (Photo 22). This indicates that Buddhism and folk beliefs have been well integrated in the Perfume Temple cluster.

**Photo 22**

*Various Deities Worshiped in Heaven Kitchen Pagoda*



The integration of Buddhism and folk beliefs in Vietnam is also reflected in the architecture and layout of the temples. There are over 10,000 temples in Vietnam. They serve as a base for the dissemination and operation of Buddhism, but also incorporate elements of folk beliefs in Vietnam; temple architecture is generally not an individual project, but a cluster of buildings containing adjoining buildings or successive buildings. The buildings include Buddhist temples and traditional shrines, as is reflected in the Heaven Kitchen Temple.

Another feature is reflected in the integration of Buddhism with other religions. Vietnam is a country where three religions, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, are integrated together and mutually supportive. Over the centuries, the image of Buddha in the middle, Lao Tzu on the left and Confucius on the right – namely the ‘Three Religious Masters’ or the temples of the three religions – has become very popular with the Vietnamese people.

Worshipping Avalokitesvara is also an important part of Vietnamese Buddhism. The belief in Avalokitesvara has, as mentioned previously, historical reasons for being accepted and spread among the general public in Vietnam (Trịnh Tiểu Quân, 2001). The main reasons are three-fold: first, under the turbulent historical conditions, the belief in Avalokitesvara was a psychological need for the general public to escape from the hardships of life. In the presence of natural and man-made disasters, the general public sought the refuge of supernatural divine power to escape from suffering, and Avalokitesvara was able to come out of the lotus seat and descend to the lower world with great mercy and happiness for all sentient beings; he adapted to the psychological needs of all social classes, and had great compassion that led him to remove the suffering of all sentient beings. Thus, the belief in Avalokitesvara was developed and spread rapidly among the public; it even formed a culture of faith in Avalokitesvara.

Second, the popularity of Guanyin belief was also associated with the influence of Confucianism. The substantial expression of the great compassion of Avalokitesvara lies in two aspects – altruism and peace. These have an implicit resemblance to the ethics and morality promoted by Confucianism, which promotes the importance of treating others with love and accommodating them with an equal and fraternal heart.

The idea of Bodhisattva relief in Mahayana Buddhism is based on the equality of all beings and Bodhisattva's aim of liberating all beings with a loving heart; therefore, the belief in Avalokitesvara is in line with the traditional proposition of Confucianism. Hence, the belief in Avalokitesvara gradually became the most widely practiced Buddhist faith in the Central Lands and Vietnam, and gradually integrated into folk beliefs. Furthermore, traditional Confucianism has a profound influence on the people, and the idea of 'no offspring, no filial piety' has deeply penetrated the people's consciousness. In the context of undeveloped science and the lack of understanding of the mysteries of childbirth, such fertility worship had resulted in many child-seeking practices among the people. The unique function of offering offspring by Avalokitesvara arose in response to this popular demand.

Regarding Avalokitesvara, who delivers offspring, and why the belief in Avalokitesvara would bring offspring, there is indeed a related text in the Buddhist classic *Lotus Sutra*. Meanwhile, folk stories of believing in Avalokitesvara and being blessed with offspring have also made the belief in Avalokitesvara deeply popular. Many pilgrims go to Perfume Cave to pray for the same purpose and with the hope that Avalokitesvara will empower them with fertility. Visiting renowned temples to pray for fertility has become a feature of Vietnamese folk beliefs.

Third, the belief in Avalokitesvara is in line with the traditional cultural belief of the worship of motherhood among the Vietnamese people. The nature of motherhood is to be extremely compassionate and self-sacrificing, and it is represented as the most noble symbol of worship in Vietnam. In the Buddhist belief system of deities, Avalokitesvara, who combines all the noble qualities of motherhood, is destined to become the preferred object of worship for all beings. Therefore, the worship of

Avalokitesvara is a reflection of the religious spirit that co-exists with the traditional Mother Worship in Vietnam.

There are also some other allusions to the South Sea Avalokitesvara. Some scholars in Vietnam have discussed the origin of the South Sea Avalokitesvara with the story of Princess Miao Shan. They suggest that Miao Shan went to south Vietnam to practice on Perfume Mountain, which is believed to be the story of the ‘Vietnamization’ of the South Sea Avalokitesvara (Thích Quảng Đức, 2018) and is similar to the story of the South Sea Avalokitesvara in Putuo Mountain, China. After the story was introduced to Vietnam, the place where South Sea Avalokitesvara practiced was written as a cave in the Perfume Mountain, Huyện Mỹ Đức, Hà Tây Province in Vietnam. The Vietnamese people also refer to Avalokitesvara as the ‘Third Princess’. Thus, regardless of whether the legend is true, there is no doubt that the Perfume Temple has a deep historical association with Avalokitesvara.

On the nineteenth day of the second lunar month, when the birthday of Avalokitesvara is celebrated, people gather from all over the world to hold a grand ritual, where devotees burn incense and pray to Avalokitesvara for blessing, and the women bring offerings and worship Avalokitesvara at the temples. Such folklore activities have become an important part of the Buddhist faith.

### **3.2.3 Confucianism**

Confucianism also exerted a profound influence on Vietnam. Confucianism, which was founded by Confucius, was introduced to Vietnam as early as the Qin Dynasty, and subsequently flourished, reaching its peak during the Lý Dynasty, during which Confucius’ Temples were built, Confucius was honoured and worshiped, and the imperial examinations were introduced. Since Confucianism was deeply rooted in the

lives of Vietnamese people and became the norm of their morality and ethics, the Vietnamese people also called Confucian culture ‘Confucianism’. First, the Confucian Culture had a profound influence on education in Vietnam. As a carrier of Confucian culture, Chinese characters became the official writing language in Vietnam for over 2,000 years. Even though Chinese characters were used as the official writing language in Vietnam, the Nan Characters – themselves were the product of the spread and integration of Chinese culture in Vietnam – created by the Vietnamese were also in use to a certain extent. The imperial examination system as a system for selecting officials was also developed in Vietnam, and Confucianism as a culture has contributed significantly to improving the cultural literacy of the entire Vietnamese nation.

During on my investigation of Vietnam, I observed another example of Confucian culture. This includes the Chinese Emperor Qianlong, who worshiped Confucius as the supreme sage, as well as was the typical representative of Confucian culture and presented two treasures to Vietnam – one being a plaque in his own handwriting nominating ‘Exemplary Teacher of All Ages’ in Confucius’ Temple (Photo 23) and the other being an incense burner in the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda named ‘Heavenly Perfume Treasure Tripod’ (Photo 24). This reflects the profound influence of Confucianism on Vietnam.

**Photo 23**

*Exemplary Teacher of All Ages’ Plaque in the Confucious’ Temple*



**Photo 24**

*Incense Burner in Heaven Kitchen Pagoda*



The Confucian Culture also had an impact on the social life of Vietnam. The ideology of loyalty and filial piety serves as an important expression of the same. In daily life, descendants should not mention the names of their parents and elders directly, otherwise they would be regarded as disrespectful to elder generations. The manner of addressing Vietnamese people created a cordial and easy-going social atmosphere while also highlighting the importance of Confucianism among the Vietnamese people, such as the notions of ‘seniority’, ‘elder and younger’ and ‘respect and inferiority’. In Confucianism, filial piety obliges children to respect and care for their parents, thereby transforming their duties to their parents beyond religious beliefs and into morality and ethics. Various types of epitaphs, chronicles and ancestral prayers



were inscribed in Vietnamese temples to emphasise gratitude to the ancestors, thereby enhancing the significance of ancestor worship and reflecting the mutual influence of Confucianism and folk beliefs. Furthermore, according to the traditional consciousness of Confucianism, carrying on the family line is the greatest filial respect to the ancestors, leading to the proposal ‘no offspring, no filial piety’; such Confucian thought has also penetrated deep into the hearts of the Vietnamese people. At the Perfume Temple, people make pilgrimages to the Goddess of Mercy to pray for offspring, which is also a manifestation of Confucian Culture. Confucian culture has had a profound influence on the ideology, culture, education, customs, ethics and morals of the Vietnamese.

When Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Vietnam, temples and pagodas became the cultural centres of faith, thus showing the crossover between local and foreign cultures; the Perfume Temple Festival is a typical representative of such integration.

Based on my fieldwork, I saw that the temple complex of the Perfume Temple incorporates multiple religious beliefs, some of which are in the form of shrines built next to Buddhist temples; for example, the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda, the Main Hall, Perfume Pagoda is a Buddhist temple with a Mother Goddess Hall built next to it. The Hall is inscribed with ‘Motherly Model of the Nation’ in Chinese and is dedicated to the Mother Goddess (Photo 8), as well as the Hall of Ancestor Worship (Sức mạnh thần) (Photo 9), It reflects the fusion of folk beliefs and Confucian culture with Buddhism. In some cases, multiple deities are worshiped in a single temple; a good example of this is the Perfume Cave, which is dedicated to both Goddess of Mercy and other deities (Photo 14). Furthermore, people worship Avalokitesvara and pray

for children, etc., all of which are elements that reflect the coexistence and integration of Confucianism and Buddhism in the Perfume Temple. In fact, diverse cultures can coexist in harmony.

I believe that the core of Buddhism is compassion, the core of Confucianism is caring for the public, observing ritual and being benevolent, while the core of folk beliefs is blessing peace and happiness; nevertheless, they all share the guideline that peace is the most important. Despite the diversity of religions in Vietnam, they all tend to ‘coexist peacefully’ without encroaching on the original values of each other; they can also adapt to historical environmental conditions at each stage (Thích Đạo Quang, 2016). Different elements of the Perfume Temple – such as the Buddhism and Avalokitesvara, the statues and images of the deities in folk beliefs, and the Cultural Concept of Confucianism – can all coexist peacefully and harmoniously in this Temple, suggesting that all of these multiple folk religious beliefs are protected; they coexist and develop peacefully in Vietnam, and are well substantiated. The same is reflected at the Perfume Temple.

### 3.3 Application of Cultural Tourism at Perfume Temple

In the conceptual framework of this thesis, the study of the concept of cultural tourism is discussed, which provides theoretical basis for reference to further analyse the tourism resources of the Perfume Temple Festival and to further develop the cultural tourist attractions of folk religious beliefs represented by the Perfume Temple in a more effective manner.

Tourism plays a predominant role in the global economy, and has already surpassed the oil, food and automobile industries (World Tourism Organization, 2017). In 2017 alone, the number of international arrivals increased by 7% to 1.322 billion,

surpassing the annual growth trend of 4% since 2010 (World Tourism Organization, 2018). These figures indicate that tourism remains a key development and research topic (Frank & Zorana Medarić, 2018). The study of cultural tourism covers multiple disciplines and has attracted widespread attention from scholars. Cultural tourism is perceived as an endogenous form of development, as tourists are enthusiastic about visiting areas with unspoiled natural beauty and genuine cultural heritage. The concern for cultural heritage is primarily attributable to the growth of the nostalgia of people, the accelerated pace of creation as well as the sense of disorientation and loss with the modern society, so much so that the preservation of the past has become a top concern. The material life of human beings has been greatly satisfied; however, it has caused spiritual imbalance. Thus, people choose to believe in religion with the hope of finding spiritual balance and confidence in the future, thereby making cultural tourism into a new tourism model, one that helps people find spiritual support and reliance (Nguyễn Phương Hồng, 2020). With the development of tourism and the acceptance of cultural tourism as a form of tourism for cultural preservation and economic development, there is a growing interest in the field of cultural tourism. The author has also observed that the focus of recent studies has shifted to the theme of cultural tourism in Asia (Richards, 2018).

I believe that despite the existence of different concepts of cultural tourism, they are broadly similar. To sum up, cultural tourism is the process of cultural collision and interaction, as well as mutual cultural integration. It aims to appreciate the traditional culture of foreign countries by tracking down the relics of famous people or participating in various local cultural activities so that tourists can acquire a collection of tourism activities with cultural connotations and deep participation in the tourism

experience. Pursuing cultural enjoyment has become one of the new emerging trends in modern tourism. Furthermore, tourism resources constitute an important basis for cultural tourism, which is a prerequisite for the existence and development of cultural tourism. These resources include natural as well as human resources, and the richness of the tourism resources of a country is determinant of the scale and speed of cultural tourism development.

In terms of natural and human resources pertaining to tourism, Vietnam is blessed with superior conditions. The country is surrounded by the sea on three sides, providing superior marine resources, and the many rivers and lakes in Vietnam also constitute a splendid scenery. The Perfume Mountain, where the Perfume Temple is located, is adjacent to Yen stream, and the boat journey from Yen stream to Perfume Mountain attracts numerous tourists as it offers a breath-taking view along with a visit to a sacred Buddhist site.

The human tourism resources of Vietnam deserve more attention as a cultural tourism element. Vietnam boasts of 54 ethnic groups, each of which preserves its unique history, culture and customs, and is rich in human tourism resources. The main expression of Vietnamese folk culture is the temple festival, which is a kind of human tourism wealth as it reflects the most quintessential cultural characteristics of the local people.

Different regions and ethnic groups have different forms and characteristics of temple festivals, among which the most influential one is the temple festival of the Perfume Temple. The Perfume Temple Festival is the longest national temple festival in Vietnam; it lasts for three months every year. The cultural elements embedded in the

temple festivals can be divided into ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ parts (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012).

Cultural tourism, on the other hand, is precisely promoted through the combination of ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ contents. The ‘tangible’ content includes temples and structures of different styles, relics, the harmonious landscape around the temple festival, etc. There are over 20 temples and pagodas of various sizes at the Perfume Temple, and among the several developed temple clusters, Presentation shrine, Heaven Kitchen Pagoda, Clearing Unjust Charges’ Pagoda and Perfume Cave all have high research and cultural tourism values. The harmonious surrounding natural landscapes of these ancient temple buildings added to the grandeur of the Perfume Temple, and the site is a typical example of the blending of the natural landscapes of Yen stream and Perfume Cave with the temple landscapes of Presentation shrine and Heaven Kitchen Pagoda.

The Temple also contains a wide range of ‘intangible’ cultural tourism resources; the ‘intangible’ content refers to the formation and development of the temple precipitated in the region and the social culture of the nation, which itself is loaded with a deep and profound history and culture. In the process of inheriting history and culture, a subtle mode of dissemination has been formed by the temple festivals, which carry all the beliefs and wishes of the people. The Perfume Temple is a cultural and religious site cluster of special significance in Vietnam. It is not only a sacred Buddhist site, but also features various religious folk activities and statues of deities, Buddhas and Goddesses enshrined in the temple. Furthermore, it contains ‘intangible’ resources created by various worship activities to ancestors, which can attract devotees and tourists of different faiths to visit with different needs and wishes in

their hearts through various pilgrimages, rituals and prayers. All of this aids in promoting the development of cultural tourism at the Perfume Temple.

The 'intangible' cultural tourism resources also include the folk art of temple festivals, and numerous folk-art performances, mostly from traditional temple festivals. These performances are dignified and sacred, and are historical and cultural treasures passed down from the older generations (Nguyễn Chí Bền, 2012). For example, the ancient Vietnamese style embodied in the Hát chèo of the Perfume Temple is a valuable 'intangible' tourism resource. The Perfume Temple Festival has featured the folk-art performance of Hát chèo and cultural plays since ancient times. Previously, after the rituals of Buddha, the entertainment of nuns was to paddle and sing Hát chèo, which could be done anywhere, the liveliest places being temples and ancestral shrines (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013). The Hát chèo is an integration of Vietnamese folk dance art, which creates different scenarios. Many movements and gestures can be found on some ancient cliff paintings and ancient reliefs in Vietnam nowadays, fully reflecting the artistic principle of 'every movement in dancing' in Hát chèo ((Huang Taixiang, Taiwan, 2010).

Hát Chèo Opera is an ancient traditional Vietnamese drama, which has absorbed and preserved more of the strong folklore in Vietnamese traditional art, and its content is mostly taken from folklore, for example, "The Story of the Withered Leaf Betel Nut", which narrates the story of brothers Cao Tân and Cao Lang, who look alike. Both of them simultaneously secretly fall in love with a girl from the neighboring village, who only has Cao Lang in her heart. Cao Lang requests his mother to propose a marriage for him. As the custom goes, the mother proposes a marriage for the elder brother first and then the younger brother, so she proposes a marriage for Cao Tân in to Lru's

family, and the daughter agrees to the marriage as she thinks she is matching Cao Lang. Every day, the brothers get up early and work hard at farming, and come home with the younger brother holding the cattle in the back and the older brother carrying the plow in the front. However, one day it was the younger brother walking in front carrying the plow, and the sister-in-law rushed over to hold his hand, resulting in a misunderstanding. After the three died successively, they became shriveled leaf vines tightly entwined in the betel tree. The village people built a small temple for them. The King Hùng visited the village and heard about it. He picked shriveled leaves and collected fruits (betel nut), and ate them together. The juice dripped onto the stone, the color was bright red. King Hùng ordered that betel nut should be required for engagement and wedding ceremonies nationwide to signify fidelity to love.

The Hát Chèo Opera is based on folk songs and incorporates folk dances, creating different scenarios through dance movements. For example, the religious rite dance is performed at varying paces to express nostalgia and melancholy; and the flower offering dance that represents the secret covenant of love. It is included the wine offering dance which is performed with solemn and respectful movements. Many movements seem not to be the dance at first glance, but rather steps, stand-up switching positions. They are in essence dance movements, and some characters seem to be still and unmoving at first glance, but they give the audience a sense of melody in a turbulent manner. The Hát Chèo Opera dance mainly expresses different emotional states by means of hand movements. Vietnamese Hát Chèo Opera artists regard the palm as the "pistil" of the heart, and in the dance of the Hát Chèo Opera, the palm is a symbol of both the eye and the heart. As for the dance, the performers only need to make a few movements with their fingers and eyes to generate the scene

of the moon rising and setting; and they only need to take a few steps and then switch to other movements so that the audience can perceive that the characters have left from there and gone to a faraway place.

The Vietnamese water puppet show represents the most unique folk stage show in Vietnam (Photo 25), as well as a unique puppet show worldwide, which not only boasts of widespread influence in the country but also receives worldwide acclaim. The show has already reached out to foreign countries, attracting great enthusiasm abroad. The Perfume Temple is adjacent to the Yen River, allowing for the performance of water puppet show.

The water puppet show reflects all aspects of farming and folk life. It is included several scenes like double-dragon dance, looking for and finding a wife, as a betrothal gift for the marriage of a farmer. The puppet show represents the plots of sowing seeds in spring, harvesting in autumn, followed by looking for a wife and offering a betrothal gift. The unique part of water puppet show lies in the fact that the puppet show is performed on the surface of the water. The performers are immersed in the water for a long time, and utilize their strong arm strength and pure rope control skills. The puppet is fixed at one end of a thin bamboo rod, while the other end of the rod is hidden in the water and manipulated by a person underwater. Puppets feature movable joints in the hands and feet, so that the puppets can jump, row, or walk, making them vividly perform various legends and stories. Such puppets are lively and with a comical smile, with ducks, fish, frogs and other animals to complement the performance. Most of the plays are inspired by Vietnamese folk tales. Towards the end of the performance, the puppet performers will walk up from underwater to acknowledge the audience. They wear red, purple, green clothes, and many audiences



would be aware that the performers have been standing in the water. The performance time of water puppet show is 1 hour.

**Photo 25** *Water Puppet Show*



The Spring Festival is the most important festival for the Vietnamese, and the annual Perfume Temple Festival held during the Spring Festival has become an attractive tourist destination in the northern part of Vietnam. The temple festival reflects the plurality of beliefs with the integration of Buddhism, Confucianism and Vietnamese folk beliefs. In modern Vietnam, the Perfume Temple has become a favourable destination for the development of cultural tourism by combining folk traditions and beliefs of the temple festival with the promotion of tourism. The history and religious culture of the Perfume Temple is considered a valuable museum of folk culture in terms of abundant cultural heritage, which not only provides a place for people to worship and assemble, but also contributes to the development of the cultural tourism and economy (Nguyễn Phương Hồng, 2020).

During the temple festival, materials required for food, rituals, entertainment and amusement activities in the locality increase substantially (Photos 26–27). The development of tourism is expected to drive the development of other industries, such

as local transportation, food and commerce, all of which have brought considerable economic benefits to Vietnam. The Perfume Temple Festival plays an important role in consolidating cultural tourism in the smoke-free industrial sector. Therefore, the festival has profoundly influenced modern Vietnamese society, both in the economic and cultural fields, and has undertaken the important mission of driving cultural tourism and inheriting national culture.

**Photo 26**

**Photo 27**

*Stalls on the Path to the Perfume Temple Commodities Sold at the Perfume Temple*



To sum up, these natural resources and human tourism resources, tangible temples and landscapes, Buddhism, folk beliefs and Confucian culture inherited over thousands of years, both compatible and distinctive folk religious beliefs and folk art, and the intangible cultural factors, have penetrated into the spiritual world of the people. These valuable assets constitute the foundation for the cultural tourism of the Perfume Temple; they are advantageous for today as well as for the future development and attraction of domestic and foreign tourists.

## Chapter 4: Findings from Fieldwork

Through the field survey, interviews, questionnaires and photos, the current conditions of the temple festival and cultural tourism of the Perfume Temple have been understood. I have witnessed and observed the pilgrimage of visitors – not only to worship the Buddha, but also to worship mother faiths and various deities simultaneously – as well as the integration of various religious beliefs in both architecture and pilgrimage. Concrete survey data have been obtained by administering questionnaires and conducting interviews at the Perfume Temple. This Chapter first details the research methodology, and then summarises and statistically analyses the findings obtained from the interviews during the field survey to further improve the research in this thesis.

### 4.1 Fieldwork Observation

I visited the Perfume Temple from March 15 to March 20, 2023. A total of 4 people accompanied the fieldwork on the first day, including the tour guide, translator and a Vietnamese university student, and 2 people accompanied the fieldwork on the following days. The journey began early in the morning of March 15. It took a 2-hour bus ride from Hanoi to the Perfume Temple, first arrived in Mỹ Đức District, followed by a boat ride to the foot of the Perfume Temple. After buying the ferry tickets, I started the 1-hour boat trip along the Yen Stream. The landscapes on both sides of Yen Stream were stunningly beautiful, following the stream downstream and we passing by the Santai Wine Hill and Elephant Mountain. The legend of Elephant Hill was introduced as follow:

"According to legend, there are one hundred elephant hills, all 99 of them are facing towards the Perfume Cave to express their devotion and respect, only one elephant hill turned its head to the other direction and faced with its buttocks. The Custodian was so angry at the disrespect of the Elephant Hill that he stabbed the buttocks of the elephant with his sword, so the Elephant Hill was cut off by a piece" (Phạm Đức Hiếu, 2013:11) .

Beyond Elephant Hill is Mengersong Hill, a place where the pilgrims used to stop before continuing their journey to the Perfume Cave. I was interested in the introduction of the guide, which happened to align with my study of Vietnamese folklore. We commenced the interview while observing on the boat. We interviewed a ferry woman and she introduced the basic information of the Perfume Temple and answered our questions. As I observed the other visitors on the boat, most of them were young people in general, and they were all first-time visitors to the Perfume Temple. When the ferry docked, we arrived at the foot of the mountain where the Perfume Temple is located. It was observed that many ferry boats were docked here, ready to pick up and drop off tourists for the return trip.

Upon disembarkation, we first arrived at the entrance of the mountain, behind which is the Presentation Shrine. Our route up the mountain was planned to be Presentation shrine - Castle Peak Temple - Heaven Kitchen Pagoda - Fairy Temple - Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda - Door Temple, and finally to the Perfume Cave. However, as the Perfume Temple is too large, it was impossible to visit so many temples and pagodas in one day, so it was divided into several days. It took us over 4 hours to climb from the foot of the mountain to the top. We interviewed and observed along the way while doing questionnaires.

Firstly, at the Presentation Shrine, it was observed that the front of the Presentation Shrine was extremely solemn and wide. There was a flagpole in the center of the square where the flag raising ceremony was held, and now the flag raising represents the official start of the Temple Festival. The Thanh Son Temple, on the other hand, is relatively small with its back against a mountain and facing a mound and river. There were relatively few people visiting this temple that day due to the rain. Heaven Kitchen Pagoda is the largest temple complex of the Perfume Temple. As observed in the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda, the main hall is the Heavenly Incense Treasure Shrine, in which Avalokitesvara is enshrined, a large incense burner is located in front of the main hall, and next to the main hall is the Mother Goddess Hall, Hall of Ancestor Worship, etc. The main hall is dedicated to Avalokitesvara, who is standing upright, wearing a black robe with a glittering golden head and a golden crown, and holding a treasure vase in her left hand. I observed people worshipping Avalokitesvara with folded hands, taking off their hats, kneeling on the ground, kowtowing 3 times and chanting. Offerings to Avalokitesvara include peach blossoms, kumquats, bananas, grapes, cookies and various snacks. Peach blossoms symbolize health and longevity. Kumquat is a symbol of good fortune as well as a golden symbol of a prosperous life. There are three Mother Goddesses worshiped in the Mother Goddess Hall, namely, the Upper Heavenly Mother Goddess, the Upper Rock Mother Goddess, and the Water Mother Goddess. The Liuxing Holy Mother is the Upper Heavenly Mother Goddess, dressed in red and sitting in the center, while the Water Mother Goddess is dressed in white on the left and the Upper Rock Mother Goddess is dressed in green on the right. The Three Mansions in the Mother Faith correspond to the regions of the universe, with the Holy Mother as the head of the Mansion. The Upper Heavenly

Mother Goddess (the First Mother) oversees the sky and dominates clouds, rain, storms and thunder. The Upper Rock Mother Goddess (the Second Mother) is in charge of the mountains and forests where the ethnic minorities mainly live. The Water Mother Goddess (the Third Mother) is in charge of the rivers and waters and benefits the rice farming and fishing industries. All of these three Mother Goddesses look charitable and remind people of their dear mothers.

Offerings before the Mother Goddess include drinks, kumquats, lemons, bananas, snacks with egg yolk sandwiches and sweets. This is to represent the hope that the Mother Goddess will bless happiness, good fortune, and good health. Visitors to Heaven Kitchen Pagoda are basically worshiping the Mother Goddess after worshiping Avalokitesvara. When worshiping, people take 3 sticks of incense in their hands, kneel down 3 times to make a wish, and then put these 3 sticks on the incense burner on the table. Few visitors bring their own offerings in the Main Hall and the Mother Hall, while most people just worship without offerings.

At the Temple of Unwrong Stream, it was observed that there were many offerings made by visitors at the Thiên Nhiên Thanh Trì pond or the pond of purifying. The offerings includes flowers such as chrysanthemums, plums and orchids, fruit plates and baskets, fortune stickers, bananas, kumquats, dragon fruits, and donated Vietnamese coins, etc. People put a lot of offerings to express their wishes because of the legend that this place was once the place where Goddess of Mercy washed away the worldly dust.

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The road to the Perfume Cave is relatively difficult. Upon reaching the top of the mountain, one has to climb another stretch of the mountain path and then walk down 120 steps into the deep mountain to reach the Cave. Moreover, it was a weekend when we visited the Perfume Cave, and it was crowded with people going up and down the mountain when we arrived at the entrance of the Cave. From a distance, the Perfume Cave resembles a huge dragon's mouth holding a pearl, and the first things one sees when entering the Cave are various types of oddly shaped stalactites, and only when one goes deeper can one see many statues. We observed a statue of Avalokitesvara carved in green stone, with the left leg of Avalokitesvara stretched out, the left foot on a lotus seat, the right leg bent and supported by a lotus with soft leaves, holding a pearl in the left hand, and a lotus in full bloom beneath the statue. The Cave also enshrines large statues of Buddha, arhats and other deities. I observed that many people took great efforts to bring various offerings from the bottom of the mountain to the top and placed them at the offering table. Standing in front of the consecrated Buddha platform were pilgrims praying and lining up to prepare to come forward. People bowed their heads in worship and prayed, muttering words from their mouths and praying for the wishes from their hearts. Their offerings included kumquats, lemons, five-fruit bowl, cakes, and even foreign Russian candy, and the stone wall by the Buddha's platform was covered with Vietnamese coins.

The "Five-fruit Bowl" includes five kinds of fruits which can be local fruits such as lychee, coconut, papaya, dragon fruit and mango. In Vietnamese, lychee is

pronounced the same as "pray", coconut the same as "surplus", papaya the same as "sufficient", dragon fruit the same as "full", and mango the same as "use". These five fruits imply people's hope for the future of life, indicating that everyone is praying for more income in the new year (enough money to spend, enough clothes to wear, enough things to use), surplus things every year, sufficient food and clothing, and unlimited money to use. It is evident from the gathering of so many pilgrims at the Perfume Cave and the devotion and worship of the people that the legendary place where Bodhisattva descended to make miraculous signs has a magical power in the hearts of the Vietnamese people.

In these few days of fieldwork, we all climbed up on foot and went down by cable car so that we could interview more tourists and visit more temples while climbing up the mountain. Normally there are many tourists queuing for the cable car on the way down, especially on weekends. Riding on the cable car, the scenery of the Perfume Mountain is in full view. One can see that this is a majestic group of mountains, with rounded tops, lush hills full of various plants, as well as various temples scattered in the mountains, which is extremely spectacular. After descending from the mountain, it is still 1 hour by ferry to return, and the Yen Stream puts on a new view under nightfall every day. The following features have been identified through the observations during these days:

(1) The Perfume Temple is one of the most popular cultural tourism destinations in Vietnam. Among the temple complexes of the Perfume Temple, the main temples – such as the Presentation shrine (Đền Trình), the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda), the Clearing Unjust Charges' Pagoda (Giải Oan Pagoda) and the Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave) – all feature their own characteristics. Some are tall and



majestic, while others are elaborate and ingenious; be that as it may, all contain high research values and cultural tourism resources. Even though the Perfume Temple Festival lasts for three months, it still attracts a great number of visitors every day, especially during weekends. A field visit was made to the Perfume Cave (Hương Tích Cave) on a weekend – when the number of visitors might reach more than ten thousand that day – with visitors from all over the world waiting to visit. The Perfume Temple was prosperous and popular with burning joss sticks and candles, and offered many great attractions to tourists (Photos 28–29).

**Photo 28** *Perfume Cave*



**Photo 29** *Road leading to Perfume Cave*



(2) The temple complex of the Perfume Temple incorporates multiple religious beliefs, some of which are in the form of shrines built next to Buddhist temples. An example is the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda (Thiên Trù Pagoda) where the Main Hall, Perfume Pagoda, is a Buddhist temple (Photo 30). There is a Mother Goddess Hall built next to it that is inscribed with ‘Motherly Model of the Nation’ and dedicated to the Mother Goddess (Photo 31). There is also the Hall of Ancestor Worship (Sức mạnh thần) built close by; it reflects the fusion of the beliefs of Mother Goddess with Buddhism, and has a hall of worship (Sức mạnh thần) – in the left and right sides of

the hall – to worship a civil official, as well as a armed military attaché (Photos 32–33). Confucian culture emphasises the use of civil and military forces, which is key to the spirit of bravery. One text, one force and one relaxation constitute the essence of Confucianism. At the same time, the hall of Ancestor worship is also a concentrated embodiment of the Confucian thought of loyalty and filial piety and respect for ancestors. In some cases, multiple deities are worshiped in a single temple; for example, the Perfume Cave, which is dedicated to both Goddess of Mercy and other deities. Worshipers worship Avalokitesvara for children. All these embody the coexistence and fusion of Buddhism, folk belief and Confucian culture in the Perfume Temple.

**Photo 30**

*Main Hall, Perfume Pagoda*



**Photo 31**

*Tourists worship at the Mother Goddess Hall*



**Photo 32**

*Civil officials in the Hall of Ancestor Worship*

**Photo 33**

*The Military attaché in the Hall of Ancestor Worship*



(3) The Perfume Temple Festival also features a spectacular and unique view of the Perfume Mountain. Along the way, there are clusters of flowers, which are called ‘Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow’ by the locals; three-petaled purple flowers with brilliant purple on the sunrise side and light purple on the shade side, which is unique, can also be seen. They are also in full bloom, as are the flaming red kapok and white plum in full bloom. The sounds of wooden knockers echo with the bells in the mountains. By riding a small boat to and from the Yen stream (Suối Yên) in the Perfume Temple (Chùa Hương), the green hills are reflected in the water, and one can enjoy watching the mountains in various forms (Photo 34).

**Photo 34** *On the Yen stream boat*



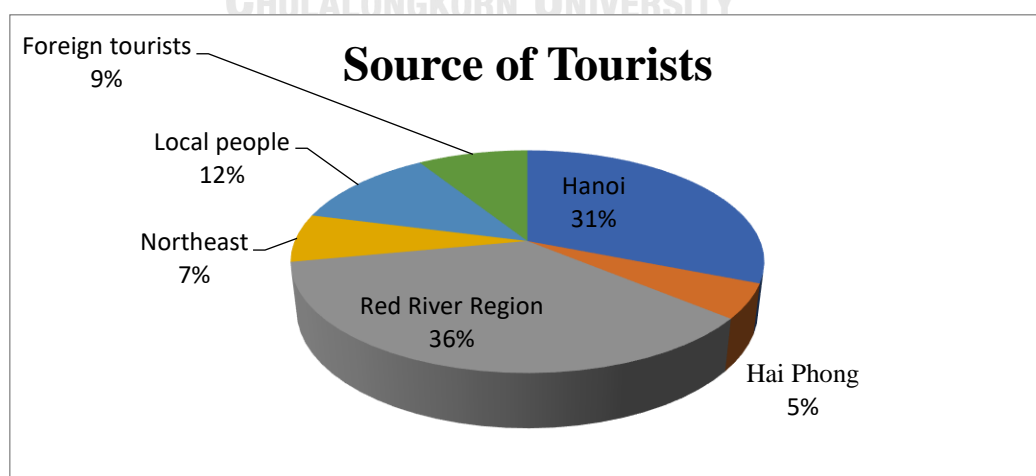
## 4.2 Questionnaire Analysis

Besides the observations from the fieldwork mentioned above, a questionnaire survey was administered to 100 visitors; for this, visitors over 18 years of age were selected. To ensure that the respondents could understand the content of the questionnaire, they were requested to answer the questions on the spot. Due to the high level of cooperation and attentive participation of visitors in filling the questionnaires, a total of 100 questionnaires were distributed and filled in on site. Of this, 100 were returned, with a valid rate of 100%. The questionnaire consists of basic information about the tourist, the purpose of visiting the Temple, what religion they believed in, what activities they came to the Temple for, what wishes they prayed for, etc. Since the respondents included Vietnamese visitors, who were not always familiar with English, the questionnaire and interview were designed in two languages, English and Vietnamese (Appendix 1 to Appendix 4).

### 4.2.1 Results of the Questionnaire and Summary Analysis

#### (1) Source of Respondents

**Graph 1** Source of Tourists

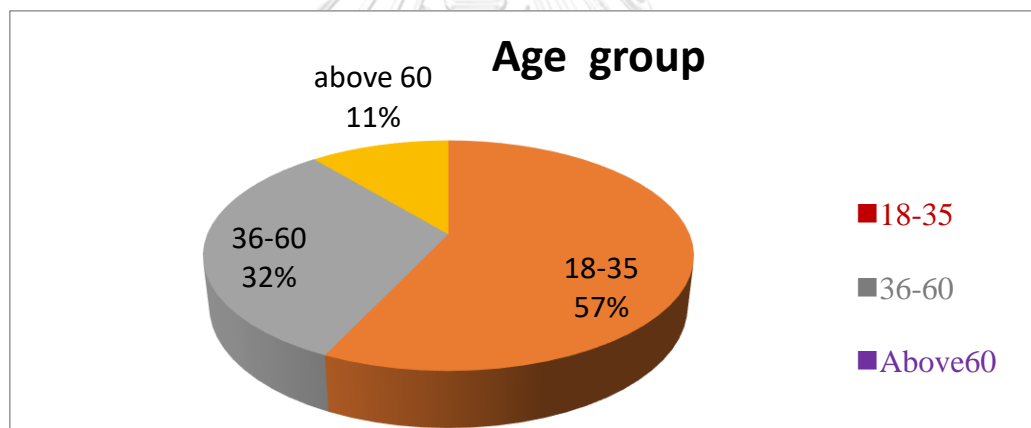




Among the 100 visitors, 31% were from Hanoi, 5% from Hai Phong, 36% from the Red River region, 7% from the four north-eastern provinces, 12% from the local population of the Perfume Temple and 9% foreign visitors (five from Europe and four from Asia). According to the source of tourists, Vietnamese tourists accounted for 79% of the total visitors; they were mainly from the northern part of Vietnam, and mostly from Hanoi and the Red River Delta, indicating that there were relatively large number of people believing in Buddhism in the northern part of Vietnam. (as shown in Graph 1)

*(2) Age of Respondents*

**Graph 2** *Age of Respondents*



According to the survey, among the 100 respondents visiting the Perfume Temple, young people aged 18–35 years old represented the majority of the tourists visiting the temple as they accounted for 57% of the visitors, thus reflecting the increasing attraction of the Temple to the local younger generation, who mainly come to the temple to worship Buddha for health and peace. This reflects the problems in contemporary Vietnamese society, as these young people feel worried or stressed about the contemporary life in Vietnam. Thanh (2016) pointed out that, at present, young Vietnamese people feel a lot of pressure in academic and interpersonal aspects,

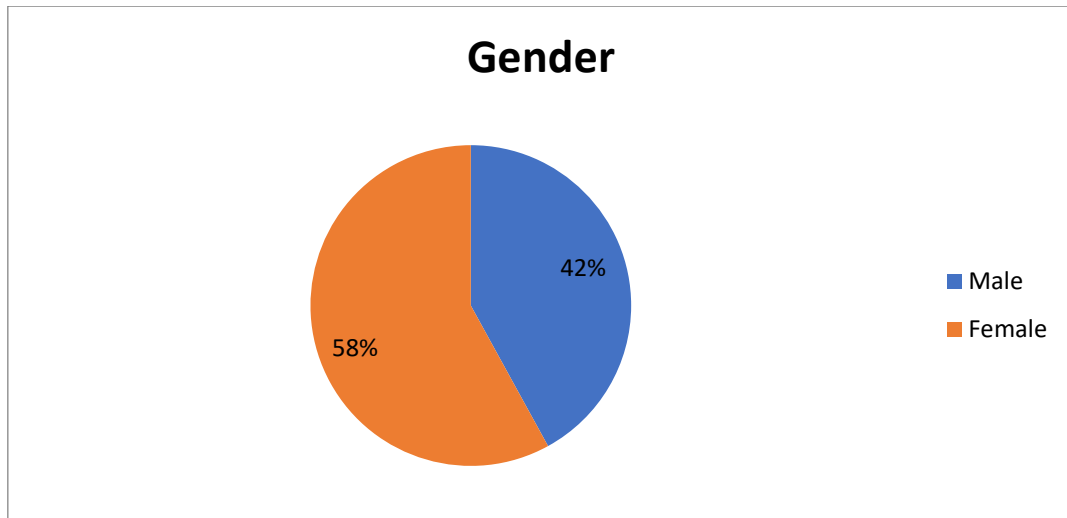
and they want to go to a good school and develop well in the future. At work, in northern Vietnam, hierarchy is more serious, so interpersonal relationships in the workplace are complicated, leading to greater competitive pressure (Thanh, 2016). Van Thanh's view was in line with my judgment. Hence, it was seen that more and more people came to the temple to pray to the Buddha for success in school and at work and safety of their families. This indirectly reflects the views of young Vietnamese towards life. Further, the mountains here are high and also suitable for young people to climb and have fun with their friends.

The second largest group consists of middle-aged people between 36 and 60 years old (32%). The perfume temple is a good choice for their holiday activities, suitable for them both in terms of worship and sightseeing. These people come to the Perfume Temple and pray for peace and good luck. Perhaps as they are over 40 and have reached a crossroads in their careers and families, they seek to gain strength and guidance through worship. As Gordon (2020) explained, stress among middle-aged people has increased by 19% as compared to the 1990s. People become irritable in the face of challenges, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, and they are afraid of layoffs and become self-threatening. Gordon's (2020) opinion is consistent with the judgment of this thesis. People in their 40s would feel the most unstable and would like to bring a sense of security to themselves by worshipping Buddha.

The last group of informants are people over 60 years old, accounting for 11% of the population. This reflects that religious beliefs exist in Vietnam among the older age groups as well. Graph 2 below will show number of respondents in percentage.

### *(3) Gender*

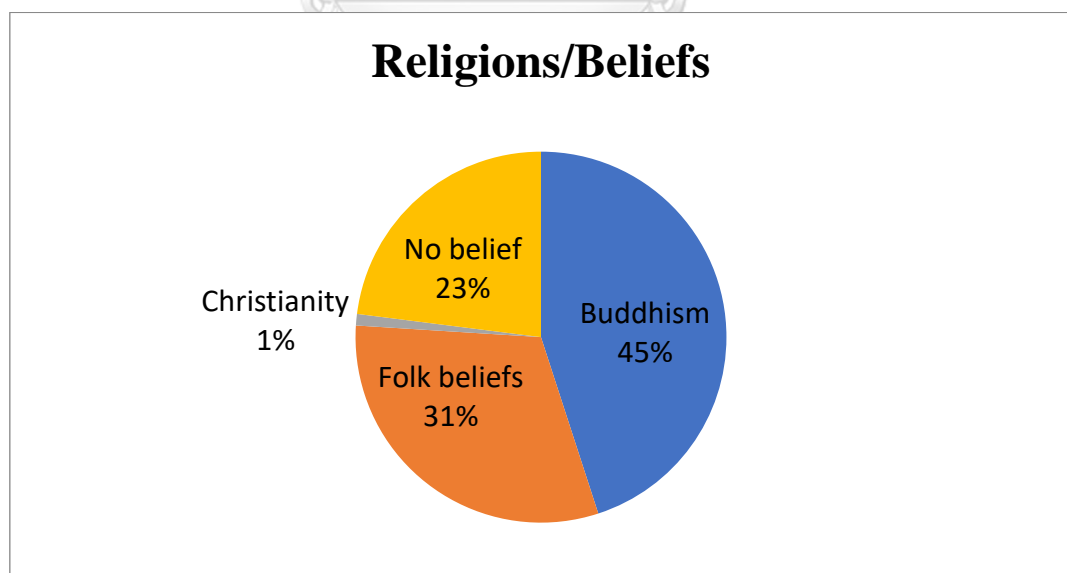
#### **Graph 3 Gender**



The proportion of women visiting the Temple is slightly higher than that of men, indicating that women are more devoted to the deities than men. However, Graph 3 clearly shows that the proportions are relatively close, indicating that both men and women are interested in the Perfume Temple Festival.

#### *(4) Religions/Beliefs*

**Graph 4** *Religious Beliefs*



**Table 1** *Visitors' Beliefs*

Belief	Number of people	Ratio

Buddhism	45 (including 4 Asian tourists)	45%
Folk beliefs	31 (all Vietnamese, also containing some believing in both Buddhism and folk beliefs)	31%
Christianity	1 (European tourist)	1%
No belief	23 (4 European tourists, 19 Vietnamese tourists)	23%

Based on a survey of the religions and beliefs of the respondents, it was observed that 45% of the tourists visiting the Perfume Temple believe in Buddhism. There are 31% of those with folk beliefs and all of them are Vietnamese. Further, 1% of respondents answered Christianity; they were European-Belgian tourists, and 23% answered that they have no beliefs. This suggests that the main visitors to this Buddhist holy place are Buddhist believers, the majority of them are Vietnamese locals and there are quite a number of folk beliefs. Meanwhile, the folk beliefs also involve some people who believe in Buddhism simultaneously, and there is a combination of multiple beliefs rather than just one.

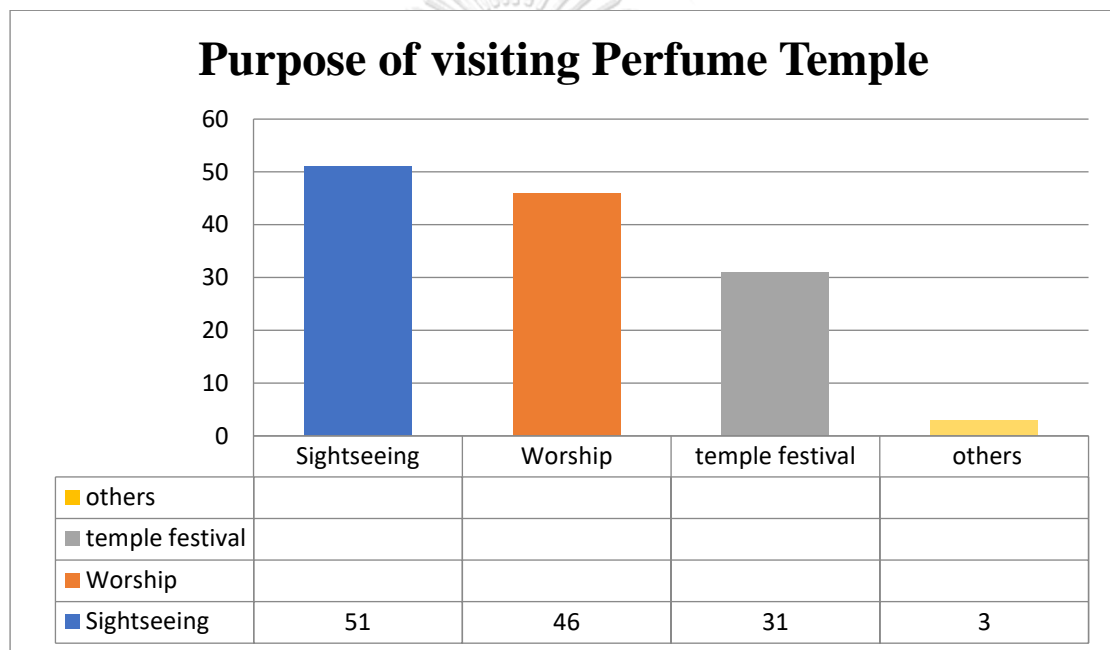
Among the 23 respondents with no beliefs, four were foreign tourists (The United Kingdom and France) and 19 were Vietnamese tourists. Filipino and Indian respondents practiced Buddhism. This suggests that the number of Asian tourists believing in Buddhism who come to the Temple is relatively high, while European tourists believe in Christianity or have no beliefs and are mainly for sightseeing. It is also evident that the proportion of people without beliefs is still relatively large. A possible explanation is that both young and middle-aged people have already perceived everything in the world and are less interested in retaining various beliefs. They probably no longer have faith in the deities, or they have become overwhelmed by the formidable worldly life. Overall, atheists are becoming more and more



prominent in modern Vietnamese society. According to the Vietnamese Population Network (2023), as of 2022, Vietnam has a population of 98.26 million. Of this, about 45.3% belonged to the folk beliefs, no beliefs accounted for 28.4%, Buddhism was 14.9% and Christianity was 8.5%. The survey results are shown in Graph 4 and Table 1.

*(5) Purpose of visiting the Perfume Temple*

**Graph 5 Purpose of visiting the Perfume Temple**



According to the survey to understand the purpose of visiting the temple, 51 respondents came for sightseeing, which is the highest proportion. However, as the actual questionnaire covers both sightseeing and temple festival, there is a crossover to some extent; therefore, the number is relatively high. A total of 31 respondents came for the temple festival only, and 46 respondents came for worshipping deities including Buddha, which is also a high proportion. It indicates that the temple attracts many visitors as a Buddhist holy place. Only three respondents came for other

purposes, such as praying for their study. This clearly reflects the fact that the main purposes of visitors visiting the Temple include worship, sightseeing and attending temple festivals. The answers of foreign tourists were all for sightseeing. This is reflected in Graph 5 shown below:

*(6) What do the visitors pray for?*

**Graph 6** *What the visitors pray for*



**Table 2** *What the visitors pray for*

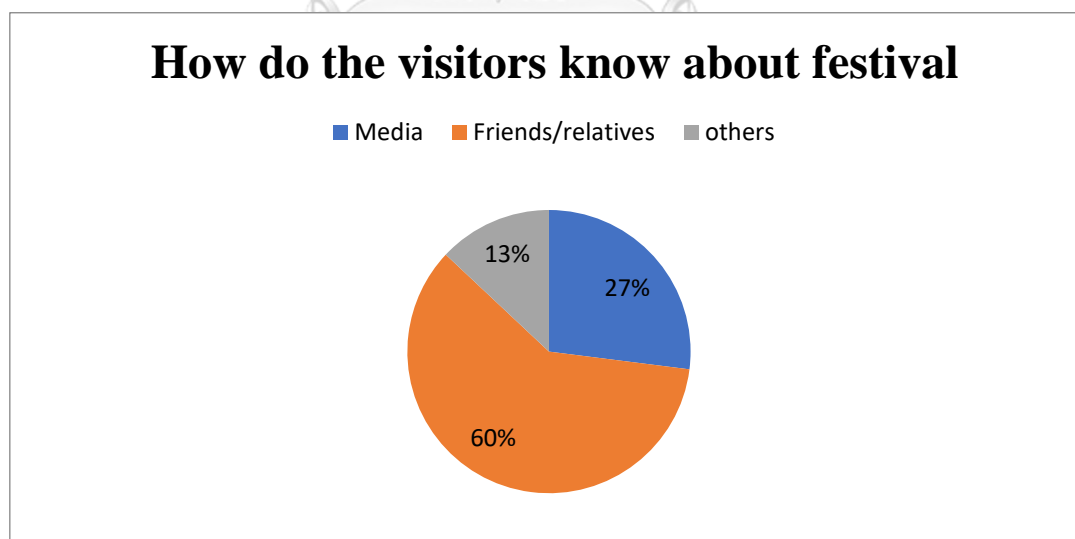
Pray	Total Number of Respondents	Remark
Children	8	
Health	84	(including praying for good luck)
Good fortune	35	
Work promotion	22	
Study	15	
Other	4	

According to the questionnaires, many people come to the Perfume Temple in order to worship Buddha, Avalokitesvara, or other deities for various purposes – primarily

for health – as shown by 84 answers. However, there is a crossover to some extent as many informants selected health as well as good luck. There are 22 answers for work promotion, 35 answers for only good luck, 15 answers for study, eight answers for children, and four answers for other purposes. These answers reveal that the purpose of praying at the Perfume Temple is not singular; rather, it contains many wishes of visitors. These purposes are only limited to Vietnamese tourists, i.e., foreign tourists who come mainly for sightseeing do not fall under the same category. It is evident that, due to the turmoil in the world today, the greatest wish of the young people who come here is to pray for peace, health and good luck. One probably needs to first have good health so they can enjoy everything. Graph 6 and Table 2 demonstrates respondents' purpose of visit.

*(7) How do the visitors know about festival?*

**Graph 7** *How the visitors know about festival*

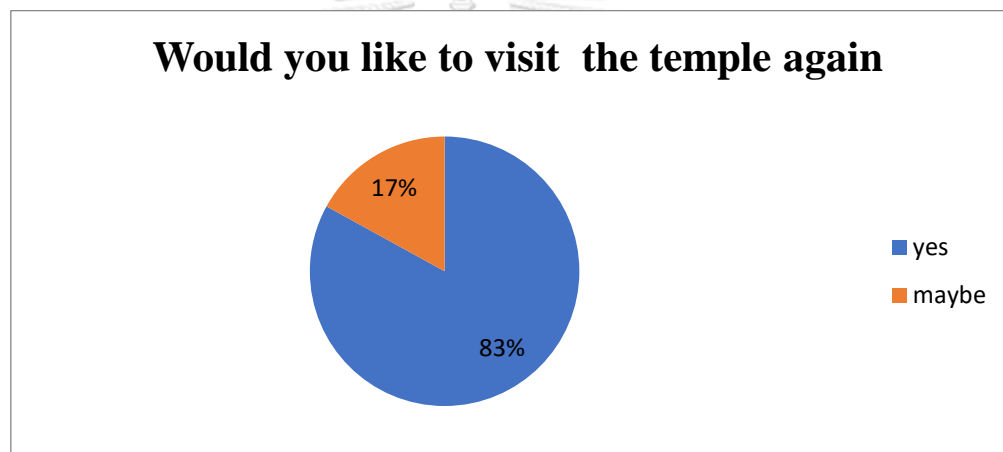


According to the survey, 60% of the respondents became aware of the Perfume Temple mainly through its introduction by friends or relatives. Many visitors of the temple are impressed by the scenery and the architecture, and have positive feelings,

which they spread among their acquaintances. Another 27% of visitors have been informed through media campaigns. Foreign visitors responded that they were introduced to the Temple by their friends. They found that it is difficult to trace the temple from the media or websites. This result suggests that the promotional efforts for the Perfume Temple Festival among foreign tourists should be further strengthened.

*(8) Would you like to visit the temple again?*

**Graph 8** *Would you like to visit the temple again?*



By surveying the respondents about whether they would like to re-visit the Perfume Temple in the future, 83% expressed their wish to do so while 17% thought they probably might return. This suggests that the Perfume Temple has left a good memory for many tourists, and, despite the high mountains and long routes, there are still many who are willing to come back again. However, it was noted that most positive answers for re-visiting the temple were from the Vietnamese visitors rather than foreign tourists.

#### 4.2.2 Analysis of In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Vietnamese tourists and residents around the Perfume Temple. These 10 individuals were selected based on criteria of different backgrounds, including different genders and ages, different occupations, and they could come from government agencies, companies, individual businessmen, workers,

farmers, technicians, etc., These informants were basically selected randomly based on the actual situation at the interview site. It took about 12 minutes for interviewing and filling information per person. The questions included: the significance of Perfume Temple to visitors in terms of culture and economy, the impact of Perfume Temple Festival on local people, what elements of Perfume Temple Festival were liked, including the positive and negative impacts of the Festival, and the information from the interviews is summarized in Table 3:

**Table 3**

*Summary of interviews on attitudes and perceptions of visitors to the Perfume Temple Festival*

No.	About informants	Impacts of the festival	Aspect	Positive impact	Negative impact
1	Gender: female Age: 31-year-old salarywoman	The Perfume Temple is a destination for cultural tourism, which brings peace and good fortune to visitors, and I feel proud of the Huong Tich Cave, which is famous as 'The First Cave of Southern Heaven'.	Culturally and Economically	The crowds are bustling and joyful, spreading Vietnamese traditional culture to foreign tourists and increasing the income of the temple festival	Too many tourists have brought environmental pollution
2	Gender: female Age: 57-year-old local person	It enables the traditional culture of the Perfume Temple to transition from the past to the present	Culturally	It will enhance the understanding of tradition	None
3	Gender:	The tourists can learn more	Culturally	It is under satisfactory	None

	male Age: 32- year-old businessman	about the religions in Vietnam and many foreign tourists are attracted to pay a visit		management	
4	Gender: female Age: 50- year-old worker	It is a place where traditional cultural elements are well preserved, all attributed to Buddha	Culturally	The visitors are very polite	There are some undesirable consequences associated with crowds, such as theft, swarming
5	Gender: male Age: 35- year-old street trader	I feel that the Perfume Temple is a combined spiritual site of Buddhism and tourism, which is a sacred Buddhist site, especially holy to pray for everything (peace, health, wealth, career)	Culturally and Economically	People are on a journey towards truth and beauty, promoting filial piety and increasing income	None
6	Gender: female Age: 42- year-old Ferrywoman	It preserves the spiritual values of Vietnam and brings luck and peace to worship Buddha at the Perfume Temple	Culturally and Economically	More tourists will bring more happiness	The ferry crew do not feel satisfied with the organising body of the temple festival and feel that they are not paid in proportion to their efforts.to their efforts.
7	Gender: male Age:37year	It is a sacred place that can dispel the troubles in this	Culturally and Economically	It can create jobs for people	When there're too many people, many tourists don't

	old Sculptor	world. The Perfume Temple is a renowned place that is famous throughout the country.			follow the rules, and they litter and crush.
8	Gender: female Age: 33-year-old local person	It is a place that contributes to the preservation of culture and folklore, where Buddhists can visit on pilgrimage and tourists can enjoy the scenery on both sides of the Yen Stream.	Culturally and Economically	It can attract more visitors and increase the income of the temple festival	None
9	Gender: male Age: 35-year-old engineer	The Perfume Temple Festival can disseminate Buddhism and enable more people to know about the folklore of Vietnamese people	Culturally	The atmosphere of the temple festival is harmonious and joyful, which enriches the traditional folklore of Vietnamese culture and maintains the national identity	There are still many visitors who are not aware of the significance of the temple festival at the Perfume Temple, and efforts should be made to promote the culture and preserve it better.
10	Gender: female Age: 40-year-old salarywoman	This is a Buddhist temple festival to disseminate Vietnamese culture to foreign visitors. The Perfume Temple Festival is a traditional Vietnamese temple festival where Buddhist believers come on pilgrimage. This is	Culturally and Economically	It has prompted cultural exchanges and more and more people know this place as a historical landmark of Vietnam. Visitors can also purchase a lot of products from the mountains here,	There are some undesirable practices, for example, forcing tourists to spend more money and littering.

		also a sacred Buddhist site. And the scenery is beautiful. The romantic and poetic Yen stream can attract a lot of foreign tourists and promote tourism.		and they can taste the specialties of the Perfume Mountain	
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From the Table 3, it can be seen that the Perfume Temple has influenced the Vietnamese people both spiritually and economically. The 10 interviewees, regardless of their professions, i.e., whether they were company employees, local people, businessmen, sculptors, workers, or boatmen, all shared a common point in recognising the cultural and economic significance of cultural tourism at the Perfume Temple. They mutually agreed that this is a place for more people to learn about Vietnamese folk culture and disseminate Buddhism. Meanwhile, they may enjoy the scenery of Yen River and experience the temple culture while on pilgrimage and worship. Pilgrimage and worship will bring them good luck, health and peace, and they can also pray for wealth and career and academic success, thus attaining the wishes of their hearts. The local people are expecting the pilgrimage and the scenic landscape to attract more visitors, both to promote the ethnic culture and to increase their income during the Temple Festival. The interviewees differed in certain aspects; for instance, some tourists prefer the tranquillity of the Temple, believing that too many people would break it and pollute the pleasant environment as well as the overload of tourists would cause congestion and affect the caves.

For visitors, the temple is source of national pride and spirituality. It is a place where traditional cultural elements are preserved, the soul is purified, folk beliefs and



traditional culture assimilate and one can experience the long history and essence of Buddhism. Many Vietnamese are proud of the Perfume Temple. It is a perfect example of the harmony of green mountains and clear water with magnificent and spectacular temples and mysterious natural caves; therefore, such a temple festival is unique in Vietnam, and a visit here also allows people to have their different wishes fulfilled, their minds relaxed and stress released.

For the local people, the temple is vital because a visit to it not only promotes local traditional folk customs, but also highlights its cultural value. More importantly, with the prosperous Temple Festival, the arrival of a large number of domestic and foreign tourists has increased the income for local residents during that time, and the sales staff of specialties, souvenirs, tourist food and drink as well as ferrymen in the Perfume Mountain have increased their considerable economic income; they have also increased their exchanges with people from all over the world while bringing economic benefits to the local government..

However, based on the interviews, with the growing number of visitors, there are also some unpleasant elements such as environmental pollution, littering, and crowding of visitors going up and down the mountains which may cause safety hazards. Furthermore, the publicity and cultural popularisation of this site is not well-prepared. Many tourists do not understand the cultural and spiritual significance of the Perfume Temple Festival. Thus, efforts should be made to strengthen the publicity and preserve the national culture. This cultural and historical site should be better understood by more people and the development of cultural tourism in the Perfume Temple must be promoted properly.

### 4.3 Management of Perfume Temple

During the trip to the Perfume Temple, I had a chance to meet several temple managers and learned the basic information about the temple management of the Perfume Temple from them during the conversation. At the present, the Perfume Temple is managed by the Management Committee of the Perfume Mountain Scenic Spot, which covers many departments, each of which administers the temple based on its jurisdiction. To further clarify the management status of the Perfume Temple, I also consulted related materials at the National Library of Vietnam. The Perfume Temple was severely damaged during the war, and was rebuilt after the victory in the Anti-French War. For the organization and management of the Perfume Temple Festival, in 1997, preparations were made for the establishment of the Management Committee of the Perfume Mountain Scenic Spot, which is directly subordinate to the Provincial People's Committee. In June 2000, Mỹ Đức District established the Management Committee of the Perfume Mountain Scenic Spot and Relics to protect the relic areas outside the temple complex by managing the guests attending the Perfume Temple Festival and the visitors outside the Temple Festival by means of admission tickets. In 2008, after the incorporation of the area into Ha Noi, a steering committee for the temple festival was established with members from the Municipal Public Security, the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the People's Committee of Mỹ Đức District, and the Perfume Mountains Town Commune Committee. Meanwhile, the Perfume Temple was renovated and further developed. With such efforts, the People's Committee of Hanoi City is now in charge of general management of the development of Perfume Temple Tourism Zone, while Mỹ Đức District is specifically responsible for the development and management of the

Perfume Mountains Historic Site Zone. Implementing the guidance of the People's Committee of Hanoi City, Mỹ Đức District has established the Management Committee of Perfume Mountain Scenic Spot and Relics Area, with the tasks of developing programs to supervise the construction and development of the tourist area in collaboration with the Perfume Mountains Town Commune Committee and related industries; managing the services of the local tourist area such as special line transportation and catering services; supervising and organizing the sale of tickets for attractions and ferry tickets, etc. With a view to implementing the tasks, the Management Committee and the subcommittees have also established the Organizing Committee of the Perfume Temple Festival for organizing and implementing the various tasks for the Festival. These subcommittees include the Social and Cultural Subcommittee, the Economic and Financial Subcommittee, the Security Subcommittee, the Visitor Transportation and Dispatch Subcommittee, the Scenic Spot and Relics Management Subcommittee, the Daily Services and Environmental Health, and the Heaven Kitchen Pier Ticket Inspection Station. These subcommittees, in collaboration with the Organizing Committee, oversee all cultural activities, violation handling, arrange doctors, medical equipment, medicine and medical emergency points in the Temple area, inspect quarantine rooms, and focus on food hygiene, water safety and security order.

The Organizing Committee has publicized the scenic spot and ferry ticket prices at the gate and pier of Perfume Temple. Parking services are also managed by the Perfume Mountains Town Commune Committee. Meanwhile, to ensure the safety and convenience of pilgrims, the Organizing Committee has decided that no business outlets shall be arranged inside the temples, inside the caves, at narrow roads, in

dangerous deep areas, on the grounds outside the main gate of the South Heavenly Gate, on the grounds of the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda, and in the area of the Perfume Cave. To facilitate visitors to go up and down the mountain, the cable car system was put into operation in 2006, making it convenient for visitors, especially for the elderly or disabled. New investments were made in the power grid, electronic information, and transportation systems, which are ready to serve visitors. Since 2001, many projects have been undertaken to renovate and upgrade the tourism infrastructure by building roads, expanding and upgrading stations, and providing additional cable cars to transport tourists to the Temple Festival. In terms of catering, the food and beverage services of the Perfume Temple are mainly concentrated in the three main areas of Ferry Pier, Yan Pier and Heavenly Kitchen Pagoda. Since the 2013 Temple Festival, the Management Committee has been improving the catering service situation by requiring the price list to be posted in a sealed frame, giving priority to environmental hygiene and improving food hygiene and safety. On the other hand, the Management Committee has also actively mobilized local residents and tourists to be aware of the need to keep the site area clean and sanitary, not to litter, and to promote and educate tourists to offer incense along with the group or only one piece of incense. This is to protect the temple and cave architecture as well as to maintain a clear air condition and cleanliness in the worship area. In terms of communication services, the infrastructure has also been improved. Previously, cell phone coverage was not available in the Perfume Temple area, however, after the improvement, visitors could receive mobile signals in the Heaven Kitchen Pagoda area at first. And now, mobile signals can be received in almost all areas of the Perfume Temple during our visit.

According to the fieldwork and interview, it can be concluded that the the temples, statues, and monuments are rennovated on a yearly basis, and the conservation and restoration of the Perfume Temple is under the responsibility of the management committee of the Perfume Mountain Heritage Area, and the cost of restoration and maintenance comes from the support of the local government and the meritorious donations of tourists, respectively.

#### 4.4 Summary

Based on my field trip to the Perfume Temple, I was able to witness the magnificent, ingenious, unique and beautiful tangible cultural tourism resources surrounding the Perfume Temple Festival. People visited the temple not only to worship the Buddha, but also to worship mother faiths and various deities simultaneously. The temple complex illustrates the integration of various religions and beliefs as clearly reflected in temple architectural styles and pilgrimage patterns. More concrete survey data have been obtained from questionnaires and interviews at the Perfume Temple. It can be concluded that young and middle-aged people aged 18–35 years are the main visitors to the Perfume Temple. This also shows the increasing attraction of the temple among the local younger generations.

In terms of beliefs, nearly half of the visitors believe in Buddhism, while the percentage of visitors with folk beliefs is also high. In terms of the purpose of visiting the Perfume Temple, nearly half of tourists come to worship Buddha, Avalokitesvara and making offerings to the deities at this sacred Buddhist site. However, there is quite a number of tourists who attend the temple festival only for sightseeing and experiencing the scenic landscape. Therefore, the purposes of tourists visiting this temple are diverse and serve their many demands. The majority of visitors pray for

health and good luck at the Perfume Temple, and some for children and academic success. The questionnaire also reveals that more than 80% of visitors would like to return to the Perfume Temple in the future. This signifies that this tourist destination has left a good impression on them.

According to the interviews, many informants have affirmed the significance of the Perfume Temple, both culturally and economically. It is a place to promote cultural exchange and to enable domestic and foreign visitors to understand more about the folk culture of Vietnam. The dissemination of Buddhism has purified the minds of people based on satisfying their spiritual and cultural demands. Local farmers who cultivate their lands on a regular basis act as helmsmen during the Temple Festival, and scull for the tourists who come to visit. This is not only to increase their income, but also to enable them to interact with tourists from all over Vietnam and even foreign countries. The Perfume Temple festival promotes cultural exchange and communication between local villagers and visitors. However, there are also some negative comments and areas for improvement, such as the pollution and the environmental problems caused by visitor crowding and non-compliance with rules. These are problems that temple management team needs to find solutions to in order to cope with the increasing number of tourists in the future.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### 5.1 Conclusion

This thesis, based on the study of various literature and in conjunction with fieldwork in Vietnam, presents an in-depth study of folk religious beliefs and the application of cultural tourism in modern Vietnamese society, with a case study of the Perfume Temple Festival in Vietnam as an example.

This thesis studies folk beliefs and religions in modern Vietnam through the development of the Perfume Temple festival in Vietnam. Through a review of the history of the Perfume Temple along the course of its development from ancient times to the present, it is evident that the Perfume Temple, a huge Buddhist temple and pagoda complex became a Buddhist shrine as early as the reign of Emperor Lê Thánh Tông. The temple was rebuilt many times and enabled the large-scale development of the Perfume Temple and its temple festivals. Nowadays, with the concern of Vietnamese governments at all levels and the efforts of the Management Committee of the Perfume Temple Relics Area, the Perfume Temple Festival has grown and developed into one of the largest national temple festivals in Vietnam.

Furthermore, from the study of folk beliefs and religions in modern Vietnam, it can be concluded the Perfume Temple is a sacred Buddhist site, and the introduction of foreign religions in Vietnam has not affected the traditional Vietnamese folk beliefs. Instead, these religious beliefs have been integrated into Vietnamese folk beliefs and traditional culture, and this integration has contributed to the stability and harmony of modern Vietnamese society. Meanwhile, the Perfume Temple has retained many indigenous folk beliefs. With the temple buildings, various statues of the deities enshrined in the temples and shrines, or the various pilgrimages of people, all of them

have reflected the concentration of various religions and beliefs at the Perfume Temple, where they all coexist peacefully with each other, and developing together with the Perfume Temple.

Meanwhile, this thesis studies how folk beliefs and religions promote cultural tourism in Vietnam. Cultural tourism represents a new trend in the development of tourism in various countries in recent years. The widely popular folklore event of Perfume Temple Festival is in line with the trend championed by modern cultural tourism, from comprehensive elements such as folk beliefs, religions, temple relics and folk art, all of which are fully reflected in the Perfume Temple. Cultural tourism consists of tangible and intangible cultural resources. Based on the study, it can be concluded that the tangible resources are derived from the temples and shrine buildings. The over 18 temples and shrines of the Perfume Temple representing different folk religious beliefs, also contain high values of cultural tourism. This magnificent temple complex, which integrates the Buddhist temples with the mother halls of folk mother beliefs and ancestor worship halls, constitutes a tangible cultural resource attracting people to visit. More importantly, the Perfume Temple also encompasses a wider range of "intangible" cultural resources, and it is these people of religious and folk beliefs that have promoted cultural tourism. The statues of deities, Buddha and Avalokitesvara enshrined in the temples can attract believers and tourists of different faiths to come here and pray for different wishes as seen through various pilgrimages, rituals and prayers. This can also help promote the development of cultural tourism in Vietnam. The characteristic values of the Perfume Temple Festival and its cultural values in the hearts of Vietnamese people are the fusion of Buddhism and folk beliefs, together with activities featuring folk art and



performances. These elements of folklore, containing mystery and solemnity, have formed an intangible tourist features of the Perfume Temple. As different people have different beliefs and different demands, the wide range of demands has driven people of different religions and beliefs to increasingly gather here. The Perfume Temple visit is not only for sightseeing, but also a perfect combination of cultural tourism that integrates religions, beliefs and customs.

The fieldwork has further substantiated my conclusion. That is to say, unique historical value of the buildings, temples, monuments and statues, the beautiful landscape, and the historical features of the caves have all formed the undeniable advantages for the Perfume Temple. Fieldwork has shown that visitors come here not only to worship Buddha, but also to worship the Mother Goddess and other deities simultaneously. Many tourists, while praying for blessings, worshipping Buddha, and attending temple festivals, also experience the scenic beauty of the landscape. Therefore, the purposes of tourists coming here are diversified and can satisfy the multiple demands of tourists.

The Perfume Temple is mainly visited by young people, and it provides them with a place to purify their minds, to relieve stress, and to experience folk cultures. It is also found that more than 80% of the visitors want to come back to the Temple in the future. Based on the interviews, it has been concluded that the Perfume Temple plays an important role in economic development by satisfying the spiritual and cultural demands of the people, as well as bringing an increase in income to the local area.

In terms of management, the Perfume Temple Festival has received support from the national and local governments. The Management Committee of the Perfume Temple Relics Area has undertaken a lot of work in terms of infrastructure, transportation and

communication services to better improve management. As a result, the valuable spiritual and cultural heritage of the Perfume Temple, as a cultural and tourist destination, can be better presented to domestic and foreign visitors. The fieldwork and interviews further illustrated the impact of religions and folk beliefs represented by the Perfume Temple on modern Vietnamese society, and its promotion of cultural tourism.

## 5.2 Recommendations

This study is designed to explore the impact of folk beliefs and religions on modern Vietnamese society and the promotion of cultural tourism in Vietnam. In recent years, with the emergence of cultural tourism, the exploration and promotion of traditional folk beliefs and religions have become a valuable resource for the development of cultural tourism. Meanwhile, with the economic development and the deepening interaction with the world, the local folk culture will inevitably be affected, therefore, it is hoped that this paper will play a small part in promoting the excavation of Vietnamese folk beliefs, and the better integration of cultural tourism and folklore. It is also hoped that in the future, more experts and scholars will carry out more research works on folk beliefs and other traditional folk cultures, and further explore the development of cultural tourism in Vietnam.

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