



DORISEA WORKING PAPER

ISSUE 20, 2015, ISSN: 2196-6893

ANDREA LAUSER

TRAVELING TO YÊN TỬ (NORTH VIETNAM)
RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE, CULTURAL
NATIONALISM AND TOURISTIC HERITAGE
IN THE SHAPING OF A PILGRIMAGE
LANDSCAPE



20

DORISEA WORKING PAPER SERIES

EDITORS

Peter J. Bräunlein
Michael Dickhardt
Andrea Lauser

BMBF Competence Network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA)

The research network “Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia” (DORISEA) is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) and coordinated by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Georg-August-University of Göttingen. Scholars from the Universities of Göttingen, Hamburg, Münster, Heidelberg and Berlin (Humboldt University) are involved in several projects that investigate the relationship between religion and modernity in Southeast Asia.

How to cite this paper: Andrea Lauser (2015): Traveling to Yên Tử (North Vietnam). Religious Resurgence, Cultural Nationalism and Touristic Heritage in the Shaping of a Pilgrimage Landscape. In: DORISEA Working Paper Series, No. 20.

Research Network DORISEA
Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia

Project Office
Georg-August-University Göttingen
Institut für Ethnologie
Berliner Str. 28
D - 37073 Göttingen
Germany
+49 (0)551 39 20153

dorisea@uni-goettingen.de
www.dorisea.net



FUNDED BY



Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research

ANDREA LAUSER

TRAVELING TO YÊN TỬ (NORTH VIETNAM). RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE, CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND TOURISTIC HERITAGE IN THE SHAPING OF A PILGRIMAGE LANDSCAPE

ABSTRACT Yên Tử, a well-known “Sacred Mountain” in northeastern Vietnam, is surrounded by primeval forest with plentiful and diverse flora. The attribution of sacred or mystical qualities to Yên Tử has a long tradition, with the mountain providing a symbol of cosmic order in Vietnamese Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Since Vietnam’s government launched its open-door policy in the late 1980s, the pilgrimage centre has been given official recognition by the Ministry of Culture as a national cultural heritage site. Recently, through the construction of a cable-car system carrying pilgrims—and tourists—to the top, Yên Tử has also become one of the ‘must do’ things for local and global “pilgrim-tourists”, attracting over one million visitors since 2009. Looking at the pilgrimage site as a multidimensional arena, this paper focuses on the negotiation of agendas between wealth, merit-making, ‘touristification’ and political certification of national culture and heritage in contemporary Vietnam (and beyond).

All photos by Andrea Lauser, 2011, unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage can be many—even contradictory—things at once: a personal journey of healing and entertainment, a place and space of ‘communitas’ and identity, but also of conflict and division, a celebration of roots or homecoming and an experience of liminality and even a political movement and a memorial (Eade & Sallnow 1991, Morinis 1992, Bauman 1996, Coleman & Eade 2004, Badone & Roseman 2004, Dallen & Olsen 2006, Swatos 2006). Many recent studies of pilgrimage have emphasized movement and motion at the expense of centre or place. In theorizing pilgrimage and spiritual journeys, these studies focus on identifying different forms of embodied, imagined and metaphorical motions (Coleman & Eade 2004). This shift away from the classical anthropological focus on ritual and communitas (Turner & Turner 1978) towards movement is situated within the ‘mobilities turn’ in scholarly debates, which has emerged as a theoretic-

cal approach to the challenges in the new age of globalization (Urry 2007, Hyndman-Rizik 2012). Yet, as Soja (1989) reminds us, in a globalised world of mobility and decentering, centres nevertheless remain significant. As some come apart or fade away, others emerge or are reinvented. Since pilgrimage is both a moving practice *and* a localised resource of meaning, pilgrimage studies’ (re-)focusing on the concept of place recognizes not only that pilgrims but also various ‘placemaking’ agencies give rise to and produce pilgrimages (Reader 2014, Eade & Katić 2013).

Taking the example of the Yên Tử pilgrimage destination in North Vietnam, I will tell a multilayered story of a landscape that is shaped, formed, steered and controlled by diverse agencies, each of which is a composite of different expressions. In this sense, the complex story of the pilgrimage landscape of Yên Tử is to be understood as a cultural process, characterized by the interaction and mutual constitution of people and their historically

constructed environment, as well as a site of power struggles and the interplay of actuality and potentiality.¹

I propose considering Yên Tử as a spatial complex shaped by economic interests, state politics, religious ambitions, and individual desires. Thus, the forces of Vietnamese history, culture and religion have actuated the sedimentation of the Yên Tử landscape. The geographical as well as the historical and socio-political morphology of the Yên Tử complex are of equal analytic importance. The diverse layers can be described as follows:

- Yên Tử is a mountainous region in the north-eastern part of Vietnam on the border with China, surrounded by primeval forest with plentiful and diverse flora and fauna.
- The landscape is surrounded by black coal stockpiles and rugged, torn-open mountainsides which encroach into the forest landscape, paying witness to intense coalmining. Dating from the beginning of French colonial domination and intensifying during the period of socialist industrialization, the northeastern region of Vietnam remains the most important and largest coalmining area in the country.
- Located on the adjacent west coast is the industrial port city of Haiphong, while on the east coast, Ha Long Bay has been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1994. With millions of annual visitors, Ha Long Bay—an area of around 400 km² (and more than 700 islands)—is one of Vietnam's, and indeed Southeast Asia's, most popular tourist attractions.² However, the environmental destruction caused both by coalmining as well as tourism threatens its removal from the UNESCO World Heritage List. In response to this, several specific projects and plans dealing with environmental protection, tourism development and conservation management have been launched.³
- Moving inland from Ha Long Bay to nearby Yên Tử mountain, our perspective is directed towards a landscape whose temples and stupas

reference a past of two heroic king dynasties, under which Chinese invasions were *politically* repelled and a so-called 'golden era' of Vietnamese Buddhism was *religiously* introduced.

- The concrete materiality of pagodas, stupas, unique relics and Buddha statues are considered to be highly charged with (sacralized) power. Buddhist pilgrims are therefore eager to perform devotional practices in order to accumulate merit and improve their karma.
- Mount Yên Tử is thus considered to be one pilgrim destination among many 'must do' destinations in the Vietnamese pilgrimage landscape, such as the Perfume Pagoda (*Chùa Hương*) and the temples of the Hung kings (*Hùng Vương*), to name only two of the most famous sites that are visited annually by millions of local, national and by now transnational Vietnamese travellers.
- These sites are part of a booming tourism market known as "Travelling to the Nation's Roots" (*Du lịch—Về Cội Nguồn*).⁴
- Yên Tử is but one of many sites of religious pilgrimage and/or patriotic commemoration in Vietnam which have grown into tourist attractions where commodified refashioning is part of the business. Rigid distinctions between 'serious' and 'pious' pilgrims always on a journey to a sacred site, and 'playful' and 'curious' tourists only on a trip to places of secular pleasure have become blurred. As both a national site of cultural heritage and a touristic site of economic development, Yên Tử has also developed into a destination of a 'going home' (*về quê*) and 'returning to the roots' (*về nguồn*) movement.
- While pilgrims may act like tourists, tourists and overseas Vietnamese travelling "home" in particular, may become pilgrim-tourist hybrids looking for their roots. "Being on the routes" is, in this case, also understood as "searching for the roots".

¹ This has also been reflected in numerous studies within an emerging subfield, 'anthropology of pilgrimage', where 'sacred' space and other phenomena are to be found at the intersection of environment, religious, social, cultural, political, and economic interests (e.g. Eade & Sallnow 1991, Coleman & Eade 2004, Badone & Roseman 2004, Dallen & Olsen 2006, Swatos 2006, Margy 2008, Eade, John & Mario Katić 2013, Reader 2014).

² <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/6709>.

³ Cf. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672>. For international funding for environmental planning, see i.a. "Research Association Mining and Environment in Vietnam" supported by the BMBF: <http://www.rame.vn/>.

⁴ Under the labels *Văn Hóa Việt* (Vietnamese Culture) and *Du Lịch Về Cội Nguồn* (travelling to the roots) there are many tour companies which run tours for Vietnamese pilgrim-tourists, with the tour guides speaking(only) in Vietnamese. See among numerous others: <https://sites.google.com/site/dulichintours/du-lich-hanh-huong/tour-du-lich-hanh-huong-ve-coi-nguon---yen-tu---cua-ong>; <https://sites.google.com/site/dulichnhatranggiare/du-lich-hanh-huong/du-lich-hanh-huong-ve-lai-coi-nguon-yen-tu---cua-ong>; <http://diendan.dulichhue.com.vn/threads/hanh-trinh-ve-voi-yen-tu-coi-nguon-tam-linh.30423/>; <http://www.vanhoaviet.biz.vn/>; <http://quehuongonline.vn/VietNam/Home/> see also: http://www.aseanreligioustours.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=3&Itemid=45, http://www.aseanreligioustours.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=49&Itemid=73 (all links accessed June 2014).

In using the hybrid terms pilgrim/roots tourist and pilgrimage-roots tourism, I want neither to embrace nor reject the notion of pilgrimage. To many overseas Vietnamese, the fulfilment of the pilgrimage tour seems to be a kind of homecoming, suggesting a possibility of reconnection to Vietnamese traditions and 'roots'. Longing for a collective cultural identity—or (be)longing—is not utterly dissolved by decentralization, dispersal and fragmentation. But in contexts of such diasporic homecomings, there is a pronounced articulation of belonging and roots. I suggest that both pilgrimage and (roots-)tourism are (crucially) bound together and are best viewed as multi-vocal semantic systems which bring numerous values, stereotypes, images, ideas and sentiments into relation with one another (Basu 2004).

However, the Yên Tử pilgrimage cannot be reduced to pilgrim-roots tourism. Many more correlations are evident in this multidimensional landscape, which can also be considered an arena of competing discourses, creating hypercomplex spaces that are constantly produced, supervised and controlled by different interests and authorities.

This complex multidimensionality echoes conceptions of "assemblages" as multifaceted networks of persons, natural or manufactured materials, objects and actions, concepts of religion and heritage as well as intangible values and narratives which are re-constructed and therefore have to be interpreted in their historical, social and cultural context (cf. Marcus and Saka 2006, Latour 2005, De Landa 2006).

Drawing on my experience of fieldwork and pilgrimage in Vietnam in 2006-7 and 2011, in this article I am especially interested in the close connection between and choreography of pilgrimage, tourism, and the nation-state. Through the (post-) socialist nation-state's continuous and increasing interference, spatializing and materializing processes take on peculiar forms seen in cultural policies on heritage, the re-construction of temples, pagodas and shrines, the recent construction of both a cable car system and a giant Buddha statue and in new year pilgrimage festivals and folklore dance performances. All of these 'orchestrations' transform the long-standing 'sacralized' landscape of memory into a 'modern' space of Vietnamese national identity and vitality.

VISITING YÊN TỬ MOUNTAIN—LEGENDARY ORIGIN, JOURNEY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Yên Tử Mountain refers to a system of pagodas and scenic spots in northeastern Vietnam⁵ in the border

region to China. The famous Dong Pagoda—*Chùa Đồng*—which stands on its highest peak—was once the centre of the *Trúc Lâm* (Bamboo Forest) Zen school of Vietnamese Buddhism. The school was co-founded by the so-called Buddha King (*Phật Hoàng*) Trần Nhân Tông in the 13th century. Both under his rule and that of his descendents, hundreds of religious buildings and temples were built. King Trần Nhân Tông is renowned for having led the country to victory over the powerful invading Mongolian armies in two wars (in 1285 and 1288, aided by the legendary general Trần Hưng Đạo, who is now worshipped as a national hero and deity). In 1293, he abdicated the throne to his son Trần Anh Tông to begin a new life as a Buddhist monk, retreating to the Yên Tử mountains.

According to legend, one day Trần Nhân Tông sat on the peak and saw a nearby mountain covered with colourful clouds. From his followers he learned that the mountain was Yên Phụ, where one of his famous ancestors, the legendary Taoist priest An Kỳ Sinh, was worshiped. Trần Nhân Tông is said to have prostrated himself and bowed towards the Yên Phụ Mountain, saying: 'An Kỳ Sinh is my forefather, I am just his descendant. He named his mountain Yên Phụ (*Phụ*—Father) so I should name my mountain as Yên Tử (*Tử*—Children)' (cf. Trần Trương 2010).⁶

Aside from the legend, Yên Tử already existed as a site for religious practice by Taoists and Buddhists before the arrival of Trần Nhân Tông. But it is not only the spiritual genealogy of the site, located as it is close to heaven, but strategic reasons which may have inspired Trần Nhân Tông's to choose it. Standing on the peak of the mountain (1068m above sea level) one could look over a large north-eastern borderland region of the country, with Ha Long Bay nearby and important border gates close to China. These strategic viewpoints made the mountain more than just a religious sanctuary, and reflect the close connection between Buddhism and politics at that time (Nguyễn Lang 1994⁷).

The many temples, pagodas and pilgrim stations on the site today are intended as a reenactment of Trần Nhân Tông's first "pilgrimage". Today, pilgrims wishing to relive this ancestral journey and pay respect to this founding father walk at least 30 kilometres and pass around ten pagodas and hundreds

flanked by Hải Dương, Bắc Giang and Quảng Ninh provinces. It is about 15 km northwest of Uông Bí, a provincial town in Quảng Ninh province.

⁶ Duc The Dao (2008, 101), referring to Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1977, 10), argues that An Kỳ Sinh was a Taoist priest and herbalist known for the powerful herbal medicine he made at Mount Yên Tử in the 2nd century. Like other divine mountains, Yên Tử was recorded as a "land of happiness" (*phúc địa*.) with a long tradition as a symbol of cosmic order in Vietnamese Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

⁷ Open online access is available: <http://thuvienhoasen.org/p58a8401/chuong-xii-tran-nhan-tong-va-thien-phai-truc-lam> and/or <http://cusi.free.fr/lsp/suluan/vnpgsuluan1-12.html>

⁵ The Complex of Yên Tử Monuments and Landscape is located on the so-called Đông Triều mountain range. It is

of shrines and stupas. Legendary stories endow certain sites with special significance because they are considered as places where Trần Nhân Tông lived, walked, and meditated. By describing how the sites are mapped together, these narratives create a pilgrimage space.

Being on the journey

Let us start our ‘journey’ with a short account by Van Quoc An⁸, a young overseas Vietnamese (*Việt kiều*) man on his first, “unforgettable” trip—a kind of homecoming—to the Yên Tử pilgrimage site. Van Quoc An represents a certain category of “pilgrim-tourists” who set off on the “way home” (*về nguồn*—returning to the source), seeking their roots, origins and identity as well as hoping for touristic adventure and new experiences on the occasion of the Tết new year festival, and the ensuing three-month pilgrimage season (Lauser 2008):

“I took a trip together with some friends to Yên Tử Pagoda, the most holy and highest pagoda in the north and in fact, in the whole of Vietnam. On the way we stopped at a few temples⁹. When we finally arrived, we went straight on to Giải oan¹⁰ Temple to pray to release whatever we had done wrong in the past year, before heading up to buy cable car tickets for the next day. We decided to sleep overnight on the sleeping mats in Ngoc Hai restaurant, right next to Hoa Yên Pagoda where we went again for a short prayer. The rules of the pagoda don’t allow visitors to put meat on the offerings tray and my friends had to remove the chicken and replace it with some more beers, cokes, sticky rice, money, fruit, and lighted incense.

We were the first at the cable car station but we weren’t the first on the top of the mountain

as there were quite a lot people already up there. They must have climbed in the dark.

On the top at the bronze pagoda—Chùa Đồng—it seemed the wind would blow everything away, including the chanting ladies in raincoats. This small pagoda is made completely of bronze and everyone tries to touch the pagoda and/or the bronze bell next to it, hoping to get blessings from the gods, and wishing for a lucky year. We had to be aggressive to get close to the altars to pray.

It looked surreal. It was also a little bit scary.

I was quite surprised about how religious these people were, choosing to walk from the base to the top in such horrible conditions. Some of them may not have been able to afford to buy tickets, as it’s quite expensive (140,000 VND, about \$US6). Then again, many devotees spend billions of dong both here and at the Perfume Pagoda, as I witnessed last year on my Tết festival pilgrimage, in the form of fake money and fake holy stuff which is then burnt in giant incinerators after a short time of praying and offering. People stand in queues just to burn these papers and the ashes fly around in the air, into everyone’s hair, like a volcano has just erupted.

This is a tradition that should remain but people shouldn’t burn so much in the hope that they will get the same in return. It’s all very superstitious. Many people spent millions of dong with the burning of the fake papers.

*As the weather cleared up we had a pleasant climb down, as we could take in the scenery around us and also hear the crazy music and look at the souvenir shops along the way. For lunch, we ate all of the food which had been offered to the gods (*lộc*—blessed gifts). We felt a bit drunk and sleepy after a few beers, but we had to finish our trip and arrived at the Bảo Sái Pagoda and my friends repeated the same procedure with the tray and more food!*

Thanks to the invitation to take this journey and, even though I’m not a very religious person, I really enjoyed the cultural experience and hope that everyone who believes gets what they prayed for! Hope the weather is good on my second trip back next year! I really intend to repeat this experience.”

This short narrative shows that there are many paths to the ‘holy’ mountain of Yên Tử, and that the travellers are driven by very different motives. In addition to groups of friends or tourist groups who travel “just for fun” and sightseeing, pilgrimage groups are also formed by company employees, civil servants, as well as religious laywomen’s groups amongst others. These others include (smaller) groups of followers of the Four Palace Cult (*Đạo Tứ Phủ*), or “Mother Goddess Religion” (*Đạo Mẫu*), who frequently visit temples dedicated to the pantheon of *Đạo Mẫu* in order to perform rites of possession (*lên đồng*) and pray for health, success and prosperity (see also Phạm Quỳnh Phương 2009, 47ff., Duc The Dao 2008, 67ff.).

⁸ I have created Van Quoc An—and his account—as a kind of fictional collage based on materials I collected during my pilgrimages (2006/7 and 2011) as well as on countless internet blog entries, such as: <http://cathrinka.blog.de/2012/02/11/nui-yen-tu-berg-yen-tu-12760602/> („Zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Mein Leben in Vietnam und Drumherum“- *Between Tradition and Modernity. My life in Vietnam and beyond*), <http://vietnamesegod.blogspot.de/search/label/Traditional%20Culture>; <http://eyedrd.org/2012/06/the-rituals-of-worshiping-vietnamese-nations-founders.html> and others. An analysis of the increasing amount of digital testimonies available online, in blogs and on youtube platforms, could form a research area in itself.

⁹ Quite often pilgrimages to Yên Tử are combined with visitations, prayers and rituals at the most well-known temples from the Trần dynasty, including Đền Kiếp Bạc and Côn Sơn Pagoda in the Hải Dương Province, and Cửa Ông Temple in Cẩm Phả (see as well my own field notes from October 2006 and for Yên Tử March 2011).

¹⁰ Literally, clearing unjust charges.



Figure 1: Fog shrouds the way to the top.



Figure 2: Praying on the highest peak at Chùa Đồng.

Pilgrimage topography: following the sacred track

As this short account demonstrates, going on pilgrimage (literally *đi lễ hội*—journeying to the festival)¹¹ includes numerous stops on route to the most important site, the *Động* pagoda at the top of Yên Tử mountain. Amongst the countless temples, pagodas and shrines in the Yên Tử landscape, the following are generally considered the most significant stations on the way to the peak (compiled after Trần Trương 2008).

- At *Suối Tắm* (Bathing Brook), Trần Nhân Tông washed off the dust and grime of his earthly life before immersing himself in his life as a disciple of the Buddha.
- At the nearby pagoda *Cảm thức*, Trần Nhân Tông was said to have had his first vegetarian meal of plain rice cooked with water from the streams and vegetables gathered on the spot.
- The next crucial site in the foothills is the *Giải Oan Pagoda*—*chùa Giải Oan* ('Clearing Unjust Charges' or 'Salvation of Wandering Souls') located near a brook bearing the same name. The pagoda and the brook are associated with a narrative in which the king was voluntarily accompanied by 100 royal concubines. When he ordered them to return home, they jumped into the brook to show their faithfulness to him. Some drowned, while others were saved by local people. *Chùa Giải Oan* was established near the brook in commemoration of a ceremony organized by the deeply moved King to "clear unjust charges" against the dead.
- The path then leads the visitors/pilgrims to the *Hòn Ngọc* (Emerald) garden where, next to numerous small stupas and stelae, the main stupa, *Huệ Quang Kim tháp*, is located. The stupa reportedly contains the ashes of Trần Nhân Tông. Stupas and memorial monuments with venerable relics make the power present and mediate it to the lives of Buddhist believers and practitioners. It is this power that pilgrims hope to connect with when they visit the stupas (Scott 2009, 106).
- Pilgrims light incense and make a short prayer at *Chùa Hoa Yên*, a stupa along the trail through the middle of the Yên Tử mountain area. It is regarded as one of the main destinations and serves as a stage at the annual festival.
- *Hoa Yên* Pagoda is the founding place. Initially it was a very big pagoda, comprising several main buildings, with bell and drum towers, and living quarters for both

monks and guests. The current and smaller *Hoa Yên* Pagoda was last rebuilt by the government in 2002. It is dedicated to the three founders of the Trúc Lâm school: Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang.

- Following the right-hand slope of the mountain is the *Cloudy Shrine* (*Vân Am*) where the King died in peace. With its back to the mountain and standing amidst pine and bamboo trees, the shrine overlooks the sea.
- A little further on stands the small *Ngọa Vân* Temple (lying in the clouds), the 'One-roof Pagoda' (*Một Mai*) and the *Chùa Bảo Sát*. To the west, the *Ruins of the Vạn Tiêu Pagoda* stand next to the nine-story *Vọng Tiên* Temple.
- Further on, there is a two-metre tall stone statue reported to be *An Kỳ Sinh*¹², who in the pre-Buddhist era substantiated the narrative of a divine mountain.
- Finally, the *Chùa Động* stands on the peak of Yên Tử mountain. It contains statues of the Buddha and the three founders of Trúc Lâm Zen School (Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang). The walk to the peak—the so-called *Heaven's Gate*—is usually 'a walk in the clouds'. As such, it embodies the meeting point between heaven and earth, giving the pilgrim the physical experience of being touched by the celestial world. "Living in such an environment", my companion commented, "you really feel cloistered from the world of human beings".



Figure 3: Site to worship An Kỳ (Photo: Petra Weigand)

¹¹ The Vietnamese dictionary term for pilgrimage is *hành hương*—literally "to walk with incense". The common Vietnamese expression, however, for going on pilgrimage is *đi lễ hội*—literally, to go for a ceremonial meeting. While *lễ* connotes a religious, ceremonial activity related to the 'sacred', *hội* connotes more the 'secular' festival part, the meeting (see Nguyễn Duy Hinh (1993, 232).

¹² See footnote 6; see also http://www.chuyenluan.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3433:yentu-pho-tuong-an-ky-sinh-va-nhung-bi-an-cho-giai-ma-&catid=117:van-hoa-van-nghe&Itemid=15 (access June 2014).



Figure 4: One of many (less famous) relics on the way.

RELIGIOUS POLICY AS THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL VALUES

An integral part of the modernist project of communist politics was the attempt to disassemble ‘religion’. The new society itself ought to be the object of worship. However, the regime considered this project to have faltered in Vietnam. The *đổi mới* (“renovation”) politics¹³ of the mid-1980s posed a new challenge for the project of nation building. Since then, pilgrimage sites as well as the concept of “cultural heritage” have become key elements in the government’s nation building agenda. Pilgrimage studies show that nation building is often at stake at pilgrimage sites, where pilgrimage shrines function as national cultural heritage, making collective memories more real. They are therefore often directly connected to the perception and structuring of national identity (e.g. Jansen & Notermans 2012, Eade & Katić 2013).

The religious and cultural policies of the Vietnamese state, their impact and their limits have been discussed by a growing number of scholars

(c.f. Malarney 1996, 2002, 2003; Pelley 2002; Taylor 2004, Lauser 2008b, Phạm Quỳnh Phương 2009, Endres 2011). Rather than reiterating these debates in detail, in this section I will describe how religion and nationalism are intertwined in the histories of Yên Tử. In doing so, it once again becomes clear that, in the study of Vietnamese religion, one has to navigate “rampant forests”¹⁴ of countless blurring entities and topics which are continuously being contested and negotiated.

In Vietnam, it is important to note that one of the most influential discourses on the concept of ‘reli-

¹⁴ Leopold Cadière, an influential scholar of Vietnamese religion, used this analogy to illustrate the interwoven nature of religious ‘systems’: «La religion annamite, si tant est que l’on puisse employer le singulier, donne une impression analogue à celle que l’on ressent quand on pénètre dans la grande forêt de la Chaîne annamitique: de ci de là, de grands troncs qui plongent leurs racines à des profondeurs inconnues et soutiennent une voûte de feuillage noyée dans l’ombre; des branches qui se recourbent vers le sol et prennent racine; des lianes qui courent d’un arbre à l’autre, qui naissent on ne sait où, et qui semblent ne pas avoir de fin; des ronces inextricable; des frondes d’une finesse, d’une élégance rares; de larges fleurs, des fleurs bizarres qui jonchent le sol, couvrent le sommet d’un arbre d’un dôme de feu, ou se tapissent à la fourche de deux branches; des écorces rugueuses, noires, visqueuses, qui donnent le frisson; des branches mortes; un épais tapis d’humus, de la pourriture; partout une sève abondante, une vie profonde qui vous submerge » (Cadière 1958, 8).

¹³ *Đổi Mới Policy* refers to the economic reforms initiated in 1986 with the aim of a socialist-oriented market economy.

gion' is linked directly with the state. It is the ruling party which is interested in defining the essence of 'good' or 'bad' religion. 'Religion' has played a part both in legitimizing and reinforcing the state *and* in rebellions against it (Soucy 2003:126). For that reason, the state continues to monitor and attempts to control religious activity. On the one hand, religion is still addressed in a Marxist (and Confucian) rationalized rhetoric of superstition (*mê tín*), and seen as something hindering the progress of the country. On the other hand, 'religion' is not rejected because it is a cornerstone in the state's construction of both cultural identity and nationalism. The relationship between religion and state is thus best characterized in terms of "balanced tension" (ibid.). Correspondingly, 'religion'—or rather what is to be accepted as "good religion" or legitimate beliefs (*tín ngưỡng*) and "beautiful customs" (*thuần phong mỹ tục*) (Endres 2002, 2011)—is continuously negotiated by the state, Vietnamese scholars, the media and local ritual practitioners. Indeed, there is ongoing debate about whether certain religious traditions are fundamental—or not—to the conception of Vietnamese culture and national identity (*bản sắc văn hóa dân tộc*) (Lauser 2008b, Lauser forthcoming, Ngô Đức Thịnh 2002, 2004 2006, Endres 2011). These debates have focused on, amongst others, the veneration of ancestors (*thờ cúng tổ tiên*), and the Mother Goddesses religion [of the Four Palaces]—*Đạo Mẫu [Tam Phủ / Tứ Phủ]* in more recent times.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Communist Party became increasing hard-line in cultural and religious policy (Endres 2011, 158ff, Malarney 2002).¹⁵ As such, many religious rituals and festivals were stopped and sacred spaces of worship were converted into secular spaces. During this period, the main responsibilities of cultural officials at Yên Tử and other sites was to keep pilgrims from superstitious practices during the Spring pilgrimage months. According to some interlocutors, the unspoken agreement had been that pilgrims were, however, free to do what they wanted at night. Thus, many mediums and followers of the Four Palace Cult (*Đạo Tứ Phủ*) continued to secretly serve the spirits in remote places. By advancing the "fine Vietnamese traditions and customs" while excluding their "obsolete, corrupt and feudal characteristics", it was assumed that a people with "pure and beautiful customs" (*phong thuần tục mỹ*) would emerge (Trương Chinh 1994, 250-251; cited in Endres 2011, 161). Accordingly, the new culture promoted by the Com-

munist leadership was envisioned as representing the best of Vietnam's cultural heritage.

The interplay between politics "from above" and local answers "from below" is most pointed in the dynamic of desired patriotic hero worship on one side, and "illegitimate" cults of spirit possession on the other. The re-establishment of certain festivals and festival sites (which have themselves become beloved pilgrimage sites), has been and continues to be justified through discourses on hero and ancestor worship. In other words, celebratory traditions may be officially recommenced and pilgrimage sites (re)established and legitimised through reference to an honourable hero or ancestor (cf. Phạm Quỳnh Phương 2009: 153ff., Nguyễn Văn Huy et.al 2003).

Venerating both historical personages (*nhân vật lịch sử*) or legendary heroes and heroines (*anh hùng*) is a ritual/religious practice often characterized as typically (*tiêu biểu*) or authentically (*thuần túy*) Vietnamese (Nguyễn Văn Huyền 1994, 41; 1995; Toan Ánh 1997, 73 cited in Taylor 2004, 193). Many of these heroic figures are associated with the defence of the country as well as its history¹⁶. In other words, heroes and heroines are *the* symbols *par excellence* of freedom, national history and cultural identity. A dual process is thereby at work, firstly through the mythicization of history in which historical figures are given extraordinary superhuman and mythic attributes, and secondly in the historicizing of myths by which mythical figures are given historical roots within the story of the nation. Heroic figures become not only powerful heroes, but also powerful spirits and deities. As such, these figures were (traditionally) worshipped asked to provide a range of services such as to ensure peace and prosperity, prevent epidemics, drought and floods, undo injustice, and chase away ghosts and invaders (Cadière 1958).

It is exactly these dynamic narratives and practices which are at work when we have a short look at the history of the Buddhist Pilgrimage Center on Mount Yên Tử. Duc The Dao (2008, 103f.) mentions that an official investigation by the Department of Preservation and Museum to document remains of different historical sites was already carried out at Mount Yên Tử in 1958. As early as 1974, Yên Tử was given official recognition as a national cultural heritage site (*di tích lịch sử văn hoá, di sản văn hóa quốc gia*) by the then Ministry of Culture. The ministry established a Management Committee whose main task was to conduct historical research, and to preserve and restore the sites and the material objects as the heritage of a heroic era of national history. Religious elements were resolutely adapted and incorporated into this dominant discourse. In other words, as a warrior king, Trần Nhân Tông was

¹⁵ The three principles: nationalisation, popularisation and scientification (*dân tộc hoá, đại chúng hoá và khoa học hoá*) constituted the guiding concepts of nationhood and patriotism, and demanded an active return to what is uniquely Vietnamese (Endres 2011, 161). For a detailed elaboration of Vietnamese state cultural policies and debates on culture in postcolonial Vietnam, see also Pelley 2002, chapter 3 "National Essence and the Family State", 113-162.

¹⁶ Taylor (2004, 194f.) glosses them as warrior-scholar-official spirits (*thần võ-văn-quan*) because of their association with the military, scholarly, and administrative domains.

officially honoured as a national hero under early communist rule. However, it was only in the 1990s that narratives about his life as a Buddhist monk began to (re)emerge in official discourse, leading to the official establishment of the site as one of pilgrimage (Duc The Dao 2008, 105).

Paradoxes of 'conservative' forces: coalmining, war, renovation policy

Due to its impenetrable surroundings, Yên Tử remained largely isolated until 1955. Between 1955 and 1963, socialist industrialisation brought heavy industry to the region. Coalmining has subsequently led to the destruction of several stupas. Paradoxically, it was the Vietnamese-American War (escalating further in 1964 after the so-called 'Gulf of Tonkin Incident'—*Sự kiện Vịnh Bắc Bộ*) which, to a certain degree, saved the mountain and the destruction of shrines and stupas. The massive American air attacks on the industrial plants in the Quảng Ninh province slowed down the expansion of coalmining. As the highest mountain in the region, throughout the war Yên Tử served as a military station for the air forces and became a training ground for soldiers (Duc The Dao 2008, 144ff).

An intensification of the practice of rituals in the final years of the American War led to numerous government directives and circulars. After the war, it became even more difficult to control the rising religious fervour.¹⁷

When the new cultural policy of the *đổi mới* (renovation) era came into full effect in the late 1980s, the doors of shrines and temples were reopened. Once again pagodas and sacralized sites became, to borrow the words of Ann Anagnost (1994, 223), "the vehicles of local memory that restore to local communities a sense of place marked by the singularity of their history and their ritual traditions". The reassessment of Vietnamese culture was further influenced by the United Nations' 'Proclamation of the World Decade for Cultural Development 1988-98', which promoted the work of preserving and developing cultural heritage and emphasized the role of cultural identity (Phạm Quỳnh Phương 2009, 179).¹⁸

At that time, the worship of meritorious ancestors (*Đạo thờ cúng tổ tiên*) became an important element in the reification of a national cultural

identity through scholarly discourse. Generally, Vietnamese scholars agreed that ritual festivals (*lễ hội*) had an important place in modern cultural life, especially in the education of "noble thoughts and feelings" such as patriotism, communal spirit and cultural and artistic activities.¹⁹ Superstitious activities were still prohibited,²⁰ but defining which activity was superstitious varied according to context and situation (see Duc The Dao 2008, 75ff, Endres/Lauser 2011).

In this vein, the Yên Tử management committee organized an opening ceremony for the Yên Tử festival on the tenth day of the first lunar month each year. During the festival, folkloristic dragon dance performances recounted the king's legendary heroic activities and emphasized how the ethnic minorities in the region welcomed the arrival of the King (Duc The Dao 2008, 85f.). From the end of the 1990s, pilgrims no longer had to hide their activities. Today, even state officials have ventured to participate in different religious practices without the fear of being fined, and without having to pretend they are only attending the opening ceremonies and carrying out their secular duties (ibid.).

Indeed, today a political shift has become apparent. Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW from the 9th National Assembly of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam²¹, made on 9 June 2014, emphasized the enhanced promotion of both a national cultural industry and the "fine" aspects of religion, summed up in the metaphor of *uống nước nhớ nguồn* (the commemoration of the source from which one drinks). The development of tourism "in line with the UNESCO world heritage conventions" is now formulated as the state's official political program.²²

¹⁹ The resurgence of religious activities led to Decision 24 of the VCP Political Bureau. The decision recognized that "religion is a long-term issue. Beliefs and religion are the spiritual needs of a group of people. Many of the religious ethics are very much appropriate to the cause of building a new society" (Quote from Nguyễn Minh Quang 2005, 241). The Ministry of Culture encouraged, in cooperation with VICAS (at that time the Institute of Cultural Studies in Hanoi), research on religious activities in order to find traits and elements of Vietnamese national culture.

²⁰ See Article 8/2 of the new Ordinance on Belief and Religion issued in 2004 (Nguyễn Minh Quang 2005). An English translation is also accessible on the official website of the Ministry of Justice—Cổng thông tin điện tử Bộ Tư pháp: http://www.moj.gov.vn/vbpq/en/Lists/Vn%20bn%20php%20lut/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=7818.

²¹ Nghị quyết số 33-NQ/TW ngày 9/6/2014 Hội nghị Trung ương 9 khóa XI về xây dựng và phát triển văn hóa, con người Việt Nam đáp ứng yêu cầu phát triển bền vững đất nước, online access on http://123.30.190.43/tiengviet/tulieuvankien/vankiendang/details.asp?topic=191&subtopic=9&leader_topic=990&id=BT1261456140 (June 2015).

²² Xây dựng cơ chế để giải quyết hợp lý, hài hòa giữa bảo tồn, phát huy di sản văn hóa với phát triển kinh tế - xã hội. Bảo tồn, tôn tạo các di tích lịch sử - văn hóa tiêu biểu, phục vụ giáo dục truyền thống và phát triển kinh tế; gắn kết bảo tồn, phát huy di sản văn hóa với phát triển du lịch. Phục hồi và bảo tồn một số loại hình nghệ thuật truyền thống có nguy cơ mai

¹⁷ Endres mentions a circular issued in 1975 by the Buddhist Association of Hanoi as a reaction to the "revivification of superstitions and depraved customs". The circular describes the pilgrims activities vividly: Besides burning votive paper offerings, the faithful were inciting each other to rent cars and go on pilgrimages to the provinces, "thereby misusing the freedom of religion and the freedom of travelling to solicit donations, embezzle donation money, revive heretic trances, and bribe the driver into smuggling illegal goods" (Endres 2011, 165).

¹⁸ <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r187.htm>

Thus far, I have unfolded several layers of the Yên Tử complex, including pilgrimage activities and individual perspectives on the meaning of the journey, the ‘sacralized topography’ formed by specific architectural points on the way and its infrastructure. The dynamics of religious and profane histories are influential variables and forces deeply ingrained in the Yên Tử mountain area. In this sense, the pilgrimage landscape of Yên Tử and its complex story can be understood as a cultural process, characterized by the interaction and mutual constitution of people and their historically constructed environment, as well as a site of power struggles and the interplay of actuality and potentiality. It is necessary to add a further dimension essential to understanding the peculiarities of the Yên Tử pilgrimage: the official promotion and implementation of “cultural heritage” as concept and practice, and its effects on religious traditions.

‘HERITAGIZATION’ AND PILGRIMAGE-TOURISM

As a destination, Yên Tử is a relative latecomer to Vietnam’s pilgrimage tourism map. Its remoteness and limited accessibility left the sites shrouded in isolation (in a quite literal sense “fog-shrouded”), prior to being opened to visitors. The improvement and development of transportation, especially through road construction and the opening of a cable car in 2002 not only made Yên Tử more accessible, but also changed the course of the pilgrimage. This construction has led to an increase in annual visitor numbers from 10,000 in 1992 to more than one million two decades later.²³

Not least due to the growing level of interest in Vietnamese Zen Buddhism (promoted by Thích Thanh Từ as well as by the world-famous exiled Vietnamese Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh) (see Soucy 2007), many homecoming Vietnamese integrate Yên Tử into their pilgrimage travels. Comparable to the Buddhist pilgrims’ ‘duty’ to return to and “to depend” on the Buddha, the returning home-movement describes ‘the duty to return to and depend on the roots’. This sentiment is also expressed in the popular proverb *uống nước nhớ nguồn*, which can be translated as “remember always the source while drinking the water from the river”.

một. Phát huy các di sản được UNESCO công nhận, góp phần quảng bá hình ảnh đất nước và con người Việt Nam (ibid.).

²³ See Duc The Dao (2008, 153). For 2012 and the following years see the official online newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam (Báo điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam):

http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30438&cn_id=504230

²⁴ http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=10048&cn_id=570645

Buddhism is thought of as a significant component of traditional Vietnamese culture in the state’s official history. Buddhism is connected to two heroic dynasties, namely the Lý Dynasty (1009-1225) and the Trần Dynasty (1225-1400), which is widely considered the ‘golden era’ of Vietnamese Buddhism. As such, the Trần Dynasty is valorised as an assertion of a distinct and strong national identity, and regarded as essential to the modernization and nation-building projects (Keyes et al 1994, Cheng 2002).

Following Nguyen Cuong Tu (1995, 1997), Soucy (2013, 2007) has argued that Zen Buddhism—referring to *Trúc Lâm* or the Bamboo Grove School founded by Trần Nhân Tông—has been considered the core of Vietnamese Buddhism since the 1920s/30s, when it underwent a revival led by a Buddhist reform movement which included some nationalist and Western-educated intellectuals (e.g. McHale 2004, 143ff., DeVido 2007). Though Zen Buddhism has had a long history in Vietnam, it has been a largely imagined history, as there has never been a continuous tradition of Zen lineages:

“... The Trúc Lâm School expanded under the second Patriarch, Pháp Loa (1284-1334), gaining 15,000 monks and 200 monasteries. With the death of the third patriarch Huyền Quang (1258-1308), the Trúc Lâm school had effectively come to an end. There is evidence that some of the disciples of the first three patriarchs established scattered groups, and there were attempts to revive the Trúc Lâm sect, but of these attempts the historical record provides no details except a list of names ...” (Soucy 2007, 351)

The invention of a contemporary Zen tradition, the Trúc Lâm Neo-Zen (as Soucy calls it) is a new phenomenon in Vietnam (even if it has adopted nationalistic elements of the former reform Buddhists). However, the Zen tradition has been a prominent feature of Buddhism in the West.²⁴ Founded by Thích Thanh Từ, the new Zen tradition initially attracted overseas Vietnamese who had come into contact with Western spiritualities and Zen teachings. These currents have now returned to Vietnam itself, and have started to change the way that Buddhism is practiced inside the country (ibid.).

The Yên Tử mountain is (and was) one centre of this tradition of Vietnamese Buddhism. The recent development of Yên Tử tourism and pilgrimage is unthinkable without the re-shaping of Zen Buddhism in the area. The peculiar attractions for the pilgrims, however, are not retreat, meditation, and stillness—features commonly associated with Zen Buddhism in the West—but the Buddhist practice of merit-making.

²⁴ Information about Vietnamese Zen Buddhism and on associated monasteries and meditation centers comes from the website <http://www.truclamvietzen.net>, developed by an overseas Vietnamese Tu Tam Hoan and devotee of Master Thích Thanh Từ.

Buddhism and Merit-Making

According to one pilgrim I spoke to, progress in following the path set out by the Buddha is faster when one has met the Buddha: “For us people living in the time after Buddha has left this world, visiting relics of the Buddha have the same effect”. Thus, most of the pilgrims consider pilgrimage a way of merit-making (*công đức*). The merit they accumulate depends on the number of pilgrimage journeys they undertake and the quality of the Buddhist religious and pilgrimage sites they visit. There is a belief that if one goes to a pilgrimage centre three times in three successive years, one will earn more merit than if one visits it in three discontinuous years. Concerning Yên Tử, a popular saying goes: “You may be charitable and lead a religious life for a hundred years, but if you have not made it to Yên Tử, you have not reached the highest religious bliss” (*Trăm năm tích đức tu hành—Chưa về Yên Tử chưa thành quả tu*). Pilgrimage to Yên Tử is a way of accumulating merit.

My female conversation partners usually described their religious activities as merit-making (*công đức*). According to Buddhist doctrines, merit can be gained only through self-cultivation (*tu tập*) and meditation, and must be accumulated over the course of many lives in order to move towards salvation through rebirth and achievement of Buddhahood (*quả vị Phật*). In practice however people—and especially women, who form the majority of practitioners—focus on devotion. This means (for example) that they go twice a month to pagodas to make offerings, as well as making offerings at the home altar. While they go on pilgrimages and recite sutras, they also seek advice from fortune-tellers, and make offerings to goddesses, spirits and ancestors in order to gain happiness, prosperity and longevity (*phúc lộc thọ*) for themselves and their families. They also attend *lên đồng* possession rituals as part of the taoistic Đạo Mẫu (see also Soucy 2012, Lauser forthcoming). They believe that their merit may help, for example, their parents and ancestors to achieve salvation. According to this conception, sharing their merit with husbands, children and grandchildren helps to create successful, prosperous and happy families. One woman told me she wanted to make merit for her son in order to help him get a scholarship to study abroad. Since her family did not care about religious practices, she had to complete all rituals on their behalf.

Both religious and laypeople (individuals and associations) generally consider support for pagodas—in the form of material contributions, monetary donations and donations of Buddha statues—as good methods of merit-making.²⁵ Since the

economic reforms of the mid-1980s, monetary and other donations have become abundant, including the donation of statues worth between 130 million VND and nearly 80 billion VND (US\$4.5 million)²⁶.



Figure 5: Donation desk at the Bai Dinh Tempel, Bai Dinh Mountain, Ninh Binh Province

Donations large and small are recorded as meritorious contributions on wall-boards (*ghi công*) and unfold their own logics. Duc The Dao (2008, 52f) reports that tensions between local people and pilgrims have become increasingly obvious since the “renovation”, as more affluent pilgrims from the city—and more recently from abroad—have more disposable income to spend on donations. On some occasions, Buddhist officials have had to accept donations they considered inappropriate in return for more financial support. One pagoda caretaker complained she had had to move a 15th century statue of Amitabha Buddha and other statues to a less prominent position in order to make room for an ‘ugly’ (uninspired) new statue donated by a group who had contributed money to rebuild the pagoda.

Thus, the impact of affluent pilgrims is visible (and intended by them to be so). The effects of religious activities are directly linked to the activities of “cultural heritage”. The practices of reluctant renovation and preservation are making way for active

meditation. In the Buddhist conception, merit and demerit operate within the karmic cause-and-effect logics: “Do good, receive good; do evil, receive evil.” As I learned, making merit seems to be synonymous with being a good person. One receives merit through acts of generosity based on reciprocal exchange. Generous giving provides not only good morals and mental development that may lead to a favourable rebirth, but also produces material benefits within the lifetime, including wealth and prosperity. Since Buddhist ‘spiritual economies’ are based on the idea that you gain by giving away, ‘ordinary’ people view prosperity as a possibility to enhance merit by giving (money) away and building even bigger monuments to their faith. I learned also that aside from quite classical merit-making donations such as supporting the sangha and specific pagodas, lay-group activities such as supporting flood victims are interpreted as merit-making as well.

²⁶ <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/12/100-tonne-statue-of-king-tran-nhan-tong-to-be-cast.html>

²⁵ What Scott writes about Thailand (Scott 2009, 101) fits my own experiences. Merit-making is a religious activity accessible to all, unlike other specialized practices such as

forms of renewal, replacement, and even drastic change. The concept of “heritage” is thereby newly interpreted, not from the ‘global’ perspective of UNESCO experts, but from local interpretations and aspirations.

Heritage, coalmining and the heroic Buddha king

Since 2012, Yên Tử has been recognised as a “Special National Relic” (*di tích quốc gia đặc biệt*), and has been in view for nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (*di sản thế giới tại*). In September 2014 “The Complex of Yên Tử Monuments and Landscape” was submitted by the *Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO* to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List (Ref.: 5940). The State Party considers the site to be cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, and therefore suitable for inscription on the World Heritage List.²⁷ With the nomination for the Tentative List, the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is now working with the People’s Committees of Quảng Ninh and Bắc Giang provinces “to actively protect the integrity of the Complex of Yên Tử Monuments and Landscape through a legal framework including Law on Cultural Heritage, Law on Forest Protection and Development, Tourism Law, Law on Bio-diversity, etc.”²⁸ In June 2015, the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Vietnam organized a conference where designated scholars and delegates of the People’s Committee of Quảng Ninh, the National Commission for UNESCO, the Council of National Cultural Heritage, the Government Committee for Religious Affairs and others discussed with representatives and experts from various organisations such as ICOMOS (The International Council on Monuments and Sites) and IUCN (The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) the necessary efforts concerning successful certification as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017.²⁹

Acceptance as a World Heritage Site would boost the development of tourism already generated by the proximity to Ha Long Bay, one of the coun-

try’s most important tourist destinations and itself declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994.³⁰ In the process of Vietnam’s modernization, the ‘heritagization’ of Yên Tử has been integrated into broader economic policies placing greater emphasis on the tourism economy than on heavy industry. Indeed, the declaration of Ha Long Bay as a World Heritage Site marked an ideological shift towards participation in an exploding tourism industry³¹. This industry concentrates particularly on heritage,³² spiritual and eco-tourism alongside trade and border tourism and resort tourism. More recently, this has also started to include ‘mining heritage’ tourism³³. This seems to offer an economic alternative to the coalmining industry, since heritage strategies fuel the simmering conflicts between the local coalmining industry and the preservation of national cultural heritage, with the option of shifting the pendulum towards economic development through tourism.³⁴

The construction of a giant statue of the Buddhist King (*Phật Hoàng*) Trần Nhân Tông at Yên Tử made the landscape’s material transformation into a pilgrimage-tourism and hence heritage site yet more visible. After years of negotiations, construction was underway on my last visit in 2011.³⁵ The statue has meanwhile been built close to the top of the mountain, where King-Monk Trần Nhân Tông’s passage to nirvana is supposed to have taken place. A commemoration festival to celebrate the 705th anniversary of Trần Nhân Tông’s attainment of nir-

²⁷ In the category of natural landscape: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672>, Vietnam is one of the ambitious “heritage players”. It has a long list of recognized heritage sites, an impressive list of nominations, and an abundance of projects and activities in the process of planning. Cf. Bui Huong Giang (2011), <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/VN/>.

²⁸ Among countless links see, for example: <http://myvietnamnews.com/2010/04/11/spiritual-tourism-area-to-be-built-in-quang-ninh/>; and <https://sites.google.com/site/du-lichintours/du-lich-hanh-huong/tour-du-lich-hanh-huong-ve-coi-nguon-yen-tu-cua-ong> with a tourist program of traveling to the nation’s root *du lịch về cội nguồn* of the Tran dynasties (Ha Noi-Yên Tử-Den Cua Ong).

²⁹ Ha Long Bay, cf. Galla 2002.

³⁰ In 2006, the Tourism Department of Quang Ninh developed a pilot coalmine as a further contribution to the local tourism development. There, tourists are supposed to experience the hard life of mine workers, as well as their pride in producing black gold for the country. An all-inclusive program where tourists wear mining worker uniforms and are transported to open-pit mines, visit a mine museum about the history of the coal industry since the French colonial period, as well as performances of song, dance and poetry about mining livelihoods, were provided with a picnic meal at the mine and the possibility to purchase handcrafted coal-souvenirs (Cuong Nguyen Duc Hoa et. al. 2011).

³¹ <http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/Opinion/141214/mineral-exploitation-threatens-environment-cultural-heritage.html>.

³² <http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/12/100-tonne-statue-of-king-tran-nhan-tong-to-be-cast.html> see also http://talkvietnam.com/2012/07/statue-of-king-tran-nhan-tong-to-be-sculpted-from-4-5-ton-gemstone/#.UEE_e6BVM.e.

²⁷ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5940/>

²⁸ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5940/> see as well <http://www.ninhthuantourist.com/en/local-news/383-trinh-unesco-dua-quan-the-di-tich-va-danh-thang-yen-tu-vao-danh-muc-du-kien-xay-dung-ho-so-di-san-the-gioi.html>, <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/index.php/items/16479>, <http://vov.vn/van-hoa/du-lich/unesco-dua-yen-tu-vao-danh-muc-de-cu-la-di-san-the-gioi-376834.vov>

²⁹ See the official websites of the ministries “The Government Committees for Religious Affairs: http://btgcp.gov.vn/Plus.aspx/vi/News/38/0/243/0/7621/Chuyen_gia_quoc_te_tham_van_ho_so_danh_thang_Yen_Tu and The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Vietnam, Department of Cultural Heritage: <http://dch.gov.vn/pages/news/preview.aspx?n=949&c=4> (july 2015).

vana was held in 2013. Reportedly built at a cost of 72 billion VND, the 138 ton, 15 metre tall statue is the site's heaviest and tallest bronze Buddha statue, and at a height of 900 meters above sea level, the highest bronze Buddha statue on Yên Tử Mountain.



Figure 6: Donation box (left) or the statue, still under construction in 2011 (right).



Figure 7: The completed statue of the Buddhist King Trần Nhân Tông

Resource: <http://thethaovanhoa.vn/xa-hoi/le-hoi-yen-tu-2014-duong-hanh-huong-sach-bong-hang-rong-n20140111113735155.htm>

Through diverse, globally circulating media reports made by tourist agencies³⁶ and the official website of the Communist Party of Vietnam,³⁷ we learn that the Yên Tử festival was opened with an incense offering ceremony attended by the country's Vice President Nguyễn Thị Doan, representatives of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, monks, nuns, and by followers and visitors from different corners of the country and beyond. At the festival, a wide range of rituals and processions reportedly took place to

pray for peace for the nation and prosperity of the people. The opening ceremony also included drum shows, lion dances and other performances. Organizers claimed that over three million pilgrims and visitors would attend the three-month festival.³⁸

Indeed, the festival was part of the state programme to promote Yên Tử as a future UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site in Vietnam (*Di sản thế giới tại Việt Nam*)³⁹ and therefore to increase its prominence in the nationally and globally booming heritage market. Various masterplans “for preserving and developing the values of scenic Yên Tử as a relic site” (*quần thể di tích và danh thắng Yên Tử*) were discussed between August 2012 and December 2013 at diverse working sessions, meetings and conferences coordinated by the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Vietnam (*Bộ Văn hóa, Thể thao và Du lịch Việt Nam*—*Bộ VHTTDL*) together with the provincial People's Committee (*Ủy ban nhân dân*—*UBND*) Quảng Ninh, Bắc Giang and the provincial Buddhist sangha, the Vietnam National University and the Vietnam Buddhist Academy. It was suggested that a dossier be put together for an application for World Intangible Cultural Heritage status, profiling the *Phật Hoàng Trần Nhân Tông* as a ‘Great Man of Culture’ in combination with the profile and scripts of the *Trúc Lâm* School of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism.⁴⁰ In broad terms, site promoters have argued that Vietnamese Buddhism has left a rich and diverse history of material and spiritual cultural heritage. In addition, there have been a number of workshops, meetings and discussions to prepare an application dossier for the recognition of the whole Yên Tử landscape as a World Heritage Site.⁴¹ These

³⁸ <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/Home/Yen-Tu-becomes-special-national-relic/20132/31810.vnpplus>

³⁹ For discussions on how acquisition of World Heritage status has boosted the numbers of visitors and pilgrims (around the world) see Daly/Winter 2012, Bendix et al. 2013. For discussion of a competitive “heritage-submitting-fever” on a national level see, for example: <http://vov.vn/van-hoa/di-san-de-trinh-unesco-truoc-mat-chi-co-don-ca-tai-tu-253807.vov> and <http://www.baomoi.com/Di-san-the-gioi-o-Viet-Nam-noi-lo-gin-giu/54/10034737.epi>. The approval of the Ancestor-Worship of Hùng kings in Phú Thọ—*Tín ngưỡng thờ cúng Hùng Vương ở Phú Thọ* (a ‘must do’ pilgrimage destination) in the category of intangible heritage was processed and launched in cooperation with the Department of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism with Prof. Dr. Nguyễn Chí Bền, Director of Viet Nam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies—VICAS (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism), and Member of National Committee of Cultural Heritage. The narrative fits the discourse of cultural nationalism: “The Hùng Kings veneration tradition is thus a powerful expression of the richness of Vietnamese national history and solidarity, powerfully expressive of its people’s reverence for their ancestral past and vibrant cultural heritage”. See: Nomination File Nr. 00735 for Inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2012, seventh session Paris, December 2012, p 4.

⁴⁰ Similar to the successful approval of the Ancestor-Worship of Hùng kings in Phú Thọ (see footnote 39).

⁴¹ See the Online Newspaper of the Communist Party of Vietnam: <http://www.cpv.org.vn/CPV/Modules/>

³⁶ <http://www.talkvietnam.com/2013/12/nation-honors-king-monk-tran-nhan-tong/>, <http://phatgiao.org.vn/tin-tuc/201402/Quang-Ninh-Khai-mac-Hoi-Xuan-yen-Tu-2014-13529/>, http://cattour.vn/tour/400_223/tour-du-lich-ha-noi-yen-tu-1-ngay.htm

³⁷ http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30107&cn_id=623863

activities finally led to Yên Tử's nomination to the UNESCO tentative list (Ref.: 5940). Finally, on 15 November 2014 a Vietnam Cultural Heritage Conservation Support Fund was established. One of the fund's most important projects in the coming years will be to establish a compound for cultural heritage conservation at Yên Tử Mountain and at other religious sites.⁴²

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the ambitious aspirations include promoting not only tourism, “modernization and internationalization” at the Yên Tử relic site, but also the re-construction of Yên Tử into a Buddhist Centre of the Vietnamese Trúc Lâm Zen Buddhism.

In terms of the symbolic economy expressed by oversized statues (as exemplified by the newly established statue of Phật Hoàng Trần Nhân Tông) and monumental religious buildings, the Yên Tử landscape is at an early stage. What Askew (2008, 92) describes with respect to Thailand is applicable: the symbolic economy surrounding this religious site seems to be a system driven by a popular (and scripturally legitimized) imperative to focus devotion, merit-making and ‘boon-seeking’ on sacralized objects. As such, there is a concomitant imperative among institutions and enterprises to continually reproduce material symbols which require financial offerings to permit maintenance and further reproduction through the elaboration and expansion of ritual.

New wealth and merit-making finds expression materially and tangibly. That is, the rebuilding of temples and the donation of statues are conceptualized as meritorious services to ancestral spirits, gods, and the nation. In turn, they are recorded on large boards (*ghi công*) where the merit—*công*—is measured in US-dollars and Vietnamese đồngs, and its remembrance is captured in the verb *ghi* (recorded). The consequent rebuilding of temples leads to

a revitalization of related ceremonies which in turn lead to further building and so on.

CONCLUSION

The complex story of the Yên Tử pilgrimage site involves many different and entangled aspects. As I have shown in my synoptic overview, Yên Tử is a site associated with individual and collective prayer and merit-making, economic development and tourism, and the official politics of culture and religion. These entanglements create tensions and ambiguities, as well as synergies. Not least, the materiality and iconicity in and of this landscape opens it up for processes of signification and struggles over meaning.

Yên Tử is a celebrated site in Buddhist history, which was founded by the King-Monk Trần Nhân Tông who is at once constructed and commemorated as a great national hero, a cultural figure and the founder of the Vietnamese Nation. Today, Yên Tử is playing a new but considerable role as a sacralized landscape of memory, and as a touristic site with promising economic development potential. This pilgrimage landscape is presented to visitors/pilgrims as a place of spiritual relief, patriotism and sacrifice, as well as a place to experience nature and both cultural and natural heritage. Taking in the spectacular scenery on a walk through the mountains (with their steep slopes and small winding paths leading to a peak enshrouded in cloud), and visiting ancient pagodas and shrines on the way reflects multidimensional meanings between religion and politics, the economic development of tourism and the ‘coming home’ movement (*về quê*) of overseas Vietnamese (expatriates).

The Vietnamese state primarily orchestrates Yên Tử as a site of national cultural heritage, where Trần Nhân Tông—the third King of the Trần dynasty—protected the Vietnamese nation and unified the different sects of Buddhism into a distinctive Vietnamese Buddhism. In accordance with state propaganda, he represents a national hero-ancestor, Buddhism, patriotism, national defence, and development. In rhetoric and practice, this ideology is tied into a concept of cultural and/or pilgrimage tourism, and models a new form of Vietnamese (trans)nationalism in the form of a *về nguồn* (back to the roots) or *đi-về* (leave and return) movement.

At the same time, the certification of cultural heritage in the service of an exploding tourism industry creates collision and competition with the local coalmining industry. In so doing, the renovation-era project of modernisation and economic development through cultural heritage collides with the project of heavy industry, central to the state's former project of economic development throughout the era of socialist industrialization.

News_English/News_Detail_E.aspx?CN_ID=538827&CO_ID=10048; http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30107&cn_id=623863, <http://hanoi.vietnamplus.vn/Home/De-nghi-UNESCO-vinh-danh-Tran-Nhan-Tong-Yen-Tu/20128/7870.vnplus>. However the current dossier (10766/VPVP-KGVX MOCST) is still of “low profile” according to Nguyễn Mạnh Thắng, Deputy General Secretary of the National Committee for UNESCO VN (Phó Tổng thư ký Ủy ban Quốc gia UNESCO VN). <http://www.cinet.gov.vn/articledetail.aspx?articleid=10525&sitepageid=418#sthash.OrdBUJPT.dpbs>, <http://www.cinet.gov.vn/articledetail.aspx?articleid=10525&sitepageid=418#sthash.NYbE2Ejm.QFSnISY1.dpbs>

⁴² <http://quydisan.org.vn/gioi-thieu-p3.html> (June 2015). As I learned in a personal conversation with a scientific officer of the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism in March 2015, important sponsors of the Vietnam Cultural Heritage Conservation Support Fund are both the cable car company Tung Lam and especially the construction company Xuân Trường GmbH (Doanh nghiệp tư nhân xây dựng Xuân Trường), which is known for intransparent irregularities in tenders. See also: <http://ctat8.vn/News/72/1040/bat-thuong-nhung-ong-lon-duoc-uu-ai-du-an-ngan-ty.aspx>

As national and transnational citizens, contemporary ‘Renovation Age’ (*đổi mới*) Vietnamese are investing heavily in the cultivation of memory: the work of “remembering moral debt” (*nhớ ơn*), “recording meritorious contribution” (*ghi công*), coming home (*về quê*) and “returning to the source” (*về nguồn*) (Lauser 2008, Jellema 2007). New wealth also finds moral expression in the reinterpretation of the centuries-old concept of *công*—merit. The complex workings of these understandings of merit in contemporary Renovation-era Vietnam need to be understood as multiple, mutually-informative moral systems: official and unofficial, transnational, national and local, Confucian and Buddhist, revolutionary and renovated. The recent reconstruction of the Yên Tử pilgrimage landscape, with an annual festival and the new ‘superlative’ Buddha statue of Trần Nhân Tông reflects processes similar to those Askew describes in Southern Thailand. In Thailand, under a capitalist-driven money economy, the opportunities for making and expressing merit expand and condense into ever-multiplying monuments and symbols which become vehicles for the endless accumulation of merit (Askew 2008, 91). To borrow the words of Askew:

“It is a landscape that is nurtured and reproduced by two complementary imperatives—religious ‘consumers’ seek to accumulate potent blessings, and the enterprises that produce and publicize these sites seek to yield material profit and income for further expansion. This process reflects the acceleration of general trends towards monumentalism in Asia, where prosperity had helped a multi-faceted religious industry that feeds a quest to accumulate merit and fortune.” (Askew 2008, 94)

Instead of describing these new kinds of monumental landscape (Askew also mentions, for instance, the proliferation of Buddhist-Taoist theme parks) as a clear expression of sheer profit-seeking and spectacle-driven consumerism, he proposes to conceive of them as a spiritual-material nexus:

“A deep and persisting belief in merit-accumulation and the efficacy of merit transference, together with the complementary disposition to materialize merit and venerate sacred objects, is central to popular and scripturally-supported Buddhist belief systems, and this has been so from the earliest times.” (ibid.)

It is evident that this process engages the energies of religious foundations, local communities and provincial authorities—in dialogue with the central state party—as well as (state) tourist agencies or the Ministry of Tourism and Culture.

Moreover, the emerging religious monument-landscape is based on a specific transnational

dynamic, since, especially for ‘diaspora Vietnamese’, it is developing into a blurred ‘culture/leisure/homecoming’ destination. At the site, the complex engagements clustering around consumption/leisure time (such as eating, drinking, playing games, flirting) interact dynamically with changing religio-spatial practices (including blessings and visits to shrines and monuments). Longstanding pilgrimage patterns are thus being transformed by the intensification of homecoming-related travel patterns that have accompanied the heightened marketing of sites as a kind of spectacle.

ANDREA LAUSER is professor of anthropology in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Georg-August-University, Göttingen. Her doctoral and post-doctoral research has focused on Southeast Asia, with a special focus on power, gender, and generation among the Mangyan of Mindoro, the Philippines, and on Filipino transnational marriage migration. Between 2006 and 2007 she was part of a research project at the Max-Planck-Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, about pilgrimage and ancestor worship, and she conducted fieldwork in northern Vietnam. Since 2011 she is the spokesperson for the research program on the dynamics of religion in Southeast Asia (www.dorisea.net). She co-edited the recent volume *“Engaging the Spirit World. Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia”* (2011).

CONTACT alauser@uni-goettingen.de

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Anagnost, Ann S. 1994. "The Politics of Ritual Displacement." In *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre, 221-254. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Askew, Marc. 2008. "Materializing Merit: Reflections on the Symbolic Economy of Religious Monuments and Tourist-Pilgrimage in Contemporary Thailand." In *Religious Commodifications in Asia. Marketing Gods*, edited by Pattana Kitiarsa, 89-119. London: Routledge.
- Badone, E., & S. Roseman, eds. 2004. *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Basu, Paul. 2004. "Route Metaphors of Roots-Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora." In *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, edited by S. Coleman and J. Eade, 150-174. London: Routledge.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1996. "From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity." In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 18-35. London: Sage.
- Bendix, Regina F., Aditya Eggert, and Arnika Pelselmann, eds. 2013. *Heritage Regimes and the State*. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag.
- Bùi Hương Giang. 2011. *The World Heritages in Việt Nam* (Di sản thế giới ở Việt Nam). Thế Giới Publishers.
- Cadière, Leopold. 1958. *Croyances et pratiques religieuses des Vietnamiens*. Deuxième édition, etc. [With plates, including maps.] vol. 1 ([Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises. Nouvelle série. tom. 33. no. 1/2]).
- Cheng, Grace Ming-hui. 2002. "Culture for Development and Development for Culture is the Ideology of the Day: The Politics of Culture in Vietnam's post-1986 Transition." PhD diss., University of Hawaii.
- Coleman, Simon and John Eade, eds. 2004. *Reframing Pilgrimage. Cultures in Motion*. London: Routledge.
- Cuong Nguyen Duc Hoa, Nancy Chesworth and Lee Jolliffe. 2011. "Planning For the Future: Tourism Options for an Open Pit Mine, Vietnam." In *Mining Heritage and Tourism. A Global Synthesis*, edited by Conlin, Michael V. and Lee Jolliffe, 183-193. London, NY: Routledge.
- Daly, Patrick and Tim Winter, eds. 2012. *Routledge Handbook of Heritage in Asia*. London, NY: Routledge.
- Đặng Nghiêm Vạn. 1998. *Ethnological and Religious Problems in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House.
- De Landa, Manuel. 2006. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London & New York: Continuum.
- DeVido, Elise Anne. 2007. "Buddhism for This World: The Buddhist Revival in Vietnam, 1920-51 and its Legacy." In *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, edited by Philip Taylor, 250-96. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Đình Gia Khánh, Lê Hữu Tăng, eds. 1993. *Lễ hội truyền thống trong đời sống xã hội hiện đại* (Traditional Festivals in Modern Social Life). Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội.
- Duc The Dao. 2008. "Buddhist Pilgrimage and Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Vietnam." PhD diss., University of Washington.
- Eade, John and Mario Katić, eds. 2013. *Pilgrimage, Politics and Placemaking in Eastern Europe. Crossing the Borders*. New York: Routledge.
- Eade, John and Michael Sallnow, eds. 1991. *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. London: Routledge.
- Endres, Kirsten W. 2002. "Beautiful Customs, Worthy Traditions: Changing State Discourse on the Role of Vietnamese Culture." *Internationales Asienforum—International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 33(3-4):303-332.
- Endres, Kirsten W. 2011. *Performing the Divine. Mediums, Markets and Modernity in Urban Vietnam*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Endres, Kristen and Andrea Lauser. 2011. "Contests of Commemoration: Virgin War Martyrs, State Memorials, and the Invocation of the Spirit World in Contemporary Vietnam." In *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, edited by Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser, 121-143. New York und Oxford: Berghahn.
- Galla, Amareswar. 2002. "Culture and Heritage in Development. Ha Long Ecomuseum, a Case Study from Vietnam." *Humanities Research* 19(1):63-76.
- Hyndman-Rizk, Nelia, ed. 2012. *Pilgrimage in the Age of Globalisation. Constructions of the Sacred and Secular in Late Modernity*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Jansen, Willy H.M. and Catrien Notermans, eds. 2012. *Gender, Nation and Religion in European Pilgrimage*. Surrey: Ashgate Press.
- Jellema, Kate. 2007a. "Returning Home: Ancestor Veneration and the Nationalism of Đồi Mỏi Vietnam." In *Modernity and Re-enchantment. Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam*, edited by Philipp Taylor, 57-80. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Keyes, Charles F., Laurel Kendall, and Helen Hardacre, eds. 1994. *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kim Ngoc Bao Ninh. 2002. *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam*,

- 1945-1965. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Latour, Bruno. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford, New York: Oxford: University Press.
- Lauser, Andrea. 2008. „Ahnen, Götter, Geister in Vietnam und der Diaspora. Ein transnationales Forschungsfeld“ (Ancestors, Deities and Spirits in Vietnam and the Diaspora). In *Religionen in Bewegung. Ethnologische Religionsforschung im transnationalen Kontext*. (Religions on the Move. Anthropological Studies of Religion in Transnational Perspectives), edited by Andrea Lauser and Cordula Weisskoeppel, 147-72. Bielefeld: transkript.
- Lauser, Andrea. 2008b. „Zwischen Heldenverehrung und Geisterkult. Politik und Religion im gegenwärtigen Vietnam“. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 133:121-144.
- Lauser, Andrea (forthcoming). „Lên Đồng—Cult—Culture—Spectacle: From Controlled Possession to Staged Performances.“ *DORISEA Working Paper*.
- Malarney, Shaun Kingsley. 1996. „The Emerging Cult of Ho Chi Minh? A Report on Religious Innovation in Contemporary Northern Viet Nam.“ *Asian Cultural Studies* 22:121-31.
- Malarney, Shaun Kingsley. 2002. *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- Malarney, Shaun Kingsley. 2003. „Return to the Past? The Dynamics of contemporary Religious and Ritual Transformation.“ In *Postwar Vietnam. Dynamics of a Transforming Society*, edited by Hy V. Luong, 225-256. Lanham, Bolder, New York and Oxford: Institute of Southeast Asian studies, Singapore and Rowman&Littlefield Publisher.
- Marcus, George E., and Erkan Saka. 2006. „Assemblage.“ Special Issue on Problematizing Global Knowledge. *Theory, Culture & Society* 23(2-3): 101-106.
- Margry, Peter Jan, ed. 2008. *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries Into the Sacred*. Amsterdam University Press.
- McHale, Shawn Frederick. 2004. *Print and Power. Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Morinis, Alan E., ed. 1992. *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*. Westport: Greenwood.
- Ngô Đức Thịnh. 2001. *Tín Ngưỡng và Văn Hóa Tín Ngưỡng ở Việt Nam* (The Belief and the Belief Culture in Vietnam). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Ngô Đức Thịnh. 2002. *Đạo Mẫu ở Việt Nam* (The Mother Religion in Vietnam). Hanoi: Culture-Information Publishing House.
- Ngô Đức Thịnh. 2004. *Đạo Mẫu và các Hình Thức Shaman Trong Các Tộc Người ở Việt Nam và Châu Á* (Mother Goddesses and Some Shamanistic Form of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam and Asia). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Ngô Đức Thịnh. 2006. „The Mother Goddess Religion: Its History, Pantheon, and Practices.“ In *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities*, edited by Fjellstad, Karen and Nguyen Thi Hien, 19-30. Ithaca and New York: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Publications.
- Nguyen Cuong Tu. 1995. „Rethinking Vietnamese Buddhist History: Is the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh a 'Transmission of the Lamp' Text?“ In *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, edited by Taylor, K.W. and John K. Whitmore, 81-115. Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Nguyen Cuong Tu. 1997. *Zen in Medieval Vietnam: A Study and Translation of the Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawai'i Press.
- Nguyễn Duy Hinh. 1993. „Đôi điều suy nghĩ lý luận về lễ hội.“ In *Lễ hội truyền thống trong đời sống xã hội hiện đại* (Traditional Festivals in Modern Social Life), edited by Đinh Gia Khánh and Lê Hữu Tầng, 225-233. Hanoi: Khoa Học Xã Hội.
- Nguyễn Duy Hinh. 1977. „Yên Tử -Vua Trần-Trúc Lâm. Suy nghĩ sử học“ (Yên Tử - Trần Kings- Trúc Lâm. Historical Thoughts). *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* 2 (173):3-4.
- Nguyễn Lang. 1994 (reprint 1979). *Việt Nam Phật Giáo Sử Luận* (Essays on the History of Vietnamese Buddhism) Hanoi: Văn Học, Vol 1-3. Open online access under: <http://cusi.free.fr/lsp/su-luan/vnpgsuluan.html> and <http://thuvienhoasen.org/a8387/viet-nam-phat-giao-su-luan-tap-i-nguyen-lang.a.o..>
- Nguyễn Minh Quang. 2005. *Religious Issues and Government Policies in Việt Nam*. Thế Giới Publishers Hà Nội.
- Nguyễn Văn Huy and Laurel Kendall. 2003. *Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit*. Berkeley: University of California Press in association with American Museum of Natural History, New York, and Vietnam Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi.
- Nguyễn Văn Huyền. 1994. *La Civilisation Ancienne du Vietnam*. Hanoi: The Gioi.
- Nguyễn Văn Huyền. 1995. *The Ancient Civilization of Vietnam*. Hanoi: The Gioi.
- Pelley, Patricia M. 2002. *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press.
- Phạm Quỳnh Phương. 2009. *Hero and Deity. Tran Hung Dao and the Resurgence of Popular Religion in Vietnam*. Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.
- Reader, Ian. 2014. *Pilgrimage in the Marketplace*. New York: Routledge.
- Scott, Rachelle M. 2009. *Nirvana for Sale? Buddhism, Wealth, and the Dhammakāya Temple in Contemporary Thailand*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Shawn Frederick McHale. 2004. *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the*

- Making of Modern Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Soja, Edward. 1989. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso Press, 1989.
- Soucy, Alexander. 2003. "Pilgrims and pleasure-seekers." In *Consuming Urban Culture in Contemporary Vietnam*, edited by Lisa B.W. Drummond and Mandy Thomas, 125-137. London and New York: Routledge Curzon.
- Soucy, Alexander. 2007. "Nationalism, Globalism and the Re-establishment of the Trúc Lâm Thiền Buddhist Sect in Northern Vietnam." In *Modernity and Re-enchantment. Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam*, edited by Philip Taylor, 342-371. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing.
- Soucy, Alexander. 2012. *The Buddha Side: Gender, Power, and Buddhist Practice in Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Soucy, Alexander. 2013. "Altered Space for a New Zen in Vietnam." *DORISEA Working Paper Series*, No. 3.
- Swatos, Jr., W.H., ed. 2006. *On the Road to Being There: Studies in Pilgrimage and Tourism in Late Modernity*. Leiden: Brill.
- Taylor, Philip. 2004. *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Timothy, Dallen J. and Daniel H. Olsen, eds. 2006. *Tourism, Religion & Spiritual Journeys*. London: Routledge.
- Toan Ánh. 1997. *Nếp Cũ: Tín Ngưỡng Việt Nam* [Old Ways: Vietnamese religious beliefs]. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Trần Trương. 2008. *Chùa Yên Tử. Lịch Sử Truyền Thuyết Di Tích Danh Thắng*. Nhà xuất bản văn hoá—Thông Tin. HÀ NỘI.
- Trần Trương. 2010. *Phật Hoàng Trần Nhân Tông. Truyền Lịch Sử. Nhà xuất bản văn hoá—Thông Tin*. HÀ NỘI.
- Trường Chinh. 1994. *Selected writings*. Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers.
- Turner, Victor and Edith Turner. 1978. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Online links (all accesses re-checked on July 2015):**
- http://123.30.190.43/tiengviet/tulieuvankien/vankiendang/details.asp?topic=191&subtopic=9&leader_topic=990&id=BT1261456140
- http://123.30.190.43/tiengviet/tulieuvankien/vankiendang/details.asp?topic=191&subtopic=9&leader_topic=990&id=BT7111340436
- http://btgcp.gov.vn/Plus.aspx/vi/News/38/0/243/0/7621/Chuyen_gia_quoc_te_tham_van_ho_so_danh_thang_Yen_Tu
- http://cattour.vn/tour/400_223/tour-du-lich-ha-noi-yen-tu-1-ngay.htm
- <http://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/nuom-nuop-nguoi-hanh-huong-ve-yen-tu-truoc-gio-khai-hoi-836270.htm>
- <http://dch.gov.vn/pages/news/preview.aspx?n=949&c=4>
- <http://diendan.dulichhue.com.vn/threads/hanh-trinh-ve-voi-yen-tu-coi-nguon-tam-linh.30423/>
- <http://en.vietnamplus.vn/Home/Yen-Tu-becomes-special-national-relic/20132/31810.vnplus>
- <http://eyedrd.org/2012/06/the-rituals-of-worshipping-vietnamese-nations-founders.html>
- <http://giadinh.net.vn/xa-hoi/khai-hoi-xuan-yen-tu-vao-ngay-92-2014011011536493.htm>
- <http://hanoi.vietnamplus.vn/Home/De-nghi-UNESCO-vinh-danh-Tran-Nhan-Tong-Yen-Tu/20128/7870.vnplus>
- <http://myvietnamnews.com/2010/04/11/spiritual-tourism-area-to-be-built-in-quang-ninh>
- <http://phatgiao.org.vn/tin-tuc/201402/Quang-Ninh-Khai-mac-Hoi-Xuan-yen-Tu-2014-13529/>
- <http://quehuongonline.vn/VietNam/Home/>
- <http://quydisan.org.vn/gioi-thieu-p3.htm>
- <http://quydisan.org.vn/gioi-thieu-p3.html>
- http://talkvietnam.com/2012/07/statue-of-king-tran-nhan-tong-to-be-sculpted-from-4-5-ton-gemstone/#.UEE_e6BVM_e
- <http://thethaovanhoa.vn/xa-hoi/le-hoi-yen-tu-2014-duong-hanh-huong-sach-bong-hang-rong-n20140111113735155.htm>
- <http://vietnamesegod.blogspot.de/search/label/Traditional%20Culture>
- <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/english/index.php/items/6709>
- <http://vietnamtourism.gov.vn/index.php/items/16479>
- <http://vov.vn/van-hoa/di-san-de-trinh-unesco-truoc-mat-chi-co-don-ca-tai-tu-253807.vov>
- <http://vov.vn/van-hoa/du-lich/unesco-dua-yen-tu-vao-danh-muc-de-cu-la-di-san-the-gioi-376834.vov>
- <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/672>
- <http://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/VN/>
- <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5940/>
- http://www.aseanreligioustours.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=3&Itemid=45
- <http://www.baomoi.com/Di-san-the-gioi-o-Viet-Nam-noi-lo-gin-giu/54/10034737.epi>
- http://www.chuyenluan.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3433:yen-tu-pho-tuong-an-ky-sinh-va-nhung-bi-an-cho-giai-ma-&catid=117:van-hoa-van-nghe&Itemid=15
- <http://www.cinet.gov.vn/articledetail.aspx?articleid=10525&sitepageid=418#sthash.0rdBUJPT.dpbs>
- <http://www.cinet.gov.vn/articledetail.aspx?articleid=10525&sitepageid=418#sthash.NYbE2Ejm.QFSnISY1.dpbs>
- http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=10048&cn_id=570645

http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=28340747&cn_id=603810.
http://www.cpv.org.vn/cpv/Modules/News/NewsDetail.aspx?co_id=30107&cn_id=623863.
http://www.cpv.org.vn/CPV/Modules/News_English/News_Detail_E.aspx?CN_ID=538827&CO_ID=10048.
<http://www.lookatvietnam.com/2009/12/100-tonne-statue-of-king-tran-nhan-tong-to-be-cast.html>.
http://www.moj.gov.vn/vbpq/en/Lists/Vn%20bn%20php%20lut/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=7818.
<http://www.ninhthuantourist.com/en/local-news/383-trinh-unesco-dua-quan-the-di-tich-va-danh-thang-yen-tu-vao-danh-muc-du-kien-xay-dung-ho-so-di-san-the-gioi.html>
<http://www.rame.vn/>
<http://www.talkvietnam.com/2013/12/nation-honors-king-monk-tran-nhan-tong/>.
<http://www.truclamvietzen.net>.
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/41/a41r187.htm>.
<http://www.vanhoaviet.biz.vn/>.
<https://sites.google.com/site/dulichintours/du-lich-hanh-huong/tour-du-lich-hanh-huong-ve-coi-nguon--yen-tu---cua-ong>.
<https://sites.google.com/site/dulichnhatranggiare/du-lich-hanh-huong/du-lich-hanh-huong-ve-lai-coi-nguon-yen-tu---cua-ong>.