



## Nguyen Trung Truc Festival in Kien Giang – A change in history process

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### ABSTRACT

*For more than a hundred years, the people of Kien Giang have maintained the celebration of Nguyen Trung Truc's death anniversary in order to pay tribute to this "Born as a general, die as a god". According to the movement and development of history, the death anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc must also have certain changes, to match the content and nature of the historical – cultural time. This is an important issue, helping to better identify the regular adaptations and changes of national cultural values. However, to date this issue has not been studied. The purpose of the article is to analyze and clarify the process of organizing the death anniversary celebration and its changes, contributing to explaining the adaptation and regular change of cultural values.*

**Key words:** *change, Kien Giang province, Nguyen Trung Truc Festival*

### 1. Introduction

The history of Vietnam in the second half of the nineteenth century was a heroic page of movements against the French colonialists. Vietnamese steadfast people who “would rather sacrifice everything, definitely not be a slave” have been forever credited. Among thousands and tens of thousands of people representing that indomitable spirit, Nguyen Trung Truc appeared as a bright star in Kien Giang - the land at the southwestern land of the country.

Nguyen Trung Truc - a national hero who made his mark in history with two resounding feats: burning the Espérance ship on the Nhut Tao river confluence in 1861 and

destroying the Rach Gia fortress in 1868.

Kien Giang people in particular and the Southwest River region in general, with their admiration for the man who “determined to brave death for the survival of the fatherland”, held the death anniversary (now known as the festival) of Nguyen Trung Truc. Over the years, the Nguyen Trung Truc traditional festival has spread more and more widely, increasing the scale, renovating the content and form in order to unite the community, educate the young generation, and preserve the national identity culture.

There have been many works, dissertations, etc. about the Nguyen Trung Truc festival, Nguyen Trung Truc's life and career: *Special monograph on Nguyen Trung Truc* (Special journal History - Geography, No. 12/1968); two scientific seminars organized by the People's Committee of Kien Giang province (1st time, December 1986 “*Nguyen Trung Truc - Life and career*”; 2nd time, September 2009 “Preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the national hero Nguyen Trung Truc festival”...but so far there has been no article to identify and analyze the change of Nguyen Trung Truc festival in the historical process. This article can be seen as a necessary addition to an understudied issue in the current context.

## **2. Theoretical foundations and research methods**

Kien Giang people have always admired Nguyen Trung Truc. Therefore, although he has long passed away, the image of Mr. Nguyen (as the people of Kien Giang call Nguyen Trung Truc) still live forever in people's minds. In Kien Giang province, through the survey, there are currently 14 communal houses or temples dedicated to Nguyen: Mong Tho (Tan Hiep district), Tan Dien (Hon Dat district), My Lam (Hon Dat district), Soc Xoai (Hon Dat district). ), Ta Nien (Chau Thanh district), Ganh Dau (Phu Quoc city)... Not only that, some provinces in the South of Hau River also have communal houses to worship Nguyen, such as: An Giang (Long Giang communal house, Vinh Trach communal house, etc.) ...), Hau Giang (Long My communal house,...), Soc Trang (Long Phu communal house, An Lac communal house, Phu Lac communal house...), Bac Lieu (An Hoa communal house,...). In addition, Mr. Nguyen is worshiped in many communal houses or at home in the South.

Thus, there is a system of communal houses, temples, etc. to worship Mr. Nguyen in many provinces of the Mekong Delta. Because, for the people of this land, Nguyen Trung Truc is a god; hence, the construction of the communal house of Nguyen Trung Truc was to pay tribute to the man who sacrificed himself for the cause of fighting against foreign invaders.

Not only building temples to worship Nguyen Trung Truc, the celebration of Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary (from August 26 to 28 of the lunar calendar) has become a traditional cultural activity for more than a century.

It can be seen that Nguyen Trung Truc's career background and heroic spirit have left an indelible mark in the hearts of the people of Kien Giang in particular and the Mekong Delta in general. Over time, Nguyen's death anniversary has become a festival that brings people from all over the Mekong Delta to Rach Gia - where the first communal house worships Mr. Nguyen. It can be said that the national hero festival Nguyen Trung Truc is a valuable cultural heritage.

On the basis of the process of organizing Nguyen Trung Truc festival, I selected the following research methods:

- Historical method: to learn and examine the transformation of Nguyen Trung Truc festival in a specific way in continuous chronological order.
- Method of data collection: Using available information from different sources.
- Systemic-structural method: when researching Nguyen Trung Truc festival, I put the organizing process into specific historical circumstances to see the unique features in each period.
- Comparative method: to show the inheritance as well as innovation of the festival.
- Method of analysis - synthesis: on the basis of scale, rituals, community roles, etc., I analyze and synthesize in order to clarify the changes of the festival to adapt to the environment.

### **3. Results and discussions**

Nguyen Trung Truc (real name Nguyen Van Lich) was born in 1838 in Binh Nhat village, Cuu Cu Ha commune, Cuu An district, Tan An district, Gia Dinh province during the reign of King Minh Mang (now Binh Duc commune, Ben Luc district, Long An Province) in a family that specializes in fishing. After the French colonialists captured Gia Dinh citadel in 1859, responding to the court's call, he joined the resistance army.

In order to control the waterway between Saigon and My Tho, the French colonialists let the ship *Espérance* stationed at the mouth of Nhat Tao River on the Vam Co River to control the passing boats. Knowing the operational schedule of enemy ships, at noon on December 10, 1861, Nguyen Trung Truc and the insurgents used fire to attack and burn the ship, killing 17 French soldiers on board, only 05 people escaped. The battle terrified the French and made the people very excited.

On the night of June 16, 1868, Nguyen Trung Truc led the insurgents to capture Rach Gia fort, destroying most of the French troops in the fort, and mastered it for 5 days. The French colonialists had to send troops from Vinh Long to retake the fort. Before the enemy's superior firepower, Nguyen Trung Truc and the insurgents withdrew to Hon Chong. Pursued, he and the insurgents crossed the sea to Phu Quoc Island to establish a

base in the deep forest to fight the French for a long time. The French colonialists had to mobilize a powerful force to surround and attack the island. In October 1868, in order to protect the insurgent forces and the people on the island, Nguyen Trung Truc decided to make sacrifices and surrender himself to the enemy. On the way to bring Nguyen Trung Truc to the mainland, the French tried to seduce and bribe him, from titles to benefits, but he was adamant: "I just want to do one job, which has the right to kill all the Western invaders". Seeing that he could not be persuaded, the French colonialists sentenced Nguyen Trung Truc to death. On October 27, 1868 (September 12, Mau Thin Year), Nguyen Trung Truc was sentenced to death.

Before leaving the world, Nguyen Trung Truc left a saying that will stand the test of time: "When will the West pull out all the weeds in the South, there will be no the Southerners fight the West". The steadfast spirit of Nguyen Trung Truc has become an undying flame that illuminates time and gives strength to the whole nation in the struggle against foreign invaders. People have a deep admiration and regard Nguyen Trung Truc as a god. Therefore, the construction of "Nguyen Trung Truc temple" throughout the Mekong Delta is a typical example of respect.

For more than a hundred years, every August 26 - 28 of the lunar calendar, the people of Kien Giang and the people of the neighboring provinces come to Nguyen Trung Truc communal house in Rach Gia to offer incense to Mr. Nguyen. This has clearly shown the principle of "When you eat a fruit, think of the man who planted the tree" of the nation.

Over time, Nguyen Trung Truc's death anniversary has become a traditional festival. Nguyen Trung Truc Festival is a beautiful symbol of spiritual values, fully expressing the people's morality, character and soul. The purpose and meaning of the festival is to show gratitude and honor the merit and feat of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc; At the same time, it is to educate the young generation on patriotic traditions, the spirit of resilience against foreign invaders, defending the country, meeting the people's folk belief needs for the god conferred by the people. Not only that, the festival is also an opportunity for people to participate in cultural exchange activities, sports, ... in order to unite the community between the three ethnic groups Kinh - Hoa - Khmer...

Through survey and research, it can be seen that the Nguyen Trung Truc festival is "dynamic" and placed in a certain space - time - cultural subject coordinate system. In the process of development, Nguyen Trung Truc festival has changes in accordance with each historical moment. In other words, the transformation of Nguyen Trung Truc festival depends on the change of political, economic, social conditions.

### ***3.1. Transformation of worship space***

Despite being banned by the enemy from worshipping Nguyen Trung Truc, Kien Giang people still tried to establish a temple.

Particularly, the provincial capital of Rach Gia (today's Kien Giang province) - which was the headquarters of the French colonialists - people could not publicly worship, so they wrote Nguyen's tablet and brought it to the communal house where worships general Nam Hai to revere.

According to the documents left, at first, this temple was Lang Ong Nam Hai (worshiping whale). This shrine existed before 1852, from the reign of King Tu Duc. Communal house is located in Thu hamlet - the village of fishermen catching sea fish at Rach Gia river confluence. The communal house was ordained: "The great national identity of Nam Hai, general to worship as the god", in the fifth year of Tu Duc period, on November 29, 1852 (Nham Ty Year). After that, this place was called Pho Co Nguyen Hien Dieu communal house, because after 1840, people brought Pho Co's head to worship in the communal house. In 1868, the place of Mr. Nguyen's execution was not far from this place, so Nguyen was brought in to worship with Pho Co Dieu.

To prevent the French invaders from suspecting, there was a plaque in front of the communal house with a sign written in French "Lapagode de la balaine" (Temple of worshipping the Whale).

Every year, Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary is held according to traditional customs at the temple worshipping Nam Hai god, but in the name of a ceremony to pray for peace.

By 1881, the village officials and many people in the community found that the communal house was badly damaged and needed to be rebuilt. At that time, the Department of Thuong - Chanh near Nam Hai communal house had Mr. Le Nestour - a Frenchman with a Vietnamese wife. He lived in this locality since the French occupied Rach Gia; therefore, he is very knowledgeable about customs and is very fluent in Vietnamese. He specializes in cultivating *Acacia* plantations from Rach Gia to Tan Dien, My Lam to provide fuel for ships operating on routes Ha Tien, Rach Gia, and My Tho.

When he heard that the village committee discussed about rebuilding the communal house to worship the god Nam Hai and worship Nguyen Trung Truc, he immediately responded and contributed a lot of property, then joined the communal building committee. Although he is French, he respects Nguyen Trung Truc very much.

After that, Vinh Thanh Van village committee set up a construction board, gradually repaired the communal house. The area of the communal house is about 120 square meters, with a length of 20 meters, a width of 9 meters, round columns made of trees, trusses made of *lagerstroemia angustifolia* Pierre ex Laness, and the floor is lined with bricks.

After completion, the village board of Vinh Thanh Van (also the management board of the communal house), called Vinh Thanh Van village (Vinh Thanh Van is the name of 03 villages merged: Vinh Hoa, Thanh Luong, Van Tap). . In terms of decoration for worship, the main hall has 03 altars: In the middle of the altar, there is no photo of Nguyen Trung Truc. The memorial tablet is written in Chinese characters with the content: majesty/

bravery/Vietnamese people/ Nguyen Trung Truc. The left side worships the god of great general Nam Hai. The right side worships Thanh Hoang Bon Canh.

The temple worshipping Mr. Nguyen was so stable for a long time. Every year, his death anniversary was celebrated. When the ceremony was performed, the village officials and provincial officials were invited to attend. But around 1915, when celebrating Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary, the head of the province was invited to attend. He was a Frenchman of Chinese origin, knowing Chinese characters, so when he attended the ceremony, he read the tablet and discovered the temple worshipping Mr. Nguyen Trung Truc. He got angry and left the ceremony. After a while, the village dignitaries discussed bringing Mr. Nguyen's tablet to Tan Dien. At Nam Hai temple, they still continues to worship Mr. Nguyen, even though he no longer has a tablet.

In 1954, France lost to Vietnam and had to withdraw all its troops back home. In 1957, taking advantage of the “national, national” demagoguery of the Republic of Vietnam, the people legalized the worship of Mr. Nguyen. Also in 1957, the first high school of Kien Giang province was named Nguyen Trung Truc. This year, the tablet of Mr. Nguyen was moved to the central altar. This is due to the legitimate request of the people of Kien Giang. From here, Nguyen Trung Truc was crowned “God of Thanh Hoang Bon Canh”. Mr. Nguyen was honored by the people because of “living is a general, dying is a god”, his heroic spirit reigns in everyone's mind. To increase the majesty of the central altar, people added a picture of Mr. Nguyen to match the spirit of the hero...

Over a long period of time, from 1881 to 1964, more than 80 years, the communal house was seriously degraded, so the management board of the communal house asked the province for permission to mobilize finance to rebuild it firmly in the style of “thuong lau, ha hien” (there are 3 roofs, Vo Ca, Dong Lang, Tay Lang adjacent to the roof). Construction started in 1964 and completed in 1970. In 1972, construction of the communal house gate was completed; since then, the communal house has been officially named “Nguyen Trung Truc Temple”.

In 2013, Kien Giang province completed the Exhibition House about the status and career of National Hero Nguyen Trung Truc in the communal house. The exhibition house has an area of 250 square meters, simulating traditional temple architecture, built in the shape of the word “Đình (丁)” in Chinese characters with eight roofs in front.

### ***3.2. Changes in worship rites***

Every year, Nguyen Trung Truc communal house organizes five worshipping ceremonies with different meanings. Firstly, the festival of praying for peace, held from January 9 to 11 to pray for “national peace and people's peace”; January 14 is the ceremony to worship the first officer Nguyen Hien Dieu. Secondly, the ceremony to worship Nam Hai on May 5. Thirdly, the ceremony to worship deputy leader Lam Quang Ky on May 12. Next, the anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death from August 26 to 27. Finally,

the celebration of the temple's founding on December 16. Previously, the ceremony of praying for peace was considered the biggest of the year. In 1996, Nguyen Trung Truc was recognized by the State as A National Hero, so the biggest holiday of the year was changed to the anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death.

In the 90s of the twentieth century, Nguyen Trung Truc festival had a parade from Nguyen Trung Truc communal house to Tam Quan gate with many participants. "From the 26th day of the 8th lunar month, all the pedestals in the temple gathered to prepare for the main holidays. At 5 a.m. on August 27, the ceremony began to take place. First, the police opened the way, followed by the dancing lion troupe, then the ceremonial music group and the flower car. On the flower car, there were six ceremony students, 01 priest. On either side of the float were 30 people marching in the role of special agents, armed with weapons. Finally, the people were divided into groups. All walked on the ground (except for the flower procession), which lasted about one kilometer. The costumes of the participants in the procession depend on each object. If you are a group of communal houses and pagodas, you will wear ao dai and a scarf, the Hoa Hao religion will wear a brown ao dai, the Cao Dai religion will wear a white shirt, etc. When the procession goes around the temple gate, the head of the ceremonial department shouts loudly: "*start music, enter the temple*". At the inside of the temple, the band cheers and welcomes the gods to the temple" (Tran Van Thanh, 2018).

At the same time, there are performances of lion dance, dragon dance, drums and gongs, soldiers, costumes, flags and music. This shows that this procession simulates a ceremony (or re-enactment) of the family worshiping ceremony.

However, this form is not good. "How true? That is the ordination for Thanh Hoang Bon Canh. The god is the human god Nguyen Trung Truc, and the ordination belongs to Thanh Hoang. Is that reasonable?...Don't put a square peg in a round hole, which makes both gods confused. Although Tam Quan Gate is a symbol of Rach Gia city, it is not the place to store the "Sac Than" (which is the text that transmits the orders of the king - the head of the monarchy dynasty - deified and ranked the the gods are worshiped in communal houses and temples according to the beliefs of Vietnamese villages)", where do they take the "Sac" from there and then return it to?" (Truong Thanh Hung, 2011).

"The worship of Nguyen Trung Truc also has a wrong detail, which is the celebration of the death anniversary on the 28th day of the 8th lunar month. This date corresponds to October 13, 1868. Meanwhile, the date of Nguyen's death was recorded in the official documents of the archives of the French period as October 27, 1868, corresponding to the 12th September of the lunar calendar. Perhaps the relocation of the spiritual person to the place of worship in Tan Dien hamlet, My Lam commune in 1908 and the absence of worship at that place during the period 1945 - 1954, was the cause of the event that the date of Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary was wrong" (Truong Minh Dat, 2011).

By 2015, the Standing Committee of the Kien Giang Provincial Party Committee agreed on the death anniversary of Mr. Nguyen, the province will still organize on August 26, 27, and 28 of the lunar calendar with the name “Traditional festival of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc”. Particularly, the protection board of Nguyen Trung Truc communal house will hold a ceremony to worship Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary within the communal house on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month. Regarding the ordination of Nguyen Trung Truc's communal house, the Standing Committee of the Kien Giang Provincial Party Committee determined that this was the royal ordination for Thanh Hoang Bon Canh in Van Tap village, not for Nguyen Trung Truc personally. Therefore, the traditional festival of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc will no longer have the procession program as it has been doing for a long time.

### ***3.3. Changes in scale, scope, and participants in Nguyen Trung Truc Festival***

When the economy develops and integrates, festivals are considered an opportunity to promote economic development, promote tourism, introduce local culture, meet people's spiritual needs, etc. In 1989, The Ministry of Culture and Information recognized the communal house as a “cultural historical relic”. Also from this year, the relic has been restored and repaired many times, and Mr. Nguyen's death anniversary has an additional festival (folk games, fairs, lion dance, sports festival, art,...). A large number of people from provinces in the Southwest region attend.

Until now, Nguyen Trung Truc festival has spread more and more widely. From an ordinary death anniversary ceremony, it has become a traditional festival, which is increasingly raised in scale and scope. Every year, the number of attendees increases. Usually, about two months before the festival, people in Kien Giang province and the southwestern provinces have chosen among their healthy relatives and skilled people to help the management board of the communal house: to clean up the communal house, build stoves to cook rice and water, temporarily build dozens of houses, borrow hundreds of tables, thousands of seats, etc.

On the days of the festival, the area around the historical - cultural relics: Nguyen Trung Truc communal house, Rach Gia city becomes bustling. Visitors from all over the world follow each other to Nguyen Trung Truc communal house and park to burn incense, pay tribute, etc. to Mr. Nguyen. Not only that, thousand people from the provinces, they volunteered to serve meal and water for offerings (cooking, cleaning, making drinks,...) and serving guests all day and night. They work enthusiastically and responsibly, self-consciously, voluntarily and enthusiastically just to show a little respect to Mr. Nguyen.

Participating in all of the above activities, the people do not need to get paid, but they just need to eat and drink together with simple meals as a family on the anniversary of their grandparents' death (Mr Nguyen's death anniversary only worships vegetarian food and drinks according to the custom “inside offering vegetarian food, outside displaying

entertainment, singing”). This is a unique festival pattern. People go to festivals eat, live, work, and enjoy their labor together. People go to the ceremony from all over the world, they bring to the communal house what they have to show their devotion: wealth, vegetables, fruits, rice, monosodium glutamate, sugar, etc. According to custom, after the ceremony ends, offering things are used to save the poor, nursing homes, charity kitchens, etc.

Attending Mr. Nguyen's festival, everyone is equal: from waiters to pilgrims, from officials to ordinary people, from lottery ticket sellers to underprivileged children, etc., they also get to eat and drink, all are respected without distinction between rich and poor.

On festival days, people are always present in large numbers at Nguyen Trung Truc communal house, but the atmosphere here is very orderly. Services (restaurants, hotels, etc.) are discounted; the evils of begging and gambling are almost nonexistent.

A noticeable beauty in Nguyen Trung Truc festival is the multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Coming to the festival, everyone feels excited, forgets all their worries, and integrates into the sacred and bustling atmosphere of the festival. Thereby, expressing their gratitude to their ancestors, showing the spirit of community solidarity.

Through the survey, it can be seen that the number of visitors to Nguyen Trung Truc festival is increasing. Compared with other festivals such as the Ba Chua Xu festival in Chau Doc (An Giang), Linh Son Thanh Mau festival in Ba Den Mountain (Tay Ninh), the national hero Nguyen Trung Truc festival also attracts a large number of tourists.

The festival in 2003 coincided with the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death. At the same time, this is the first year that the Ministry of Culture and Sports allows Kien Giang province to organize a traditional festival to celebrate the 135<sup>th</sup> anniversary of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc's death solemnly as one of the most typical festivals in Vietnam. Therefore, the festival that year was held very solemnly. To create more magnificence, the province advocates to encourage people to live around the area of Nguyen Trung Truc communal house, where the stage is held and lanterns are hung; people responded enthusiastically. In addition, people also contributed to the Organizing Committee to make more large lanterns about 1.6 meter high hanging on both sides of Mr. Nguyen's statue.

A special feature of this time is that in the past, it was heavy on the “ceremony” part, now there are more socio-cultural activities to harmonize the “ceremony” and “festival”. Specifically, the “ceremony” part is held according to traditional rites. Part of the “festival” includes: mass cultural exchange of three ethnic groups Kinh - Hoa - Khmer, folk games, martial arts performances, playing chess, lion - monk - dragon dance competition, flower competition, and drop of 5000 flower garlands and colored lanterns on Kien River. At the same time, the Provincial Literature and Art Association responded to organize a photo exhibition introducing the country and people of Kien Giang. The Provincial Youth Union organizes a culinary culture, introduces the specific

culture of the homeland's dishes. 2003 was also the first year of theatricalization with the theme “Nguyen Trung Truc - the immortal son” with the script set up to simulate the battle of Rach Gia fort. The festival that year attracted 6000 people.

The festival in 2007 attracted about 6000 people with some new features. Specifically, the province held a procession on the street and was broadcast live on VCTV1 channel. The Vietnamese Guinness Book recognized “The largest calligraphy mural in Vietnam” with 04 lines of poetry written by Huynh Man Dat to praise Nguyen Trung Truc's mettle:

“Thắng phụ hung trường bất túc luân  
Đôi ba để trụ ức ngư dân  
Hoả hồng Nhựt Tảo oanh thiên địa  
Kiếm bạc Kiên Giang khắp quỷ thần”

Translate: *On victory or defeat (which is common for generals) there is nothing worth discussing/ In decadent times (to find) a capable person (to do) remembers a fisherman/ The fiery red fire in Nhat Tao shook heaven and earth/ The shining sword in Kien Giang made demons and gods shed tears.*

Festival 2008 – the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death; and was also a key tourism program that Kien Giang responds to the Mekong - Can Tho National Tourism Year 2008 (hosted by Can Tho city) so it was organized very grandly and the highlight was the opening night with The performance of the song “*Anh khí như hồng*” clearly showed the brave mettle on the battlefield and the glorious feats of Nguyen Trung Truc. As for the association, the following activities took place: Rach Gia cultural - trade - tourism fair at Lac Hong children's park; street photo exhibition “Kien Giang land and people”, exhibition of calligraphy, walking street and culinary culture on Ton Duc Thang street, Vietnam record “Ta Nien mat weaving” night program at Nguyen Trung Truc monument park... According to statistics, about 700,000 people attended the festival.

The festival in 2010 - the 142<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's sacrifice - took place on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of Thang Long - Hanoi; at the same time, it is also the occasion that Kien Giang province successfully organized the 9<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, moving towards the 11<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, so Kien Giang province required a strict and dignified organization, maintaining the national culture, strongly promoting the traditional Vietnamese identity. The opening night theatrical program consisted of two main parts: praising the cause of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc to fight against foreign invaders and the southern land towards 1000 years of Thang Long - Hanoi. On the second day, the ceremony was held from Tam Quan gate to the courtyard of Nguyen Trung Truc monument. More than 5,000 people participated in the incense offering ceremony, listened to traditional rituals, and watched folk dances and traditional martial arts performance. At the same time, the festival took place at many locations throughout Rach Gia city such as: Lac Hong Park - Bai Duong, Nguyen

Trung Truc Park, Provincial Information and Culture Center, An Hoa Cultural Park, provincial children's house, stadium, etc. Besides, there are also activities: cultural performances, don ca tai tu, wine mixing performance, beer drinking contest, performances, lion dance, folk flower contest, artistic swimming, water puppetry, photo exhibition, motorcycle racing, ... attract the attention of visitors.

In 2015, the traditional festival celebrates the 147<sup>th</sup> anniversary of national hero Nguyen Trung Truc's death with many activities imbued with the national identity and culture of the Southern region. The ceremony was held at Nguyen Trung Truc communal house and Nguyen Trung Truc Park with traditional rites such as the ceremony of big flag hanging ceremony, worshiping ceremony on the altar, rice offering, etc. The festival part, in addition to the opening ceremony, was held with many cultural activities such as "Don ca tai tu - Southern colors", photo exhibitions, fairs, etc. The special thing of this year's festival was that the organizers distribute 1,000 free hammocks for residents and visitors. During the festival, every day hundreds of thousands of people (from Long An, An Giang, Can Tho, Ho Chi Minh City, ...) came to offer incense at Nguyen's communal house.

In 2018, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death, the festival was organized with newer and larger-scale activities than previous years. The activities were carefully invested, quality and diversified, spread in many locations in Rach Gia city. Specifically, the ceremony was still held according to traditional, solemn and respectful rites such as: incense burning ceremony of representatives of people, army, government, provincial Party Committee; incense offering ceremony at Nguyen Trung Truc Monument Park; the ceremony to visit Lam Quang Ky's grave (Chau Thanh district) and Huynh Man Dat's grave (Rach Gia city); along with traditional rituals: big flag hanging ceremony, worshiping ceremony on the altar, rice offering, etc. Particularly, the art program to open the festival taking place at Tran Quang Khai Square was staged on a larger scale than previous years... Also on this occasion, Kien Giang province also built and inaugurated the stele marking the place where Nguyen Trung Truc was executed by the French in 1868 in front of the Provincial Religious Affairs Department (in front of the Rach Gia City Post Office); The stele marked the battle of Rach Gia fort in 1868 (in front of the Provincial Children's House); making a documentary film with a duration of 30 minutes to honor Nguyen Trung Truc; compiling and publishing books and pamphlets about the biography of Nguyen Trung Truc; embellishing and upgrading Nguyen Trung Truc monument park; embellishing and restoring the relics of Nguyen Trung Truc communal house in Rach Gia city and some spots around the festival area. As for the festival, many cultural and sports events were organized in a grand and unique way. Among them, there were some outstanding activities such as: incense offering ceremony, Nguyen Trung Truc stamp issuance at Nguyen Trung Truc monument park; space for don ca tai tu; performing calligraphy and displaying artwork; flower competition; exhibition of ornamental creatures; human chess competition; culinary space...

In 2019, the traditional festival celebrates the 152<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Nguyen Trung Truc's death, but due to the complicated development of the Covid-19 epidemic, Kien Giang province did not organize many activities. The locality only organized for representatives of people, army, government, provincial Party Committee to offer incense (not organize the ceremony), and did not send invitations to provinces and cities to attend. The protection board of Nguyen Trung Truc Communal House's relics internally organized traditional rituals in the communal house's premises. Activities such as opening ceremony, fair, sports festival, lion - monk - dragon performance, hammock camp, communal meal, etc. were not organized.

In 2020, due to the complicated situation of the Covid - 19 epidemic, the province only held the ceremony, not the festival. Like 2019, the Organizing Committee did not organize cooking for guests with vegetarian meals. However, because the people who came to worship Mr. Nguyen belonged to many different backgrounds, some of them were from poor families, so the Organizing Committee set up many places to distribute free vegetarian meals and drinking water for people. At the same time, the Organizing Committee also set up a number of places to distribute free medical masks to prevent, control and raise awareness of epidemic prevention.

### ***3.4. Change the purpose of attending the festival***

#### ***3.4.1. Spiritual purpose***

Participating in the Nguyen Trung Truc festival is an important need in people's lives. Being present at the festival is not only a satisfaction of the need to be immersed in the community's life in many aspects, but also an opportunity to contemplate, awaken, and pray for “peaceful people, prosperous things”. Spiritual beliefs are an important feature in folk beliefs, with the concept of dividing the world into two extremes: the world of existence and the world of non-existence, the world of the living and the world after death – the world of invisible objects. But in practice “there is a lack of clear distinction between the invisible and the visible, the living and the dead, the earthly and the supernatural, the human and the natural, the natural and the divine, the devil. All seem to be one, but not exactly one. It is still two” (Dang Nghiem Van, 1999). Those who come to Mr. Nguyen's festival can live seemingly at the same time in two worlds, but distinguish themselves between the two worlds. That is the time when they enter the place of worship, light the incense, it is the time when people step from the mundane space into the sacred space to live in the sacred moment of belief.

Today, in the context of the growing economy. Individuals and businesses succeed in the marketplace, thanks in part to their constant self-effort, and people also think about being helped by the gods. With such a mentality, when they come to the Nguyen Trung Truc festival - where the god Nguyen Trung Truc is - they become more secure and give their faith to the gods to pray for “going off without a hitch”. On the other hand,

although the scientific and technological revolution is taking place day by day, scientific achievements - including medicine - are increasing every day, but the mysteries of human life, the pain suffering from disease, because “hữu sinh vô duỡng”(i.e. having children but not being able to raise them) is still there, so from a functionalist point of view, it can be explained that people still need some help, even if it only means spiritual consolation. This phenomenon was mentioned by B. Malinowski in functional theory. Malinowski emphasizes that the magical rituals of the Trobriand Islanders of the Pacific, although seen as ignorant and absurd, were understandable and effective. For example, “when the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands go fishing in the lagoons, it is an understandable matter. But when they come out of the rocks, out into the open sea with erratic changes and dangers, raging waves, sudden storms, unpredictable catches and other difficulties, they often rely on into magic rituals to allay fears and get on with work. When fishing at sea, the risk increases and the results are also more precarious. Trobriand fishermen often performed rituals and spells to reassure themselves psychologically, hoping for safety and a big catch” (Bronislaw Malinowski, 1992).

#### *3.4.2. Recreational and tourism purposes*

Kien Giang is a province with a rich festival system, showing its own characteristics in the community's culture, such as: Nghinh Ong festival (Kien Hai district), boat racing festival, Dinh Cau festival (Phu Quoc city). , Chieu Anh Cac Tao Dan Festival (Ha Tien city), Hung King's death anniversary at Hung Temple (Tan Hiep district), the anniversary of the sacrifice of Hero of the Armed Forces Phan Thi Rang (Hon Dat district), cultural - sport - tourism festival of Khmer people (Go Quao district), ...

In the past, the main purpose of people coming to the festival was to find fun through folk games. Now, the festivals have their own unique cultural characteristics, with the participation of tourists.

In terms of space, Nguyen Trung Truc communal house is located in Rach Gia city - which is identified as the tourist triangle axis of Rach Gia - Ha Tien - Phu Quoc. Therefore, visitors come to the festival as a destination to visit, shop for local products, experience traditional cultural values in the midst of modern life. This purpose appears when people's lives are increasingly improved. Thus, Nguyen Trung Truc festival is also a place to connect and transmit traditional cultural values. This contributes to local economic growth.

## **4. Conclusion**

Community culture is always influenced by the cultural subject and the cultural space that creates it. Nguyen Trung Truc festival is not out of that influence. Nguyen Trung Truc Festival was born on the basis of meeting the needs of the people; therefore, to form the Nguyen Trung Truc festival, people had to work, create, search, and select.

Approaching the theory of structure - function, it can be seen that Nguyen Trung Truc festival is formed on the basis of customs and practices of the community.

According to H.Spencer, a British psychologist (1820-1903), “humans like animals only exist in the environment, when they know how to adapt”. On that basis, people will adapt to the environment in the process of their existence and development. Thus, according to the historical process, Nguyen Trung Truc festival has had changes (accepting and developing by interweaving new ones or removing old elements that are no longer relevant). This contributes to gathering the strength of national unity; enrich cultural identity; bringing economic benefits to Kien Giang province (through revenue from services and tourism), and at the same time contributing to the promotion of the worship of Nguyen Trung Truc (a particular belief formed from the admiration of the national hero); create conditions for the community to look towards the heroic historical tradition of the nation, participate in cultural activities, express gratitude to people with meritorious services to the fatherland, be aware of their own responsibility for building and protecting the country.

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