

SOCIAL NETWORK IN MOTHER GODDESS WORSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF MEDIUM DANG THI MAT, HANG PAGODA-QUAN TAM TEMPLE, THANH MY COMMUNE, SON TAY TOWN, HANOI

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Article history

Received: April 25th, 2022

Received in revised form: July 25th, 2022 | Accepted: August 1st, 2022

Available online: September 6th, 2022

Abstract

Many authors, domestic and foreign, have studied different aspects of Mother Goddess worship. Studying Mother Goddess worship on the basis of social network theory is a modern research trend, and is valuable in determining the complexity of social relationships that people build, maintain, and develop in their real lives as members of society. This article adopts some points of view in social network theory to study a specific social network in Mother Goddess worship, that of medium Dang Thi Mat, of Hang Pagoda-Quan Tam Temple, Thanh My Commune, Son Tay Town, Hanoi to clarify the characteristics, structure, homophily, operating principles, and development of this social network in modern society. The analysis in the article is based on long-term fieldwork (2015-2018), observations, and in-depth interviews with many individuals to obtain objective and tangible research results.

Keywords: Hang Pagoda; Medium; Mother Goddess worship; Quan Tam Phu Temple; Social network.

DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.37569/DalatUniversity.12.4.1045\(2022\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.37569/DalatUniversity.12.4.1045(2022))

Article type: (peer-reviewed) Full-length research article

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Mother Goddess worship in Vietnam has been approached and studied in many aspects of modern anthropological and sociological theories besides the traditional approach. Theories, such as the theory of cultural entity; the theory of cultural values; S. Freud's theory of psychoanalysis; Bourdieu, Portes, and Coleman's theory of social capital; the theory of masculinity and femininity; and the structuralism developed by Claude Levi-Strauss, etc., have been applied in several studies by scholars in Vietnam (Ngô, 2012; Nguyễn, 2013; Mai, 2015; Nguyễn, 2015; Trần, 2016).

This article adopts some points of view in social network theory to study a specific social network in Mother Goddess worship, which is the social network of medium Dang Thi Mat, Hang Pagoda-Quan Tam Temple, Thanh My Commune, Son Tay Town, Hanoi to clarify the characteristics, structure, homophily, and development of the social network, including the medium and disciples. The analysis in the article is based on long-term fieldwork (2015-2018), observations, and in-depth interviews with many individuals to obtain objective and tangible research results.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASE STUDY

2.1. Theoretical basis

The concept of "social network" first appeared in the book, *Who Shall Survive?*, published in 1934 by the Romanian-American psychologist, J. L. Moreno, in which he proposed adopting graph theory, a branch of mathematics, to analyze the social relations of a group of people (Lê, 2006). A social network is a set of dyadic ties between social entities known as actors. These social entities are not only individuals but also social groups, organizations, institutions, companies, enterprises, and nations. The relationships between actors carry different meanings, such as mutual assistance, information exchange, the exchange of goods, services, etc. (Lê, 2006).

The study of social networks requires the examination of the components that make up a social network, which are the entities (actors) interacting with others and the social relationships between the actors in the social network, clarifying the influence of these relationships on the behavior and interests of entities in the social network. In this study, the author selects several relevant theoretical perspectives to elucidate the components of a social network, including entities (actors), social relationships between actors, and the impact of these relationships on the behavior and interests of the actors in the social network.

2.1.1. Homophily in social networks – J. Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin

McPherson et al. have shown that social networks are linked based on certain similarities. These similarities are classified into two types of homophily: baseline homophily and inbreeding homophily. Baseline homophily includes race and ethnicity, age groups, and narrow social contexts. Inbreeding homophily emphasizes elements such

as gender and sexuality, education, and occupation. These two types of homophily are closely related; *inbreeding homophily* forms based on *baseline homophily* and many factors combined of these two types, such as religion (Nông, 2009, p. 60). From the approach of J. Miller McPherson and Lynn Smith-Lovin, the article contributes to shedding light on the characteristics of a network of Mother Goddess worship by clarifying the similarities linking members in the social network of medium Dang Thi Mat and simultaneously pointing out the disparities between theory and reality in the social network of Mother Goddess worship.

2.1.2. The Strength of Weak Ties – Mark S. Granovetter

According to Granovetter, social network analysis researchers need to distinguish whether ties are strong or weak based on the length of the relationships; the actor's emotional intensity in relationships; the reliability within relationships; the actors' interactions in relationships; and the "multiplexity" – multiple contents in a relationship. Strong ties are relationships that take up much time from actors and carry much content, trust, and high emotional intensity. Weak ties are unstable relationships that do not take up much of the actor's time and have little content, low emotional intensity, and low mutual trust (Granovetter, 1973). Weak ties are weak because they lead to relationships outside the community, break the *closedness* of the network, and increase the social relationships outside the network, promoting the novelty and richness of information (Nông, 2009, p. 61). As for the social network of medium Dang Thi Mat, these views aim to explain the relationships between actors and clarify this social network's structure and operating principles.

2.1.3. Structural holes – Ronald Burt

The structural holes in a network appear when information gaps emerge. A *mediator* is an individual who helps connect nodes from two different networks for a particular purpose. The role of a mediator, also known as a broker, is to create information flows, bring people together, and eliminate unnecessary information (Burt, 2004). The mediators make connections, and these connections become the social capital of the actors themselves (Lê, 2006). By applying some points of view of this theory, the article clarifies the structure of the social network and evaluates the central role of medium Mat in the practice of Mother Goddess worship. The medium's and disciples' benefits within the social network are thereby clarified.

2.1.4. Social mobility through relationships – Nan Lin

Social mobility through social relationships is seen as the resource to assist the actor in attaining a new level in society, represented by the pyramidal triangle. According to Lin, direct and indirect social relationships are social resources (Lin, 2001a, 2001b). These resources are essential to improve the actor's social status and become *social capital*, a source of capital that individuals can use (Nông, 2009, p. 62). From this perspective, the author proposes a model of social mobility to acquire high social status through relationships of medium Dang Thi Mat, reflecting medium Mat's social network and Contemporary Mother Goddess worship.

2.2. Some characteristics of the case study

Medium Dang Thi Mat is currently the head of Hang Pagoda-Quan Tam Temple, Tu Bat Tu Temple in Son Tay, Hanoi, and Thuong Temple in Ba Vi, Hanoi. The spiritual journey of medium Dang Thi Mat includes many special features. When the medium was eight years old, her aunt, Dang Thi Quy, was a medium at Quan Tam Temple, Son Tay, Hanoi. When the medium grew up, Dang Thi Mat was a teacher and former principal of Thanh My Primary School (Thanh My commune, Son Tay town) and was awarded the Third-class Labor Medal. After retiring in 1983, she has devoted herself wholeheartedly to taking care of worship and spirituality. Spending her life serving the Mother Goddess, she has contributed to conserving and handing down Mother Goddess worship in Vietnam. She is now Director of the UNESCO Center for Conservation of Historical and Cultural Relics of Ba Vi, Son Tay, Hanoi, and Vice Chairman of the Sponsoring Council of the UNESCO Center for Research and Applied Buddhist Studies in Vietnam. The disciples praise and acknowledge the “remarkable ability” of medium Dang Thi Mat to rebuild temples and her special healing ability by “*trả lại vía*” – returning the astral spirit to people escaping death. These “special abilities” create prestige and captivation, attracting many disciples to medium Mat’s social network.

With more than 70 years of practicing Mother Goddess worship, medium Dang Thi Mat, being the head of many temples and shrines in Son Tay and Ba Vi, owns a social network with up to thousands of disciples. These disciples come from many provinces and cities; they have different ages, backgrounds, academic levels, occupations, etc. Regardless of the differences, they have a close bond, creating a social network in which the medium is the center.

3. THE SOCIAL NETWORK OF MEDIUM DANG THI MAT

3.1. Baseline homophily

In the network of Mother Goddess worship, the most fundamental connection between actors is the co-religion linkage – the relationship between members whom the medium *đế đồng* approves to become disciples and to practice Mother Goddess worship. However, besides sharing the co-religion connection, the actors in the Mother Goddess worship network have many similarities in ethnic culture, gender, age, problems encountered in ordinary life, etc. According to the interpretive model of J. Miller McPherson and Lynn Smith-Lovin, these similarities belong to the baseline homophily. This makes the network of Mother Goddess worship different from other social networks, such as the networks of compatriots, emigrants, employees seeking jobs, Christians, Buddhists, etc.

The social network of medium Dang Thi Mat belongs to the baseline homophily because, initially, the members of this network were mainly Vietnamese residing in all provinces and cities in the country. Having the same ethnicity, these disciples share the same Vietnamese cultural denominator. This is shown through similarities in cultural attitude, which according to the late professor, Tran Quoc Vuong, is the attitude toward

nature, society and community, oneself, and gods (Trần, 1998). The cultural factors of ethnicity are inclusive, influencing other factors such as gender, age, background, etc., in the network of social relations and are the strongest glue that creates the baseline homophily of the social network of Mother Goddess worship.

The similarities linking the members of the social network of medium Mat are based on the characteristics of age and gender. The author's field data from 2015 to 2018 shows that middle-aged women (from 40 to 60 years old) account for 50% of this social survey. Women, especially Vietnamese women who spend their lives taking care of their families, seek additional *insurance* for their lives and families, which is the protection of the Mother Goddess and the gods in the same religion – *insurance that is invisible but can be present anywhere, anytime, and for a lifetime* (Nguyễn, 2010, p. 43). Thus, they have fulfilled their physical, spiritual, and *Phúc đức tại Mẫu* (Mother's blessings) responsibilities that weigh heavily on their shoulders. This network is also home to people of the third gender. People having bad deeds from previous lives are often known as *đồng cô bóng cậu*, joining the social network of medium Mat to remove the deviations in psychophysiology – “a female soul in a male body.” The overwhelming number of women and the inclusion of third-gender people in the network suggest that this is a network with gender specificity.

This social network is a place that welcomes dreadful fates and grim realities. These stories of disciples in the network of medium Mat conclusively prove the point.

First story: Back in the day, her husband was in the army while she worked for the executive committee of the commune's women's union; later on, she worked as an accountant at a store. At the end of the subsidy period, she switched to trade and ran a very prosperous business, more so than she could ever imagine. When her child was ten years old, she and her husband separated; afterward, business was slack, money kept being lost, and she went crazy. Fortunately, she discovered that she is a person with *căn cáo số nặng* (bad fate). The Mother Goddess stated that *hết sạch sành sanh mới được manh áo đở*, which means the Goddess has offered abundance, but the person did not know how to treasure it. Hence, the Goddess takes everything back to the point where the person has nothing left and even bears debt.¹

Second story: When I was 30 years old, I suddenly became insane; nights were my days, and I wandered to the graveyard to talk to the dead. My family and people went to look for me, but when I saw them, I couldn't call out; the spirits didn't allow me to be found. It turned out that my fate was to serve the gods; they blessed me and freed me from the madness.²

The stories above are just two of many stories about the fates of network members. The grim fates, uncertainty in economic life, failure in career, family suffering, and illness have led them to the Mother Goddess and the network of medium Mat to find consolation and to share the misfortune and hardships of fate. This social network has become a place

¹ The author's fieldwork on May 21, 2016: interview with Ms. Le Thi L. (64 years old, Ba Vi, Hanoi).

² The author's fieldwork on September 27, 2016: interview with Ms. Khuat Thi D. (65 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi).

for people with many uncertainties, clearly demonstrating the humanity in the Mother Goddess worship network. Hence, this religion is different and has a gripping attractiveness compared to other religions and beliefs.

In the social network of medium Mat, the baseline homophily is the network of mediums and disciples she created. These are the people who go under rituals conducted by medium Mat, such as *trình đồng mở phủ* (an obligatory ritual for people who want to become a disciple of Mother Goddess worship) or *sang khấn tái phủ* (a ritual to begin everything again because the first attempt to free the person from bad deeds failed). The relationship between mediums and disciples is the closest – linked with each other in many ways and sharing many benefits. In addition to the co-religion linkage, the actors in the network of medium Mat have many other social relationships. For example, Ms. Nguyen Thi M. (65 years old, Luong Son, Hoa Binh), Ms. Le Thi L. (64 years old, Ba Vi, Hanoi), Ms. Chu Thi H. (67 years old, Ba Vi, Hanoi), and Mr. Do Van Q. (65 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi) are members of the UNESCO Center for Conservation of Historical and Cultural Relics of Ba Vi, Son Tay, directed by medium Mat. Ms. Le Thi L., Ms. Nguyen Thi M., and Ms. Chu Thi H. are mediums of Thuong Temple (Ba Vi, Son Tay), Da Bac Temple (Luong Son, Hoa Binh), and Rung Gia Temple (Tan Linh, Ba Vi), respectively. The actors have had a close relationship with medium Mat for a long time, mostly for 20 to 30 years. Ms. Nguyen Thi H. (86 years old, Ba Vi, Hanoi) went under *trình đồng mở phủ* performed by medium Mat in 1988; Ms. Le Thi L. went under *trình đồng* (similar to the ritual *trình đồng mở phủ*) conducted by medium Mat in March 1993; medium Mat performed *mở phủ* for Mr. Do Van Q. in 1995; Ms. Chu Thi H. went under *tái khấn* (similar to the ritual *sang khấn tái phủ*) conducted by medium Mat in 1997, etc.³

It can be seen that baseline homophily is a dense network of social relations that has a stable, long-term form. The structure of relationships in this social network is rigid, with multiplexity (multiple links), similar to a local network. Actors meet and interact with each other directly and indirectly regarding the nature of the work of different actors. In practicing the religion, such as healing, *áp vong* (calling for the spirit of a dead person to return to the body of a living person), exorcism, praying, *di cung hoán số* (changing fates), *trả nợ Tào quan* (paying spiritual debt), *cắt duyên âm* (cutting off bonds with dead people), etc., these actors often seek help from their mediums in learning and sharing experiences. Another factor to be considered in these relationships is the favorable geographical location. The actors live mainly in Ba Vi, Son Tay, Thach That, Phu Tho, Hoa Binh, and Vinh Phuc, and the longest road distance between residences is about 60 km. The direct and indirect interactions are necessary to form and maintain strong connections with mediums based on co-religion relationships.

The co-religion linkage and the interweaving of many similar factors in terms of ethnicity, culture, age group, gender, and background create a rigid structure and multiplexity for the baseline homophily with a long-term, closed, and introspective form. The structure

³ The author's fieldwork (2017).

and characteristics of the baseline homophily reflect the uniqueness and difference of the Mother Goddess worship compared to other religions, beliefs, and social networks.

3.2. Inbreeding homophily

The baseline homophily is a network of *căn đồng số lính* – people whose fates were determined to be the servant of the Mother Goddess, and they go under *trình Cha tấu Mẹ* and *bắc ghé Cha ngồi làm ngôi Mẹ ngự* (rituals for people who want to become a disciple of Mother Goddess worship). This network is often small in scale and limited to those who have *căn số* (a person's predetermined fate). In contrast, the inbreeding homophily network has a large scale with many participants: disciples, hosts of rituals, shamans, *cung vãn* (men who sing in the ritual *hầu đồng*), people who sell votive items, photography services, etc. The actors in inbreeding homophily are differentiated in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, occupation, academic level, background, etc.

In the task book of Quan Tam Temple, there are many cases where the whole family with three or four generations held a ceremony called *đội bát nhang* (a ceremony to officially recognize a person as a disciple of the Mother Goddess). For example, on February 24, 2016, the family of Ms. Nguyen Thi H. C. (69 years old, Long Bien, Hanoi) held ceremonies such as *đội bát nhang*, *giải hạn* (a ritual to relieve oneself of a run of bad luck) and *tiến mã mở cung tài lộc* (a ritual to pray for fortune). In particular, some family members living abroad (Potsdam, Federal Republic of Germany) also attended a ceremony called *tôn nhang* (another name for *đội bát nhang*) to become disciples of medium Mat. There are many cases where foreign disciples come to the temple to pray and worship. For example, in 2014, Raphael L. (36 years old, Delmark Blvd, Markham, Ontario, Canada) came and prayed for his business and health; in June 2015 (lunar calendar), Ta Gia Th. (51 years old, Nanning, China) went under the *tiến mã* to pray for a successful contract signed in Vietnam; in January 2016, Vuong D. D. (66 years old, Hunan, China) went through the *giải hạn*, *tiến mã*, *cầu tài lộc* to pray for a successful contract signed in Vietnam.⁴

These actors bond with their medium and network based on co-religion linkage and the need for personal benefits. The author's fieldwork shows that each actor has a purpose when connecting with a medium: Mr. Le Van L. (67 years old, Vinh Tuong, Vinh Phuc) is the construction manager of the temple buildings; Mr. Vu Ngoc T. (48 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi) is a *cung vãn* – the man who sings in the ritual *hầu đồng*; shaman Le Van T. (72 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi) was invited when Mr. Mat had important ceremonial work, such as *động thổ* (groundbreaking ceremony), serving Quan Tam ceremony, etc.; Mr. Dang Van Q. (44 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi) sells votive items; Ms. Khuat Thi D. (65 years old, Son Tay, Hanoi) is a *đồng bói* (a person who performs divination). Although she is not a *con nhang cái bóng* (a disciple) of medium Mat, she often introduces people who need *trình đồng mở phủ* to medium Mat. Due to the influences in terms of purpose and personal interests, the relationship between mediums

⁴ The author's fieldwork (2016, 2017).

and actors or between actors is not close. Rodney Stark believes this network is a cosmopolitan network (Phan, 2016, p. 30). Actors in this social network tend to have random associations with limited interactions; therefore, they do not invest much time and effort in these relationships. The structure of an extensive relationship is often known as a single content relationship (uniplexity).

The strong development of inbreeding homophily makes the social network of medium Mat expand and take deep root. This network is no longer a closed organization exclusively for Vietnamese but an open organization connecting disciples of different genders, ages, academic levels, occupations, and ethnicities. The inbreeding homophily reflects the diversity, richness and complexity of the actors who interact in the social network of medium Dang Thi Mat.

3.3. The fusion of baseline and inbreeding homophily

The social network of medium Dang Thi Mat is formed on the basis of baseline and inbreeding homophily. In other words, the combination of two types of homophily creates the social network of medium Mat. The medium plays a central role in the social network, and the actors gather around and are related to each other in the forms of baseline homophily and inbreeding homophily. According to social psychology analysts, this type of network is an ego/personal network, also known as an “ego-centered” network (Lê, 2006). This social network comprises three factors: the time of formation, the cause of an actor’s connections, and the linkage between actors.

- *The time of formation:* Most actors have a long-term bond and many ongoing activities in the social network of medium Mat.
- *The cause of connections:* For the baseline homophily, actors connect with the ego and connect with each other based on the co-religion linkage; they are the disciples “born” by the medium or have gone under the *tái khóa sang khãn* (a ritual to begin everything again because the first attempt to free the person from bad deeds failed). For the inbreeding homophily, actors connect to medium Mat for many reasons related to their interests.

Being the center, the medium plays the role of a mediator, or broker, to help connect the two networks. According to Ronald Burt, a medium mediates the structural holes of two different networks. The connection of these two networks is through the ego and becomes the social capital of the ego itself.

Thus, to practice Mother Goddess worship, especially the ritual *lên đồng* (receiving incarnations of the deities), medium Mat has built and maintains a professional network and service to assist mediums with both baseline and inbreeding homophily. These two forms are connected through mediums. Playing the role of a mediator, the medium connects actors with different roles in the two networks to complement and support each other so that Mother Goddess worship is conducted smoothly, quickly, and

conveniently. This social network operates under the three main principles of affection, belief, and multiplexity.

- *The principle of affection* is mainly reflected in the baseline homophily and the relationship between medium Mat and actors and between actors based on the co-religion linkage. Actors are closely related to each other like a family.
- *The principle of trust* is formed in baseline homophily and inbreeding homophily. The actors in the inbreeding homophily had a long time (about ten years) to put their trust in medium Mat. For actors in the baseline homophily, faith in the Mother Goddess and the power of the mediums create the connections between members in the social network.
- *The principle of multiplexity* is shown in the co-religion linkage, in the many crisscrossed and intertwined relationships, and in the multi-dimensional correlation of the hierarchy in the social network.

3.4. The benefits of social networks

3.4.1. For mediums

As a mediator connecting baseline homophily and inbreeding homophily, medium Dang Thi Mat creates an information flow and connects disciples. In Ronald Burt's view, these connections benefit mediums in many respects. The first aspect considered is economy; the economic factor was not highlighted in spiritual activities since the prominent role of a medium is "to take care of the spiritual life of the disciples, guide the disciples in theoretical and practical performance, and perform duties in worship."⁵ However, in the context of the vibrant spiritual culture and the explosion of spiritual services, mediums take on new roles as business owners, service providers, and mediators in disciples' relationships.

You will never return to my shop if you can't buy anything, but when you can purchase good products, you will return to my shop. So, this time you come for *đôi bát nhang, cất duyên âm cầu duyên trần*, and then you get married; next time, you pray for your children and your prayer is fulfilled; when your children grow up, you pray that they study well, finish high school, and go to university. It means that you have to come here and pray for the rest of your life: pray for yourself, pray for your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and all your life is devoted to the Mother Goddess.⁶

In the roles of business owners and service providers, mediums manage to earn economic profits. The profits are from the service packages that mediums offer at

⁵ The author's fieldwork (2017).

⁶ The author's fieldwork: an interview with medium Mat on March 10, 2016.

different prices. For example, some simple rituals, such as *cắt giải tiền duyên* (cutting off bonds with dead people), praying for fame, career, job transfer, etc., are priced relatively low, from 3 to 5 million VND. More complex rituals, such as *mở phủ trình đồng*,⁷ *mở phủ bói*,⁸ *lễ tiến mã*, *mở cung tài lộc*, *lễ trả nợ tào quan*,⁹ etc., vary widely from the lowest to the highest price. The lowest fee is 30 million VND, the average package is 40–50 million VND, and the cost of more complicated rituals is 60–100 million VND. The price depends on the amount of work and the customer's financial situation. Thus, economic benefits go hand in hand with helping people escape misery.

To gain economic benefits as mediators, mediums wanting to attract disciples to their networks must interact and connect with other services to meet customers' needs since "the customer is always right." In Burt's view, an ego with the role of a mediator makes religious activities faster and more convenient, benefiting the ego itself (Burt, 2004).

As customers of the social network members, mediums always prioritize buying goods from disciples within the network when organizing ceremonies or tasks. This act benefits both sides; the medium can buy good products cheaply, and sometimes goods are even donated by the disciples, while the disciples sell more goods, receive recognition from the medium, and are favored in other tasks of the network. Thus, more or less, economic benefits always coincide with spiritual activities in Mother Goddess worship.

Besides economic benefits, according to medium Mat, the most valuable things that actors in the social network generate are family affection, love, and sharing. For medium Mat, a disciple is like a child of the family, and she is a mother with many children. Therefore, the disciples "offer her all sorts of things"; according to her, it can be "spiritual joy, congratulations on New Year's Day or on anniversaries and holidays, visits, sharing ups and downs." Or "when I have financial difficulties in business, if I don't have money, people lend me money. It's just a call away. People offer to help me; some have possessions, and some have willingness. No matter whether it's day or night, people help me with all they have." According to her, those are the things that she "has more than everyone else does."¹⁰

Moreover, whether intentionally or unintentionally, members also contribute to the reputation of their medium by "advertising" or "introducing" their medium.

The verses praising the ability of medium Mat that Mrs. Nguyen Thi H. (86 years old, Ba Vi, Son Tay) composed at Quan Tam Temple during a time when I went to a ceremony: "You return to disturb innocent people/ Medicines taken without a sign of recovery/ When you get angry you do not speak or smile/ Innocent souls are imprisoned because of you/ To witness a medium in the flesh/ An iron hammer

⁷ The ritual *Mở phủ trình đồng*: the ritual for people having done bad deeds who want to become disciples of the Mother Goddess.

⁸ The ritual *Mở phủ bói*: the ceremony of the mediums with ability in prophesying, divination, the making of offerings, reports, and giving thanks to the gods for protection, wisdom, and improvement in prophesying.

⁹ *Trả nợ Tào Quan* or *Điền hoàn Thiên Khố*: the rituals to pay debts to heaven to make up for their previous karma and sins committed in this life and to atone for their mistakes.

¹⁰ The author's fieldwork (2017).

in the hand of the medium works the power/ You make people suffer on and off/ Medicine is pointless, the spell against you does not work for once/ Your trace is nowhere to be found/ The medium sees through you and knows your place/ People coming to your place just beg and beg/ Then you allow the healing to come to suffering people/ To whom you perform spells and curses/ Please let medium Mat save people’s lives.”¹¹

Mediums, as mediators, reap many other benefits in the context of social transformation. With the theory of social mobility in social networks, Nan Lin argues that “the social mobility shifted from low to high through social relationships is considered a social resource for the actor to achieve higher status in society. These resources are important factors to raise the level of actors’ social status” (Nông, 2009, p. 62). Applying the theoretical framework to the case study, the author discovered that to achieve a new level, medium Dang Thi Mat used many supportive resources, such as inherited position, special ability, social relationships, etc. The process of achieving this new position by medium Mat is shown in the following diagram (Figure 1).

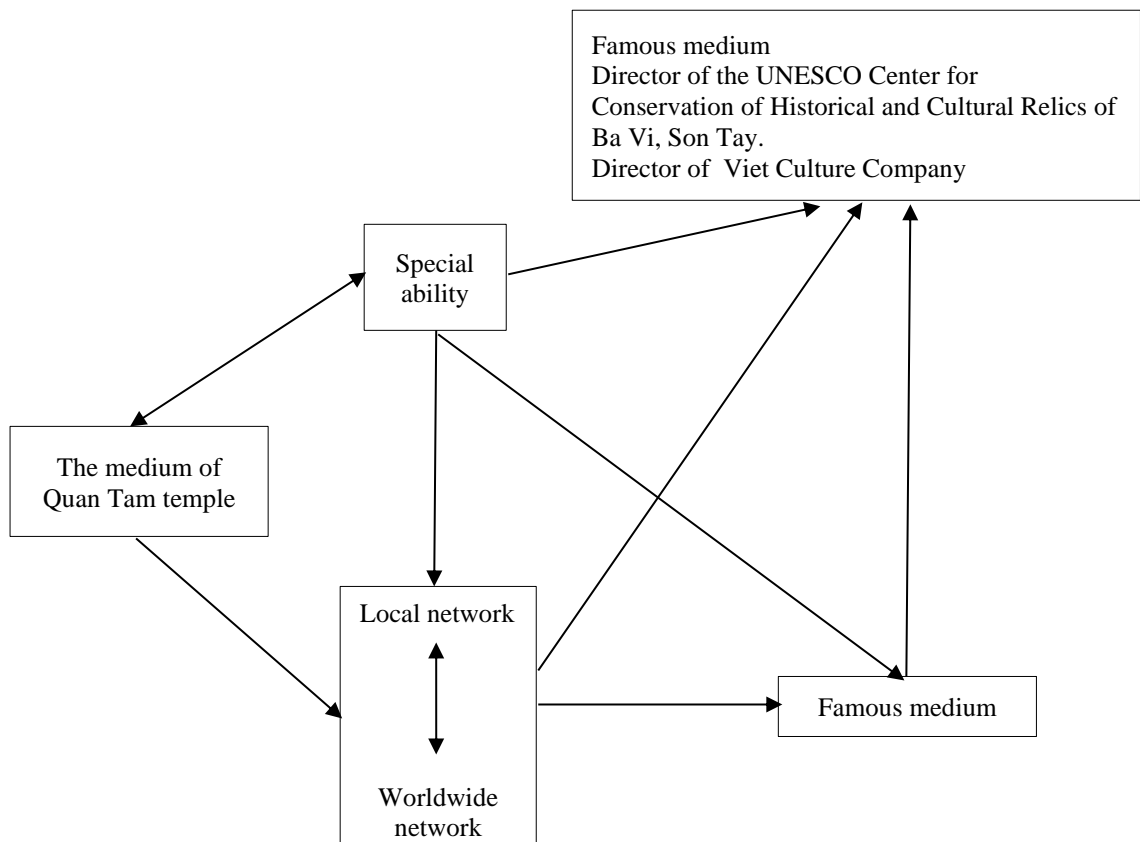


Figure 1. Diagram of the social mobility of medium Dang Thi Mat

¹¹ The author’s fieldwork on September 22, 2016: interview with Mrs. Nguyen Thi H.

In the diagram above, the head of Quan Tam Temple is an ego inherited from her aunt, who is also the medium of the ego. From a famous temple head in Son Tay–Ba Vi, along with prestige and special spiritual ability, medium Mat quickly built and maintained an extensive network of disciples with a vast network of service providers for spiritual activities. This social network makes a significant contribution to creating a reputation for the ego and building social resources in terms of economy, affection, society, relationships, and the promotion of the ego's role and position as Director of UNESCO Center Ba Vi–Son Tay and Director of Viet Culture Company. Hers is an ego awarded with many titles and certificates from organizations in the region and abroad.

Thus, the renovation has created favors for mediums like Dang Thi Mat to step out of their spiritual temples and integrate into the vibrant, existential life with their spiritual abilities. The new era enhances the mediums' role, bringing them to new heights as cultural managers, business directors, etc. Their influence is not limited to spiritual life within their nation but is known worldwide.

3.4.2. For actors

By building and maintaining a stable, long-term social network, medium Mat and disciples have reaped considerable benefits from the strong development of the economy and globalization. The negative side of the economy and the globalization process, the precariousness and instability in economic and social life, the pressures in modern urban life, and the disruption and disturbance in the moral, cultural, social value system, etc., have created psychological insecurity, disorientation, and spiritual crisis for many people. Escaping from reality, they seek Mother Goddess worship and join the social network of medium Mat as a way to solve the deadlock in their lives and, above all, find spiritual support in ordinary life. Pursuing spiritual benefits by joining the social network of medium Mat also brings benefits in terms of economic development, job opportunities, enhancement of social status, and fulfillment of the emotional needs of many disciples.

In terms of spirituality, when participating in the social network of the medium, the disciples learn how to balance their spiritual life in a volatile world. Most people who attend a séance pray for blessings in health, career, business, children's education, fate, oneself, etc., or talk about their difficulties in life to seek sympathy and help from people under similar circumstances, confidently express personal identity, share spiritual knowledge, etc. The disciples in the network are taught standardly and methodically by medium Mat, who masters many principles in the practice of Mother Goddess worship; thus, the outstanding cultural values of Mother Goddess worship are handed down. The social network of Mother Goddess worship provides the disciples with material and spiritual benefits, trust, support, and connections to form social capital for members in their careers and lives.

4. CONCLUSION

Approaching Mother Goddess worship from social network theory contributes to clarifying the elements, internal structure, and operating principles of the network of Mother Goddess worship. The homophily is the linkage between actors in the network:

homophily in beliefs about Mother Goddess worship, admiration for the medium's power, ethnic culture, gender, age group, academic level, occupation, nationality, social context, etc. Moreover, the recent development of inbreeding homophily reflects the flourishing period of Mother Goddess worship in the flow of contemporary culture.

In the context of the strong development of the economy and the trend of strongly promoting international integration, the social network of Mother Goddess worship is a social resource for the medium and disciples to improve their roles and status, creating opportunities to reach out to the region and the world.

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