

# Motifs in Woodblock Prints and the Ritual of Ong Tao:

— With Emphasis on Ong Tao Woodblock Prints in Sinh Village —

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This paper will focus on motifs in Ong Tao woodblock prints and identify their characteristics based on interviews with their producers and comparisons of these artworks.

In each household of the Kinh ethnic group in Vietnam, the yearend ritual to send the Kitchen God called Ong Tao to heaven takes place on December 23. In the Hue region, this ritual means placing an Ong Tao statue that has been enshrined in an altar for the past year in a shrine or under a sacred tree to aid the god's rise to heaven. It also involves burning Ong Tao woodblock prints produced in Sinh, one of the small villages in Thua Thien Hue province. All traditional woodblock prints from the village are produced for ritual ceremonies, and the Ong Tao prints are no exception. These pieces of art are exclusively used in the Hue region, and are not distributed anywhere else.

There are two other types of Vietnamese folk woodblock prints depicting Ong Tao: Dong Ho woodcut paintings and French artist Henri Oger's works from the early 1900s that capture daily life and the art of living in northern Vietnam. These prints are different from those from Sinh village in their printing techniques and motifs.

The author conducted interviews with artists currently creating Ong Tao woodblock prints in the village, with the aims of identifying the characteristics of the artworks based on their motifs and exploring why the motifs in these woodblock prints are different from those depicted in Dong Ho woodcut paintings and works by Henri Oger. An analysis of the motifs should confirm that Ong Tao woodblock prints are produced for the ritual. Furthermore, the study will propose that the unique features of these prints from Sinh village can be attributed to the capital of the Nguyen Dynasty being located in the Hue region.