

# How are Vietnamese people devout? A case study of burning votive paper for the dead in Hanoi



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**Abstract** This study explores the Vietnamese people's deep devotion to their ancestors and the deep spiritual beliefs in their culture and traditions. The multivariate linear regression model is applied to test the research hypotheses with a sample size of 200 based on the random sampling method. Research results found that the religious practice of burning joss paper for the dead is common in many different regions of Vietnam, including Hanoi. Ancestor worship is a fundamental aspect of Vietnamese spirituality, where deceased ancestors are believed to continue influencing the lives of living descendants with good and bad luck. Therefore, Vietnamese people maintain a deep connection with their ancestors and perform rituals, especially burning votive paper, to pay respect and appease their ancestors.

**Keywords:** Vietnamese devotion, votive paper ritual, Hanoi tradition, ancestor worship, cultural Practices, spiritual beliefs

## 1. Introduction

Vietnamese cultural and spiritual customs exhibit intricate intertwining with a profound veneration for ancestors, constituting a foundational element within their belief framework (Van & Long, 2019). The practice of ancestor worship holds a sacred and enduring position within the hearts of the Vietnamese populace, transcending generations and molding their way of life into a cherished tradition. This religious observance of substantial significance, widely prevalent across diverse regions of Vietnam, manifests in the form of burning votive paper, colloquially known as "ghost money" or "spirit money" (Van, 2021). This longstanding ritual involves the ceremonial incineration of meticulously crafted paper artifacts, meticulously fashioned to replicate tangible possessions, ranging from currency and attire to residences and contemporary items such as automobiles and smartphones (Trung & Van, 2020). The symbolic essence underpinning these offerings rests upon the conviction that the smoke serves as a conduit for representations of material affluence to traverse into the spiritual realm, where departed ancestors can receive and make use of them in the afterlife (Cipolla, 2019). Through the act of immolating votive paper, the living populace expresses their deep reverence, affection, and aspiration to confer solace and prosperity upon their departed beloved in their eternal sojourn (Heathcote, 2015).

The bustling capital city of Hanoi stands as a central locus for cultural heritage and religious practices within the ambit of Vietnam. Amidst the dynamic thoroughfares and tranquil temples of Hanoi, the tradition of burning votive paper thrives during auspicious junctures, sacred festivities, and instances of familial commemoration (Filek-Gibson, 2018). These rites constitute an integral facet of the local ethos, resonating profoundly with the collective cognizance of the community (Shneiderman, 2015).

The act of incinerating votive paper transcends superficiality, encapsulating the profound bonds that unify the living and the departed (Thanh et al., 2023). The Vietnamese populace ardently believes that their ancestors perpetuate a substantial influence over their lives, attributing blessings and adversities to the favor or displeasure of their deceased progenitors (Tien, 2022). Consequently, the nexus with ancestors is nurtured through sincere supplications, offerings, and displays of filial piety (Van & Long, 2019).

The present study aspires to delve into the multifaceted ramifications of ancestor veneration and the spiritual import of burning votive paper. Beyond the palpable dimensions of this rite lies a resplendent tapestry of cultural heritage, communal cohesion, and personal spiritual maturation. Via a methodical exploration of these traditions, our intent is to elucidate the crux of Vietnamese identity and the evolving trajectory of ancestor veneration in a contemporary, interconnected milieu.

Through meticulous scrutiny of the dynamic interplay between tradition and modern influences, we strive to glean insights into how Vietnamese cultural and spiritual mores persevere, adapt, and serve as unwavering wellsprings of resilience, bridging the historical continuum to the present and affording a conduit to the future. This research holds the promise of



fostering a deeper comprehension of the profound devotion suffusing Vietnamese society, alongside its profound resonance within the spiritual, emotional, and communal well-being of its denizens.

## 2. Literature Reviews

### 2.1. *The devout*

The term "devout" operates as an adjective employed to connote an elevated degree of commitment, wholehearted dedication, and earnestness pertaining to an individual's religious or spiritual convictions and practices (Canda et al., 2019). An individual characterized as devout typically exhibits elevated levels of piety and steadfast adherence to their faith, engaging in regular acts of prayer, worship, and observance of religious precepts and rituals (Stokes, 2014). The quality of devoutness denotes an unflinching and persistent loyalty to one's religious values and principles (Bensaid et al., 2014).

The rationales underlying the embrace of devoutness by individuals encompass a spectrum of factors influenced by the interplay of individual, societal, and cultural elements (Borum, 2011). A considerable segment of devout individuals manifests an unwavering internal conviction and trust in the tenets, doctrines, and ideals of their religion. In such instances, their faith furnishes them with solace, direction, and meaning (Becker & Woessmann, 2018). Additionally, religious communities play a pivotal role in cultivating a sense of affiliation, reciprocal support, and shared principles, culminating in a profound sense of unity among like-minded adherents (Salami et al., 2019).

Moreover, an individual's religiosity is frequently shaped by the cultural milieu in which they were nurtured or by their family's religious heritage (Jeldtoft, 2014). Religious convictions and practices often endure across generations, establishing enduring religious customs (Suddaby et al., 2023). The religious context also serves to address existential queries, offering individuals a framework through which to comprehend the origin of life, the essence of being, and the realm beyond mortality (Lagerkvist, 2017).

For certain individuals, the impetus to adopt devoutness arises from a fear of divine retribution or unfavorable repercussions stemming from non-compliance with the fundamental tenets of their faith (Johnson & Krüger, 2004; Johnson, 2016). Moreover, personal encounters, such as transcendence, spiritual enlightenment, or witnessing extraordinary occurrences, can further fortify an individual's dedication and allegiance to their faith (Marshall, 2010).

The act of burning votive papers can also be seen as an extension of filial piety, especially within cultures where ancestral veneration is prominent (Canda et al., 2019). Devout individuals engage in this ritual as an act of respect and care for their ancestors, offering symbolic representations of material possessions that they believe will benefit their forebears in the afterlife (Salami et al., 2019). This offering reflects the devotee's desire to honor and provide for their ancestors, reinforcing the strong bond between the living and the departed. In essence, the relationship between the devout and votive paper burning is one characterized by deep spiritual devotion, cultural tradition, and a desire to establish a connection with the divine (Salami et al., 2019). Burning votive papers becomes a symbolic bridge between the tangible and the spiritual, embodying the devotee's commitment to their faith and their aspiration for a closer connection to the spiritual realm (Johnson & Krüger, 2004; Johnson, 2016).

### 2.2. *Ancestor Worship in Vietnamese Spirituality*

Ancestor worship occupies a central and enduring position within Vietnamese spirituality, playing a pivotal role in shaping the cultural identity of the Vietnamese people (Soucy, 2012). The deeply rooted belief in the continuous spiritual presence of departed ancestors engenders a profound reverence for them, forging an inseparable connection between the realms of the living and the departed (Walsham, 2010). Consequently, ancestral veneration significantly influences various aspects of Vietnamese daily life, guiding their spiritual practices and traditions (Van, 2020).

Throughout Vietnamese society, the ancestral connection is intricately interwoven across different life stages, extending from birth to death and even transcending beyond (Hinton et al., 2008). The transmission of ancestral wisdom and virtuous deeds through storytelling by elders fosters a strong sense of lineage and heritage within younger generations, ensuring the perpetuation of ancestral values and virtues over time (Donald, 2012).

As individuals traverse life's milestones, their ancestors continue to hold influential roles as guiding forces (Wood et al., 2018). During weddings, couples pay homage to their ancestors, seeking blessings for a prosperous and harmonious family life (Ozment, 2009). Similarly, Lunar New Year celebrations witness families assembling elaborate ancestral altars adorned with fresh flowers, fruits, and symbolic votive paper representations of material goods (Van & Long, 2019). These offerings symbolize the desire for abundance and prosperity for both the living and the deceased, underscoring the unbroken continuity of familial ties across different realms (High, 2013).

In adversity, the Vietnamese populace often turns to their ancestors for guidance and protection (Warner, 2010). Rituals and prayers are conducted with heartfelt devotion to invoke the benevolence and intercession of the departed (Brown, 2007). This spiritual connection provides solace and reassurance, fostering a sense of community as extended families and neighbors join in collective acts of veneration (Walsh, 2007).

Ancestor worship transcends private domains and extends into the public sphere, with temples and pagodas serving as sacred sanctuaries where devotees not only honor divine entities but also pay respects to their ancestors (Schattschneider, 2003). These religious sites act as cultural hubs, fostering a sense of belonging and shared heritage among the Vietnamese (Isakhan & Shahab, 2022).

The longstanding tradition of ancestor worship stands as a testament to the resilience of Vietnamese spirituality, skillfully integrating with modernity while maintaining an unwavering commitment to preserving cultural roots and venerating the wisdom and presence of ancestors (Nguyen, 2019). This profound spiritual connection continues to shape their ethical values and collective consciousness, exemplifying the enduring and evolving bond between the living and the departed (Sweeney & Fry, 2012).

Ancestor worship holds a significant place within Vietnamese spirituality, and burning votive papers is a tangible expression of this deeply rooted cultural and religious tradition. Ancestor worship, characterized by the veneration and reverence of deceased ancestors, is a cornerstone of Vietnamese belief systems (Soucy, 2012). This practice is intricately interwoven with the fabric of daily life, guiding familial relationships, cultural identity, and spiritual rituals (Van, 2020).

### 2.3. Votive paper serves as a ceremonial offering

Votive paper occupies a substantive and integral role within the religious practices of Vietnam, intricately interwoven into the tapestry of ancestor worship (Endres, 2009). This sacred medium, painstakingly fashioned from paper, assumes diverse forms, encompassing intricately folded semblances of currency and meticulously constructed replicas of material possessions (Weldon, 2005). The act of immolating these votive objects stands as a pivotal facet of religious rituals, symbolizing the profound belief in the spiritual continuum that binds the living and the deceased (DuBois, 1999).

Embedded within Vietnamese culture, burning votive paper finds its roots in the conviction that it functions as a symbolic conduit, facilitating the transference of material representations from the corporeal to the spiritual realm (Tai, 2001). As flames dance and votive paper smolders, these offerings are believed to transcend the terrestrial realm, bridging the chasm separating the living from the departed (Pyne, 2019). The Vietnamese hold unwavering faith that these sanctified items reach their ancestral destination, where departed forebears can accept, embrace, and utilize these offerings in the afterlife (Yuill, 2004).

The act of burning votive paper encapsulates profound meaning, surpassing the realm of mere physical combustion (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020). It represents a manifestation of filial piety and deep veneration for ancestors, symbolizing an authentic aspiration to honor and support them spiritually (Park & Muller, 2014). These offerings carry sincere wishes for the well-being, prosperity, and contentment of departed souls, embodying the timeless connection between successive generations (Barrett, 2013).

Through the ceremonial incineration of votive paper, the Vietnamese reaffirm their spiritual linkage with their forebears, nurturing a sense of continuity and interdependence that bridges historical and contemporary realms (De la Portilla, 2009). This sacred rite underscores the belief that departed ancestors remain integral to the lives of their living descendants, guiding and influencing their trajectories even from the spiritual sphere (Olupona, 2014). Furthermore, this practice serves as a testament to the enduring cultural heritage ardently preserved by the Vietnamese, transmitting the teachings and wisdom of their ancestors across successive generations (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Using the act of burning votive paper, the Vietnamese signify their unwavering belief in the transcendent potency of tradition, the enduring character of familial bonds, and the profound interconnectedness bridging this world and the realm beyond (Cabrera, 2014).

### 2.4. Filial Piety and the Ritual of Votive Paper Burning

Filial piety, a revered virtue deeply ingrained in the cultural tapestry of Vietnam, assumes a prominent position as a guiding principle significantly shaping the ethical compass and conduct of its populace (Schütte & Ciarlante, 2016). Rooted in the teachings of Confucius, this esteemed value places considerable emphasis on the profound respect, unwavering care, and deep reverence children extend to their parents, grandparents, and ancestors (Thanh, Thuy, Thao, & Huong, 2023). By means of these intricately fashioned paper facsimiles of material possessions, the Vietnamese endeavor to provide for the well-being and ease of their ancestors in the afterlife, extending filial duty beyond the boundaries of mortal existence (Tien, 2022).

The presentation of votive paper serves as a potent emblem of continuity, signifying an unbroken connection that persists resiliently across the realms of life and death. The act of igniting these ritualistic offerings becomes an expression of genuine affection and remembrance, as the Vietnamese belief maintains that the smoke carries their sentiments of devotion to the ancestral domain (Tien, 2022). This symbolic affiliation denotes that filial piety transcends temporal and spatial constraints, reaching the spiritual plane where ancestors perpetuate their influence and blessings upon the lives of their descendants (Hüwelmeier, 2016). Therefore, the act of burning votive paper embodies a profound spiritual communion between the living and the departed, spanning the gap between the tangible and metaphysical worlds (Hüwelmeier, 2016). It illustrates the deep impact of filial piety on Vietnamese culture, reflecting the society's dedication to conserving ancestral traditions and nurturing a sense of unity among family members and communities.

Through the prism of filial piety, the Vietnamese illuminate an enduring verity - that familial bonds surmount time, space, and even death itself. The act of presenting votive paper, deeply rooted in this cherished virtue, propels forth the enduring legacy of their forebears, safeguarding their sagacity and values for successive generations (Tien, 2022).

### 2.5. Symbolism of Burning Votive Paper

The ritual of burning votive paper emerges as a poignant entreaty to ensure the well-being and prosperity of both the immediate and forthcoming generations of the family (Hüwelmeier, 2016). It serves as a symbol of profound interconnectedness, where the spirits of the departed persist in overseeing and bestowing blessings upon the lives of their progeny, disseminating their sagacity and directing their trajectories.

Furthermore, this cherished custom reinforces the significance of familial bonds and the perpetuity of lineage. The act of venerating ancestors through offerings of votive paper solidifies the intergenerational connection, prompting the Vietnamese to reflect upon their origins and the erudition bequeathed across successive generations (Hüwelmeier, 2016). This practice nurtures a sense of cohesion, not solely within the nuclear family unit but also within the broader community, as individuals convene to partake in these communal acts of devotion (Scott, 2007). The symbolism intrinsic to the burning of votive paper encapsulates the crux of Vietnamese spirituality, encapsulating the virtues of love, reverence, and gratitude that define their cultural identity (Hüwelmeier, 2016). This time-honored practice traverses temporal boundaries, emerging as an enduring testament to the legacy of ancestors, preserving their influence and remembrance within the hearts of the Vietnamese populace. As the votive paper elegantly transitions into ashes, the ceremony metamorphoses into a potent manifestation of life's impermanence and the continuous nature of the human spirit (Jellema, 2007). It serves as a reminder of existence's transient character and the perpetual bond connecting the living with their forebears, ensuring that the departed spirits endure eternally in the lives and hearts of those they have left behind (Jellema, 2007).

### 2.6. Fostering Community and Social Cohesion

The practice of burning votive paper assumes a substantial and cohesive role within Vietnamese families, fostering a robust sense of community and social solidarity. These sacred rituals serve as poignant occasions that unite families, surpassing individual identities while reinforcing the ties that bind them to their cultural legacy and ancestral heritage (Kwon, 2007). During the collective act of incinerating votive paper, Vietnamese families cultivate a profound shared encounter that resonates deeply with each member. Gathered around ancestral altars adorned with incense and votive paper offerings, family members join hands in rendering homage to their departed ancestors (Hüwelmeier, 2016). In these instances, the demarcations of age, societal status, and individual disparities recede, supplanted by a collective sense of purpose and reverence for their progenitors.

Beyond the realm of the familial unit, the practice of burning votive paper nurtures a broader sense of community. Families frequently assemble during religious festivals and momentous commemorations, congregating at temples and pagodas to partake in these sanctified ceremonies as a unified assembly (Hüwelmeier, 2016). This shared devotion forges a potent sense of affiliation, as individuals acknowledge their position within a larger spiritual community, bound by shared values and beliefs.

The sense of community and social cohesion fostered by burning votive paper extends beyond familial bonds and local communities. It weaves a tapestry of interconnection throughout Vietnamese society, uniting individuals from varied walks of life, regions, and backgrounds beneath the overarching canopy of cultural heritage (Hüwelmeier, 2016). This unity surpasses geographical confines, nurturing national identity and pride as Vietnamese individuals collectively embrace their ancestral origins and historical legacy.

Through these rituals, Vietnamese families underscore the significance of preserving and treasuring their cultural customs. They derive solace and fortitude from the understanding that they form part of an unbroken continuum spanning generations, and the teachings and values of their ancestors persist in guiding their lives. The act of burning votive paper emerges as a potent emblem of continuity, a thread weaving together the past, present, and future within a tapestry of interconnectedness (Hüwelmeier, 2016). As the votive paper offerings metamorphose into smoke and ashes, the unity and shared devotion within Vietnamese families and communities are further cemented (Kwon, 2007). This age-old tradition remains a testimony to the enduring potency of cultural heritage, molding not solely individual existences but also the collective identity of the Vietnamese populace (Hüwelmeier, 2016).

Based on literature reviews, we formulated the following research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Votive paper as a ceremonial offering has a substantial and beneficial effect on ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Filial piety and votive paper burning have a substantial and beneficial effect on ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The symbolism of burning votive paper has a substantial and beneficial effect on ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Fostering community and social cohesion has a substantial and beneficial effect on ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality.

Based on the above research hypotheses, the following research model is proposed (Figure 1):

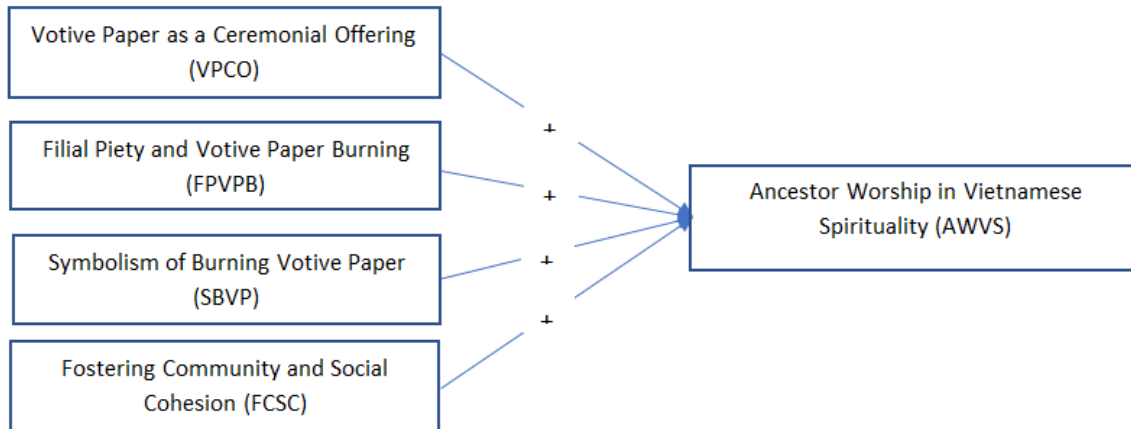


Figure 1 Proposed Research Model.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Instrument and participant

This research endeavor transpired amidst Vietnam's Lunar New Year celebration in February 2023, within the city of Hanoi, acknowledged as the capital of Vietnam and renowned for its multitude of pagodas. Within this cultural milieu, the central point of investigation lies in the pagoda, a locus of profound import for the Vietnamese populace, particularly accentuated during the Lunar New Year. Notably, this period witnesses the venerable tradition of the ritual burning of yellow paper codes, as articulated by Tien (2022). The study enlisted the participation of a cohort comprising 200 adults, selected through a random sampling procedure.

To procure the requisite data, the researchers orchestrated a collaborative effort in conjunction with five esteemed experts specializing in religious studies and sociology. A meticulously designed two-part questionnaire was formulated to facilitate the data collection process, drawing upon prior scholarship for guidance (Rabren & Johnson, 2010). The initial section of the questionnaire served as a demographic inventory, soliciting essential information about respondents' age, gender, educational attainment, and occupational status (Lauser, 2010). The subsequent section comprised a set of twenty questions, categorized into five distinct factors, tailored to gauge the religious practices of the Vietnamese populace about the act of burning votive papers (Van, 2021). These factors encompassed the role of ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality, the ceremonial significance of votive paper as an offering, the interplay between filial piety and votive paper burning, the symbolism inherent in the act of burning votive paper, and the role of votive paper burning in fostering community cohesion and social solidarity (Ginovart Cid, 2020).

To align the questionnaire with the cultural nuances of the Vietnamese context, two linguists undertook a modification process, as delineated in prior scholarship (Ginovart Cid, 2020). Subsequently, a pre-testing phase involving forty individuals, selected to mirror the demographic composition of the study population, was executed. The outcome of this pre-test phase informed minor revisions aimed at optimizing the structure and comprehensibility of the questions, culminating in the final iteration of the Vietnamese version of the survey instrument (DeVellis, 2017; see Appendix).

A sample size of two hundred Hanoi residents was randomly drawn to partake in the study, with the distribution of questionnaires administered by a designated member of the research team. Respondents were instructed to indicate their responses using pencil, adhering to established protocols within survey research (Van, 2021). Notably, the study achieved a commendable 100% response rate, with all two hundred administered surveys returned and completed (Lauser, 2010). The demographic characteristics of the study participants are presented in Table 1."

#### 3.2. Reliability analysis

In the evaluation of survey data's quality and accuracy, reliability analysis stands as a crucial procedural step. The fundamental objective of reliability analysis lies in appraising the consistency and stability exhibited by a measuring instrument or survey questionnaire across various temporal and contextual conditions. In the present investigation, Cronbach's alpha was employed to ascertain the extent of internal consistency reliability. The criteria applied to assess the outcomes of the Cronbach's alpha analysis are contingent upon subjectivity on the specific research context and the variables constituting the questionnaire or test under examination (Cortina, 1993; Kline, 2015).



**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of survey participants.

|            |                 | Education |         |         |         |       |         |
|------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
|            |                 | Bachelor  |         | College |         | Other |         |
|            |                 | Count     | Row N % | Count   | Row N % | Count | Row N % |
| Age        | 23 - 30 years   | 21        | 48.8%   | 16      | 37.2%   | 6     | 14.0%   |
|            | 31- 40 years    | 36        | 46.2%   | 28      | 35.9%   | 14    | 17.9%   |
|            | 41- 50 years    | 22        | 44.9%   | 22      | 44.9%   | 5     | 10.2%   |
|            | Over 50 years   | 12        | 40.0%   | 13      | 43.3%   | 5     | 16.7%   |
| Gender     | female          | 59        | 43.7%   | 55      | 40.7%   | 21    | 15.6%   |
|            | male            | 32        | 49.2%   | 24      | 36.9%   | 9     | 13.8%   |
| Occupation | Manager         | 12        | 54.5%   | 6       | 27.3%   | 4     | 18.2%   |
|            | other           | 13        | 44.8%   | 13      | 44.8%   | 3     | 10.3%   |
|            | Small bussiness | 33        | 47.1%   | 26      | 37.1%   | 11    | 15.7%   |
|            | Teacher         | 9         | 32.1%   | 14      | 50.0%   | 5     | 17.9%   |
|            | Worker          | 24        | 47.1%   | 20      | 39.2%   | 7     | 13.7%   |

Generally, a coefficient value of 0.7 or higher is conventionally interpreted as indicative of a pronounced degree of internal consistency reliability and, thereby, is deemed an acceptable threshold for a substantial proportion of survey instruments (Cortina, 1993; Kline, 2015). A coefficient within the range of 0.6 to 0.7 might be deemed acceptable for particular surveys. However, it may suggest that certain questions within the questionnaire are not effectively contributing to the measurement of the underlying construct, warranting potential modifications or exclusions (Cortina, 1993; Kline, 2015). Conversely, a coefficient falling below 0.6 is typically considered suboptimal, implying that the questions within the questionnaire may not adequately capture the same underlying concept and may necessitate revisions (Kline, 2015).

Table 2 presents the results of testing the reliability and validity of the research questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all items were more significant than 0.7, indicating the internally consistent reliability of the questionnaire (Hair et al., 2019). The validity of the questionnaire was also confirmed through construct validity testing, including exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). All items in the questionnaire were found to have good convergent validity, indicating that they are measuring the same construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also established, as each item was more strongly correlated with its respective construct than other constructs in the questionnaire (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). The study thus demonstrated a high level of reliability and validity in the questionnaire used to measure the factors affecting sustainable tourism development in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

**Table 2** Summary of Reliability.

| Scales | Number of variables observed | Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha) | The correlation coefficient of the smallest total variable |
|--------|------------------------------|---|--|
| AWVS   | 4                            | 0.735                                     | 0.491  |
| VPCO   | 4                            | 0.776                                     | 0.531  |
| FPVP   | 4                            | 0.784                                     | 0.524  |
| SBVP   | 4                            | 0.781                                     | 0.573  |
| FCSC   | 4                            | 0.754                                     | 0.513  |

### 3.3. Factor analysis

Factor analysis constitutes a widely employed statistical technique within social sciences, serving as a valuable instrument for researchers to discern latent factors or dimensions inherent within a cluster of variables. This analytical process involves the reduction of variable count within a dataset by identifying patterns of inter-correlation among them, consequently arranging them into a more concise collection of underlying factors (Gorsuch, 1990). Determining the suitable number of factors to be extracted is frequently guided by scrutinizing scree plots and eigenvalues (Fabrigar et al., 1999).

The outcomes of a factor analysis exercise can facilitate the refinement of research inquiries, formulation of hypotheses, and construction of models with greater precision (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, they offer insights into the pivotal factors responsible for elucidating the interrelationships among variables within a dataset (Chen, 2008).

Table 3 presents the results of the factor analysis conducted to validate the research questionnaire. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient (KMO) = 0.891 (>0.5), indicating that the observed variables are correlated in the population and are, therefore, suitable for factor analysis. The factor loading coefficients for all variables  $\geq 0.5$ , indicating the validity of the factor analysis. The criterion for practical significance of factor loading is a minimum level = 0.3, an essential level = 0.4, and a practical level = 0.5. Table 3 shows that all variables have factor loading coefficients  $\geq 0.5$ , demonstrating the validity of the factor analysis. The total load squared extraction for the six factors = 57.635% (>50%), indicating that the extracted factors can explain a significant amount of variance in the data. The initial eigenvalue of the six factors = 1.128 (> 1.00), indicating that the extracted factors have eigenvalues more



significant than one and are, therefore, valid. These results demonstrate the suitability and validity of exploratory factor analysis for the proposed research model (Hair et al., 2019; Marôco, 2010; Tabachnick et al., 2013). Three items, precisely questions 4, 5, and 10, were excluded from the regression model because their factor loadings were  $\leq 0.50$ , indicating a weak association with the proposed model.

**Table 3** Result of factor analysis.

|       | Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup> |      |      |      |      |
|-------|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
|       | Component                             |      |      |      |      |
|       | 1                                     | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |
| FPVP1 | .803                                  |      |      |      |      |
| FPVP4 | .742                                  |      |      |      |      |
| FPVP2 | .697                                  |      |      |      |      |
| FPVP3 | .618                                  |      |      |      |      |
| FCSC2 |                                       | .732 |      |      |      |
| FCSC1 |                                       | .661 |      |      |      |
| FCSC3 |                                       | .645 |      |      |      |
| FCSC4 |                                       | .622 |      |      |      |
| SBVP1 |                                       |      | .735 |      |      |
| SBVP4 |                                       |      | .674 |      |      |
| SBVP2 |                                       |      | .672 |      |      |
| SBVP3 |                                       |      | .665 |      |      |
| VPCO4 |                                       |      |      | .758 |      |
| VPCO3 |                                       |      |      | .685 |      |
| VPCO2 |                                       |      |      | .685 |      |
| VPCO1 |                                       |      |      | .647 |      |
| AWVS4 |                                       |      |      |      | .739 |
| AWVS1 |                                       |      |      |      | .716 |
| AWVS2 |                                       |      |      |      | .619 |
| AWVS3 |                                       |      |      |      | .590 |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

b. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) = 0.904

c. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square =1436.518; df=190; Sig.=0.000)

Total Variance Explained (Initial Eigenvalues =1.092; Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings = 60.852)

### 3.4. Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis is a statistical method used to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), it is a way to quantify the association between two variables and to determine if changes in one variable are associated with changes in another variable. The correlation coefficient, also known as Pearson's correlation coefficient, is a measure of the strength of the linear relationship between two variables and ranges from -1 to 1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). According to Hair et. (2019), -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, 1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation. Correlation analysis can provide valuable insights into the relationships between variables and can be used to make predictions about one variable based on the values of another variable (Gronlund & Linn, 2014). However, it is important to note that correlation does not imply causality and that other factors may be contributing to the relationship between the variables (Agresti & Finlay, 2009).

The results of the correlation analysis (Figure 2) show that, with a 95% significance level, the correlation coefficient indicates that the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable is statistically significant (Sig. = 0.05). The magnitude of the correlation coefficients ensures that the variables are used to analyze the multiple linear regression model and the variable control regression in the next step (Seraphin, Gowreesunkar, & Platania, 2019; Larose, 2014). The correlation analysis allows for the examination of the relationships between variables in a quantitative manner (Field, 2018). Additionally, the significance level of the correlation coefficient is an essential element of the correlation analysis, as it determines whether or not the relationship between the variables is statistically significant (Larose, 2014). Furthermore, the use of multiple linear regression and variable control regression in the next step allows for the identification of the factors that most significantly impact sustainable tourism development (Seraphin, Gowreesunkar, & Platania, 2019). Multiple linear regression enables the identification of the independent variables that are most significantly related to the dependent variable, while variable control regression allows for the control of extraneous variables that may influence the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Field, 2018; Larose, 2014).



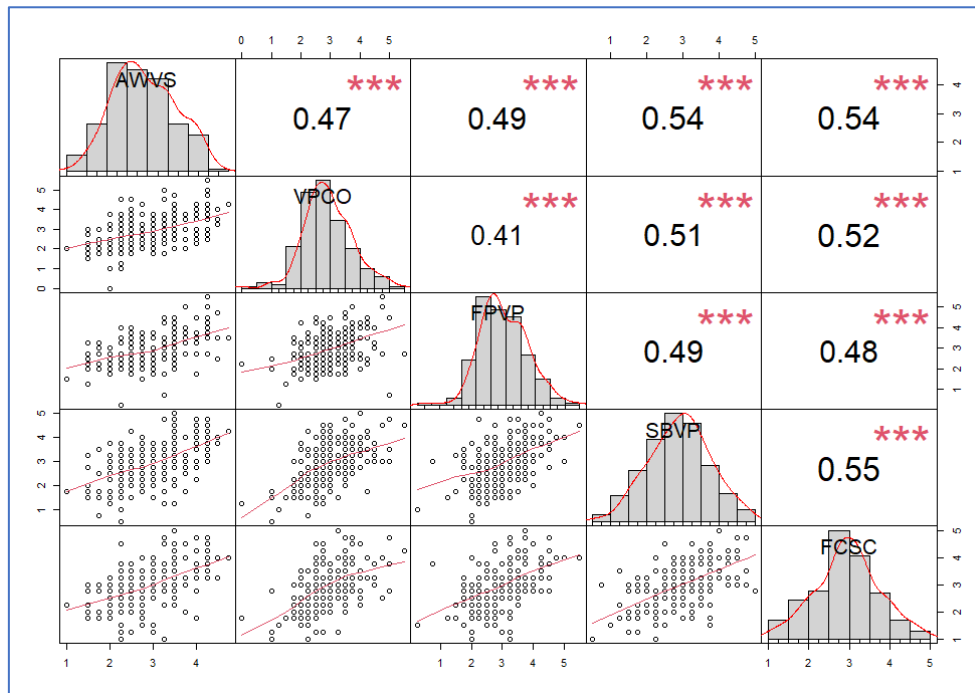


Figure 2 Correlation analysis results.

### 3.5. Multivariate linear regression analysis

Multivariate linear regression analysis is a statistical technique that investigates the intricate associations between multiple independent variables and a singular dependent variable (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Within this regression analysis framework, a linear equation is employed to formulate a representation of the interplay between the independent variables and the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2019). The primary objective of multivariate linear regression pertains to the estimation of coefficients for each independent variable, which encapsulates the magnitude and directionality of their relationship with the dependent variable (Greene, 2003). These coefficients subsequently enable the formulation of predictions concerning the dependent variable, predicated upon the values of the independent variables (Hair et al., 2019). In the domains of the social sciences, economics, and various other fields, multivariate linear regression serves as a prevalent methodological approach for unraveling the intricate connections between variables and for engendering forecasts based on these interrelations (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992).

The results of the multivariable linear regression analysis (Table 4) indicate that the regression model is valid to explain the results, as evidenced by the statistical significance of the F-test (p.value = 0.000, df = 5.194) (Hair et al., 2019). The model also does not have multicollinearity, as the variables in the model have a VIF of 1.436 (Kutner et al., 2005). This suggests that the variables are not highly correlated, and the regression coefficients can be estimated with high precision.

Table 4 Results of multivariate linear regression analysis.

| Dependent variable  |   |
|---------------------|---|
| AWVS                |   |
| Model               |   |
| VPCC                | 0.138** (0.063)                                     |
| FPVP                | 0.183*** (0.063)                                    |
| SBVP                | 0.214*** (0.064)                                    |
| FCSC                | 0.226*** (0.069)                                    |
| Constant            | 0.698*** (0.196)                                    |
| Observations        | 200   |
| R2                  | 0.419   |
| Adjusted R2         | 0.407   |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.590 (df = 195)                                    |
| F Statistic         | 35.137*** (df = 4; 195)                             |
| VIF:                | VPCC = 1.54 ; FPVP = 1.46; SBVP = 1.70 ; FCSC= 1.72 |

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

## 4. Results



Our research findings, as depicted in Table 3, provide empirical evidence supporting a statistically significant and positive influence associated with the utilization of votive paper as a ceremonial offering on the practice of ancestor worship within the context of Vietnamese spirituality. This assertion is corroborated by the regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.138$ ) and a significance level of 95% ( $p$ -value = 0.001), supporting the validation of Hypothesis 1. This outcome aligns with previous research that underscores the dual nature of this profound ritual, as it not only reinforces enduring intergenerational bonds but also fortifies communal unity (Van, 2020). The act of offering these symbolic gifts is indicative of familial and communal respect for ancestors, ensuring their continued well-being in the spiritual realm (Van, 2020). Consequently, votive paper emerges as an indispensable and revered component of Vietnamese spirituality, enhancing the practice of ancestor worship and safeguarding the intricate cultural fabric of Vietnam (Van & Long, 2019).

Further analysis (Table 3) reveals a statistically significant and positively correlated association between the expressions of filial piety and the act of votive paper burning, both of which manifest a significant and beneficial role within the context of ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality. This relationship is underscored by the regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.183$ ) and the associated significance level of 95% ( $p$ -value = 0.000), resolutely upholding Hypothesis 2. This result is similar to the previous finding that this cultural virtue manifests through burning votive paper, as families offer symbolic material goods to their departed loved ones (Tai, 2001). This practice not only embodies the Confucian principle of filial piety but also serves as a conduit for conveying respect, love, and enduring connections between the living and the deceased (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). Votive paper-burning rituals, often performed collectively during special occasions, foster strong family and community bonds, reinforcing the cultural values that underpin Vietnamese spirituality (Endres, 2009). Together, filial piety and votive paper burning form a symbiotic relationship that enriches and sustains the practice of ancestor worship in Vietnam, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and the spiritual fabric of the nation (Pyne, 2019).

The research outcomes (Table 3) uncover a statistically significant and advantageous connection linking the symbolism attributed to the act of burning votive paper with its profound influence on ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality. This assertion is substantiated by the regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.214$ ) and the associated significance level of 95% ( $p$ -value = 0.000), thereby conclusively validating Hypothesis 3. This result is similar to the previous finding that the symbolism of burning votive paper holds profound significance in ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality, and its impact is both substantial and beneficial (Hinton et al., 2008). The act of offering votive paper, meticulously crafted to resemble various material goods, symbolizes the provision of essential items for one's ancestors in the afterlife (Scott, 2007). This ritual bridges the gap between the living and the deceased, signifying a spiritual connection that endures beyond death (Jellema, 2007). The symbolic gesture of providing for one's ancestors reinforces the cultural values of filial piety, respect, and devotion that are integral to Vietnamese spirituality (Van & Long, 2019). In essence, the symbolism embedded in the burning of votive paper enriches ancestor worship in Vietnam, ensuring its continued vitality and cultural significance (Hüwelmeier, 2016).

Furthermore, our comprehensive analysis (Table 3) demonstrates that the cultivation of community bonds and the promotion of social cohesion exert a substantial and beneficial effect on the practice of ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality. This assertion is solidified by the regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.226$ ) and the associated significance level of 95% ( $p$ -value = 0.000), thereby firmly affirming Hypothesis 4. This result is similar to the previous finding that Ancestor worship in Vietnam is not merely an individual affair but a communal one (Hinton et al., 2008). When families and communities come together to perform rituals like burning votive paper, it strengthens social ties, fosters a sense of unity, and reinforces shared cultural values (Trung & Van, 2020). These collective acts of devotion not only honor the memory of ancestors but also create a space for intergenerational dialogue, storytelling, and the transmission of cultural traditions. This communal aspect of ancestor worship not only deepens the spiritual connection with one's forebears but also contributes to a stronger and more tightly knit social fabric, preserving the rich cultural heritage of Vietnam for generations to come (Thanh et al., 2023).

## 5. Discussion

Our research findings substantially contribute to our understanding of the intricate dynamics within the practice of ancestor worship in Vietnamese spirituality (Walsham, 2010). Our study confirms the statistically significant and positive impact of using votive paper as a ceremonial offering in this context (Hinton et al., 2008). This discovery underscores the central role of votive paper in expressing devotion to ancestors and solidifies its cultural significance within Vietnamese spirituality (Van & Long, 2019).

Furthermore, our analysis reveals a statistically significant and positive correlation between the expression of filial piety and the act of burning votive paper (Isakhan & Shahab, 2022). This suggests that burning votive paper is a tangible manifestation of individuals' deep respect and reverence for their ancestors, further reinforcing its cultural and spiritual importance (Hinton et al., 2008).

Additionally, our research identifies a statistically significant connection between the symbolism of burning votive paper and its profound influence on ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality (Nguyen, 2019). This indicates that the symbolism inherent in this practice carries deep cultural and spiritual meaning, enhancing the overall spiritual experience of ancestor worship (Sweeney & Fry, 2012).

Moreover, our comprehensive analysis emphasizes the substantial and positive effect of cultivating community bonds and promoting social cohesion on ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality (Weldon, 2005). These findings underscore the communal nature of ancestor worship and highlight the significant role of social connections in strengthening and perpetuating this venerable tradition (Clark & Szerszynski, 2020).

In summary, our empirical findings significantly advance our comprehension of the multifaceted dynamics underlying the practice of ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality (Barrett, 2013). The statistical significance of the regression coefficients emphasizes the significant roles played by these distinct factors in shaping and enriching the enduring tradition of ancestor worship, which stands as an integral facet of Vietnam's cultural and spiritual tapestry (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001).

The ritual of burning votive paper to honor the departed is a compelling testament to the profound devotion of the Vietnamese people to their ancestors and spiritual traditions. This religious practice enriches their cultural heritage, and its significance transcends generations, forging a deep and meaningful connection between the living and the departed (McLeod & Nguyen, 2001). An in-depth understanding of the essence of this tradition contributes to a deeper appreciation of Vietnamese spirituality and its enduring influence on the fabric of their society (Tien, 2022). For future research, exploring the evolving nature of this practice in contemporary Vietnamese culture and its intersection with modernization could offer valuable insights into preserving cultural and spiritual traditions in a changing (Hüwelmeier, 2016).

The study is encumbered by several limitations that necessitate consideration. Firstly, the potential for sampling bias exists attributed to the study's modest sample size and its specific focus on Hanoi during February 2923 (Hüwelmeier, 2016). Future research initiatives should endeavor to incorporate more extensive and diversified samples to enhance the generalizability of findings. The adoption of a cross-sectional design, while informative, restricts insights into the temporal evolution of votive burning behavior. A more dynamic perspective can be achieved through the employment of longitudinal studies. Furthermore, the cultural specificity of the study to Vietnamese spirituality underscores the importance of caution when extrapolating findings to other contexts, thereby accentuating the significance of conducting comparative studies across diverse cultures (Suddaby et al., 2023). Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data introduces a potential source of bias, suggesting the merit of complementing surveys with qualitative methods such as interviews (Thanh et al., 2023). The establishment of causality remains elusive, suggesting that future research endeavors explore experimental designs or qualitative investigations to elucidate causal relationships (Salami et al., 2019). Finally, a promising avenue for future research lies in incorporating a historical perspective to trace the evolution of ancestor worship and the exploration of modernization and globalization effects, thereby enriching our comprehension of this cultural practice.

## 6. Conclusions

Our research findings provide compelling evidence regarding the significant influence of votive paper utilization as a ceremonial offering in ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality. This emphasizes the critical role of votive paper in expressing devotion to ancestors and underscores its cultural significance (Kwon, 2007). However, it is essential to note that our study's correlational nature calls for further exploration to establish causality (Suddaby et al., 2023). Additionally, our research identifies a noteworthy correlation between expressions of filial piety and the act of votive paper burning, implying that the burning of votive paper serves as a tangible demonstration of respect for ancestors (Kwon, 2007). Nevertheless, our reliance on a cross-sectional approach necessitates future longitudinal studies to elucidate the evolving dynamics of these variables over time (Salami et al., 2019).

Furthermore, our research reveals the profound influence of the symbolism inherent in votive paper burning on ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality. This finding highlights the deep cultural and spiritual significance of the practice. However, we acknowledge the necessity for further investigation into regional nuances in the symbolism associated with votive paper burning (Van, 2020). Additionally, our study underscores the positive impact of community bonds and social cohesion on ancestor worship, underscoring its communal nature (Jellema, 2007). However, the specific mechanisms through which social cohesion influences ancestor worship remain an area warranting more in-depth exploration in future research (Thanh et al., 2023). In summary, our empirical findings significantly contribute to the comprehension of ancestor worship within Vietnamese spirituality while recognizing the importance of addressing limitations and the potential for future research to delve into causality, explore cultural intricacies, and uncover the underlying mechanisms at play (Canda et al., 2019). This research emphasizes the enduring importance of votive paper burning and its broader cultural context in the tapestry of Vietnamese spirituality, thereby paving the way for further inquiries in this field.

## Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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