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COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN COASTAL NORTHEAST VIETNAM THROUGH FESTIVALS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF QUANG NINH AND HAI PHONG COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how collective memories are produced, stabilized, and negotiated through festival practices, using a comparative design across four cases: Tra Co Communal House Festival and Cua Ong Temple Festival (Quang Ninh), and Do Son Buffalo-Fighting Festival and the Hoang Chau Xa Ma/Procession Festival (Hai Phong). Drawing on collective memory theory and performative/embodied approaches, we develop a Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) framework linking narratives, ritual scripts, sacred geographies, affective performance, and governance/media conditions. Methodologically, the study triangulates participant observation, semi-structured interviews (ritual specialists, elders, fishers, youth, and local officials), and documentary sources (local histories, heritage dossiers, regulations, and media texts). Findings reveal patterned variation in the dominant memory clusters performed: some festivals foreground settlement origins and communal legitimacy; others emphasize protection through hero cults, public discipline and spectacle, or maritime and border imaginaries. We further identify durability mechanisms – calendrical repetition, route-based spatial anchoring, embodied affect, narrative authorization, and mediated circulation via tourism and digital platforms – while highlighting tensions around commercialization, safety governance, and representational politics. The article offers the FMA as a transferable analytic model for studying coastal festival memory-making in Southeast Asia and proposes implications for heritage governance that balance ritual integrity, community agency, and sustainable cultural tourism.

KEYWORDS: Collective memory; festival studies; coastal communities; Northeast Vietnam; Quang Ninh; Hai Phong.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coastal Northeast Vietnam – stretching across the maritime and island landscapes of Quang Ninh and Hai Phong—is a region where everyday life is historically shaped by the sea’s ambivalence: the sea sustains livelihoods while also producing uncertainty through storms, accidents, seasonal scarcity, and shifting routes of trade and mobility. Alongside these material conditions, coastal communities sustain a dense repertoire of beliefs, sacred sites, and annual festivals that are widely visible in contemporary heritage and tourism economies. Yet festivals are not merely “cultural events.” They are also recurring public moments in which communities remember themselves: they revisit narratives of origins, reaffirm moral hierarchies, map meaningful places, and transmit practical and ethical knowledge across generations. In this sense, festivals are a privileged lens for examining how collective memory is constituted and renewed under modern pressures of urbanization, heritagization, and mediatization.

Classic work in collective memory argues that remembering is never purely individual; it is socially framed and anchored in group life. Halbwachs proposed that memory depends on social frameworks that organize what can be recalled, how it is interpreted, and why it matters. Later theorists refined this insight by emphasizing institutions, symbols, and media. Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish between communicative memory—everyday, intergenerational recollection—and cultural memory, which is formalized in durable forms such as rituals, monuments, texts, and sanctioned narratives. Nora’s “sites of memory” highlight the spatial and material anchoring of remembrance, while Connerton emphasizes embodied practices and commemorative ceremonies through which societies remember “in the body.” Together, these perspectives suggest that festivals are not peripheral to memory; they are a central technology of memory because they bind together narratives (what is remembered), practices (how it is remembered), and authority (who legitimizes remembrance) (Halbwachs, 1992).

Festival scholarship further supports this view by treating festivals as arenas of public pedagogy and moral order, as well as sites of negotiation over authenticity and community identity. Ritual repetition stabilizes shared meanings, while collective performance generates emotional intensities that Durkheim famously described as collective effervescence. At the same time, festivals are not static inheritances; they are reworked under

new conditions. Heritage policies, festival committees, tourism markets, and digital media reshape which elements become prominent, which are minimized, and which new audiences are addressed. Therefore, analyzing festivals as “memory-making institutions” requires attention not only to ritual content but also to governance, media circulation, and the tensions between vernacular and official narratives.

This article focuses on coastal communities in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong for both theoretical and empirical reasons. The Northeast is simultaneously a maritime zone and a historical gateway—an area linked to commerce, migration, and defense imaginaries. Its communal houses, temples, ports, and sea-routes provide a particularly rich “memory landscape” in which sacred geography and practical seafaring knowledge intertwine. Meanwhile, Quang Ninh and Hai Phong provide a productive comparative setting: both are coastal, yet they differ in administrative histories, tourism development trajectories, and public visibility of certain festivals. Such contrasts allow us to examine how similar memory concerns—livelihood risk, protection, communal solidarity—are expressed through distinct ritual forms and institutional arrangements.

Empirically, the article examines four cases that are widely recognized locally and regionally: the Tra Co Communal House Festival and the Cua Ong Temple Festival in Quang Ninh, and the Do Son Buffalo-Fighting Festival and the Hoang Chau Procession Festival in Hai Phong. These festivals are not treated as representative in a statistical sense; rather, they are analytically valuable because each foregrounds a different configuration of memory work: settlement narratives and communal organization; hero cults and protective moral exemplars; high-intensity competitive performance and communal discipline; and sea-oriented processions linking sacred authority to maritime livelihoods. Studying them comparatively makes it possible to identify recurring memory clusters across sites while also tracing local variations in emphasis and form.

The article advances two core arguments. First, festivals in coastal Northeast Vietnam function as assemblages of memory, integrating multiple layers: narrative (myths, origin stories, hero cults), ritual (offerings, processions, calendrical cycles), spatial (sacred sites, routes, thresholds such as river mouths and ports), embodied performance (races, contests, music, choreography), and governance/media (committees, regulations, heritage framing, tourism and digital circulation). These layers do not simply “express” memory; they actively produce it by selecting, repeating, and authorizing particular

versions of the past. Second, the durability of collective memory in these communities depends on specific mechanisms: calendrical repetition that refreshes shared remembrance; spatial anchoring through processional routes that materialize local history; affective intensity that binds participants through pride, fear, exhilaration, or reverence; narrative authorization through ritual specialists and institutions; and mediatization, which can extend memory to broader publics while also transforming it into spectacle or brand.

To operationalize these arguments, the study adopts a comparative qualitative design combining (i) participant observation during festival periods and preparatory phases, (ii) semi-structured interviews with elders, ritual practitioners, fishers, youth, festival organizers, and local officials, and (iii) documentary analysis of local histories, temple records where accessible, festival regulations, and media materials. Data are analyzed through thematic coding guided by a conceptual framework termed the Festival-Memory Assemblage, which helps map how different components interact to generate distinctive memory outcomes. The analysis is organized around two questions: What collective memories are performed in these festivals, and how do ritual, space, embodiment, and governance make such memories socially durable?

The article addresses the following research questions:

1. What memory narratives and moral values are foregrounded in the selected festivals in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong?
2. Through which ritual, spatial, and embodied mechanisms are these memories stabilized and transmitted across generations?
3. How do heritage governance, tourism, and digital media reshape the content, authority, and ownership of collective memory? (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009)
4. What similarities and differences emerge across the two provincial contexts, and what do they imply for theorizing collective memory in coastal settings?

The contribution of the study is threefold. Theoretically, it brings collective memory theory into dialogue with festival studies by treating festivals as institutionalized “memory work” rather than as symbolic reflections of an already-given identity. Empirically, it provides a comparative account of coastal Northeast Vietnam that highlights the region’s distinctive combination of maritime livelihoods, sacred geographies, and public heritage dynamics. Practically, it offers insights for heritage governance and community-based cultural management: how to protect ritual integrity and

community agency while engaging tourism and digital dissemination responsibly (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. *Collective Memory: From Social Frameworks to Cultural Institutions*

Collective memory research begins with the foundational claim that remembering is not simply an individual cognitive act but a socially patterned practice. Halbwachs’ formulation that memory is structured through “social frameworks” remains pivotal because it locates remembrance in the relationships, categories, and interpretive repertoires provided by groups. In this view, what individuals recall is oriented by shared calendars, places, norms, and narratives through which a community renders the past intelligible and relevant in the present. Subsequent scholarship has expanded this insight by emphasizing durability, mediation, and institutionalization. Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish *communicative memory*—everyday recollection sustained through living generations—from *cultural memory*, which is stabilized in symbolic forms and institutional carriers such as ritual, monuments, texts, and authoritative performances. This distinction is particularly useful for festival research because annual ritual cycles operate as a bridge: they draw on communicative memories (personal stories of livelihood, storms, migration, lineage) while translating select elements into culturally durable forms (ritual scripts, processional routes, sacred objects, commemorative speech) (Halbwachs, 1992).

A second strand in collective memory theory foregrounds spatial anchoring and materialization. Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* highlights how memory consolidates around sites, objects, and practices when traditional, taken-for-granted milieus of memory are perceived to be under threat or in transition. Coastal festivals in Northeast Vietnam are embedded in dense sacred landscapes—communal houses, temples, river mouths, ports, and island routes—that are not merely backdrops but active mnemonic resources. These places allow communities to “walk” memory through processions, to “see” memory through ritual objects and iconography, and to “stage” memory through collective gatherings that periodically make the past publicly present (Nora, 1989).

A third strand emphasizes embodiment, affect, and performance as vehicles of remembrance. Connerton argues that societies remember through

the body: commemorative ceremonies and habitual practices transmit a “practical memory” that can persist even when explicit narratives change. This perspective is crucial for understanding festival dynamics where embodied forms—competitive performances, synchronized movement, chanting, ritual gestures, and coordinated labor—produce shared emotions and reinforce communal discipline. Olick’s work on “mnemonic practices” further encourages attention to remembrance as a field of action rather than a container of content: memory is made through public performances, institutional selection, and interpretive struggles over representation. Such approaches underscore that collective memory is not neutral; it is shaped by power relations, authorized narratives, and competing claims over what should be remembered and by whom (Connerton, 1989; Olick & Robbins, 1998).

Together, these perspectives suggest an analytical shift that is central to this article: instead of treating festivals as expressions of a pre-existing cultural identity, we treat festivals as infrastructures of memory—institutionalized settings where narratives, bodies, spaces, and governance combine to generate socially durable versions of the past (Erl, 2025).

2.2. *Festivals as Memory Work: Ritual, Pedagogy, and Negotiation*

Festival studies provide a complementary lens by conceptualizing festivals as periodic events that concentrate cultural meaning, public pedagogy, and social organization. In a Durkheimian register, collective gatherings can generate heightened emotional energy that binds participants and reaffirms group solidarity. Turner’s work on ritual process and *communitas*, while developed in different ethnographic contexts, remains analytically productive for understanding how festivals alternate between structured hierarchy (ritual order, role differentiation) and intensified togetherness (shared excitement, pride, catharsis). Yet contemporary festival scholarship also emphasizes that festivals are not simply arenas of social integration. They are sites where identities are articulated, contested, and reconfigured amid modern governance, markets, and media (Turner, 1969).

From a memory perspective, festivals are powerful because they achieve three tasks simultaneously. First, they select from heterogeneous pasts: among many possible stories, some become “festival memory,” repeated and made socially prominent. Second, festivals stabilize selected narratives by embedding them in calendars,

ritual scripts, and spatial routes. Third, festivals authorize remembrance through institutional arrangements—festival committees, ritual specialists, elders, and increasingly state heritage actors—who regulate the boundaries of legitimate performance. This selection–stabilization–authorization dynamic becomes especially visible when festivals are heritagized, promoted for tourism, or circulated digitally. Heritagization can strengthen intergenerational transmission and provide resources for preservation, but it may also transform ritual into spectacle, prioritize external audiences, or marginalize vernacular interpretations in favor of standardized narratives.

For coastal communities, festival memory work has additional salience because maritime livelihoods are characterized by seasonal rhythms, occupational risk, and reciprocity networks. Rituals oriented to water, sea routes, protective deities, and communal safety operate as moral infrastructures that encode local knowledge and ethics. They also articulate an implicit geography of belonging: river mouths, ports, and coastal thresholds become ritualized “edges” where community boundaries are enacted and the sea is symbolically domesticated. In Northeast Vietnam, where coastal economies intersect with border imaginaries and national narratives, festivals may also function as a culturally resonant means of expressing attachment to sea-space and local gateways—without necessarily speaking in explicit political terms.

2.3. *Coastal Northeast Vietnam: Maritime Belief Systems, Border Imaginaries, and Heritage Dynamics*

The Northeast coastal belt is analytically distinctive because it combines (i) maritime subsistence and trade, (ii) a history of mobility and settlement formation, and (iii) state and market-driven heritage development. This regional configuration shapes both the content and the form of collective memory. Memory is frequently organized around *livelihood* (seafaring skills, seasonal knowledge, risk management), *origins* (founding narratives, lineage legitimacy), and *protection* (hero cults, sea-related deities, communal safeguarding). At the same time, the region’s strategic position as a coastal gateway can inform memory imaginaries of defense and passage—encoded not only in stories but also in sacred geographies and processional routes.

Heritage governance and tourism intensify these dynamics. When festivals become regional brands or heritage assets, they enter a field of multi-actor negotiation: community committees, ritual authorities, local governments, media producers,

tourists, and sponsors. This field affects which memory elements are amplified, which are simplified, and which are silenced. Therefore, analyzing festivals in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong requires attention to both cultural continuity and institutional transformation. Rather than presuming a linear decline from “authentic tradition” to “modern spectacle,” a collective memory approach encourages empirical tracing of how memory is actively remade under new conditions—often through compromise, contestation, and creative adaptation (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

2.4. Theoretical framework: the Festival-Memory Assemblage

To integrate the above literatures, this article proposes the *Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA)* as an analytical framework for mapping how festivals generate durable collective memory in coastal Northeast Vietnam. The term “assemblage” signals that memory production is not driven by a single mechanism (narrative, ritual, place, or authority) but emerges from the interaction of multiple components. The framework operationalizes festival memory work through five interacting layers, each of which can be observed, coded, and compared across sites:

1. Narrative layer (memory content): myths, legends, founding stories, hero cult narratives, moral exemplars, and plot structures (threat-protection-reward; origin-settlement-legitimacy).
2. Ritual layer (memory practice): calendrical repetition, offerings, processions, water/sea-oriented rites, and ritual scripts that translate narratives into performative acts.

3. Spatial layer (memory anchoring): sacred sites (communal houses, temples), thresholds (river mouths, ports), and routes that materialize belonging and transform geography into mnemonic maps.
4. Embodied-performance layer (affect and discipline): synchronized movement, contests, music/chanting, ritual gestures, and bodily labor that generate collective emotion and encode communal ethics.
5. Governance/media layer (memory authority and circulation): festival committees, ritual specialists, state heritage policies, regulations, tourism markets, and digital mediation that authorize and disseminate memory.

Analytical proposition: Collective memory becomes durable when these layers align—when narratives are ritualized, rituals are spatially anchored, performances generate shared affect, and institutions authorize and circulate the resulting memory. Misalignment, by contrast, can produce contestation (e.g., when media spectacle outpaces ritual authority, or when standardized heritage narratives override vernacular memory).

Comparative use: The FMA framework enables cross-case comparison by asking: Which memory clusters dominate a given festival? Which layers are most influential? Where does authority reside? How does mediatization reshape the assemblage? This approach is particularly suited to Quang Ninh and Hai Phong cases because it captures both shared regional themes (maritime risk, protection, communal solidarity) and divergent institutional trajectories (tourism intensity, governance style, public visibility).



Figure 1: Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) conceptual model

Figure 1 shows the Festival-Memory Assemblage model linking festival components to collective memory outcomes in coastal Northeast Vietnam. The model conceptualizes festivals as memory-making institutions in which narrative, ritual, spatial anchoring, embodied performance, and governance/media interact to produce durable collective memory clusters (e.g., livelihood risk, origins, protection, social order, coastal/border imaginaries). Feedback loops indicate that

heritagization, tourism, and digital mediation can reshape both the content of memory and the authority structures that authorize remembrance.

Table 1 and Figure 2 show the profiles of the four festival cases analyzed in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong. The table summarizes each case’s mnemonic focus, dominant ritual/spatial features, primary carriers of memory authority, and contemporary transformation pressures.



Figure 2: Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) conceptual model

The collective memory literature clarifies how remembrance is socially framed, institutionalized, spatially anchored, and embodied, while festival studies explain how ritual events select, authorize, and transmit shared meanings under modern governance and media conditions. The Festival-Memory Assemblage framework operationalizes

these insights into a comparative tool for analyzing coastal festivals as infrastructures of collective memory. The next section outlines the research design, case selection logic, and data collection and analysis procedures used to apply this framework to Quang Ninh and Hai Phong.

Table 1: Profiles of the four festival cases analyzed in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong.

Case (Province)	Festival type and setting	Central mnemonic focus (dominant memory clusters)	Key ritual/spatial features (FMA layers)	Primary authority carriers	Contemporary dynamics shaping memory
Tra Co Communal House Festival (Quang Ninh)	Communal-house festival in a coastal-border locality (Mong Cai)	Settlement origins; communal legitimacy; maritime livelihood; local moral order	Processions linked to communal house; ritual calendar; community organization; performative elements tied to village identity	Elders, ritual specialists, festival committee; local regulations	Tourism visibility; standardization of narratives; intergenerational transmission challenges; media circulation
Cua Ong Temple Festival (Quang Ninh)	Temple festival associated with revered historical/heroic figure (Cam Pha)	Protection and moral exemplars; historical memory; regional gateway imaginaries	Temple-centered rites; offerings and processions; spatial anchoring in sacred landscape	Temple custodians, ritual specialists; local cultural authorities	Heritage framing; visitor-oriented presentation; negotiation between official and vernacular storylines
Do Son Buffalo-Fighting	High-intensity public festival with competitive	Communal discipline; solidarity; maritime	Competitive embodied performance; formal rules; ritual preparation;	Festival committee; local authorities;	Mediatization and spectacle risk; regulation and safety

Case (Province)	Festival type and setting	Central mnemonic focus (dominant memory clusters)	Key ritual/spatial features (FMA layers)	Primary authority carriers	Contemporary dynamics shaping memory
Festival (Hai Phong)	performance (Do Son coastal district)	risk imaginaries; prestige politics	strong affective intensities	ritual actors; public/media stakeholders	governance; commercialization pressures
Hoang Chau Procession Festival (Hai Phong)	Procession-oriented coastal/island communal festival (Cat Hai)	Maritime livelihood; protection; gratitude for vocational knowledge; communal reciprocity	Processions and offerings; sacred route-making; sea-oriented symbolism; community labor	Communal leaders, elders, ritual specialists; local committees	Tourism and island development; selective revival; documentation/digital dissemination opportunities

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Approach and Overall Design

This study adopts a comparative qualitative case-study design to examine how collective memory is produced, stabilized, and transformed through festival practices among coastal communities in Northeast Vietnam. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research questions concern meaning-making, authority, ritual efficacy, and embodied experience—dimensions that cannot be captured adequately through survey measures alone. The study is guided by interpretive social science traditions that treat cultural practices as socially situated action and view “memory” as a public, institutional, and performative phenomenon rather than as a purely individual psychological property.

The design is comparative in two senses. First, it compares two provinces—Quang Ninh and Hai Phong—that share a maritime setting but differ in administrative histories, tourism development trajectories, and festival visibility. Second, it compares four festivals that vary in ritual form (communal-house festival, temple festival, competitive spectacular festival, and procession-centered coastal/island festival). This configuration enables the study to identify both shared regional memory clusters (e.g., maritime livelihood risk, protective cosmologies, communal discipline) and locally distinctive emphases (e.g., borderland imaginaries, hero cult narratives, or high-intensity public performance and mediatization).

Analytically, the study is structured around the Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) framework introduced in Section 2. The framework functions as a “sensitizing concept” and a coding architecture for data collection and analysis, ensuring that attention is paid not only to narrative content but also to ritual repetition, spatial anchoring, embodied performance, and governance/media conditions that authorize and circulate memory.

3.2. Case Selection and Site Rationale

The study focuses on four festival cases:

1) Tra Co Communal House Festival (Mong Cai,

Quang Ninh)

2) Cua Ong Temple Festival (Cam Pha, Quang Ninh)

3) Do Son Buffalo-Fighting Festival (Do Son, Hai Phong)

4) Hoang Chau Procession Festival (Cat Hai, Hai Phong)

These cases were selected through purposive sampling based on four criteria:

(i) Coastal social ecology. Each case is embedded in communities where the sea is central to livelihood, identity, and risk management, enabling analysis of maritime memory clusters.

(ii) Strong ritual calendar and public participation. The festivals recur on annual cycles and mobilize broad participation, making them appropriate for studying how memory is reproduced through periodic public events.

(iii) Variation in festival form and mnemonic emphasis. The cases collectively represent key regional festival forms—communal-house ritual, temple-based veneration, competitive spectacle, and procession-centered coastal rites—allowing comparison of how different ritual architectures produce different memory effects.

(iv) Contemporary transformation pressures. Each case is implicated in heritagization, tourism development, or mediatization, providing empirical leverage on how memory authority and authenticity are negotiated under modern conditions.

The comparative logic is therefore not statistical representativeness but theoretical replication: each case is expected to reveal mechanisms of festival-based memory work while also enabling the identification of patterned variation across sites.

3.3. Data sources and Corpus Construction

To capture the multi-layered character of collective memory production, the study draws on four complementary data streams. Together, these enable triangulation across what people say (narratives), what people do (ritual practice), where memory is anchored (space and material culture), and how memory is regulated and circulated (governance/media).

3.3.1. *Participant Observation and Festival-Centered Ethnography*

The primary method is participant observation during festival periods and preparatory phases. Observation focuses on:

1. **Ritual scripts and sequences:** offerings, invocations, processions, role order, timing, and transitions between “lễ” (ritual) and “hội” (festive play).
2. **Embodied performance and affect:** gestures, collective movement, competitive intensity, crowd dynamics, emotional peaks, and moments of reverence or tension.
3. **Spatial anchoring:** sacred sites, thresholds (river mouths, ports), procession routes, and the symbolic mapping of community territory through movement.
4. **Governance in action:** committee decision-making, rule enforcement, boundary maintenance (who can participate, who can speak), and interactions with state authorities, sponsors, or media.
5. **Mediatized practices:** filming, livestreaming, staging for cameras, tourist interactions, and signage or scripted narration that frames meaning for outsiders.

Field notes are written daily during fieldwork, with descriptive and analytic sections separated to preserve evidentiary clarity. When permitted and appropriate, observation is complemented by photographs of public, non-restricted scenes and mapping of routes (without recording sensitive ritual details that local authorities or custodians identify as restricted).

3.3.2. *Semi-structured Interviews*

The study conducts semi-structured interviews to capture vernacular and institutional perspectives on memory. Interview protocols are designed to elicit (i) narrative accounts of origins, deities/figures, and moral meaning; (ii) interpretations of ritual efficacy; (iii) perceptions of change over time; and (iv) views on heritage governance, tourism, and media (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

Key informant groups include: Elders and lineage representatives (holders of settlement and kinship memory); Ritual specialists, temple/communal house custodians (carriers of ritual authority); Fishers and maritime workers (livelihood memory and risk ethics); Festival committee members and local cultural officials (organizational authority and regulation); Youth participants and return migrants (intergenerational transmission and contemporary reinterpretation); Vendors, tourism actors, and

media producers where relevant (market and mediatization dynamics)

Interviews are conducted in Vietnamese, recorded with consent, and transcribed selectively or fully depending on data volume and sensitivity. Where recording is not permitted or participants prefer not to be recorded, detailed notes are taken immediately after the conversation. Interviews are designed to avoid leading questions; prompts are framed to encourage narrative elaboration (e.g., “Can you tell me the story people here associate with...?”; “What makes this ritual ‘correct?’”; “Who decides how the festival should be conducted?”).

3.3.3. *Documentary and Archival Analysis*

To understand how memory is formalized and authorized, the study analyzes a corpus of documentary materials, including: Local histories and cultural monographs (where accessible); Temple/communal house documents (ritual calendars, inscriptions, public notices); Festival regulations and organizational plans; Heritage dossiers or official communications (as available); Media reports, promotional materials, and online descriptions; Public signage at festival sites (narrative framing for visitors)

Documentary sources are treated not as neutral records but as discursive artifacts that encode institutional claims about authenticity, history, and legitimacy. Analysis pays attention to recurring keywords, narrative templates, and shifts in emphasis across time, particularly where new heritage or tourism framing becomes visible.

3.3.4. *Visual-Material Culture and Spatial Data*

Material culture and space are central to festival memory work. The study therefore documents: Ritual objects and iconography (publicly visible objects, banners, costumes); Spatial arrangements of sacred sites (layout and symbolic focal points); Procession routes and key thresholds (river mouth, port, boundary markers); Objects of commemoration and authority (plaques, commemorative boards, donor lists).

These materials are analyzed to examine how memory is “made durable” through objects, routes, and embodied interaction with space. When possible, route mapping is used to create a comparable representation across cases, supporting cross-site analysis of spatial anchoring.

3.4. *Sampling Strategy and Fieldwork Procedures*

Sampling is purposive and iterative, combining initial case-based selection with snowball sampling

to identify key ritual authorities and community voices. Fieldwork coverage and interview corpus. Fieldwork was conducted between January 2024 and December 2025 (approximately 24 months in total) across the four sites, combining repeated pre-festival visits, intensive observation during the core festival days, and post-festival follow-up. In total, the study completed 68 semi-structured interviews, distributed as follows: Tra Co (Mong Cai): n = 20, Cua Ong (Cam Pha): n = 16, Do Son (Do Son district): n = 20, and Hoang Chau (Cat Hai): n = 12. This distribution ensured a balanced representation of ritual authorities, local officials, and community members (elders, fishers, and youth) relative to each site's specific social organization and access constraints. Interviews typically lasted 30-45 minutes, were conducted in Vietnamese, and were complemented by short informal conversations during preparations and festival days that were captured in fieldnotes but are not counted as formal interviews. Across sites, the researcher spent approximately 14-21 days on-site, with per-site engagement of roughly 2-3 days during the core festival days, reflecting differences in festival calendars, access conditions, and the availability of key ritual authorities. Saturation is assessed not by the mere repetition of opinions but by the stabilization of interpretive patterns regarding (i) core memory clusters; (ii) perceived changes and tensions; and (iii) authority structures.

Fieldwork proceeds in three phases:

- 1) *Pre-festival phase*: establishing rapport, mapping governance structures, collecting documents, identifying key informants, and observing preparations and rehearsals.
- 2) *Festival phase*: intensive observation of ritual sequences, spatial movement, performances, crowd interactions, and mediatic practices; conducting short opportunistic interviews and scheduling longer interviews after peak ritual moments.
- 3) *Post-festival phase*: reflective interviews on meanings and evaluations; follow-up on contested issues; verification of key details; collection of media artifacts and organizational records when possible.

This sequencing recognizes that many actors are unavailable or constrained during peak festival

moments and that interpretive reflection often becomes more articulate after the event.

3.5. Data Analysis: Coding, Comparison, and Interpretive Strategy

Data analysis follows a thematic and comparative procedure, combining deductive coding guided by the Festival-Memory Assemblage framework with inductive coding attentive to emergent local categories.

3.5.1. Coding Framework and Codebook Development

A preliminary codebook is developed around the five FMA layers:

- Narrative codes: origin stories, hero cult narratives, moral exemplars, threat/protection motifs, "sea as livelihood/risk," settlement legitimacy
- Ritual codes: calendrical repetition, offerings, processions, water/sea rites, transitions between ritual and play
- Spatial codes: sacred sites, thresholds, route-making, boundary enactment, territorial imaginaries
- Embodied-performance codes: competition, collective movement, discipline, collective emotion, bodily labor, charisma and prestige
- Governance/media codes: committees, rule enforcement, heritage framing, tourist orientation, digital mediation, sponsorship and market dynamics

In addition, the codebook includes memory outcome codes corresponding to identified clusters (maritime livelihood and risk; origins and settlement; protection and moral exemplars; social order and discipline; coastal/border imaginaries). These outcome codes capture how the assemblage produces recognizable mnemonic patterns.

Coding proceeds in cycles: first-cycle coding applies broad categories; second-cycle coding refines subthemes and identifies relationships among layers (e.g., how a narrative motif is enacted through a spatial route; how governance shapes ritual sequence; how mediatization modifies performance) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Coding Framework for the Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) and Empirical Indicators

FMA layer / code family	Definition (what to code)	Empirical indicators (observable / documentable)	Typical data sources	Example analytic questions
1. Narrative layer (NAR)	Stories and interpretive repertoires that define "what is remembered" (origins, heroes, moral lessons, sea-risk narratives).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founding/origin myths; lineage legitimacy claims • Hero cult narratives; protective deity stories • Threat-protection-reward plots 	Interviews (elders, custodians, fishers, youth); ritual speech; brochures; signage; local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What past is made salient? Who is credited/blamed? - Which moral lessons are repeated? What

FMA layer / code family	Definition (what to code)	Empirical indicators (observable / documentable)	Typical data sources	Example analytic questions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral keywords (duty, loyalty, gratitude, reciprocity) Narrative variation/contestation across actors 	histories; media posts	narratives compete or are silenced?
2. Ritual layer (RIT)	Repeated ceremonial sequences that enact memory in time (scripts, offerings, processions, calendrical cycles).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed ritual sequence (opening, invocation, offering, procession, closing) Calendrical repetition markers (annual cycle, "proper dates") Sea/water rites ("RỪC NƯỚC, CÀU AN/CÀU NGU" elements if present) Boundary between "LỄ" and "HỘI". Rules of ritual correctness (taboos, prohibitions) 	Participant observation; ritual programs; temple/communal house notices; committee plans; video documentation (public parts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What actions "make the past present"? Which segments are non-negotiable vs flexible? How are transitions managed?
3. Spatial layer (SPA)	Sacred geography and route-making through which memory is anchored in place (nodes, thresholds, routes).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sacred nodes (communal house/ temple/ shrine) Processional route map (start-stop points) Coastal thresholds (ports, river mouths, gates, shoreline markers) Symbolic territorial claims through movement Spatial hierarchy (front/back, inner/outer, sacred/ profane) 	Route mapping; field notes; photos (public); GIS sketch; site plans; signage; local maps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which places become mnemonic anchors? How does movement map belonging? How are boundaries enacted?
4. Embodied-performance layer (EMB)	Bodily practices and affect through which memory becomes "felt" and transmitted (discipline, competition, collective emotion).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated movement (marching, carrying, synchronized gestures) Competitive performance (races/contests/ fights) and crowd affect Emotional peaks (awe, pride, excitement, catharsis) Dress/costume protocols; bodily comportment Participation labor (building stages, preparing offerings) 	Observation; video (public); interviews; soundscape notes; performance scripts; crowd management records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What emotions are produced and why do they matter? How do bodies learn "how to belong"? Which performances intensify memory transmission?
5. Governance and authority layer (GOV)	Institutional arrangements that authorize memory (who decides, who speaks, who leads; rules, sanctions, resource allocation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Festival committee structure; role assignment Ritual leadership hierarchy (chief officiant, elders, custodians) Rule enforcement and sanctions Resource flows (donations, sponsorship, public funding) Disputes over authenticity and decision-making 	Interviews (committee/officials/custodians); regulations; meeting notes (if accessible); public announcements; donor boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who controls "the correct festival"? How is legitimacy produced? What conflicts reveal memory politics?
6. Mediation and circulation layer (MED)	How memory travels and transforms via tourism, media, platforms, and heritage branding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official narratives for visitors (brochures, MC scripts) Filming/livestreaming practices; platform presence Iconic imagery (logos, posters, slogans) Tourism staging (timing, routes, curated viewpoints) Shifts in audience composition (locals vs visitors) 	Media posts; news; promotional materials; on-site signage; interviews (tourism actors); observation of filming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does public visibility reshape meaning? What gets simplified or amplified? How do platforms re-author memory?
7. Memory outcomes: cluster codes (OUT)	The "what is remembered" outcomes produced by the assemblage (use as thematic result codes).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OUT-1 Maritime livelihood and risk OUT-2 Settlement origins and legitimacy OUT-3 Protection and moral exemplars OUT-4 Social order and discipline OUT-5 Sea-space/border imaginaries 	All sources (triangulate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which clusters dominate each festival? What combination of layers produces each cluster?
8. Transformation and tension codes (TRN)	Processes of change and contestation shaping durability and meaning (heritagization, commercialization, regulation, generational shifts).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardization of scripts Safety/security regulation changes Commodification concerns Youth participation/withdrawal Vernacular vs official narratives "Spectacle vs ritual" debates 	Interviews; policy docs; media discourse; observation across cycles (if available)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is changing and why? Who benefits/loses? How is "authenticity" negotiated?

3.5.2. Cross-Case Comparison

Cross-case analysis is conducted using a

comparative matrix that maps for each festival: dominant memory clusters, key carriers of

authority, salient ritual/spatial mechanisms, and contemporary transformation pressures. This enables identification of:

- Shared mechanisms across sites (e.g., calendrical repetition and spatial anchoring)
- Divergent emphases (e.g., hero cult narratives vs. livelihood risk; spectacle vs. ritual authority)

- Points of tension (vernacular vs official narratives; ritual integrity vs tourism staging)

Where possible, comparison is anchored in analogous observational moments: opening rites, key processions, peak performative events, and closing rituals (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

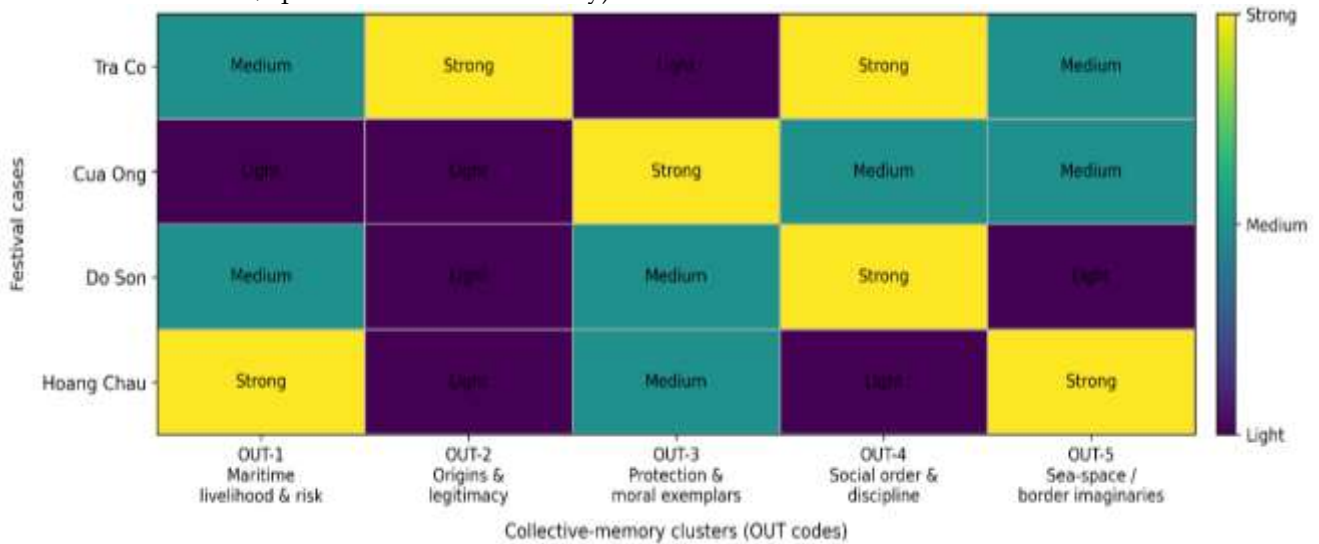


Figure 3: Cross-Case Heatmap of Collective-Memory Clusters (OUT-1 to OUT-5)

Table 3: Cross-Case Comparison Matrix for Four Festival Sites in Quảng Ninh and Hải Phòng

Case	Dominant collective-memory clusters (OUT codes)	Dominant FMA drivers (layer emphasis)	Core coded evidence (high-yield indicators)	Key transformation / tension signals
Tra Co Communal House Festival (Mong Cai, Quang Ninh)	OUT-2 Origins and communal legitimacy; OUT-4 Social order and reciprocity; OUT-5 Coastal/border place-belonging	NAR + RIT + SPA + GOV (strong communal-house anchoring + committee-based order)	Origin/settlement narratives; communal-house centrality; role allocation and lineage participation; procession routes around sacred nodes; “LỄ/HỘI” boundary management	Standardization for visitors; expanded publicity; negotiation of “who speaks for the past” (elders/custodians vs program scripts)
Cua Ong Temple Festival (Cam Pha, Quang Ninh)	OUT-3 Protection and moral exemplars (hero cult); OUT-5 Gateway sacred geography; OUT-4 Ritualized moral order	NAR + RIT + SPA (temple authority + moral pedagogy)	Hero cult narrative (Tran Quoc Tang); devotional rites; sacred-site hierarchy (den Thuong/den Mau...); ritual calendar (two seasonal openings); authorized public interpretation (signage/official framing)	Heritage framing and tourism-friendly narration may compress narrative plurality; ritual authority negotiated via official cultural governance
Do Son Buffalo-Fighting Festival (Do Son, Hai Phong)	OUT-4. Discipline/ public legitimacy; OUT-3 Protection (implicit sacred backing); OUT-1 Risk imaginaries and communal safeguarding	EMB + GOV + MED (performative intensity + regulation + media circulation)	Competitive embodied performance; crowd affect peaks; rule enforcement and safety governance; institutional authorization; platform/TV mediation and “spectacle management”	Spectacle vs ritual meaning; heightened regulation; media-driven narrative simplification; legitimacy tied to “organizing correctly + safely”
Hoang Chau Xa Ma Procession Festival (Cat Hai, Hai Phong)	OUT-1 Maritime livelihood and risk; OUT-3 Protection and gratitude; OUT-5 Route-based belonging (island/coastal thresholds)	SPA + RIT + GOV (+ EMB) (procession/route-making + communal labor)	Processional route; rước nước (sea-oriented rite); community labor and lineage participation (“GIÁP/HỒ”); sacred thresholds (shore/boat ritual); heritage recognition discourse	Tourism/island development pressures; selective revival; documentation helps youth/return migrants engage but may reframe meanings

3.5.3. Narrative and Discourse Analysis

To capture how memory becomes authoritative,

the study supplements thematic coding with narrative analysis (plot structure, moral lessons,

hero/villain roles, causal explanations) and discourse analysis (how official texts and public signage frame authenticity, history, and community). This helps identify whether festivals circulate a single coherent narrative or a plural set of competing storylines, and how such pluralism is managed in practice.

3.6. Research Quality: Credibility, Transferability, and Triangulation

The study addresses research quality through multiple strategies aligned with qualitative standards:

- Triangulation: cross-checking claims across interviews, observation, documents, and material/visual evidence.
- Thick description: detailed contextualization of ritual sequences and social interactions to support interpretive validity.
- Negative case analysis: attending to exceptions and disagreements, especially regarding authenticity, change, and authority.
- Reflexive memoing: documenting the researcher's interpretive decisions, positionality, and potential biases, particularly in contexts where sacred restrictions and state heritage narratives shape access.

Furthermore, the findings must be interpreted in light of the researcher's positionality. As an academic outsider to some ritual lineages, access to 'backstage' esoteric knowledge or highly restricted family-level rituals was occasionally mediated by local gatekeepers, which may have prioritized publicly sanctioned narratives over more private, vernacular interpretations. While the study mitigated this through prolonged engagement and snowball sampling, the emphasis on visible public memory clusters partially reflects these structural access boundaries. Future research could benefit from longer-term immersion within specific lineages to capture more granular, counter-hegemonic memory fragments that remain less accessible to broader public performance. Rather than seeking universal generalization, the study aims for analytical transferability: the Festival-Memory Assemblage framework is offered as a model that can be applied to other coastal contexts, while empirical conclusions remain grounded in Northeast Vietnam's specific socio-historical ecology.

3.7. Ethics, Consent, and Positionality

Ethical procedures prioritize respect for sacred settings and participant autonomy. All participants are informed about the research purpose, how data will be used, and their right to withdraw.

Anonymity is offered, particularly for statements involving internal disputes or critiques of governance. The study avoids documenting restricted ritual knowledge when custodians request confidentiality. Where public events are photographed or described, care is taken not to expose sensitive details or identify private individuals without consent.

Positionality is approached as both an analytic lens and a structuring condition of the field: the researcher's institutional affiliation and visible presence in highly publicized festivals can shape what interlocutors consider appropriate to disclose, as well as what is performable in front-stage settings. Accordingly, the analysis incorporates sustained reflexive attention to how access was mediated—often through officials, organizing committees, and ritual specialists—and how these mediation processes may have privileged publicly legible, policy-consistent, or heritage-authorized narratives over backstage deliberations and more contested interpretations. This reflexive stance is particularly important under conditions of heritagization, where festivals operate simultaneously as lived community practices and as curated cultural assets addressed to external audiences, thereby intensifying strategic self-presentation, narrative alignment, and selective silencing.

This section design combines festival-centered ethnography, interviews, and documentary/material analysis within a comparative case study framework. Guided by the Festival-Memory Assemblage model, the methodology captures both what is remembered through festivals and how memory is stabilized through ritual repetition, spatial anchoring, embodied performance, and governance/media conditions. The next section introduces the socio-historical and cultural contexts of coastal Northeast Vietnam and provides a brief overview of the four cases to situate the empirical analysis that follows.

4. CASE CONTEXTS

4.1. Coastal Northeast Vietnam as A Memory Landscape: Maritime Livelihood, Mobility, and Gateways

The coastal Northeast of Vietnam—encompassing Quang Ninh and Hai Phong—constitutes a distinctive maritime social ecology where livelihood, mobility, and risk are organized around sea-space. Communities in this region historically rely on fishing, small-scale maritime trade, boat-building and related services, salt-making in some localities, and more recently a diversified economy

shaped by port development, tourism, and urban expansion. These occupational and infrastructural configurations are not simply economic; they shape how the past is remembered because they generate recurring problems that demand collective solutions: coping with storms and accidents, managing seasonal scarcity, sustaining reciprocity networks, and negotiating rights to waters and coastal resources (Giang, 2023).

From a collective memory perspective, the region can be understood as a memory landscape in which social remembrance is anchored in both coastal thresholds (river mouths, ports, estuaries, inlets) and sacred infrastructures (communal houses, temples, shrines, and procession routes). Such places do not merely “represent” history but function as sites where community boundaries are enacted. The sea simultaneously expands the horizon of contact – through migration, trade, and inter-regional networks – and intensifies the sense of vulnerability that is often managed through protective cosmologies. This combination produces a recurrent mnemonic pattern in coastal festivals: memory is organized around origins (who founded the settlement, how the community came to inhabit this shoreline), protection (which deities or revered figures safeguard the community), and order (how communal discipline and reciprocity are maintained under risk).

The Northeast is also characterized by its status as a set of gateways, both in material and symbolic terms. Ports and coastal routes connect the region to broader national and transnational circuits; at the same time, these gateways have historically been narrated as spaces of vigilance and safeguarding. In such contexts, festivals become a culturally legible means through which communities periodically map sea-space into meaningful territory. Processions enact routes that bind sacred centers to thresholds; ritual speech links local sites to broader histories; and embodied performances – whether competitive or devotional – transform abstract values into shared experience. Importantly, contemporary transformations (tourism, heritagization, media circulation, and infrastructural development) intensify both the visibility and the contestability of these memories.

4.2. Quang Ninh: Border-Maritime Imaginaries and Temple-Communal Networks

Quang Ninh offers a particularly productive setting for collective memory analysis because it combines coastal/island geographies with borderland imaginaries and a dense network of sacred sites. Coastal communities here have long interacted with sea routes and cross-border flows,

while simultaneously cultivating place-based identities anchored in communal houses and temples. In many localities, communal institutions serve as carriers of settlement legitimacy, while temple networks consolidate protective cosmologies tied to regional histories and revered figures.

4.2.1. Mong Cai and the Tra Co Setting

Mong Cai is frequently understood by residents and outsiders as a coastal-border locality, where the sea is intertwined with trade, migration, and cross-border interactions. In this setting, the Tra Co Communal House Festival can be interpreted as a ritual institution that stabilizes community identity amid mobility and transformation. The communal house functions as a symbolic center of social order, and festival cycles provide a recurring occasion to reaffirm origins, lineage legitimacy, and moral community. Preparation work – organizing teams, coordinating roles, mobilizing contributions – often matters as much as the public-facing ritual itself because it materializes the community’s capacity for coordinated action (Mong Cai City Portal, 2020; Institute of Cultural Heritage, n.d.).

Within the FMA framework, Tra Co’s relevance lies in how it aligns multiple layers: origin narratives and community legitimacy (narrative layer) are translated into public rites and processions (ritual layer), anchored in the communal house and its associated sacred geography (spatial layer), reinforced through collective participation and performance (embodied layer), and regulated by community committees and local cultural governance (governance layer). This alignment helps explain why the festival is frequently experienced as a moral and mnemonic “reset” for the community: it reasserts who belongs, what obligations bind members together, and how the community narrates itself in a coastal-border setting characterized by movement (Institute of Cultural Heritage, n.d.; Hue, 2022).

4.2.2. Cam Pha and the Cua Ong Temple Landscape

Cam Pha is shaped by a different regional context, where temple networks and regional religious landscapes have strong symbolic presence. The Cua Ong Temple Festival is centered on a revered figure associated with protection and historical virtue, making it a compelling case for examining how hero cults operate as mnemonic infrastructures. In such settings, collective memory often becomes authorized through a combination of ritual correctness, the sacred authority of place, and the moral narrative of exemplary figures (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2016; Quang Ninh

Provincial Portal, 2016).

The temple setting foregrounds a specific configuration of memory work. Compared to communal-house-centered festivals, temple festivals tend to emphasize the sanctification of history through devotional forms: offerings, invocations, and ritual routes that reaffirm sacred geography. The memory produced is not only a story about the past but also a moral schema about duty, protection, and communal safeguarding. In contemporary conditions, Cua Ong's public visibility also places it within heritage and tourism dynamics that may shift interpretive emphasis—from internal moral pedagogy to external cultural representation. This tension provides empirical leverage for analyzing how memory authority is negotiated between custodians, local officials, and broader audiences.

4.3. Hai Phong: Port-City Dynamics, Spectacular Festivals, and Island/Coastal Village Networks

Hai Phong, as a major port city with coastal districts and island spaces, offers a different configuration of social ecology and cultural governance. The province combines high-visibility festival economies with village-based ritual infrastructures that remain deeply embedded in local moral worlds. In Hai Phong, festivals often function simultaneously as communal rituals and as regional cultural events that attract large crowds and intense media coverage. This dual character makes the province analytically useful for studying how mediatization and regulation reshape memory work.

4.3.1. Do Son and the dynamics of public spectacle

Do Son is widely known for the Buffalo-Fighting Festival, a case that foregrounds the relationship between embodied performance, communal discipline, and public visibility. In the FMA framework, this festival provides a clear example of how the embodied-performance layer can become a dominant driver of mnemonic intensity. Competitive events generate strong affect—excitement, pride, collective identification, and sometimes controversy—that can amplify memory transmission precisely because participation is emotionally charged and socially consequential. At the same time, high visibility introduces governance pressures: rules, safety concerns, and public accountability become central to festival organization. Under such conditions, “memory authority” is not held only by ritual specialists or elders; it is distributed across committees, state

actors, and media institutions that shape what is seen, how it is narrated, and which elements become emblematic. This makes Do Son a key site for examining how festival memory can be both strengthened and transformed by mediatization. On the one hand, media circulation extends memory beyond the locality and can reinforce pride and recognition. On the other hand, spectacle can compress complex ritual meanings into simplified images, producing tensions over authenticity and purpose (Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism, 2013; Hai Phong Portal, 2026).

For analytic purposes, Do Son enables the study to trace how selection and authorization operate under the pressures of audience expansion. The question is not whether spectacle “destroys” tradition, but how the assemblage is recalibrated: which ritual elements are preserved to maintain legitimacy, which are modified to manage risk and public perception, and how local actors negotiate the festival's meaning when it becomes a public cultural asset.

4.3.2. Cat Hai and the Hoang Chau island/coastal community

Cat Hai represents a more village-centered but rapidly transforming coastal/island context. The Hoang Chau Procession Festival foregrounds route-making, communal labor, and protective cosmologies tied to maritime livelihood. Compared to Do Son's spectacle intensity, Hoang Chau's mnemonic force lies in how ritual routes bind community space together and how communal participation materializes reciprocity networks—critical infrastructures in maritime life. Island and coastal village contexts often produce a particularly strong linkage between ritual and livelihood. Protective figures and sea-related symbolism are not merely metaphors but are integrated into practical orientations toward safe voyages and communal prosperity. The festival thus operates as a social technology for aligning moral order with livelihood conditions: participation indicates belonging, contributions demonstrate reciprocity, and ritual correctness signifies respect for communal authority. In contemporary conditions, however, island development, tourism, and mobility (including out-migration and return migration) can reshape participation patterns and the balance between internal meaning and external representation (Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism, 2017; Cat Hai District Portal, 2026).

Hoang Chau therefore provides a case for examining collective memory as a relational accomplishment: it is produced not only through narrative claims but also through the coordinated

labor of organizing and enacting the procession. Such labor is itself mnemonic because it trains bodies and social relations into a pattern that can be repeated across years. In this respect, the festival exemplifies Connerton's insight that societies remember through embodied practices, while also demonstrating the Assmannian notion that rituals serve as carriers of cultural memory (Connerton, 1989).

4.4. Cross-case Contextual Contrasts And Analytic Expectations

Across the four cases, the shared coastal ecology suggests recurring memory clusters: maritime livelihood and risk; protective cosmologies; origins and legitimacy; social order and communal discipline; and implicit sea-space imaginaries. However, the cases also differ in ways that are analytically meaningful:

1. *Communal-house vs temple-centered memory.* Tra Co foregrounds settlement legitimacy and communal order anchored in a communal house, while Cua Ong foregrounds hero cult narratives and temple-centered moral exemplars.
2. *Spectacle intensity and mediatization.* Do Son's competitive performance produces high affect and visibility, distributing authority across committees and media; Hoang Chau emphasizes procession routes and communal labor that sustain more localized forms of memory authority.
3. *Borderland vs port-city dynamics.* Quang Ninh's coastal-border imaginaries may amplify narratives of gateways and place-based legitimacy, whereas Hai Phong's port-city visibility intensifies issues of regulation, branding, and audience expansion.
4. *Tourism and heritagization trajectories.* All sites face transformation pressures, but the modes differ: some contexts prioritize visitor presentation and standardized narratives; others negotiate continuity through selective revival and community-centered participation.

These contextual contrasts matter because the study's core aim is not to treat festivals as isolated cultural phenomena but to understand how memory work is shaped by the interaction between local social ecology and broader institutional forces. The next sections therefore move from context to analysis: Section 5 identifies the dominant memory clusters performed through festivals, and Section 6 explains the mechanisms through which ritual repetition, spatial anchoring, embodied performance, and governance/media conditions make those memories durable and socially

authoritative.

4.5. Heritage Governance and The Policy Environment in The Northeast Coastal Belt

Across coastal Northeast Vietnam, festivals operate within an increasingly formalized heritage governance ecosystem shaped by state cultural management, local political-administrative structures, and market-facing tourism agendas. In general terms, Vietnam's cultural governance distinguishes between (i) protected heritage (tangible sites such as temples/communal houses and recognized intangible practices), (ii) festival management (rules on organization, security, finance, and public order), and (iii) heritage promotion (tourism development, branding, and media communication). In the Northeast coastal belt, these domains overlap because festivals are simultaneously sacred events, community institutions, and high-visibility public gatherings (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

At the institutional level, governance commonly involves multi-tiered coordination: local festival committees and custodians (often embedded in village or ward-level structures) work alongside district/provincial cultural offices and, where applicable, sectoral agencies related to tourism, security, and public health. This layered governance can stabilize festivals by providing resources for restoration, infrastructural upgrades, and documentation. It can also reshape memory work by standardizing narratives (e.g., through official descriptions, signage, and curated programs), reorganizing ritual schedules to match administrative requirements, and re-weighting priorities toward visitor experience and risk management.

From a collective memory perspective, heritagization introduces a key dynamic: it tends to shift festivals from primarily vernacular memory infrastructures (authoritative within the community) toward public heritage objects (authoritative to external audiences). This shift can generate productive outcomes—intergenerational transmission, enhanced recognition, and new funding streams—while also creating tensions over ritual integrity, interpretive authority, and authenticity. In practice, disputes may emerge around what counts as "correct ritual," which elements are considered essential versus optional, and who has the legitimate right to speak for the festival's past (elders and ritual specialists, festival committees, cultural officials, or media actors). These tensions are especially salient in coastal settings where tourism intensifies seasonally and

where public safety and crowd governance become central concerns, particularly for highly mediated festivals. Accordingly, the policy environment should be treated not merely as an external constraint but as part of the governance/media layer of the Festival-Memory Assemblage—an active component that conditions how memory is selected, authorized, and circulated.

5. MAPPING FESTIVAL-PERFORMED COLLECTIVE MEMORY THROUGH THE FESTIVAL-MEMORY ASSEMBLAGE FRAMEWORK

This section presents the core empirical finding that the four festivals operate as public memory events in which coastal communities repeatedly stage recognizable memory clusters. These clusters

are not reducible to “festival themes” in an aesthetic sense; rather, they function as socially authorized ways of remembering that connect narrative traditions, ritual practices, embodied experience, and sacred geography. Across Quang Ninh and Hai Phong, five clusters appear consistently, though with different emphases and degrees of visibility: (1) maritime livelihood and risk, (2) settlement origins and communal legitimacy, (3) protection and moral exemplars through hero cults and sacred authority, (4) social order and communal discipline, and (5) coastal/border sea-space imaginaries. The clusters below are presented as analytic categories; in practice they overlap and mutually reinforce one another through the Festival-Memory Assemblage (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Mapping festival-performed collective memory through the festival-memory assemblage framework

5.1. Memory of Maritime Livelihood and Risk: “Living With an Uncertain Sea”

Across all four cases, festivals enact collective memory of the sea as an ambivalent environment—both provider and threat. This memory is expressed not only in explicit narratives about storms, accidents, or safe voyages, but also in the ritual vocabulary of protection, gratitude, and “proper conduct” toward sea-space. In Hoang Chau, for example, the mnemonic center of gravity lies in the linkage between ritual obligation and maritime livelihood: the festival does not merely celebrate; it reaffirms the moral economy through which a community interprets fishing work as requiring both skill and ritualized reciprocity with protective

forces. Offerings, processions, and communal coordination effectively “translate” livelihood concerns into culturally durable forms, demonstrating how communicative memory (personal or familial experience of risk) becomes cultural memory (institutionalized, repeatable ritual action).

In Tra Co and Cua Ong, livelihood memory is less directly framed as “fishing knowledge” but remains present in the orientation toward coastal thresholds and the sea-facing sacred landscape. The mnemonic logic is that coastal communities must repeatedly reaffirm their relationship with a volatile environment, and festivals offer a culturally recognized medium for doing so. In Do Son,

livelihood risk is enacted less through explicitly sea-oriented rites and more through the underlying moral narrative that collective discipline and protection are necessary for communal flourishing. Here the memory of risk appears as a background condition that legitimizes strict organization, regulated participation, and high levels of communal investment.

Importantly, livelihood memory is not only about danger; it is also about competence and pride. Festivals create a setting where maritime identity becomes publicly visible and emotionally affirmed. The repeated enactment of this cluster stabilizes a collective sense of “who we are” as people whose lives are shaped by sea rhythms and who therefore require both practical and moral infrastructures for survival.

5.2. *Memory of Settlement Origins and Communal Legitimacy: “Who Belongs and Why”*

A second cluster concerns the collective memory of origins: how a community came into being, who founded it, and how legitimacy is distributed across lineages and local institutions. This cluster is most explicitly foregrounded in Tra Co, where the communal-house setting functions as a privileged carrier of settlement memory. Here, origins are not treated as distant history but as a lived resource that continues to structure communal identity. The festival’s preparatory labor—role assignment, contribution mobilization, coordination of ritual tasks—matters as much as formal ceremonies because it performs legitimacy in the present: belonging is demonstrated through participation, reciprocity, and acceptance of communal order.

In the FMA terms, origin memory becomes socially durable when narrative claims (founding stories, lineage legitimacy) are anchored in the communal house as a spatial and institutional center. Processions and ritual sequences materialize the community’s claim to place by making people move together along established routes and by staging the communal house as the node through which the past is made authoritative. This dynamic is especially salient in a coastal-border locality where mobility is high and where the social boundaries of the community require periodic reaffirmation.

Hoang Chau also activates origin memory, though in a more livelihood-centered register. The community’s sense of belonging is not only genealogical; it is occupational and ethical: the community remembers itself through the shared inheritance of maritime knowledge and the obligation to honor protective sources of that

knowledge. This differs from a purely lineage-based legitimacy claim, but it performs a similar social function: it defines membership and obligation through recognized forms of remembrance.

In Cua Ong and Do Son, origins are less prominent than other clusters, yet communal legitimacy remains embedded in the governance of ritual correctness. Who has the right to organize, to lead, to speak, and to perform key roles is often grounded in implicit claims to seniority, custodianship, or locally recognized authority—forms of legitimacy that derive from long-standing institutional memory even when origin narratives are not explicitly foregrounded.

5.3. *Memory of Protection and Moral Exemplars: Hero Cults and Sacred Authority*

A third cluster concerns protective memory, often enacted through the veneration of revered figures and sacred authorities. This is most explicit in Cua Ong, where temple-centered ritual reaffirms the moral and protective capacity of a historically sanctified figure. The festival operates as a periodic mechanism of moral pedagogy: the revered figure becomes an ethical template through which values such as responsibility, loyalty, and guardianship are communicated. Importantly, what is transmitted is not only a story about the past but a normative schema about how a community should be oriented toward danger, duty, and collective welfare.

This protective cluster is also visible in Hoang Chau, where protective figures are linked to maritime livelihood and the community’s continued capacity to navigate sea-space safely. Protection is thus both cosmological and practical: the festival asserts that communal prosperity depends on maintaining reciprocal relations with protective forces and on upholding the moral order embedded in ritual obligations.

In Tra Co, protective memory often appears as a broader moral umbrella under which communal identity and origin narratives are safeguarded. The communal house as sacred infrastructure is itself a protective institution, and rituals centered there reassert the integrity of community boundaries. In Do Son, protective memory is woven into the high-intensity public ritual economy: the festival’s prominence and emotional force amplify the sense that a collective moral and sacred order stands behind communal life. Even when explicit devotional motifs vary, the logic of protection remains: the community is protected when ritual order is maintained and when collective participation is aligned with recognized norms.

Across cases, the protective cluster demonstrates a key property of collective memory: it is not merely

descriptive but prescriptive. By centering protection on revered figures and sacred infrastructures, festivals translate memory into moral instruction, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of communal authority and the durability of shared norms.

5.4. *Memory of Social Order and Communal Discipline: "Ritual Correctness as Governance"*

A fourth cluster concerns order: how the community organizes itself, disciplines behavior, and reproduces hierarchy and reciprocity. This cluster is especially salient in Do Son, where the competitive spectacle requires strict coordination, regulated participation, and public governance. Here, "ritual correctness" extends beyond religious procedure to include rule enforcement, scheduling, crowd management, and the maintenance of public legitimacy. The festival thus becomes a vivid demonstration of how memory and governance intertwine: the community remembers itself not only through narrative but through the repeated enactment of organized collective action.

In Tra Co, communal discipline is performed through the festival's organizational structure and role allocation. The repeated distribution of responsibilities—who prepares what, who leads which segment, how contributions are gathered—constitutes an annual rehearsal of communal order. This aligns with Connerton's insight that societies remember through habitual and ceremonial practices: the community learns its structure by doing it.

In Cua Ong, order is linked to sacred authority. Ritual sequences and hierarchies of participation demonstrate that social order is not only administrative but sanctified. In Hoang Chau, communal discipline takes the form of coordinated labor and route-making: the procession itself is a social choreography that trains bodies into collective movement, making order both visible and emotionally experienced.

Across cases, this cluster shows that festivals are not merely expressive; they are institutional rehearsals. They reproduce social order by periodically re-activating the roles, hierarchies, and reciprocity mechanisms that hold coastal communities together in contexts of environmental risk and social mobility.

5.5. *Memory of Sea-Space and Coastal/Border Imaginaries: Mapping Belonging Through Ritual Movement*

The fifth cluster concerns how festivals articulate a collective imagination of sea-space and coastal thresholds. Importantly, this is often not expressed

as explicit political discourse but as a culturally embedded mapping of belonging. Processions, route-making, and the placement of sacred sites near coastal thresholds create a mnemonic geography through which communities interpret their relationship to sea-space.

This cluster is especially visible in Quang Ninh contexts where coastal-border imaginaries are prominent. Tra Co's position in a coastal-border locality makes spatial anchoring particularly salient: festivals contribute to a shared sense of place by repeatedly centering communal identity on specific sacred nodes and routes. Cua Ong similarly reinforces a regional sacred geography that resonates with gateway imaginaries; the temple setting condenses history, virtue, and place into a site that becomes a mnemonic anchor for broader territorial meaning.

In Hai Phong, sea-space imaginaries are enacted through different modalities. Do Son's public visibility transforms coastal identity into a broader cultural symbol recognized beyond the locality, while Hoang Chau's procession routes bind island/coastal community space through ritual movement. In both cases, the community's relationship to sea-space becomes publicly legible: participants do not merely "occupy" space but perform it as meaningful territory.

Overall, this cluster highlights a central finding: festivals function as spatial memory technologies. They make the coastal environment rememberable by embedding it in sacred routes, thresholds, and collectively enacted geographies. Through repetition, these spatial practices transform sea-space from a natural setting into a moral and mnemonic landscape.

5.6. *Synthesis: Shared Clusters, Patterned Variation, and The Role of Festival Form*

While the five memory clusters recur across sites, the festivals differ in which clusters dominate and how they are performed. Communal-house-centered Tra Co foregrounds origins and communal legitimacy, temple-centered Cua Ong foregrounds moral exemplars and protective authority, spectacular Do Son foregrounds discipline, affect, and public legitimacy, and procession-centered Hoang Chau foregrounds livelihood-centered protection and spatial route-making. These patterned variations suggest that festival form is not merely a container for memory content; it shapes which memories become most salient, how they are embodied, and how they are authorized.

The findings also indicate that collective memory is not a static inheritance but a repeated accomplishment. Each annual cycle reselects, re-

stabilizes, and reauthorizes the past, often under changing governance and media conditions. The next section therefore moves from “what is remembered” to “how remembering becomes durable,” analyzing the mechanisms through which ritual repetition, spatial anchoring, embodied performance, and governance/media dynamics make festival-based collective memory socially authoritative and resilient—while also opening it to contestation and transformation.

6. MECHANISMS AND MODEL CONTRIBUTION: OPERATIONALIZING THE FESTIVAL-MEMORY ASSEMBLAGE FOR MEMORY DURABILITY

Section 5 identified what collective memories are performed, this section explains how festival practices render those memories durable, socially authoritative, and transmittable across generations. The central finding is that durability is not produced by narrative content alone. Rather, memory persistence emerges from the interaction of mechanisms that operate across the Festival-Memory Assemblage: calendrical repetition, spatial anchoring, embodied affect, narrative authorization, and mediatized circulation. These mechanisms do not merely preserve “tradition”; they actively re-create memory each year through processes of selection, stabilization, and re-legitimation. At the same time, the very mechanisms that sustain memory also open it to negotiation and transformation, especially under heritage governance and tourism economies (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

6.1. *Calendrical Repetition: Annual Cycles as “Memory Refresh and Reinforcement”*

The first durability mechanism is calendrical repetition. Festivals recur on annual or seasonal cycles that structure local time and provide predictable moments when the community collectively returns to foundational narratives and norms. From an Assmannian perspective, this is a classic pathway through which communicative memory is converted into cultural memory: personal experience and intergenerational stories are periodically re-encoded into ritual scripts and public performances that outlast any single generation.

In practice, annual recurrence produces durability through two linked effects. First, repetition creates mnemonic expectation: community members anticipate the return of the festival calendar as a social obligation, a moral checkpoint, and a marker of belonging. Second, repetition enables incremental recalibration. Each year, organizers and participants

adjust details—timing, routes, roles, or public framing—while maintaining recognizable core sequences. This balance between continuity and adjustment helps festivals remain socially relevant without losing legitimacy. The durability of collective memory therefore depends less on static preservation than on the capacity of ritual time to provide a structured opportunity for renewal.

Across the four cases, repetition functions as an annual “re-centering” of memory clusters. In communal-house-centered settings (e.g., Tra Co), the annual cycle reinforces origin and legitimacy narratives by embedding them in routine community labor and role allocation. In temple-centered settings (e.g., Cua Ong), calendrical recurrence reinforces protective and moral exemplar memory by repeatedly placing the revered figure at the center of public devotion. In high-visibility festivals (e.g., Do Son), repetition maintains public recognition and local pride while also forcing governance recalibration in response to safety, media scrutiny, and audience expansion. In procession-centered settings (e.g., Hoang Chau), repetition ensures that route-based belonging is not a one-time event but a cumulative practice, layered over years.

6.2. *Spatial Anchoring and Route-Making: Turning Geography Into Mnemonic Infrastructure*

A second mechanism is spatial anchoring, especially through processions and route-making. Festivals transform physical geography—temples, communal houses, ports, river mouths, and coastal thresholds—into mnemonic infrastructure. This mechanism aligns closely with Nora’s notion of sites of memory, but the empirical emphasis here is not only on static sites; it is on movement as a spatial technology of memory. Processional routes, repeated year after year, materialize collective narratives by tracing a socially sanctioned map of belonging (Nora, 1989).

Route-making sustains memory in at least three ways. First, it creates spatial legibility: participants learn which places matter and how they are connected. Second, it generates territorial enactment: moving together through specific thresholds symbolically asserts communal boundaries and attachments to sea-space. Third, it produces multi-sensory inscription: sound, rhythm, crowd density, and bodily effort embed memory in lived experience rather than abstract knowledge. In this sense, spatial anchoring is not merely symbolic; it is pedagogical and affective.

Spatial anchoring is especially salient in coastal contexts where sea-space is inherently fluid and

difficult to “own” materially. Sacred sites near ports or river mouths allow communities to render sea-space socially intelligible by attaching it to fixed nodes and repeatable routes. In Quang Ninh cases, where gateway and border imaginaries are culturally salient, spatial anchoring intensifies the sense that certain coastal points are not simply locations but markers of collective history and moral responsibility. In Hai Phong cases, spatial anchoring operates through different modalities: Hoang Chau’s processions bind island/coastal community space, while Do Son’s public festival infrastructure and staging create a recognizable “festival geography” that becomes a mnemonic signature for both local residents and external audiences.

6.3. *Embodiment, Affect, and Performative Intensity: Remembering Through The Body*

A third durability mechanism is embodied performance and the affective intensities it produces. Connerton’s insight that societies remember through bodily practices is strongly supported by the festival context: repetition is not only cognitive but corporeal. Festivals train participants into recognizable sequences of movement, gesture, and coordinated labor. These embodied practices create what might be termed procedural memory at the community level: people “know” the festival not only as a story but as a felt routine (Connerton, 1989).

Embodied memory becomes durable because it is reinforced by collective emotion. High-intensity moments—reverence in temple rituals, excitement in competitive performances, pride in processions, or catharsis in communal gatherings—are sticky mnemonic anchors. They bind participants not only to an event but to one another. This is one reason why spectacle-oriented festivals can be powerful memory devices: strong affect accelerates transmission by making the festival a salient reference point in local narrative life (“the year when...”, “the moment when...”).

The cases illustrate different affect regimes. Temple-centered Cua Ong tends to generate reverential affect that legitimizes moral exemplar memory through solemnity and sacred authority. Communal-house Tra Co integrates order and belonging into a slower affective rhythm of communal coordination and pride in origins. Procession-centered Hoang Chau generates a sense of communal solidarity through coordinated movement and shared labor. Do Son produces highly amplified affect through competitive performance and public attention, generating strong identification but also raising stakes around legitimacy and control. Across cases, affect works as

a durability mechanism by ensuring that memory is not only remembered but *experienced as significant*.

6.4. *Narrative Authorization and Institutional Control: Who Can Define “The Correct Past”*

A fourth mechanism concerns authorization: the institutional processes by which certain narratives become legitimate and repeatable while others remain private, marginal, or contested. Collective memory durability requires not only repetition but also recognized authority to define what counts as “proper ritual,” “authentic history,” and “correct interpretation.” In festivals, authorization is distributed across multiple actors: elders, ritual specialists, custodians, festival committees, and local state cultural institutions.

Authorization operates through several observable practices. First, it occurs through ritual hierarchies: who leads prayers, who carries sacred objects, who speaks publicly, and whose interpretation is treated as definitive. Second, it occurs through organizational regulation: committees codify rules, manage access, allocate resources, and decide which elements are emphasized. Third, it occurs through discursive framing: public signage, official programs, and media narratives stabilize a particular story about what the festival “means.”

This mechanism is crucial because it explains why festivals can sustain collective memory even under conditions of mobility and social change. Authorized narratives provide a stable interpretive core that can be taught and re-enacted. However, authorization can also generate tension. When heritage governance becomes more formalized, official framings may simplify or standardize memory in ways that do not fully align with vernacular interpretations. In high-visibility contexts, media narratives may compete with custodial authority, turning complex ritual meanings into consumable representations. Thus, authorization is a double-edged mechanism: it stabilizes memory but also makes visible the politics of memory (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

6.5. *Mediatization, tourism, and heritage governance: extending memory while transforming it*

A fifth mechanism is mediatized circulation, increasingly mediated by tourism economies and digital platforms. Mediatization changes not only how far festival memory travels but also how it is packaged and understood. When festivals are filmed, livestreamed, narrated for visitors, or framed

as heritage attractions, memory becomes portable—capable of circulating beyond the locality. This extension can strengthen durability by increasing recognition, attracting resources for preservation, and motivating youth participation through new modes of engagement (Makhortykh, 2023; Mandolessi, 2024; Adriaansen & Smit, 2025).

At the same time, mediatization can transform memory content and authority. The demands of public presentation—clear narratives, visually striking moments, predictable schedules—can favor certain clusters (spectacle, iconic symbols, simplified origin stories) over others (subtle ritual knowledge, contested histories, internal moral pedagogy). Tourism can shift the festival's audience composition, introducing an external gaze that influences staging and interpretive framing. Heritage governance may institutionalize these shifts through documentation, standardized scripts, and performance protocols.

The empirical pattern across cases suggests that mediatization does not simply erode tradition; it reconfigures the assemblage. In Do Son, high visibility amplifies affect and strengthens public recognition but also increases regulation and the risk that spectacle overwhelms ritual meaning. In temple-centered and communal-house settings, mediatization tends to appear through official descriptions, signage, and visitor management, potentially stabilizing a canonical narrative while reducing interpretive plurality. In Hoang Chau, digital documentation can support transmission for mobile populations (return migrants, youth) but may also invite selective revival that privileges easily communicable symbols.

6.6. *Mechanism Interaction and "Durability Through Recalibration"*

Crucially, these mechanisms do not operate independently. Durability is produced when mechanisms align: annual repetition renews memory; spatial anchoring materializes it; embodied affect makes it salient; authorization legitimizes it; and mediatization circulates it. Misalignment, by contrast, can generate contestation—e.g., when media spectacle expands faster than custodial authority can regulate meaning, or when heritage standardization conflicts with vernacular memory.

The cross-case comparison suggests a general process that can be termed durability through recalibration. Festivals persist as memory infrastructures because each cycle allows for negotiated adjustment in response to changing conditions—migration, development, policy requirements, and audience expansion—without

abandoning recognizable cores. This finding supports an interpretive claim central to the article: collective memory in coastal Northeast Vietnam is neither a fixed inheritance nor a purely strategic construction. It is a repeated social accomplishment that depends on patterned mechanisms of renewal and authorization.

6.7. *Transition to Discussion: Why Mechanisms Matter*

By identifying the mechanisms through which festivals make memory durable, this section clarifies how the memory clusters reported in Section 5 are not merely thematic contents but outcomes of specific social processes. The next section (Discussion) interprets these findings in relation to collective memory theory and festival studies, sharpening the article's theoretical contribution: festivals should be understood as memory-making institutions whose durability depends on the interaction of ritual time, sacred geography, embodied performance, and governance/media infrastructures.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. *Theoretical Implications: Festivals as Memory-Making Institutions*

The findings substantiate a core theoretical claim of collective memory scholarship: remembrance is not a passive reflection of the past but a socially organized practice that depends on institutional carriers, symbolic forms, and authorized performances. What this study adds is a more explicit account of festivals as memory-making institutions in coastal settings. Across the four cases, collective memory is produced through recurring alignments between narrative repertoires, ritual scripts, spatial infrastructures, embodied performances, and governance/media conditions. This supports an Assmannian interpretation of festivals as a bridge between communicative and cultural memory, but it also specifies the *mechanisms* through which such a bridge operates: calendrical repetition, route-based spatial anchoring, affective embodiment, narrative authorization, and mediatized circulation.

The Festival-Memory Assemblage (FMA) framework helps clarify that festival memory is not located in a single element (e.g., an origin story or a sacred site). Rather, memory becomes durable when multiple layers cohere: narratives are ritualized, rituals are spatially anchored, performance generates affect, and institutions authorize and circulate the result. This point refines Halbwachs' notion of social frameworks by demonstrating how frameworks are materially and bodily enacted at

regular temporal intervals. It also extends Nora's spatial emphasis by highlighting movement—processional route-making—as a key mnemonic technology in coastal communities where sea-space is fluid and difficult to “fix” in material form. Further, the findings resonate with Connerton's attention to embodied memory by showing that bodily coordination and collective affect are not secondary embellishments but central durability mechanisms (Halbwachs, 1992).

7.2. Comparative Insights: Shared Repertoires, Patterned Variation

The cross-site comparison reveals a shared mnemonic repertoire organized around five clusters—maritime livelihood and risk; origins and legitimacy; protection and moral exemplars; social order and discipline; and sea-space imaginaries—yet with patterned variation by festival form and local context. Tra Co foregrounds origins and communal legitimacy, making the communal house a central memory anchor that stabilizes belonging in a coastal-border setting. Cua Ong foregrounds protective moral exemplars through temple-centered authority, illustrating how hero cult narratives function as a moral pedagogy of duty and safeguarding. Do Son amplifies embodied performance and public visibility, showing how competitive spectacle intensifies affect and expands memory circulation while also increasing the salience of governance and regulation. Hoang Chau emphasizes route-making and communal labor as livelihood-centered memory work in an island/coastal context.

These variations suggest that “coastal collective memory” should not be treated as a uniform cultural essence. Instead, it is better understood as a structured field of mnemonic possibilities that different festival forms activate in different combinations. The region's maritime ecology provides shared problematics (risk, reciprocity, mobility), while local sacred infrastructures and governance trajectories shape which memories become dominant and how they are publicly authorized. This comparative logic also helps avoid reductionist accounts of heritagization as either “loss of authenticity” or “simple preservation.” The evidence points instead to recalibration: festivals sustain memory by adjusting institutional arrangements and public framing while retaining recognizable ritual cores.

7.3. Governance, Mediatization, and The Politics of Memory Authority

A key implication concerns memory authority. In all cases, collective memory is stabilized through

recognized custodians (elders, ritual specialists) and organizational structures (festival committees), but contemporary heritage governance and media circulation redistribute authority by introducing additional stakeholders—cultural officials, tourism actors, sponsors, and digital publics. This redistribution can be productive, enabling documentation, infrastructural support, and broader intergenerational engagement. However, it can also generate tensions: standardization may compress narrative plurality; spectacle may outpace ritual meaning; and external audience expectations may shift performance priorities (UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

From a theoretical standpoint, these dynamics align with practice-oriented memory studies emphasizing that collective memory is shaped by institutional selection and public representation. The coastal Northeast cases show how these processes are intensified in high-visibility festivals, where regulation and mediatization become constitutive elements of memory work rather than external add-ons. The broader implication is that memory durability depends not only on what communities remember but also on how communities negotiate the governance conditions under which remembering becomes publicly legitimate.

8. CONCLUSION

This article examined collective memory through festivals among coastal communities in Northeast Vietnam, focusing on four comparative cases in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong. By integrating collective memory theory with festival studies, the analysis demonstrated that festivals function as public memory events that repeatedly perform five clusters of collective memory: (1) maritime livelihood and risk, (2) settlement origins and communal legitimacy, (3) protection and moral exemplars through sacred authority, (4) social order and communal discipline, and (5) sea-space imaginaries anchored in coastal thresholds and routes. These clusters recur across sites, yet their salience varies systematically with festival form and local governance contexts.

The study also identified mechanisms that make memory durable: calendrical repetition, spatial anchoring through route-making, embodied affect, narrative authorization, and mediatized circulation. Together, these mechanisms support a process best described as durability through recalibration: collective memory persists not by remaining unchanged, but by being periodically renewed and re-legitimized under shifting conditions of mobility, heritage governance, tourism, and digital media

(UNESCO, 2003; Government of Viet Nam, 2001/2009).

The article's main contribution is conceptual and comparative. Conceptually, it proposes the Festival-Memory Assemblage framework to map how narrative, ritual, space, embodiment, and governance/media interact to produce durable collective memory in coastal settings. Comparatively, it shows how shared maritime problematics generate common mnemonic repertoires while local sacred infrastructures and visibility pressures produce patterned differences between Quang Ninh and Hai Phong cases.

Several limitations of the paper should be noted. Festival-based fieldwork is inherently seasonal and may underrepresent off-season memory practices (family rituals, everyday speech, and informal commemorations). Access constraints may also limit observation of restricted rites and internal committee deliberations. These access constraints are not methodologically neutral: because entry to restricted rites and backstage decision-making was often mediated by custodians, committee members, or local officials, the evidentiary record is likely weighted toward publicly performable and institutionally authorized versions of the past, potentially under-representing esoteric, dissenting,

or less publicly shareable interpretations. In addition, the researcher's positionality as a university-affiliated outsider working in high-visibility heritage settings may have encouraged some interlocutors—especially officials and committee actors—to foreground policy-consistent or socially desirable narratives and to downplay controversy, thereby shaping how tensions around commercialization, safety governance, and “authenticity” are articulated. Future research could strengthen the analysis through multi-year longitudinal comparison, expanded digital ethnography of online festival circulation, and network analysis of temple and communal-house connections across the Gulf of Tonkin coastal belt.

Despite these limitations, the findings underscore a broader implication for cultural governance: sustaining festival heritage in coastal Northeast Vietnam requires attention not only to preservation of forms but to the social mechanisms through which festivals produce memory, authority, and belonging. Policies that support community agency, ritual integrity, and ethically managed tourism are likely to strengthen the intergenerational durability of collective memory while reducing conflict over authenticity and representation.

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