



Supplementary Notebook (RTEP - Brazilian academic journal, ISSN 2316-1493)

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE IN THE RED RIVER DELTA IN VIETNAM TODAY

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Abstract: *Vietnam is a multi-religious and belief nation. Traditional beliefs have occupied an important position and left significant traces in the social activities and Vietnamese people. The Red River Delta region is considered the cradle of traditional beliefs and festivals in Vietnam, such as beliefs in ancestor worship, village's tutelary god worship, national hero worship, goddess worship, fertility worship, life cycle, and ancestor of handicraft worship. Traditional religious activities are reserved and promoted by the people in order to connect, consolidate the community and satisfy the people's cultural and spiritual activities, enhance the moral values and lifestyles of Vietnamese people, contribute significantly to preserving the traditional cultural values of the nation. The article uses some research methods such as: Analysis method, Synthesis method, Comparative method, and Ethnographic fieldwork method to learn the characteristics of traditional beliefs and to properly appreciate the role of traditional beliefs in the spiritual life of people in the Red River Delta in Vietnam today.*

Keywords: *Traditional beliefs, spiritual life, the Red River Delta, Vietnam.*

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a multi-religious and belief nation. Throughout the history of the nation, at different levels, traditional beliefs have occupied an important position and left significant traces in the social activities and Vietnamese people. In addition to a quarter of the population that is religious people, the remaining three quarters of the population needs and is engaged in traditional religious activities. The Red River Delta region is considered the cradle of various types of beliefs and folk festivals in Vietnam.

Religious activities have occupied an important position in the spiritual life of those people. Traditional religious activities in the Red River Delta region have helped them preserve traditional values of their ancestors, unite and strengthen the community and partly satisfy their needs of cultural and spiritual activities, improving the moral

values and lifestyles of Vietnamese people, contributing significantly to the consolidation and preservation of the traditional cultural values of the nation.

Researching on the role of Belief of the spiritual life of people, Killer S. said that "Traditional beliefs part of people's lives" (Keller, 1996). Also, "Most families wanted to follow the beliefs and practices of their parents and grandparents. Some perceived modern beliefs and practices as "foreign" to their cultural context" (Joanna, 2007). Religion and spirituality are important aspects of Vietnamese culture (Jamison, 1993). Folk religion is the oldest of Vietnam's religious systems, encompassing beliefs in a supernatural realm that is inhabited by deities and spirits: "The stones, the mountains, the trees, the streams, and the rivers, and even the air was full of these deities, ghosts, and spirits" (Tai, 1985).

"The spirit world also referred to the souls of the departed, including deceased family members or ancestors, who continue to influence and animate the visible, natural realm of the living. In popular Vietnamese culture, the animistic folk religions were melded with, rather than supplanted by, religions and spiritual traditions introduced at later times." (Ladson, 2008).

The research on beliefs in the lives of people in the Red River Delta in Vietnam agreed that a society with a predominant agricultural economy has formed a traditional belief system that reflects the rich and diverse spiritual life of the ancient Vietnamese (Leopold, 1957).

Those are beliefs in goddess worship, Mother goddess worship, ancestor worship, cultural hero worship, national hero worship, etc, reserved and continued to develop to this day. *Viet dien u linh* (Ly, 1972) and *God Worship in Vietnam* (Le, 1996) are research works about the gods worshiped in Vietnam and studies about the god worship beliefs of Vietnamese people in various aspects such as legends, myths, ways of worship in people's lives and the transformation in the concept of gods worshiped by Vietnamese people.

Vietnamese folklore in the context of Southeast Asian folklore (Dinh, 1993) and *Approach to Vietnamese folk beliefs* (Nguyen, 1994) have clarified the elements of folklore (including folk beliefs), the development of Vietnamese folklore over the process of Southeast Asian folklore. Thereby, the authors point out the similarities and characteristics of Vietnamese folklore in the context of Southeast Asian folklore. In *Culture and residents of the Red River Delta*, mentioned the characteristics of the population in the Red River Delta and religious and belief elements as one of the constituent parts of the Vietnamese cultural characteristics in the Red River Delta (Vu, 1991).

In *Old sticky rice - Vietnamese belief*, mentioned some types of Vietnamese beliefs such as ancestor worship and god worship. In which, the author goes into depth analysis on the Vietnamese veneration and worship of ancestors, on the death anniversary, on the arrangement and layout of the family altar, and the inheritance of obligation to worship. Besides, the author refers to the deities at home, the deities are worshiped at the public worship places of the Vietnamese villages and communes (Toan, 1992). In *The nation's cultural heritages in beliefs and religions in Vietnam*, stated that cultural heritages in beliefs and religions occupy an important position in the nation's cultural heritage treasure.

These values need to be identified, preserved and promoted in the process of building the nation's culture in the new era (Chu, 2002). *Vietnamese traditional customs and rituals* (Thich, 2007), *Customary culture* (Hoang, 2001) mentioned rituals and customs in human life such as birth, marriage and funeral, house construction and

family worship customs, ritual practices such as wishing for salvation and safety, exonerating or relieving of bad luck. In addition, the authors also mentioned the religious activities of Vietnamese people such as: worship of gods such as the god of justice, god of wealth, the first owner of the house, mountain god, and Jupiter, etc. and beliefs such as: ancestor worship, Mother Goddess worship and shadow worship of Vietnamese people. In *Famous goddesses in Vietnamese culture and beliefs* (Nguyen, 1996), *Goddess and Vietnamese Mother Goddess* (Vu, 2002) the authors have affirmed that the veneration and worship of the goddesses have existed for a long time and is a common phenomenon in the traditional beliefs of ethnic groups in Vietnam. Among the goddesses, there are some goddesses who have been ordained to the Mother goddesses. The authors studied the background, origins and rituals for worshipping the Mother goddesses worshiped by Vietnamese ethnic groups.

Study the role of traditional beliefs in the spiritual life of the people such as meeting the needs of people's cultural and spiritual activities, maintaining the nation's traditional cultural values, contributing to promoting the development of society: *Vietnamese folklore with the development of Vietnamese society* (Dinh, 1995), *Vietnamese cultural identity* (Phan, 2002), *Vietnamese folklore – sketches* (Nguyen, 2003), etc. went in depth to analyze the contents of village conventions, village meetings, indigenous beliefs, aesthetic values, and social significance of village meetings. The authors affirmed the specific elements that make up the Vietnamese cultural identity, including the types of beliefs such as ancestor worship, Mother worship, national hero worship, Village's Tutelary god worship, sun and moon worship, ancestor of handicraft worship and fertility worship, etc.

In the research works like *Vietnamese Tutelary god* (Pham, 1997), *Vietnamese Tutelary god worship* (Nguyen, 1998), *The Tutelary gods and Thang Long – Hanoi beliefs* (Nguyen, 2009), the authors have analyzed the type of Belief of worshipping village's Tutelary god as a common Belief of Vietnamese villages and communes. According to the authors, the Vietnamese believe that the village's Tutelary god is the guardian of the village, and the people worship many different tutelary gods. The village's tutelary god may be the person who had the merit of establishing the village, maybe the ancestor of the trade village, but may also be just a young person with an extraordinary death worshiped by the people, regarded as a god protecting the village, and neighbor, etc.

This type of belief has a close process with the community and plays an important role in the lives of the villagers in Vietnam. Studies from different approaches have sketched out the basic features of traditional types of belief of ethnic groups in Vietnam such as ancestor worship, tutelary god worship, Duc Thanh Tran worship, Mother Goddess worship, Lady Ngoc worship, Chu Dong Tu worship, the worship of agricultural gods, fishery, ancestral arts, life cycle beliefs, such as: *Beliefs and religious culture in Vietnam* (Ngo, 2001) and *Beliefs in folklore activities* (Ngo, 2012), *Types of religious beliefs in Vietnam* (Nguyen, 2001) and *Spiritual culture* (Nguyen, 1998), etc.

The authors believed that each ethnic group has its own characteristics in traditional religious activities, along with certain taboos and rituals, and traditional beliefs that contribute to the development of the arts such as literature, music, painting, dance, etc. The authors assert that traditional beliefs have a great role in human life, contribute to education, value orientation, assessment, identification of human behavior standards, and contribute to ensuring the inheritance of history, contributing to social organization, and adjustment of community relations.

In-depth studies on some traditional beliefs in the Vietnamese people's lives such as Mother Goddess worship, and ancestor worship, for example, Vu Ngoc Khanh, in *The*

custom of worshipping Lieu Mother goddess – The Goddess, studied two gods commonly worshiped by the Vietnamese people, Lieu Hanh Mother and Duc Thanh Tran. According to the author, Lieu Hanh Mother and Duc Thanh Tran are worshiped by people in all regions of Vietnam and people send in Lieu Hanh's image and Duc Thanh Tran's image the wishes for assistance against disasters, illness and advice on conduct in life (Vu, 2008). *Philosophical aspects of ancestor worship of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta today* (Chan, 2010), *About Vietnamese religious beliefs today* (Dang, 1996), *Ancestor worship in Vietnam in the past and present* (Nguyen, 2013) etc. The authors study the belief system of Vietnamese people in general and ancestor worship in particular, the important role of this traditional Belief of strengthening the personal - family - lineage - village and commune - country relationships. According to the authors, ancestor worship also plays an important role in the formation of endogenous religions of the Vietnamese nation and contributes to the localization of foreign religions. At the same time, ancestor worship also contributes to recreating the traditional ethics of the nation, directing people to rediscover the roots and memorize their ancestor merit.

In general, the studies have confirmed that traditional beliefs in Vietnam play a great role in the spiritual life of people. This article focuses on studying some typical traditional beliefs in the spiritual life of people in the Red River Delta in Vietnam to see the cultural characteristics and role of traditional beliefs in the spiritual life of people in this region.

METHODS

To understand the characteristics of traditional beliefs and the role of traditional beliefs in the lives of people in the Red River Delta in Vietnam, the article uses some basic research methods:

Analysis and synthesis methods: Analyze the theoretical framework, secondary documents to accurately identify the characteristics of different types of beliefs and properly appreciate the effects of folk beliefs in the spiritual life.

Comparative method: Using secondary statistics to analyze and compare in order to draw conclusions about the current status of the influence of folk beliefs in the spiritual life of people in the Red River Delta today.

Ethnographic fieldwork method: Conduct field research in a number of areas with various forms of folk beliefs to collect materials.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Traditional beliefs in the lives of people in the Red River Delta

The Red River Delta is a large delta, in the Northern Vietnam including 10 provinces and cities: Vinh Phuc, Hanoi, Bac Ninh, Ha Nam, Hung Yen, Hai Duong, Hai Phong, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh. The whole region has an area of about 15,000 km², accounting for 4.6% of the country's area. This is the most densely populated region with 22.5 million people, making up nearly 23.4% of the country's population (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019). The majority of the population in the Red River Delta is Kinh people, in a small part of Ba Vi (Hanoi) and Nho Quan (Ninh Binh), there are Muong ethnic group (Ba Vi - Hanoi, Nho Quan - Ninh Binh, Quang Ninh), Dao, Tay, San Diu, Hoa (Vinh Phuc), Cao Lan and Ngai (Vinh Phuc) ethnic groups.

The Red River Delta is the cradle of the ancient Vietnamese people, the center of the production, maintaining many traditional cultural values and also the cradle of traditional types of beliefs in Vietnam. Traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta are quite diverse and plentiful with basic types such as ancestor worship, beliefs related to life cycle, ancestor of handicraft worship, and god worship such as: village's tutelary god worship, national hero worship, goddess/ Mother goddess worship, deities of agricultural beliefs (thunder god, cloud god, rain god, lightning god, river god, mountain god), etc.

Belief of ancestor worship

Ancestor worship is a social phenomenon that has existed for such a long time in human history and has existed in many ethnic communities in the world. Ancestor worship of Vietnamese people today in general and in the Red River Delta in particular is under the influence of historical and present conditions, is a combination of objective and subjective elements in social life. Ancestor worship is the most characteristic feature in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. It is practiced throughout the country and by all Vietnamese people.

The tradition of ancestor worship of Vietnamese people has become *directed at home, directed to be human*. Worship forms manifest themselves on three levels: family, relatives; village; country. In every Vietnamese family in the Red River Delta, ancestral altars are often placed in the nave, decorated, and laid out in a variety of settings. The altar is the sacred space, the taboo place and the most revered in the family house.

Right from the time the house was built, people paid attention to create a space in the center to set up the altar, altar table or incense (including incense sticks, tablets, incense burners and other offerings). In the minds of the people here, the altar is the residence of the souls of the family's ancestors. When descendants in the family have developed over generations, the lineages set up the genus, write the genealogy, and build the lineage hall. The object of worship is grandparents, ancestors, blood relatives who have contributed to the birth and nurturing of descendants.

The ancestor worship ceremony is carried out by families mainly on the dates of death of parents, grandparents, ancestors and people often call "day of taboos" or the death anniversary, the full moon day and 1st day of a lunar month. In addition, when the family has important events such as getting married, building a house, buying buffaloes, buying fields, away from home, taking examinations, etc., the family often burns incense and offers fruits to pay respect to the ancestors.

Belief of village's tutelary god worship

Belief of village's tutelary god worship is the faith of a community of people in the protection of a god. The village's tutelary gods of Vietnamese people are quite diverse and varied. Village's tutelary god worship is a common belief among Vietnamese villages in the Red River Delta. Those who are honored to be a village's tutelary are those who have contributed to the defending of the country or to save the people, some are those who have established the village, and some are those who created new occupations, etc.

The village's tutelary god can be a real character in history and can also be a legendary character fictionalized by the villagers' imagination. They are not of the same bloodline, but extraordinary people of strength, talent, form, and morality, etc. Those are

the characters who express the desire and aspiration of the community about the noble and good things to be reached.

The village's tutelary god in the Red River delta is worshiped in the village communal house and in the shrine (or temple). In the minds of people in the Red River Delta, the village's tutelary god is a sacred god, witnessing the entire life of the villagers and regularly protecting and blessing the villagers in thriving and healthy businesses. The village's tutelary god became an undeniable witness of a village through the development of history.

In the village's tutelary god shrine, the villagers usually worship two to five gods. Among the gods to be worshiped as tutelary gods, there are human gods, natural gods, goddesses, and evil gods, etc. There are also many historicized cases, such as those in Truc Dong village, Dong Truc commune, Thach That district (Hanoi). Village's tutelary gods are mostly blessing gods, reflecting the role of solidarity in the process of labor, production and fighting against the country's invaders, protecting the people's villages through the ages.

Typical for that spirit are those who have contributed to the establishment of hamlets and handicrafts, the generals who have contributed to defeating the invaders to protect the country and the villages in historical eras, were honored and worshiped by the villagers as follows: the god of communal house of Van Xa (Duc Ly, Ly Nhan, Ha Nam), the tutelary god of Da Tien Phong communal house (Tien Phong, Duy Tien, Ha Nam), Diem temple (ViemXa, Bac Ninh) worshipping the tutelary god as the goddess of wells, etc.

Today, some localities in the Red River Delta such as Hai Duong and Hai Phong also honor modern-day celebrities who become village's tutelary gods, such as: President Ho Chi Minh as the supreme saint, honor the martyrs, etc. The practice of worshipping village's tutelary gods in the Red River Delta has strict steps with spiritual customs and rituals that are imbued with traditional culture. Rituals of tutelary god worshipping ceremony is performed solemnly with festivals covering folk arts and culture activities such as swinging, wrestling, cockfighting, singing, cooking rice, etc. showing special characteristic of each locality.

Belief of national hero worship

Belief of national hero worship is a belief of worshipping those who, while still alive, have great merits to the country and people, who are remembered and believed by the posterity to be especially sacred and honored as deities and gods worshiped sincerely by the people here. Among them, there are those who are officially recognized by the village dignitaries, those who have been ordained by the feudal government and specified specific worship arrangements.

The worship of famous people and heroes is not only a gratitude of the posterity for people who have made great contributions to the people and country but the people here also want to receive the support and assistance of Gods in the defense of the country.

In the Red River Delta region, there are many national heroes who are honored and worshiped by the people such as Hat Mon Temple in Phuc Tho District and Dong Nhan Temple in Hai Ba Trung District (Hanoi) worshipping two national female heroes that are Trung Trac and Trung Nhi; Nghe Temple (Hai Phong) worships female general Le Chan; Hero Ngo Quyen who defeated the Southern Han army is worshiped at Ngo Vuong temple in Duong Lam village, Son Tay, Hanoi; National hero Trieu Viet Vuong is

worshiped in Dai Nha, Nam Dinh; General Ly Thuong Kietis worshiped at a temple in Bac Ninh; Tran Hung Dao is worshiped in Kiep Bac temple (Hai Duong); National hero Nguyen Trai is worshiped in Con Son (Hai Duong); In Hoa Lu and Ninh Binh, there are temples of Dinh Tien Hoang and Le Dai Hanh kings; In Dinh Bang, Bac Ninh, there is Li Bat De Temple worshipping 8 kings of the Ly Dynasty, etc.

Practicing beliefs and festivals of worshipping national heroes contributes to promoting the morality “when drinking water, remember its source, and when eating fruit, remember who planted the tree”, bearing the humanity of the people.

Belief of goddess/ mother goddess worship

Mother goddess worship isa system of beliefs consists of three different beliefs but which are related and governed by one another, those are goddess worship, Mother goddess worship and Mother goddess of the three or four palaces worship. The mother worship takes the form of the Mother worship to be the guardian of the universe, the human being, the place where people entrust their desires and aspirations to earthly life and attain health and fortune.

The Red River Delta is the center of the belief of mother worship, and especially the Mother goddess of the three or four palaces. Accordingly, the belief of Mother worship following the Vietnamese people to conquer and expand the southern border has gradually developed, to spread to the southern provinces and also in that process, the belief of Mother worship of the Vietnam people has Vietnamesized the belief of goddess worship of other ethnic groups, making the belief of Mother worship spread throughout the regions.

In the Red River Delta region, this type of belief not only exists independently in temples, shrines, and palaces but also interweaves a lot in worship facilities and activities of other types of beliefs and religions, especially Buddhism. In the temples in the Red River Delta today, there is a Buddhist-Mother worship. The belief of mother worship in some localities has also been extended to the scope of the communal houses (for worshipping tutelary gods).

In Nam Dinh province alone - the capital of the belief of mother worship in the Red River Delta, according to current statistics, there are mother worshipping facilities as follows: In Vu Ban district (there is Day Palace - the homeland of Lieu Hanh Mother Goddess), the belief of mother worship is present in 5 pagodas, 19 temples, 5 communal houses, 3 main palaces and 8 palaces; In Y Yen district, the belief of mother worship is present in 9 pagodas, 12 temples, 1 communal house, 26 palaces and 2 shrines; In the remaining districts and towns of Nam Dinh province, the number of worshipping places with the belief of mother worship is as follows: Nam Dinh City has 4 temples and 1 communal house; My Loc district has 7 palaces, 5 temples, 2 communal houses; Nam Truc district has 71 palaces, 5 temples, 2 main palaces and 3 pagodas; Truc Ninh district has 7 palaces and 1 temple; Xuan Truong district has 5 palaces, 3 temples, 22 main palaces, 1 pagoda and 5 shrines; Giao Thuy district has 3 palaces, 1 temple, 3 pagodas and 1 shrine; Hai Hau district has 14 palaces, 17 temples, 6 main palaces, 10 pagodas and 2 shrines; Nghia Hung district has 10 temples, 7 pagodas and 1 shrine (Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts,2014, p.4).

Currently, along with many other types of religions and beliefs in Vietnam, the beliefs of goddess/ mother goddess worship is increasingly restored and developed. In recent years, this type of belief has become a central issue of many conferences, many research projects by the vitality and the proliferation of its activities throughout the

country and The Red River Delta where is considered the “cradle” of the belief of mother worship.

Fertility belief

Fertility belief is a popular belief among agricultural residents. Fertility belief stems from a combination of yin-yang, earth-heaven, and mother-father bringing to the concept of life and multiplication and development of all species. Therefore, fertility belief is a type of belief that respects the reproduction and proliferation in order to maintain and develop human life. Because the dominant economy is rice agriculture, since ancient times, this kind of belief was very popular among Vietnamese people in the Red River Delta. Fertility Belief of Vietnam in general, in the Red River Delta in particular focuses on two cult objects: Worship of reproductive instruments and worship of mating behavior. Today, this type of traditional belief almost ceases to exist as an independent type of faith, but interwoven into the activities of other types of beliefs and festivals, reflecting the conventions and the needs of wet rice farming residents.

The fertility belief of Vietnamese people in the Red River Delta are quite diverse and plentiful. Fertility symbols are often described discreetly and delicately, imitating the image of reproductive instruments, abstracting and implicating them under a variety of objects: a wooden cocoon shaped like a male and female reproductive instruments in Dong Ky (Bac Ninh), a piece of bamboo and an areca palm leaf plates in Son Dong festival (Hanoi), etc (Vu, 2010, p. 155).

Fertility beliefs are practiced in festivals: “Cuop no xe bong” festival (“oi ai”) in Mieng Ha village (Ung Hoa district, Hanoi), the “chen” festival in Nga Hoang village (Que Vo district, Bac Ninh), etc. or in traditional dances such as “Muamo” (Son Dong district, Hanoi), etc. In recent times, fertility beliefs in the Red River Delta have also recovered and developed in many diverse and different forms, maintained and developed in the direction of integrating cultural and religious values, in order to continue to reflect the living aspirations of Vietnamese people.

Life cycle belief

In the perception of people in the Red River Delta, the stages in which people are born, grow up and die are the stages in each person’s life. Therefore, those residents have established sacrifices at every stage of a person’s life from birth to death. Therefore, beliefs related to the life cycle are adopted through a series of sacrifices such as: Ceremony for giving birth, naming ceremony, child raising ceremony, ceremony praying for health, adulthood ceremony, weddings, ceremony praying for peace, longevity ceremony, funerals, etc.

People in the Red River Delta today still attach great importance to rituals of life cycle beliefs such as birth, marriage, funeral, etc. In particular, people pay close attention to the “taboo” elements when practicing life cycle rituals. For an infant who is brought home from the hospital, the family member usually marks a red dot on the child’s forehead or uses a small knife and a chopstick under his/her hand to mark it for preventing the devil from taking the child’s “soul”.

When naming a child, the family must prevent from naming the same as a family member or relative, especially not giving a name to the child the same as the name of an elderly in the village or the name of a lost family member. In addition to naming the

child with an official name, parents also give the child a very bad name to call out in the family for the purpose of avoiding the devil and not being cursed by ghosts to avoid disaster for the child. During the wedding, many “taboos” are shared for the bride, groom, relatives of both sides to avoid causing “discord” in the marriage life, for example, the bride’s mother does not participate in the bridal procession, the mother-in-law must not meet the bride when the bride arrives at the new house, the bride must not look behind her house when she has stepped out the door, etc.

For funerals, when a family member has died, the family members must choose the time, avoid people with unsuitable age entering the burial ceremony, and choose a good day for the funeral of the deceased. Absolutely avoid entering the burial ceremony in bad hours and bad days to avoid unlucky things for the family.

When the dead body has not been placed in the coffin, the offspring and relatives of the deceased must take turns to keep watch day and night, not to allow animals like dogs and cats jump over the dead body to avoid the phenomenon of demonic invasion (the deceased aroused, then chased to capture human). People here believe that “taboos” in traditional beliefs will help people avoid risks and will encounter the best luck. Therefore, people in the Red River Delta in particular and Vietnamese people in general maintain and practice seriously the customs of life cycle beliefs.

Belief of ancestor of handicraft worship

The Red River Delta is a region with many traditional craft villages (668 villages), in which handicrafts are highly developed with a long tradition, plentiful products of diverse materials and types. This is the place of origin of the traditional crafts such as silk weaving, embroidery, sewing, carpentry, jewelry making, silver carving, mother-of-pearl inlays, papermaking, bamboo and rattan making, hat making, painting, stone carving, copper casting, pottery making, etc. People doing traditional jobs often live in wards, groups, and villages (trade villages).

Grateful to the founders for their crafts, the people worship their ancestors of handicraft. Many families set up home-based altars to worship their ancestors of handicraft, and worship on Tet holidays. But mostly, craft wards and villages often create temples and shrines to worship common ancestors of handicraft of the wards and villages, such as: Tu Thi Communal house (Hanoi) is the place to worship the ancestor of embroidery - Dr. Le Cong Hanh; Dao Vien Hamlet (Nguyet Duc commune, Thuan Thanh, Bac Ninh province) worship the ancestor of bronze casting Nguyen Minh Khong; Tho Ha communal house (Bac Giang) worships the ancestor of Dao Tri Tien pottery; Bao Ha village, formerly called Linh Dong village, is located in Dong Minh commune, Vinh Bao district, Hai Phong city, worships the village’s ancestor of sculptor Nguyen Cong Hue; An Tiem village, Thuy Dan commune, Thai Thuy district worships the ancestor off orging with the title “Da Tuong Tien Su”; Dong Xam village (Kien Xuong district, Thai Binh) worships Nguyen Kim Lau - the ancestor of the Vietnamese jewelry making. In particular, many ancestors of handicraft are worshiped as tutelary gods such as Mr. Hoang Don Hoa, a master of medicine making in Da Si village, Ha Dong (Hanoi).

In one year, the most important worshipping ceremony of an ancestor of handicraft is the “day of taboo” (the day of death) of the ancestor of handicraft. The day of taboo of the ancestor of handicraft in wards is also known as the ward death anniversary. The belief of ancestor of handicraft worship is to wish that the ancestor of handicraft would be blessed for the job to be smooth, the tradeot be favorable or to avoid all risks when going far away.

After the work has achieved good results, people will give thanksgiving to the ancestor of handicraft. At present, the belief of ancestor of handicraft worship are always kept and respected by people in the Red River Delta. On major holidays, people in traditional craft villages organize the festival in the most solemn way.

Traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta are one of the important elements contributing to the national cultural identity of Vietnam. Diverse types of traditional beliefs, vividly reflecting the people's outlook, reflecting the core and typical spiritual values of the Vietnamese people. Each type of traditional belief contains hidden wisdom from ancient times that has been handed down to the present and contributes to fostering affection and traditional education for generations of Vietnamese people.

Characteristics of traditional beliefs of the Red River Delta

The system of natural gods was formed very early

Vietnam is an agricultural country located in the humid tropical monsoon region, natural conditions play a decisive role in production activities and daily life of people. Besides favorable natural conditions, the difficulties due to the nature of the humid tropical monsoon region, the water regime of rivers, high humidity, etc. also cause difficulties and greatly affect production and life of the residents. Natural phenomena such as storms, floods, droughts, etc. have caused great losses to production, damage on human and property. Therefore, the residents always pray for a favorable weather so that they can be assured to produce and live. Since then, the need to worship the "gods" of the natural world has been set up.

With the abundant natural resources of Vietnam, which can afford to meet the needs of people, people from ancient times considered nature as their "source of life", treating nature as a friend, who closely associated with them. Thus, Vietnamese people have an attitude of "accompanying" and "obeying" to the natural world, creating a "mingling" attitude with the nature, and respecting the natural laws (Phung, 2015, p.44).

Therefore, the belief of natural god worship of Vietnamese people in the Red River Delta is very rich and diverse in terms of objects worshiped in the beliefs such as: "Ba Troi, Ba Dat, Ba Nuoc" - goddesses oversees the natural, most important, most intimate phenomena of the lives of farmers. After that, the residents worshiped Ngoc Hoang, Tho Cong, Ha Ba, the gods of Cloud - Rain - Thunder - Lightening, those are natural phenomena that play a huge role in the lives of wet rice farmers. However, the worship of the trio of the Gods of Heaven - Earth - Water is still handed down in folklore as a form of worshipping the three and four Palaces.

When Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, this group of goddesses was molded into a system of four gods: Phap Van (Cloud god) worshiped at Ba Dau Pagoda, Phap Vu (Rain god) worshiped at Ba Dau Pagoda, Phap Loi (Thunder god) worshiped at Ba Tuong Pagoda, Phap Dien (Lightening god) worshiped in Ba Dan Pagoda (these temples are in Bac Ninh province) (Toan, 2005, p.133-134).

Mountain god worship is a common phenomenon in Vietnam and manifests itself in a relatively unified system - that of Son Tinh - Tan Vien system. In Vietnam, Tan Vien is worshiped by many Kinh and Muong people in many places, but the most concentrated is in the Red River Delta, especially in Ba Vi mountain area - the original area of the mountain god system in Vietnam.

In the field of the natural world worship, there is the worship of animals and snakes, which are the most popular animals in the river area and are one of the most

worshiped animals in Vietnam. In Vietnamese folklore in the Red River Delta, snake is a popular and obsessive image. Snake worship can be found in temples along the Red, Cau and Duong rivers, etc. (Chan, 2010, p.77)

Traditional beliefs promote femininity

In the religion and belief system of the Vietnamese people, the image of the woman was put on the temple for worshiping and people considered them as a supernatural force, mastering the divine world and forming a type of Goddess worship, Mother worship (also known as Mother Goddess Religion). In the legends and myths of Vietnam, the goddesses are also identified with the supernatural forces that create the essence of the universe such as the Sun Goddess, Moon Goddess, and Nu Oa who carried stones to repair the sky, embanked the mountains and digged the rivers.

Cosmopolitan elements are also associated with the femininity: Ba Kim (Air woman), Ba Moc (Soil woman), Ba Thuy (Water woman), and Ba Hoa (Fire woman). In the Mother worship, the femininity is expressed as follows: The object to be worshiped is female, the woman is identified with the supreme gods capable of creating, sponsoring and protecting the life of human. Real historical figures such as the empress dowager, queen, princess and women with meritorious services to the country, and female characters associated with the myths and legends are all honored as *Goddesses* and are put into temples, pagodas, shrines, and palaces for worshiping. Out of 1000 relics, there are 250 relics worshiping goddesses and female celebrities (Nguyen, 2018).

The celebrants of these types of beliefs and religions are mainly women. In the Mother worship, they are called clairvoyants. Currently, there more clairvoyants who are male appear (called male clairvoyants), but when these men chair the seances, they also must wear costume and makeup to look like women.

People who believe in and practice mother worship are also mostly female, because women are those who have more free time, are the head of the family, take care of the family and the clan, so they go to the ceremonies, seances, temples, pagodas and shrines to pray for good luck and peace for the whole family. (Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 2015, p.144).

Traditional beliefs have the fusion, harmony and equality in objects of worship

The spirits worshiped in the traditional belief system of Vietnamese people include *Blessed* and *Evil god*. The objects of worship also include *Human god* and *Natural god*, between the human god and the natural god, there is an interference, mutual penetration or the human deification and natural deification takes place in parallel. One of the highlights of the fusion and harmony in the traditional belief system is the phenomenon of combined worship.

Gods, deities, Buddhas and people with meritorious services to the people and country are all worshiped in the same temple. For example, in Tay Ho palace in Hanoi, which is the place to worship Lieu Hanh Mother Goddess, but people still have the Mother Goddess Trinity altars to worship Thuong Thien Mother, Thuong Ngan Mother, and Thoai Mother; there are Lau Co and Lau Lau; and there are altars worshiping Ngoc Hoang Father, Nam Tao, Bac Dau, and the Palace of Ngu Dinh (Five Tigers) and the two Long Xa (Thanh Xa and Bach Xa).

The beliefs of Mother worship and Buddhist worship also have a quite close relationship with each other. Buddhism in Vietnam combined with the indigenous belief

system, including the mother worship, created a unique line of Buddhism with Vietnamese colors. At present, in many temples, there is a Goddess altar placed next to the Buddha altar, or a Goddess altar in the back - the harem or the ancient house of the Buddhist temple.

In particular, Lieu mother altar usually occupies a solemn place in these places of worship. Buddhists come to the temple not only to worship the Buddha but also to practice the ritual of worshiping Mother with the desire that the Buddha and Mother will bestow their health, peace, good harvest, and full life.

Belief of ancestor worship occupies an important position and role in the spiritual life of the people

Traditionally, the social structure of Vietnamese people has been built on three foundational pillars of family, village/ commune and country. In the Red River Delta region, the family - lineage - village - commune cultural structure plays a particularly important role in the lives of individuals. People here always consciously attach themselves in the common of family, lineage, village, commune and country. The sense of community is always emphasized and the village and commune community is the family, the country - the nation is a big family.

Therefore, the behavior pattern in the family and lineage has been expanded into a behavior pattern for the social community. Thus, every human being has a family and ancestors, the community of the village and commune has the same guardian tutelary god, the country and nation has the National Father King Hungs. From ancestor worship in every family and lineage to the village's tutelary god worship and the worship of National Father King Hungs, it is the crystallization and development of special traditional moral and cultural values of Vietnamese people in the form of a strong flow: family - village, commune - nation, ethnic group. In every Vietnamese family in the Red River Delta, there are ancestral altars, lineages have their own lineage hall or ancestral hall, village and commune communities have their own communal house worshipping the village's tutelary god and some localities have King Hung temple.

The ancestor worship of people in the Red River Delta in particular and the Vietnamese people in general is like a link between the individuals and the community, showing the filial piety of the descendants towards grandparents, parents and educating the family, lineage, village and the people to preserve the morality of being a human being.

Practices of traditional beliefs are often interwoven in religious activities.

One of the basic characteristics of Vietnamese religious and belief activities, which has been recognized by many researchers, is the sociability and mixture of different types of beliefs and religions. The most typical combination of folk belief activities with religious activities is shown in the relationship between ancestor worship and religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Catholicism. Currently, Vietnamese villages in general and villages in the Red River Delta in particular pay attention to spiritual values and participate in remodeling and offering worship at temples, shrines, communal houses and pagodas. The miraculous sacredness of Taoism, the concept of Nhan, Nghia, Le, Tri, Tin of Confucianism, the human philosophy of Buddha deepened the concept of ancestor worship.

Between the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) and traditional beliefs (including ancestor worship), there is a close relationship, interweaving, penetrating each other and coexisting. Many Vietnamese families on the fifteenth day and the first day of the lunar month, not only burn incense for holding ancestor worship in the family, but also go to the temple to worship the Buddha. Many Buddhists hold ancestor worship at the pagoda and offerings made by the pagoda are vegetarian, the family members offer incense and perform ritual practices. Many families invite monks to read salvation prayers, to give the salvation for the souls of the deceased family members at the funeral or 49-day and 100-day death anniversary.

In some areas of Catholicism, Christian families also offer incense to ancestors, ancestral altars are placed under the altar of God or next to the altar of God. During the wedding, in addition to going to the church, the bride and groom also perform the ancestral ceremony at home according to the traditional customs of the nation. Displaying images, statues and offering flowers to people with meritorious services to the country is also a regular practice of some parishioners. On the death anniversary, the parishioners also go to visit graves, and burn incense and these are practical activities to pay homage to their ancestors.

In addition, the belief of ancestor worship is interwoven with many other types of beliefs such as the mother worship, the village's tutelary god worship, the national hero worship, etc. In the Buddhist temples in the Red River Delta, next to the ancestral altar, there is also a worshiping space or an altar for worshiping heroes and martyrs, etc. In religious festivals worshipping national heroes, especially worshipping a village's tutelary god, the procession of god palanquin and procession of the holy palanquin is usually taken from the communal house and temple passing the pagoda, and then back to the communal house and temple. It can be said that the intermingling of religious elements and folk belief activities has created a unique feature for the cultural activities of people in the Red River Delta.

Traditional beliefs in the lives of people in the Red River Delta are one of the indispensable elements that create the Vietnamese national cultural identity. The various types of beliefs reflect vividly the outlook of the Vietnamese people, reflect the core spiritual and typical values of the Vietnamese people. Each type of belief has hidden the wisdom of the ancestors since ancient times and contributes to nurturing affection, traditional education for generations of descendants of the residents.

The role of traditional beliefs in the spiritual life

The belief system in the life of the Vietnamese people in general and in the lives of people in the Red River Delta in particular is very diverse and plentiful, from beliefs related to personal life and family life to beliefs related to the life of the social community; from ancestor worship, the worship of people with meritorious services to the village to the worship of people with meritorious services to the country; from god worship to mother worship, etc. In the process of existence and development, different types of beliefs have accultured the values of culture, morality, and customs of the community. Therefore, traditional beliefs have an important role and have a lasting vitality in the lives of people here.

Traditional beliefs contribute to preserving many good cultural and moral values, and traditions of the nation and today are still strongly promoted in life as filial piety, "when

drinking water, remember its source, and when eating fruit, remember who planted the tree”

According to the traditional morality of the Vietnamese people, anyone must have the responsibility and obligation to take care of their grandparents and parents while they are still alive and to worship when their grandparents and parents have died. The worship shows the filial piety of the descendants, at the same time is a way to preserve the traditions, a way of transmitting culture and educating human obligations to the next generations. As in other regions of Vietnam, people in the Red River Delta place great importance on ancestor worship, taking it as a human obligation. According to statistics in 5 provinces and cities, including Hanoi, 100% of families in both cities and rural areas have ancestral altars(Ngo, 2001, p .84).

Stemming from the concept that despite going away, the souls of ancestors are always beside their descendants, so ancestor worship at home is usually conducted during the year. In addition to worshipping on important occasions and Tet holidays, people in the Red River Delta respectfully report the sorrow and happiness to their ancestors. In addition to the worship of grandparents and parents who have died in each family, people also worship their ancestors at the lineage hall or the house of the head of their family. On the occasion of death anniversary or sacrifices, and Tet holidays, the indispensable thing is that the head (or representative) reviews the achievements and merits of the ancestors to educate their children to remember and understand about the ancestors, and be grateful to their source.

The Red River Delta is a region with very strict village structure, each village has its own characteristics in cultural and spiritual activities, but at the same time, it is easy to see the integration elements and the very common features of Vietnamese villages, with banyan trees, wells, and communal yards and attached with those things are special cultural activities, beliefs and folk festivals. Across the villages and cities in the Red River Delta, the worship of the village god and village’s tutelary god is still maintained.

Although the village’s tutelary god has the origin of an angel, a natural god or a human god, despite having different social backgrounds, he is believed to have been credited to the community and is still “always a protective deity protecting the community” (Ngo, 2001, p.113). Therefore, the belief of the village’s tutelary god worship in addition to expressing spiritual needs also contains the moral value of “drinking water, remember its source”, being grateful to those who have contributed to the creation of the village.

Traditional beliefs contribute to raising people’s awareness about the values and role of family, community and the nation; raising awareness of moral values and contribute to the formation of a national cultural value standard system

One of the typical values of traditional beliefs in Vietnam is to contribute to forming and raising awareness for people about family, community and the nation and this is a “mind-oriented spiritual axis of beliefs and religions of Vietnamese people” (Ta, 2015, p.400). Among traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta, ancestor worship and village’s tutelary god worship have the most profound impact on educating and raising people’s awareness about this issue.

Ancestor worship is known to worship generations of grandparents and parents related to the subject of worship. However, for people in the Red River Delta, ancestor worship is not only worshipping people of the same bloodline but also worshipping people

with meritorious services to the village and commune, with great merits to the nation. Those who have made great contributions to the community are often honored and worshiped by the residents as their own ancestors. Ancestor worship consists of three levels which are family, village, and the nation and is very important in guiding people back to their roots, raising people's awareness about the tradition system of family, community and the nation.

The worship of grandparents and ancestors in each family and lineage is to help each person identify his or her origin and understand his/ her relationships with other members of the family or lineage. At the same time, each person will be more deeply aware of traditional moral values such as the gratitude for the previous generations who have created, nurtured and taught later generations; the filial piety of descendants for grandparents, parents; and the strong attachment to people of the same blood, etc. Vietnamese people attach great importance to ancestor worship and this is a traditional belief that is very important in educating the descendants about the history, traditions of the family and lineages so that they can have knowledge about their origins.

The honor and worship of people with meritorious services to villages and communes (historical figures or legendary figures) as common ancestors of the community helps each individual have knowledge about the origin and history of the resident community. The worship of tutelary gods and ancestors of the village and commune community has been recognized through myths (also called Theogonia). A myth is a record of thrilling stories related to the origin and merits of the village's tutelary god associated with the history of the village community.

The myth also stipulates conduct among village members, along with stories about the punishment of the village's tutelary god towards those who dare to break those rules. In order to survive and develop in the community, each individual must integrate, absorb and comprehend the village cultural values recorded in the myth and concretized through the village's convention. Therefore, the worship of the village's tutelary god has contributed significantly to the formation and raising of awareness of the villagers about the culture, traditions and customs of the village community. Ancestor worship at the national level is the worship of common ancestor of the entire nation.

In Vietnam, the worship of King Hung is a popular traditional type of belief with 1,417 temples of King Hung, most of which are in the Red River Delta with 387 monuments to worship King Hung (Ta, 2015,p.134).The worship of the National King Hung reflects the history of building and defending for the country of the Vietnamese people. Therefore, the rituals of worship and festivals related to the worship of King Hung have contributed to providing the residents with knowledge about the history, culture and traditions of the nation.

Besides, the philosophy of life, cultural value system was formed such as: The philosophy that "when drinking water, remember its source, and when eating fruit, remember who planted the tree", etc. to honor the people with meritorious services to the village and to the country. The philosophies and cultural values in traditional beliefs are still imprinted in the awareness of Vietnamese people, contributing to the formation of rich cultural values of the wet rice farming residents.

In the traditional Vietnamese cultural value system including patriotism, affection for the people, hard work, loyalty, affection, etc., there is also a mix, symbiosis, and confusion among the values of the traditional belief system. The traditional belief system of people in the Red River Delta has contributed to enriching people's cognition

both in terms of the universe and human outlook, contributing to enriching the cultural value system.

For example, ancestor worship practices contribute to the cohesion of tribal communities - as the core communities of traditional villages, contributing to improving the philosophy of drinking water to remember the source; the worship of village's tutelary god has improved the strength of the villages and communes; The worship of national heroes has contributed to honoring the national heroes, fostering patriotic traditions - which is the most core value in the Vietnamese cultural value system. Thus, the influence of traditional beliefs on which social relations are firmly established, has been shaped according to certain patterns. These patterns are a way of forming human values, regulating human behaviors with the community and with herself/himself.

Traditional beliefs contribute to the formation and development of personal feelings, affection for the family, affection for the homeland and the country

Practicing traditional types of belief such as ancestor worship in the family, village's tutelary god worship, national hero worship or mother worship, worship of ancestor of handicraft, etc. are not just familiar customs and practices of residents here but it is also the expression of gratitude, faith in the support of ancestral souls (guardian deity for the family), faith in divine power of tutelary gods (guardian deity of the village) and other gods. That faith contributes to forming the human feelings in social relationships.

In the minds of people here, family affection is fostered through the time the members live together under one roof, with the care and education of previous generations and the gratitude and filial piety of the descendants. Family affection becomes more sacred and more sustainable thanks to the faith in the souls of dead ancestors.

With the belief that souls of ancestors, grandparents and parents after giving up on earthly life will continue to exist in another world and often follow and support the lives of their descendants, people consider ancestral souls as real members of the family. Therefore, the ancestor worship reminds each individual towards his or her origin, arousing the ethic "when drinking water, remember its source, and when eating fruit, remember who planted the tree" and forming the affection between those people of the same bloodline, motivating individuals to be more responsible in preserving traditions and maintaining the affection for their family.

The beliefs of worshipping the village's tutelary gods, ancestors of handicraft, national heroes, etc. reflect the common characteristics of the village and commune communities, expressing the community's common aspirations for a prosperous, happy and uplifting the solidarity between people in the community and the same beliefs. Traditional beliefs not only meet spiritual needs but also contribute to the formation and development of each person's emotional and spiritual life, contributing to the formation of affection for the family, the homeland, and the country. These are common beliefs in the Red River Delta that make a great contribution to fostering affection for the homeland.

The objects of worship of this tradition is often associated with a certain place, community, they are historical figures or legendary figures. In each festival of the village, the merits of the village's tutelary god, the national heroes associated with the process of formation and development of the village and commune community will be recurrent as reminding people about the affection for the place where they were born, expressing their gratitude, aspirations, and their belief in the protection and assistance of heroes so

that the nation and the society can live in peace, and people are happy. Therefore, every resident, whether busy or away on business trips, still tries to take time to return home, and come back to the village at those sacred moments.

Traditional beliefs contribute to educating and orienting human behavior in family relationships, relationships with the community and nature

To varying degrees, traditional types of beliefs have a certain influence on human behavior in relationships. Ancestor worship has had a great influence on the behavior of each individual, showing the respect for the elderly, especially the respect of descendants for their grandparents and parents in the family and the respect for the elderly in society.

Ancestor worship always reminds everyone to be filial and polite to their grandparents and parents and remember the merit of giving birth and nurturing even when they are alive or when they are dead. 87.9% of people believe that maintaining the ancestor worship at home contributes an important part in the traditional moral education, to orientating behaviours for family members (Nguyen, 2014, p.201). The habit of being polite and respectful to the elderly in the family will be done naturally, making it reluctant when being polite and respectful to the elderly in the society.

Traditional beliefs also have certain influences on each person's behavior towards the community. Vietnamese people tend to place the interests of the community (family, lineage, village, country) above the interests of the individual, often giving priority to the values and goals of the community and always take action and behave according to the attitude of the community.

The beliefs of worshiping the village's tutelary god, national heroes, cultural celebrities, ancestors of handicraft, the goddess/ mother goddess, etc. strongly influence the acts of gratitude, showing the gratitude of the people to people with meritorious services to the community, the country and the nation. At the same time, it reflects the psychological characteristics of the community in this area that is the respect for women, contributing to the formation of respectful behaviours to women in the daily life of each individual.

Some traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta have a positive impact on people's perceptions of the natural world and the environment, making them feel themselves part of the natural world. People believe in the concept that human is born from nature and exists in nature, so they need to live in harmony with nature and respect nature. In Vietnam, this concept is clearly expressed in the system of natural worship and mother worship.

The residents think that all things have souls and spirits everywhere, existing in things and phenomena in nature. Therefore, people must respect nature, learn to live in harmony with nature to avoid facing the wrath of the gods. Therefore, the residents have reasonable attitudes and behaviors with the nature to both ensure their lives and protect the natural environment and know how to use the things available in nature to serve for their living needs as well as for production.

However, besides the good cultural values, traditional ethics and the important role in the lives of people, traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta also contain some inappropriate elements in line with the new moral building orientation. Some religions still "reserve" the practices that have become outdated, such as: seal robbing and god's luck robbing at some religious festivals or pig slaughtering in the communal courtyard during Nem Thuong village festival (Bac Ninh). Some types of beliefs have been restored

to ostentatious and even hybrid forms such as: celebrating the great death anniversary; building large graves to prove the “filial piety”; building big lineage halls to prove they are cooler than others; When renovating and building worship facilities, they only pay attention to the level of “hugeness” without paying attention to preserving the traditional architectural features, so it looks rough.

During some religious festivals, there are scenes of hustle and bustle, scrambling, littering, etc. In addition to the restoration of types of belief, the phenomenon of superstition and outdated customs also increased. In many religious facilities, the actions of drawing lots, casting lots, horoscope, and divination take place publicly, both in the place of worship, on the campus and at the entrance. Abuse of beliefs for personal gain creates bad consequences, damaging the property, health and even the lives of people.

Thus, traditional beliefs are humane in nature, but like any cultural component, its existence and development in reality always have many angles. The goal is to promote the inherent good nature of traditional beliefs to serve the life, making the spiritual life more and more abundant.

CONCLUSION

Traditional belief is one of the elements of Vietnamese spiritual culture with a very rich, diverse and complex appearance. The Red River Delta region is the cradle of the ancient Vietnamese and a center for the production of traditional beliefs. At present, traditional beliefs in the Red River Delta are still reserved, restored, developed and attracted many people from all walks of life.

Traditional beliefs play an important role and greatly affect the spiritual life of the residents here. Traditional beliefs direct people to the true, the good and the beautiful, and contribute to strengthening society, raising people’s awareness and behavior in the relationships between individuals and families, relationships with communities and the nation, relationships between humans and the natural environment.

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