

# THE CHANGE OF VIETNAMESE FOLK BELIEFS IN THE NEW CONTEXT: STUDY A TYPICAL RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY

## A MUDANÇA DAS CRENÇAS DO POVO VIETNAMIANO NO NOVO CONTEXTO: ESTUDE UMA TÍPICA ATIVIDADE RELIGIOSA

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Abstract: Vietnam is a multi-faith and multi-religious country. According to incomplete statistics, Vietnam has about 95% of the population with religious and religious life. Up to now, the country has about 45,000 belief establishments, of which there are more than 2,900 relics associated with belief and religious establishments. Religious activities take place vibrantly throughout the country; many major religious activities and activities were solemnly organized, attracting hundreds of thousands of attendees. However, in recent years, many religious activities have changed in both positive and negative directions. This study selects a popular folk belief activity of the Vietnamese people, the funeral rite. Based on the survey, this study focuses on analyzing the actual situation of funeral rites, the values, and limitations of this religious activity.

Keywords: Change. Folk beliefs. New context. Religious activity. Funeral rites. Vietnamese.

Resumo: O Vietnã é um país multi-religioso e multi-religioso. De acordo com estatísticas incompletas, o Vietnã tem cerca de 95% da população com vida religiosa e religiosa. Até agora, o país tem cerca de 45.000 estabelecimentos de crença, dos quais existem mais de 2.900 relíquias associadas a estabelecimentos de crença e religiosos. As atividades religiosas acontecem de forma vibrante em todo o país; muitas das principais atividades e atividades religiosas foram organizadas solenemente, atraindo centenas de milhares de participantes. No entanto, nos últimos anos, muitas atividades religiosas mudaram em direções positivas e negativas. Este estudo seleciona uma atividade de crença popular popular do povo vietnamita, o rito fúnebre. Com base na pesquisa, este estudo se concentra em analisar a situação real dos ritos fúnebres, os valores e as limitações dessa atividade religiosa.

Palavras-chave: Mudança. Crenças populares. Novo contexto. Atividade religiosa. Ritos fúnebres. Vietnamita.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a multi-faith and multi-religious country. According to incomplete statistics, Vietnam has about 95% of the population having a religious and religious life (among thousands of beliefs, the most popular beliefs are ancestor worship, Mother Goddess belief, worshipping the Village Citadel, soul worshipping beliefs, etc.) (Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2019). Up to now, the country has about 45,000 belief establishments, of which there are more than 2,900 relics associated with faith establishments. beliefs, religions, a number of monuments recognized by UNESCO as world heritage. Every year, Vietnam has nearly 13,000 festivals, including 5 types: folk festivals, revolutionary history festivals, religious festivals, festivals imported from abroad, cultural - sports festivals, and professions. Particularly in the field of religion, Vietnam has more than 26.5 million followers (accounting for 27% of the population), 43 organizations belonging to 16 religions recognized or certified by the state for operation registration.

The whole country currently has more than 57.4 thousand dignitaries, over 147,000 positions, more than 29.6 thousand places of worship. The number of followers of the current religions is about: Buddhism: 15.1 million; Catholic: 7.1 million; Cao Dai: 1.1 million; Protestant: 1 million; Muslim: 80,000; Hoa Hao Buddhism: 1.3 million, the rest are other religions (TinhDoCuSiPhatHoi, TuAnHieuNghia, Brahmin, BuuSonKyHuong, MinhSuDao, MinhLyDao, etc.) (Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2019).

The funeral is one of the ancient and long-standing customs, perhaps formed from the early days of the Vietnamese people (Giau, 1973 & 1983). Since ancient times, due to the influence of many Chinese ceremonies, Vietnamese funerals also include many processes, but many places have been modified to fit with Vietnamese traditions (Giau, 1983). Funerals are all rites performed by the living for the dead from death to burial, in order to show respect and gratitude to the deceased (Hinh, 2007). Therefore, funeral rites are done very carefully and very carefully. The living in Asian society in general and in Vietnam, in particular, attaches great importance to affection, appreciates

kinship, attaches great importance to the bloodline of families and relatives, so the funeral rituals are carried out very carefully repertoires. In Asian philosophy and thought, the performance of funeral rituals for the dead is very important, the duty of the living to the deceased who are grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives your clan (Habenstein, 1963). Death for everyone is inevitable and the funeral is a serious problem for a certain family. Right from the moment of one's death, the family atmosphere has become quiet with a sad look; children from near and far are informed to rush back to "meet them one last time", though crowded but they were quiet with a gloomy, sad expression.

Each ethnic group in Vietnam will have different funeral rituals suitable to their spiritual activities and traditions (Hoa, 2006). But basically still based on the general ritual performance rules of the Vietnamese people, whether it is Kinh or ethnic minorities, there is little difference. And, in funerals today there are other and new points compared to the period from the 20th century onwards. Many rituals are simplified to suit the social situation, especially in urban areas with "crowded land, crowded people" with modern life rhythm.

Vietnamese people funeral is a great event marking a transformation of people from the physical world to the spiritual world (Them, 1999). It is a phenomenon not only related to the life of each individual but also organically interacts with the entire social system, becoming a social event of the community. It is both a constituent element of the ethnic culture and a reflection of ethnic cultural characteristics (Ngoc, 2002). Through the study of Vietnamese's funeral rituals from a cultural perspective, I give some comments and assessments as follows:

Vietnamese funeral rituals are very complicated, but there are still similarities between ethnic groups and regions of Vietnam. The form of burying the dead is very popular, and with the change of society today, there is a cremation;

Vietnamese funeral rituals are influenced and strongly influenced by Buddhism and Taoism; in addition, for other religious believers influenced by their religions. The community is shown highly, when a family has a dead person, the neighbors will help a lot;

In funeral rites, the householder often has great respect for the gods, with the spirit of respecting the spirit so that family members can leave peacefully. The Vietnamese people's funeral ritual has shown the spirit of "drinking water, remember its source" (gratitude to ancestors) deeply.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Vietnamese people's concept of death

Since ancient times, Vietnamese people have lived with the mind: People are born, grow up, get married, give birth to children, create a career, etc. (Binh, 2005); Finally, according to the law of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Because of seeing and accepting death, as a rule, Vietnamese people accept death in an active and relaxed spirit, such as buying a coffin (called longevity) and building a living part (called static needle) when we are alive (Dao & Van, 2020).

The Vietnamese people's views on life in the past also considered "living in, falling back", seeing life on earth as just a temporary place, and death is not the end, but about eternity. Therefore, "the dead need a beautiful grave", the "grave cave" is very abstaining from a wallet that can affect the career of descendants for many generations (Dao & Van, 2020).

Every Vietnamese has the notion that there is something before their parents give birth to them. Therefore, Vietnamese people often say: Parents give birth to children, nature gives birth to nature. That's right; but the word heaven here is used to refer to the supreme being, higher than the human head, not necessarily a cardinal of other religions. They believe that parents are just a cooperative agent to give birth to a child with a complete body and shape, but the parents are sure that the spirit of the child cannot be born. But that nature is a rebirth of a certain reincarnation.

Our life is like a light bulb. That light bulb has many different shapes such as long, short, round, square. Or fake has many different colors and brightness is also much different, but one day this light bulb is damaged and the color also fades because of the years of use. Looking back at our bodies, too, it is no different from those light bulbs. Some people are tall, some are short, some are beautiful, some are ugly, etc., but they are all human bodies. A broken light bulb also means the loss of the human body. But one thing is for sure, the electric current still exists and the consciousness cannot completely disappear. Because, if you change another light bulb, the light bulb will come back on. In the same way, when the mind collides with the other's wish, that consciousness will enter and become the object that will have continuity, which can be a person, it

may be an animal, it can also be born. into worlds other than humans. It is all due to our own causes that have been created by ourselves in this life or in a previous life.

Those who know peace with their lives and think that the results of life today are their own creations from many lifetimes and many lifetimes, then that person will be at peace and continue the rest of the journey (Lang, 1974; Van et al., 2020). If someone does not know this truth, even if they live on luxury and material abundance, they still feel lack and suffer as usual. When we are in trouble, we blame God or people, but very few people blame themselves. This is what it means to be introspective. You have to look inside to know who you are, but you will only understand others if you look outside, but you will never understand yourself.

### **Rituals used in funerals**

Preparing for burial (changing new clothes for the dead and putting the body in the coffin):  
Moving the dying person through the main room (upstairs to downstairs, from the room to the main house, especially in the middle of the house), usually turns your head east. Depending on the layout to suit the age of the landlord, the age of the dead;

The dead person's head will be turned indoors, eyes facing the door. Family members will ask if the dying person has any thoughts and wishes to see anyone again;

The head of the family will assign relatives and descendants to stay beside the dying person. There must always be someone close to the person who is dying;

Family members will do prayer ceremonies (depending on different religions there will be different prayer ceremonies). In today's modern society, many families have used tapes, CDs, etc. pre-recorded to play for the dying person listen instead of family members to do prayers;

Remember the exact death time of relatives (the experience in many Vietnamese villages through surveys is that people often take some cotton to put on the nose of the dead, when seeing that the cotton does not move anymore, it is time to die);

Absolutely not let the tears of the living fall on the dead body. Folk belief that the deceased will not be able to leave peacefully;

Absolutely not let a black cat jump over a relative's body. According to folk beliefs, those who are dying and are jumping over people by a black cat will be possessed by a demon;

Prepare necessary items for bathing and personal use items of the dead when burial as: photos, 2 bowls of incense, money, gold, clothes etc. According to folk beliefs, what utensils are used by the survivors, the dead will use that them, so the items to carry are often very carefully prepared. In particular, clothes must be completely new.

By comparing and comparing the rituals recorded in the ancient documents with the actual survey results, the following are funeral rites that are often applied to the elderly, frail family members, die at home according to Vietnamese traditional funeral customs. For those who are die at the hospital, along the road, or accident ... are not eligible to perform the rituals, there will be another research project. Through studying ancient documents, in ancient times there were many complex funeral rituals (Thu, 1994). However, as the times changed, many rituals were no longer used; there are rituals that are still in use but reduce the fussy (Van & Long, 20220).

In the past, the use of a small shroud or big shroud because of the small cloth. Nowadays, use loose cloth, as long as the legs, arms, head, and heels are covered. "In Vietnam's custom, many people believe in witchcraft, in the coffin, there is often a piece of plank with star Bac Dau. Before entering the mandarins, often choose the time, avoid age, and then use the charm and the other is stuck inside, outside the coffin. Some people think that if death must be a bad time, they leave the deck of the shrimp nest or the calendar or the leaf boat to overwhelm the devil" (Binh, 2005, p.31). After everything is done, paint the coffin carefully, put it in the middle of the middle space, or the house, while the more dignified people, putting it in the next room.

What should we do in case of death, the person cowering and not putting on the coffin? According to folk experience: Heat a fire around the corpse and straighten it straight, or massage it with alcohol or alcohol (Long & Van, 2019). If it still hardens, then you can use two chopsticks to place both sides of the coffin and let the body slowly fall down. When they fall into the coffin, they have to cut off the leg straps, their arms, their shoulders, and their buttocks so that the dead can lie comfortably.

### **Changes in religious activities**

As analyzed above, Vietnam is a multi-faith and religious country with 95% of the population having a belief and religious life, more than 26.5 million followers of religions (accounting for 27% of the population), more than 58,000 dignitaries, 148,000 positions, 29,000 worship facilities, 53 religious training institutions. During the process of revolutionary leadership, the Party and the State of Vietnam have consistently implemented the policy of respecting and guaranteeing everyone's right to freedom of belief and religion and the right to freedom of non-belief and religion (Government Department of Religious Affairs, 2019). These rights are enshrined in the 2013 Constitution, the 2016 Law on Beliefs and Religions, and the Government's Decree No. 162/2017/ND-CP, which have created a solid legal framework for better guaranteeing the right to freedom. by faith or religion.

Not only a multi-religious country, but Vietnam is also a multi-ethnic country (with 54 ethnic groups living together), each ethnic group keeps different forms of beliefs with many traditional folk festivals, creating diversity in the spiritual life related to the beliefs and religions of the Vietnamese people. Every year, thousands of belief and religious festivals are held across the country (Van, et al., 2020).

Religious activities take place vibrantly throughout the country; many major religious activities and activities were solemnly organized, attracting hundreds of thousands of attendees. Religious organizations are allowed to set up training schools and open training classes for people specializing in religious activities to meet the needs of religion. Currently, in Vietnam, there are 53 institutions that train people specializing in religious activities; in which, a number of institutions are allowed to train at masters and doctoral levels. Local authorities also create conditions for religious organizations to open training courses, fostering theology and doctrine for more than 10,000 people each year (Government Department of Religious Affairs, 2019). However, like other beliefs, there have been many changes in Vietnamese funeral rites, specifically:

For the Vietnamese people, from ancient times up to now, when still alive, people simultaneously depended on many different factors of nature leading to polytheism (Them, 1999,

p. 242). The afterlife (underworld), not only dead people but also gods and demons. Vietnamese people clearly distinguish between ghosts and demons, specifically:

The demons are often eviler than ghosts, including two types: One is created by humans by enchanting spells to do evil deeds (Thanh, 2019, p. 115). The second includes those who die unexpectedly, die young, die from resentment, anger, and not reincarnate into another life, but the soul wanders to tease and revenge (Thanh, 2019, p. 116). “Demons and gods here have a clear appearance and participate in human activities” (Binh, 2005, p. 167). Each type of the ghost, the devil has a different shape when appearing, so people name them as tangible objects such as the demon Misa, the Basa hungry devil, the demon long hair, the fetus demon, etc.

The starting point of the Vietnamese people was agriculture, wet rice cultivation, the former residence was only a wilderness, harsh nature plus widespread spread of Buddhism and Taoism, so the Vietnamese people soon formed to give me the concepts of soul, ghost, and devil with deep Buddhism and Taoism philosophies.

Vietnamese people explain the phenomenon of “fainting” or “swoon” is because the soul temporarily leaves the body to find a new place to live. If the soul finds a new place he will die, if he cannot find it, the soul will return to the old body, he will awaken. That is why when someone faints, people often donate to the local soul things such as chickens, ducks, and pig heads, etc. in order for the soul to return to the body, making that person awake.

The soul having left the body, becomes an independent entity, also has life, and also needs to find food to survive. Therefore, the family has to do blessings to “dedicate” food (to offer food) and burn money, gold for the soul (are gold coins made from paper with the same shape and color as gold coins and people live using). The people believe that the wealth that was devoted to the pagoda and given to the monk will depend on incense smoke and sutras that come to their dead relatives. Therefore, whether these people are happy or not depends not only on the merit they had during their lifetime, but also on whether their descendants or relatives have done the merit more or less.

As the agricultural resident, Vietnamese funeral customs are also imbued with the spirit of the yin and yang five elements of the South. The mourning flag and tied only for the dead are white (Lang, 1974). At the same time in the philosophy of yin and yang, negative corresponds to even



number, so everything that makes the dead belong to even number. They think that the odd number is the number of the ghost, the number of the fire, so conflicts are easy (Duy, 2002). That's why in funerals and at weddings, Vietnamese people abstain from odd days (Giang, 2000). The offerings made to the dead are also arranged in an even number. The west is said to be the direction of the dead, so the objects are all arranged facing west. When the dead are left in the house, their heads are still facing the East, because they believe that their loved ones are still somewhere and have not really left (Duy, 2002). Only when carried for burial or cremation can the head be placed in the West direction? This confirms once again that the person has actually started the journey to the afterlife, has no chance to return to the East, the direction of the living. The procession of anti-clockwise three-round procession around the main hall during the "cải mã" ceremony or around the crematorium is also a movement from east to west, from positive to negative.

Behavioral culture between the living and the dead is expressed through the thoughtful preparation for the dead to return to the afterlife by means of preparing utensils, bathing the corpse, performing rituals, offering offerings items, etc. During the burial process, the road from home to the burial place will be spread by family members with money and money along the way, with the belief that the loved one's soul can track and return home.

As a Buddhist, the Vietnamese still know that at death, people cannot bring anything, only sin and blessings (Lang, 1974). However, the common people still believe that the afterlife where the dead will come is a world like the world of the living. "Yang stars, yin" (how he lives, when he dies that it), this concept leads the Vietnamese to prepare for the dead the items they use every day such as clothes, shoes, familiar objects of the dead for the dead to carry to the afterlife and use. At the same time, the living person cleanses and scents the body so that the dead soul is clean and go to the ancestors, meeting the Buddha also shows the living's thoughtful preparation for the dead, expresses the living's concern for the deceased's life after death. At the same time, offering offerings to the deceased is also the Vietnamese culture of behavior towards the dead. They also believe that the soul, although no longer residing in the body, still needs food and drink, that is why the living must offer food for the dead, so that the dead can be fully satisfied in the next world that.

The funeral ritual also shows the relationship between people and gods (Thanh, 2019; Van et al., 2020). The gods is one of the powerful forces that people fear. The agricultural lifestyle formed a diverse system of gods, divided into two types of good and evil. For Vietnamese people, demons have a clear appearance and participate in human activities (Anh, 2005). It is because the gods can decide the health or the sickness, the prosperity of the region that people fear the gods and must make offerings to the gods so that they can be healthy and full. In general, however, the relationship between man and spirit is a please-give relationship and the Vietnamese people worship the divine forces for their own livelihood (Ngoc, 2002).

For the gods in nature that have a direct influence on their livelihoods, they hold solemn rituals to pray for the season, pray for country (New Year's) and pray for sunshine (moon worship). For the gods, they make offerings to ask for the protection of their health and safety. To the devil, they make offerings to ask for peace, not to be disturbed or harmed by demons. At the same time, the Vietnamese people believe that demons are responsible for watching the souls, bringing the soul home to attend the ceremony as well as the return of the soul. So they do not forget to donate gift to the devil, they also give it to the wandering, wandering, helpless soul.

The belief of the eternal soul, of death is only a temporary cessation of the body, then the soul begins a new eternal life in the afterlife, a peaceful world of the gods, non-birth and death led to the birth of ancestor soul worship, of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship and the rituals around it are the way through which a person comes into contact with the object of worship, that is, his or her deceased grandparents.

The Vietnamese people worship their ancestors very attentively, because they think that “trees have a new root that blooms green branches, the water has a new source that is wide and deep in the river” (Thu, 1997). Therefore, people, without parents and grandparents, could not have them today. Parents and grandparents are not only people who have the grace of birth, but also have the grace to raise us into people and teach us how to do business. And grandparents and parents left behind not only material possessions but also a rich spiritual life. That is why children must be filial to their parents (Van, 2020).

Traditionally, the Vietnamese people in addition to setting up an altar at the family, they also gave the remains and the cards their ancestors to the pagoda (Ngoc, 2002). By bringing rice and

fruit cakes to the temple, offering to the Buddha and the Buddhist monk, the Vietnamese people believe that the items and food they offer will depend on the incense smoke and their prayers to bring their prayers to their ancestors, parent; for the world between the living and the dead “seems to always have a close relationship” (Ngoc, 2002, p. 231). This worship is the meeting bridge between the visible world and the divine universe. And the dead, even though the body is gone, the soul remains. “*Dương sao, âm vậy*” (How to live, die like that) is a popular concept among of people. Whatever the living needs, the dead also need that, also have a life as in the underworld, which means that the dead need to eat, drink, and consume like the living. Therefore, during the super prayers, people often buy for the dead the necessary household items, to rely on the sound of chanting, those things will come to the dead so that they can spend in the next world (Hinh, 2007).

Funeral is also an opportunity for people to behave with the divine world. Because at death, the soul leaves the body and joins the world of souls. Because of the new soul, there are still many uncertainties, so it is necessary to donate to other souls in the funeral to pray those old souls to help the souls of their grandparents in the early stages.

## CONCLUSION

In recent years, along with the process of globalization and international integration, the cultural values of Vietnamese people have changed a lot, both in the positive direction and in the fading. However, the funeral rites of the Vietnamese people are still considered as one of the religious rituals imbued with mysterious spiritual colors. There are irreplaceable values, including the role of descendants in the family in funeral rites. These are important figures and are the people who laid the cultural foundation for the spiritual rituals of the Vietnamese people.

Through the funeral ceremony, it can be seen that Vietnamese culture is clearly shown. The meaning of the rituals shows the way of life and beliefs of an entire community that have been accepted and passed down through the generations. It also shows us that the strength of the traditional culture of the Vietnamese people is very strong, creating unique cultural features of the Vietnamese people.

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