

THE CHANGE OF POPULAR BELIEFS IN THĂNG LONG - HÀ NỘI AND ITS INFLUENCE IN URBAN CULTURAL LIFE AT PRESENT

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From the first days when king Lý Thái Tổ transferred the old capital at Hoa Lư to Thăng Long, and Thăng Long - Hà Nội was top town of our country. Undergoing the rise and fall in history, Thăng Long - Hà Nội actually becomes modern town. The development of Thăng Long - Hà Nội has been manifested in the changes of culture including changes of popular belief

From the close of the 18th century to modern time, the cultural life, especially, the spiritual life of Thăng Long inhabitants, have had many changes under the influence of three great events. At close of the 18th century, Thăng Long- Hà Nội was not capital of feudal state. At the close of the 19th century Thăng Long - Hà Nội was the capital of the French colony. Since 1954 Hanoi has been capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Three stages marked the continual developments of Thăng Long - Hà Nội. For the field of spiritual life, the influence of historical changes showed in actual situations of places of worship. The worship and activities of belief have been carried out in the places of worship. The places of worship are the cultural heritage objects to present spiritual culture of community. The historical events influenced all sections of people in society. The influence has been remained in the places of worship although these places are either relics or ruins.

1- When Thăng Long - Hà Nội ceased to be the capital of feudal state, the political life of Thăng Long - Hà Nội was influenced. The bureaucratic class was reduced but social economy was developed. This event only influenced directly the places of worship belonging to State. They were deserted. The

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platform of worship in Thăng Long - Hà Nội was replaced by new platform of worship in Huế; the temple to Bạch Mã deity (white house) was lowered because this temple formerly worshiped tutelary god of capital but at that time it worshiped tutelary god of Hanoi. Almost temples, pagodas which were related to bureaucratic class and Confucian scholars became village temples and pagodas. At the beginning of the 19th century, Hanoi was only a province. In the period of French domination, Thăng Long - Hà Nội was not the capital of Vietnam so the bureaucratic class and Confucian scholars were reduced. They were replaced by intellectual class so actual situation of worship in Hanoi was changed. The interpretation of dream in Quán Thánh temple was disappeared.

In this stage the economy of Thăng Long - Hà Nội continuously developed, many craftsmen, small traders moved to live in Hanoi. When they stabilized their life they built many new places of worship.

2- Hanoi became the town of French colony at the close of the 19th century. This political event influenced deeply cultural life when Hanoi was urbanized and developed according to the West. Infrastructures of villages and handicrafts guilds in Thăng Long were changed and disordered because economy of small scale industry, and small trade and village community were gradually lost their superiority. The capital economy and more advanced mode of production gradually controlled the economic life and society in Hanoi.

At that time, infrastructure needed to be enlarged so many pagodas, temples in Hanoi were destroyed to open new ways or to build new houses.

It was noted that some communal houses were heightened by people. For example, “Yên Phú communal house was rebuilt into two storey house in 1923. The deity was worshipped in the first floor. The ground floor was leased for business”⁽¹⁾. “Đông Mỹ communal house (No. 127, Hàng Bông Street) was built by traders for worship. The altar was in the second floor.

¹. *The collection of Hanoi epitaphs*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1978, Vol. 2, p. 52.

Business was in the first floor²). Xuân Biếu communal house (No. 3, Tây Sơn Street) only remains a room in the first floor.

At that time the sacred space of places of worship in Hanoi tended to narrow. This tendency was defined by special characteristic of town. When French colonialists occupied Hanoi, this tendency had new nature to reflect the disintegration of village composition which was originally administrative division of Thăng Long- Hà Nội. The communal houses where worship of popular belief of Thăng Long - Hà Nội were changed, especially in Eastern shopping area, because urbanization was took place vigorously in this area.

Although the worship of tutelary god began to fall into oblivion and some temples and pagodas were destroyed for the aim of non religious belief the picture of popular religious life in Hanoi was not monochromatic. The popular religious life took place ebulliently as many reasons but the main reason was spiritual need of Hanoi inhabitants.

The stele was erected in the 3rd year of Bảo Đại era (1928) in Ngọc Hồ pagoda written that “in reformed movement, all temples and pagodas were renewed” in Hanoi at the beginning of the 20th century.

“The reformed movement” associated with and the belief of Tam Phủ and Tứ Phủ.

The worship of Goddesses was not limited in a city, a village or a precinct. On the one hand the worship of Goddesses met the needs of praying for peace and timely rains and favorable weather. On the other hand, the worship of Goddesses met the needs of small traders who prayed for good fortune. The worship of Goddesses also met the needs of civil servants who prayed for learn, examinations, office and title..

According to some researchers, Goddesses were worshipped in Hanoi in the 17th century. After investigating some temples in shopping area in the East of Thăng Long citadel we find that worship of Goddesses belongs to the worship of Goddess. The number of temples where Goddesses were

². Nguyễn Văn Uẩn, *The First half of the 20th Century in Hanoi*, Hanoi Publishing House, 1955, p. 933.

worshipped was not more than the number of temples where four pink goddesses were worshipped (the worship of Goddesses as well as the worship of four pink goddesses were introduced from the South by traders)⁽³⁾ Khánh Thụy temple (No. 23, Hàng Hành Street) and Đông Môn communal house (No. 8, Hàng Cân Street) worship Mẫu Thoải (the Goddess of Water). The initiation of worship of Goddesses was the belief of traders. The development of worship of Goddesses reflected the change in popular belief of Vietnam in the first half of the 20th century.

3- From 1954 up to now, the religious life of Hanoi can be divided into two stages: the first stage is from 1954 to renewal (1986) and the second stage is from 1986 up to now.

On infrastructure: in general, Hanoi has still preserved its old structure which has been established in the period of French domination, but some industrial zones were established in suburbs.

From 1954 to 1986 economic life and society in Hanoi had following characteristics:

On economic aspect: State controlled economy closely. The artisanal economy and free trade which had been main economic activities of Hanoi were limited. The State - run economy predominated over so the class of petty bourgeoisie was reduced. At the same time, the population in Hanoi was increased. Many people transferred from other area to Hanoi. They did not take part spiritual activities of Hanoi precincts and villages.

On the other hand, the infrastructures of many ancient villages of Hanoi did not change. Because the old basic organizations of villages did not operate so their places of worship were deserted. When America threw bombs into the North, the Department of Culture of Hanoi had an innovation that all worshipping objects were stored in the warehouse. After that many worshipping objects were lost or given back to wrong addresses⁽⁴⁾.

³. Nguyễn Văn Uẩn, *The First half of the 20th Century in Hanoi*, Hanoi Publishing House, 1955, p. 933.

⁴. According to old gentleman in Đông Xã village (2003)

Because of some reasons, many families lived and occupied land of Hanoi pagodas and temples. For example, Phủ Từ temple (No. 19, Hàng Lược Street) only remains the main hall. Many places of worship were occupied by descendant of caretakers of communal house (Lò Rèn and Đông Môn communal houses). Bích Câu communal house was utilized by civil service.

In this period the existence of the places of worship depended on the aid of State. Until 1986, the number of places of worship which were recognized as vestiges was few. In 1962 Đông Nhân, Voi Phục and Quán Thánh temples were recognized as vestiges; in 1980 Ngọc Sơn temple was recognized as vestige; in 1986 Bạch Mã, Hòa Mã, Thụy Khê, Vũ Thạch temples and Mai Động, Vạn Phúc Yên Phụ communal houses were recognized as vestiges. The number of pagodas which was recognized as vestiges were many. The activities in the places of worship were not ebullient.

From 1986, our State began to implement its policy of Reform and Renewal so religious life and religion began to go well. Especially, the market institution has recovered the space of traditional culture of Hanoi people; from 1986 to 1994, 336 temples and communal houses were recognized as places of historical and cultural interest. The class of petty bourgeoisie was recovered. The generation of workers who had transferred to live in Hanoi in 1956-1960 retired on pension so they had free time to take part in religious activities. The villages in the edge of town repaired their places of worship.

4- On real situation of the places of worship in Hanoi at present.

After investigating the group of communal houses in the South, in the West and the West-South of Thăng Long - Hà Nội we find that the change of worship of tutelary god is taking place on two levels.

First, tutelary god has been worshipped as normal god, at the same time many objects have been worshipped in temples

Second many temples have still worshipped tutelary god.

On communal houses: According to our vestiges, tutelary god has been worshipped as the normal god in the temples of ancient streets. On the first day and the 15th day of lunar month many people go to temples and

communal houses which have been under the management of Hanoi Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism. Many people also go to Vạn Hạnh communal house, it has derelict altar.

In the West and the South- West of Thăng Long - Hà Nội the structure of old villages has been preserved well so village communal houses have been restored well since 1986. The management board of communal house has been elected by villagers. In these areas, tutelary gods have been venerated as gods who protect villagers.

The worship of professional ancestor

This worship also belongs to the belief of tutelary god. Generally, the professional ancestor is also tutelary god, for example tutelary gods of Lò Rèn and Tú Thị communal houses, but in Đông Xá and Hồ Khẩu communal houses tutelary gods are worshipped next to professional ancestors. However, the worship of professional ancestor does not depend on structure of village much. If village was broken up, but handicrafts guild still exists, then the worship of professional ancestor is still remained.

Lò Rèn communal house (No. 1, Lò Rèn Street) has been a typical case of the worship of professional ancestor. The activities of this communal house are the activities of handicraft guild; at present communal house has 31 members who live in Hanoi.

The worship of goddesses is popular in Hanoi. Almost temples, pagodas and communal houses in Hanoi have the altars of Goddesses. Some famous places of worship of Goddesses as follows:

Nghĩa Lập temple is at No. 32, Hàng Đậu Street

Cổ Lương temple is at No. 28, Hàng Bưởi Street

Tây Hồ palace of worship is the greatest place of worship of Goddess in Hanoi. This palace was restored in 1999, 2000. Burning of votive paper and going into a trance were forbidden since 1955. The religious activities in palace are lively So many people go to palace at the beginning of year.

Pagoda is the place of worship of Buddhism. Pagoda is the center of popular religious activities. Pagoda has an important role in life of

popular belief. The popular characteristic of Buddhism have manifested in objects that are worshipped in pagoda. Not only Buddha is worshipped in pagoda. The models “Buddha in the front, saints at the rear”, “Buddha in the front, gods at the rear” are popular in Hanoi pagodas. Gods and saints who are worshipped in Hanoi pagodas are human being and natural beings. Almost Hanoi pagodas have the altars of goddesses and altars of patriarch. The worship of patriarch is manifestation the belief of ancestor- worship of Vietnamese tradition. Specially, the “hậu” (posthumous) worship and worship of souls of deaths cause many normal people to be worshipped in pagodas so pagodas are close to daily life of community.

The role of pagodas becomes more important in the spiritual life of Hanoi people because two reasons. The first reason pagodas shoulder one part of responsibility of communal house. The institution of village is decreased. The role of tutelary god is fallen into oblivion. Village does not carry out rite of praying for peace but family has to contrive this rite. In the modern life, people are interested in spiritual need so many Hanoi people go to pagodas to carry out their spiritual need through the rite of praying for peace and apotropaic ritual.

According to statistic data on “some activities and the problems of place of worship” which were investigated in October, 2000 by the Institute for Religious Studies, in 67 places of worship including 32 pagodas, 24 communal houses, 7 shrines and 7 temples, many religious activities as praying for peace of deaths’ souls, apotropaic rituals, going into a trance... were carried out in pagodas. Communal houses had not religious activities. Shrines and temples had only some religious activities. After investigating places of worship in shopping area in the East of Thăng Long and handicraft villages in the West-South of Thăng Long we find that: the aim of worship in communal house is changed, worship of normal gods replaces worship of tutelary god as Thanh Hà, Đông Môn, Phú Tứ communal houses. The village structure in the West is preserved well so the tradition of worship of tutelary god, professional ancestor and religious activities are realized in temples, shrines as Long Tỉnh shrine in An Thái village, Thăng Long temple in Hồ Khẩu village.

The second reason: pagoda is also cultural structure of village. Nearly every village has its own pagoda. In the traditional religious life, pagoda is designed especially for women while men discuss village affairs in the communal house. When village structure is broken up, pagodas can be deserted, the fate of pagodas as a whole is independent of the fate of village. But the fate of the communal house depends on the fate of village. In traditional society, women often went to pagoda. At present women are the most active members of pagoda. Nearly every Hanoi pagoda has a society of Buddhist woman devotees. It consists of about some tens of devotees or some hundreds of devotees for example Quán Sứ, Phúc Khánh, Hòe Nhai, Hai Bà Trưng pagodas.

The society of Buddhist woman devotees takes part in reciting the Buddhist scriptures in pagoda. Buddhist woman devotees realize simple rites of Buddhism as Vu Lan festival (Buddhist holiday held annually on the 15th of the 7th month of the lunar calendar) and popular rites. Every Buddhist woman follower propagates the activities of pagoda where she takes part in. Quán Sứ and Phúc Khánh pagodas have many typical popular religious activities.

In short, Hanoi always reminds us of profound and implicit things in the past and at present. The variety and firmness of mental life including spiritual life are precious heritages to be respected by Hanoi people. Before the tendency of urbanization, we should be interested in the change of popular religious life. The problems of urbanization and city culture are set up under a new angle regarding the laws that control traditional society as well as modern society. The religious activities which are cultured with the aim of building an active spiritual life correspond to developed laws of the process of Hanoi urbanization at present ... /.