

DAO PEOPLE'S RITE OF PASSAGE IN VIETNAM

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Rite of passage is a ritual imbued with the Dao cultural identity. This is the topic that many researchers are interested in approaching the cultural life of the Dao people, but to find a definition with adequate content is still a problem that has not been thoroughly studied, there are still debate and inconsistency on opinion. This paper, within the scope of the study, describes the basic contents of the ceremony from the lowest level (3 lights) to the highest one (12 lights), through which the definition of rite of passage is given their identity and value in the spiritual life of the Dao people.

Keywords: Rite of passage; Dao people; 3 lights ceremony; 7 lights ceremony; 12 lights ceremony; Definition of rite of passage.

1. Introduction

Researchers, when approaching the Dao culture, recognize that the rite of passage (lễ cấp sắc) ceremony is a universal cultural characteristic. However, to acutely understand this ceremony of Dao people, until now, there are still quite vague ways of understanding.

Researching and interpreting to reach full awareness of a universal cultural phenomenon of the ethnic group is necessary, especially when this ritual is always characterized by historical - cultural life of the Dao people.

2. Study overview

Previously, many Vietnamese scholars when approaching the rite of passage often affirmed that it was a vestige of the custom, with some people agree that the ceremony is an *initiation rite*. Therefore, sometimes to explain it specifically, it is also known as *the Initiation Rite of the Dao male*. However, in the ritual complex of this ritual, there are many small ceremonies, such as *the call-enter ceremony of soldiers, the opening ceremony of the sky gate, praying for good crops, the granting of lights and soldiers, worshiping ceremonies to Ban Vuong ancestor, the ceremony of bringing couples to cross the river/sea, the ceremony of granting yin and yang scrolls for the attending couple...* With such a complicated ritual complex, to understand and make specific and accurate judgments for the rite of passage is an issue that needs to be approached from the overall perspective and details of the entire ritual system from the lowest to the highest ranks, including: 3 lights, 7 lights and 12 lights ceremony...

Currently, the concept and nature of the rite of passage in the Dao ethnic group in general are still discussed by researchers. According to the authors of *Dao people in Vietnam* (Dang, Tung, Trung, & Tien, 1971), the rite of passage is a very popular

custom among the Dao people and compulsory for all Dao men. In terms of origin, rite of passage is a social activity phenomenon, later it is put on a "religious" cover, which is so bold that at first glance it looks like a mere religious ritual. Besides, these authors assert, the overarching meaning of this ritual of the Dao people includes many aspects such as: the person who passed into the new level becomes an adult, can do worship, when he dies, his spirit will reunite with ancestors... (Dang et al., 1971, pp.278-279). According to author Le Sy Giao, by nature the rite of passage are considered to be an expression of the initiation, a challenge for young people to officially enter the adult world. Of course, the Dao's rite of passage is not a exact clone of an initiation, but it is tinted with shamanism and aims to train young people to become shaman masters (Giao, 1996, pp.1-3)

3. Research method

The paper uses basic research methods: Methods of collecting secondary documents, methods of description, synthesis, comparison.

4. Research results

4.1. 3 lights ceremony and its significance in life

4.1.1. Naming rituals

For the Dao people, the child born must be named; The naming must be read in the worship book and must be carried out with the ancestors. For the Dao Tien group in two provinces of Bac Kan and Cao Bang, the ritual sequence was conducted as follows:

- *Informing ancestor and unofficial naming ceremony for young children (búa phàm chiu)*

With the Dao Tien people, the homeowners celebrate the *búa phàm chiu* with the purpose of informing the ancestors' ghosts. During this time, pregnant women and infants must be in a closed room, only the husband and the mother-in-law are

allowed in and out. After performing the ritual, the mother is given some kind of stem, roots, leaves of medicinal plants to bathe by her mother-in-law (or her sisters), and she can go out to do some light work. At the ritual of *búa phàm chiu*, the name of the child when used is used in numerical order (unofficial name), specifically as follows:

Son names		Daughter names	
First son	cấn ton	First daughter	sía mụi
Second son	bía nái	Second daughter	sía nái
Third son	bía lún	Third daughter	sía lún
Fourth son	bía đăm	Fourth daughter	sía đăm
Fifth son	bía điếu	Fifth daughter	sía điếu
Sixth son	bía mản	Sixth daughter	sía mản
Seventh son	bía coộc	Seventh daughter	sía coộc
Eighth son	bía liu	Eighth daughter	sía liu

Because the naming is done according to the order of the children, when praying, the shaman must clearly state which child this is, who the parents are and where they reside...; In case the father of the child has not issued three lights, the name of the child and the father will only be witnessed by the ancestors, but cannot receive the protection of magicians. When they need ancestors help, ancestors will be more difficult to identify than the children whose fathers have yin names (that is, the special name which has magicians to assist, lead or help in the underworld). Obviously, this concept also creates psychological pressure, making the practice of 3 lights ceremony in the Dao Tien community always become necessary.

- *Birth ceremony, giving an official name to the child (pháo nin sành)*

The time for *pháo nin sành* ceremony at home does not depend on the age of the child. For boys, it is mandatory to perform this ceremony before they perform the 3 lights ceremony, that is, the naming of the yin name. In other words, adult Dao men need to have 2 names, 1 in the secular world and 1 in the underworld (*pháp danh*). Dao women grow up, before going to get married, they also have to go through *pháo nin sành* ceremony, which means they also have two names.

If at the ancestor worship ceremony, the child's name only makes sense in the family life, the *pháo nin sành* ceremony is more towards the community. However, the official naming for the community

to recognize the Dao Tien people is simple, almost no witchcraft and magic elements appear. The conception of the people about this ritual is similar to that of the neighboring peoples: Finding people who is good with words and piety, and invite them to name their children in order that all good things will come to them. This name must be announced to the ancestors and the ghost in the house, for them to support the child. Therefore, since then, the child in the family should not arbitrarily change the name, because this is the name recognized by both the secular and underworld. This also explains why in the past, in some areas where Dao children went to school, the previous school year name of a student was Hue, the following school year it was changed to Hoa. When teachers call their former names, they definitely do not answer, leading to difficulty in learning and examination. The reason is that families have not conducted birth ceremony, naming their children officially so when they go to school, they choose a good name for themselves and the right to change according to their preferences.

- *Renaming ceremony for children who are difficult to raise (trúi miến)*

Normally, according to traditional practices, children who were born and raised if they were sick, their parents would invite shaman. In terms of meaning, this offering is similar to that of the Kinh people; worship Mother Bjooc, Mother Va... of the Tay and Nung people... If doing that and children are still often sick, they must make a ceremony to change the name, because the Dao Tien people believe that there is some kind of ghost disagree with the child's name. This ritual is usually conducted when children know how to walk and eat rice until about 9-10 years old, but popular in the period from 1 to 6 years old. Depending on the needs of the homeowner, the shaman conducts a renaming ceremony for the child in one of the following two ways:

The first way: The child's parents go to the forest, find a big rock and adopt it as a foster parent for the child, the rock is considered as a guardian object for the child. The name of the child then often called "Thach" (meaning stone) or "Lam" (meaning forest). In order to perform the ceremony (Dao Tien people call it a *trúi bánh*), the shaman and his parents brought the child and some rice, wine, meat, paper money, incense to the chosen rock to present the gifts and make the rock bless the children to grow up healthy. After that, the shaman burned paper money and brought home gifts, offered rice to cook porridge or cooked rice for children to eat. Next, on the first and second days of the first and second month, the parents brought the rice to the rock to offer it, then brought it back and cooked for the children. When children are healthy again, do not call them "Thach" or "Lam" anymore but called "Bánh". Since then, on the occasion of the full

moon of the seventh lunar month and the first days of the year, the homeowner must bring offerings to the rock until the children grow up, pass the rite of passage or get married. It should be added that, during the above process, whenever Bánh gets sick, if he tells what his “adoptive parents” dislike, the homeowner must invite the shaman there to make an apology and make a call for its soul.

The second way: The Dao Tien people here also have a ritual to change the name for the child called “trúi phính”, that is, change the child’s name completely by the name of a certain family of the Dao Tien people. First, the homeowner asked the shaman to see if the child suited the family, then they will go to the head of the lineage’s family to complete the procedures. If the elder’s house is far away, a family member may ask for permission, bring an offering to the altar, and burn incense to request the ancestor’s ghost to bless the healthy child. In this case, if the surname Trieu, the child’s name is Trieu; Ban family - the name of the child is Pien... Every year, on the occasion of the Lunar New Year and the Full moon in July, the homeowner must bring some offerings to burn incense and thanksgiving at the ancestral altar of that family. It ends when children get married. But with respect to their ancestors, grateful to their roots, many married couples still visit their adoptive parents on Tet and holidays.

Thus, looking at each ritual can see, all kinds of names, even of the individual, must be witnessed by the gods and ancestors. That is, the domination of the spiritual world of Taoism and ancestor worship for each individual being started from birth. This is also the first reason leading to the implementation of the 3 lights ceremony in order to give a yin name (a special name), to grant a shrine and soldiers to the worshippers, which is still practiced popularly among Dao Tien people today.

4.1.2. 3 lights ceremony

For Dao Tien’s male in particular and the Dao in general, in addition to performing the rituals related to naming above, it is also necessary to perform the rite of passage when that person reaches the prescribed age to have more name (also known as yin name – phật búa). In the process of performing the rite of passage, the worshipers are given the procedures by granting the names of the yin name, shrines and soldiers, in order to clear and enlighten the soul. The soldiers will help the person who has received the rite of passage with the army, the power... to manage the affairs of the worshiping ceremony.

According to the regulations of the Dao people in the Mien dialect, with 3 lights ceremony, the beneficiary is provided with 3 shrine lights and 36 soldiers. The three-level ceremony of lights basically consists of these main ceremonies: *The ceremony to announce the prayers of the gods; Ceremony for granting 3 lights (quá tang); Soldiers*

dance; Ceremony to see off the gods, wizards, and Ban Vuong ancestors to their old residence.

Thus, if you look at the rituals in the 3 lights ceremony, you can see that the central nucleus lies in the providing of the 3 lights and the soldiers for the beneficiary. In order to be granted lights and soldiers, the beneficiary must be given a yin name first. Only when he has a yin name, he is considered to be a mature man, qualified, capable to run the work on the underworld. This is the detail that makes many people confuse this ceremony and the initiation.

4.2. 7 lights and 12 lights ceremony and their significance in life

Surveys in the provinces of Bac Kan, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang ... showed that most of the Dao groups in Vietnam today only perform the ceremony of 3 lights and 7 lights, the 12 lights ceremony seems to have very little existence. As for the Dao Tien people in Ngan Son district (Bac Kan) and Nguyen Binh district (Cao Bang), many families still have the ability to perform the 12 lights ceremony. In this ceremony, the 7 lights ceremony is only a transitional step within the 12 lights ceremony. At the 7 lights ceremony, the beneficiary is granted 7 shrines and 72 soldiers; At the 12 lights ceremony, the beneficiary is given 12 shrines and 120 soldiers.

In daily life, the relationship between people granted with three lights and 12 lights is no difference, only difference in position when people have died. The fact also shows that the Dao Tien custom dictates the order of gradation according to the hierarchy and the generation, in which 3 lights gradations are compulsory, the 7 lights and 12 lights are combined into a ritual, but currently only exist in some families reside in Ngan Son district (Bac Kan) and Nguyen Binh (Cao Bang). Therefore, the relationships between the 3 lights, 7 lights and 12 lights people only have spiritual meaning, that is related to the concept and worship together with the ideas behind death. Particularly, the level of 3 lights is required, so almost every man goes through and must follow the order of hierarchy; Therefore, the relationships between families with people who has not done the rite of passage are less discriminatory, because those who have not been ordained are yet to turn. The problem is that, among the granted people, later those who take the effort to learn and become good worshipers are reputable in the Dao community.

Unlike the 3 lights ceremony, which is usually held within the family, 7 and 12 lights are attended by many families. Particularly for the Dao Tien group in Ngan Son district (Bac Kan) and Nguyen Binh (Cao Bang), the 12 lights ceremony has the participation of the whole family. During the implementation process, the 12 lights ceremony of the Dao Tien people here was divided into 2 separate rituals: - *Sin pè đàng* ceremony - organized

by the lineages to inform the gods and wizards about their lineage. After preparing, go into the process of prepare a man for the ceremony. After the ceremony, the whole family abstained and prepared for the *tầu sai* ceremony according to the time set by the head of the family and the shamans before the *sìn pè ðàng* ceremony.

The Dao Tien people believe that only when the Dao man goes through this ritual will he become the general in the afterlife. Therefore, the family often elaborately prepare for this great ceremony. The organization frequency is therefore also sparse, usually about every 30 years for each lineage. In particular, some families have to take 50-60 years to organize once. The main rituals of the 12 lights ceremony are: offering pigs to ancestors and deities (*lò mạ*), worshipping the earth to help manage the objects and welcoming wizards and soldiers (*biêu kiêm chê miên*); Ceremony to worship ancestors and gods about the family's initiation of fasting for the 12 lights (*puông chê*); Presentation ceremony of the spouse and the gods in 5 days of performing the great ceremony of 12 lights (*hiu lũng pua puông chê piu*); Ceremony to lead Sài ton soldiers to dance (*đồ thây*); Also to worship the gods, wizards, and soldiers to remain their positions when guiding the soldiers of Sài ton to dance (*dịa chiêm*); Offering the premature dead souls to reunite with their ancestors (*thinh tài nhuệ tri*) and the big fortune-telling ceremony to find the whereabouts of the ill-fated spirits (*tôm bâu*); Ceremony and dance to share the joy with the soldiers of Sài ton and the ill-fated souls who were redeemed to reunite with their ancestors (*là chê*); Offering gods to sharpening knives, making stairs to Mieu Dai (*mỏ dụ*) and welcoming good things to those who receive offerings (*loàng phinh*); Ceremony to grant 7 lights and 12 lights for Sài ton (*quá tầu sai tang*) and opening the sky for Sài ton (*sài ton hiu lũng*); Ceremony to bring Sài ton across the river (*tầu sùi dụ*) and make offerings to the Sài ton to be transformed into phoenixes to fly up the five elements (*pén sin pháo Tầu thây*); Ceremony to grant seals to the Sài ton (*bêu diên*) and to take the wives of 14 Sài ton across the streams (*tầu là choông*); Ceremony of granting colors to Sài ton (*quá chê*), giving yin and yang to the couple of Sài ton (*là cháo chây*), adjusting the soldiers (*là chái peng*); Ceremony to welcome good things for the couple of Sài ton (*phâu nghinh ðàng tầu*), the soldiers giving each Sài ton to Heavenly King (*puông nghinh peng piu*), reporting on heaven and earth about the Tầu sai (*puả mài sán piu*); Offering thanks to our ancestors, shamans, soldiers, and land guardian ... (*séng loông*).

Through a complex of ceremonies in the 12 lights great ceremony, it is clear that the mark of the customs of the initiation has almost disappeared. Instead, there are rituals imbued with Taoism, interwoven with ancestor worship, animism...

Especially in the 12-lights ceremony, there are three important rituals: - *Ceremony invite the premature dead souls to reunite with their ancestors (thinh tài nhuệ tri) and the big fortune-telling ceremony to find the whereabouts of the ill-fated spirits (tôm bâu)*. Dao Tien people believe that in life, there are unfortunate souls, when death is not granted, so they have not been reunited with their ancestors. Therefore, they must conduct the ceremony to find and redeem their souls for reunion. This is a humanistic feature of the spiritual life of the Dao people.

The third important ritual, also the focal point of the 12 lights ceremony, is the ceremony of granting yin and yang scrolls for each couple of disciples to receive the ceremony. Yin is burned right after the rite of passage, while yang will be burned until the person dies. The souls of the deceased will follow the guidance of that scroll to become a general, and reunite spouses and descendants in the underworld. This is also the most important purpose of the great ceremony of the 7 and 12 lights in the spiritual life of the Dao Tien people in particular and the Dao people in general.

The results of the survey clearly show that at the ceremony of the 7 and 12 lights of the Dao people, the mark of the initiation in daily life was absent. Instead it is the mark of a Taoist ritual localized in the Dao faith.

4.3. Rite of passage definition

For the Dao people, the name for newborn babies must be agreed by the ancestors and the gods, so it is possible to identify clearly: - Taoism is localized, tied to ancestor worship and many other primitive beliefs, thus created their own colors in the spiritual life of the Dao people and they became disciples of this religion from the beginning.

At the 3 lights ceremony, the vestige of the initiation is quite clear. However, this is no longer an independent ritual of the initiation, but also includes ancestral tributes and some Taoist rituals. At the 12 lights ceremony, the mark of the initiation became completely absent. Therefore, if it is considered that the rite of passage is the mark of the initiation or the initiation rite of the Dao male at the 12 lights ceremony, it is incorrect.

In our opinion, it is possible to give the definition for the rite of passage from the lowest step (3 lights) to the highest step (12 lights) as follows: *The Dao people's rite of passage is a ritual conversion with Taoist colors, but has been localized by the Dao people, absorbing even Buddhism, Confucianism and incorporating some primitive beliefs of the ethnic group, the most prominent of which is the custom of ancestor worship with the presence of Ban Ho ancestor at every rituals*. The two main goals of the ceremony are to train and cultivate the qualities and abilities of the shaman, and to show the desire of each individual to be reunited to live

happily with their ancestors, to be good soul, good general on the underworld after death. It is these important goals that have become a continuous thread, educating Dao individuals to live better and more responsibly to family, friends, descendants, and relatives in daily life, also help life become more humane, bring more positive values in many development stages of the ethnic group. In daily life, Taoism and ancestor worship - Ban Ho ancestor (*Piễn Hùng*) govern each individual from the common name (the name of the secular world) and the special name (Taoism name, the afterlife name so that their ancestors and grandparents can recognize together), which makes individuals self-regulate their own behavior. This helps explain why, many values of family culture, behavior in the social life... of the Dao people are still sustainable.

5. Solutions to preserve the rite of passage of the Dao people

At present, there are few Dao groups practicing the original method of 12 lights ceremony. The fieldwork results showed that the Dao Tien group residing in Ngan Son district (Bac Kan) and Nguyen Binh (Cao Bang) still maintained the organization of 12 lights ceremony once in 30 years for each family line. In addition, the Red Dao group residing in Yen Bai area has also restored this ritual, but the family line has been broken. Instead, there was the participation of disciples from many families who contributed money, rice, wine... to organize the worshiping of the shamans. The number of married

couples of disciples is no longer limited to 12 or 14 couples but can be up to 50 - 70 couples in the same ceremony. Therefore, taboos within the lineage as well as offerings and fortune-telling to find and redeem the dead souls of the lineage to reunite with the ancestors cannot be performed. Therefore, in order to avoid being affected by cultural shifts, making rituals likely to be deformed in the future, it is necessary to have in-depth research programs on the rite of passage of all Dao groups, especially in documenting the 12 lights ceremony of the Dao Tien group in Ngan Son district (Bac Kan province) and Nguyen Binh district (Cao Bang province) to research and propagate the positive values of the ceremony. From that, helping the community and researchers have a better view of the typical and unique cultural features of the rite of passage in the spiritual life of the Dao in particular, its unique value in the treasure of cultural heritage of the ethnic communities of Vietnam in general.

6. Conclusion

Researching on ethnic cultural characteristics, accurately identifying the nature of each ritual always brings many important values; helping researchers have the right orientation in the process of finding issues related to history, consciousness, and the relationship between history and ethnic culture in each stage of development. Hopefully this research will add a voice to the research process of ethnic culture in our country today and in the future.

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LỄ CẤP SẮC CỦA NGƯỜI DAO Ở VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt: Lễ cấp sắc là nghi lễ mang đậm bản sắc văn hóa người Dao. Đây là nội dung được nhiều nhà nghiên cứu quan tâm khi tiếp cận đời sống văn hóa người Dao, nhưng để tìm ra một định nghĩa với đầy đủ nội dung, giá trị vẫn là vấn đề chưa được nghiên cứu thấu đáo, vẫn có những tranh luận và sự thiếu thống nhất về quan điểm. Bài viết này, trong phạm vi nghiên cứu, mô tả các nội dung cơ bản của lễ cấp sắc từ cấp độ thấp nhất (3 đèn) đến cao nhất (12 đèn), thông qua đó, đưa ra định nghĩa nhận diện nghi lễ cấp sắc cùng giá trị của nghi lễ đó trong đời sống tâm linh của người Dao.

Từ khoá: Lễ cấp sắc; Người Dao; Lễ cấp sắc 3 đèn, Lễ cấp sắc 7 đèn; Lễ cấp sắc 12 đèn; Định nghĩa về lễ cấp sắc.