

## RESEARCH ON RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS AND FESTIVALS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

**Abstract:** *Traditional festivals are typical ritual practices in the system of beliefs of Vietnamese people (Kinh) in particular and ethnic groups in Vietnam in general. Since the Renovation (Đổi mới) in 1986, along with the restoration of ancient culture, religious relics have been restored, embellished, or rebuilt throughout the country. Traditional rituals and festivals have also been restored. Therefore, this paper analyses to clarify the relationship between beliefs and festivals in order to have the foundations for the study of traditional festivals in contemporary life.*

**Keywords:** *Relationship; beliefs; festival; contemporary; Vietnam.*

### 1. Concepts and schools of study

#### 1.1. Introduction to some concepts

*The concept of the festival:* this concept is often used to refer to traditional festivals in Vietnamese villages. This article focuses on analyzing the festivals of the Vietnamese in the Red River Delta in comparison with the festivals of some ethnic minorities. For example, the communal temple festival is associated with the belief in worshipping the tutelary deity of villages (Thành hoàng); Festivals of worshipping deities at the palaces, temples, and shrines belonging to the worship of Mother goddesses (thờ Mẫu) such as Phủ Dày, Ông Hoàng Mười, Tân La, Đức Thánh Trần and the generals of Đức Thánh Trần, the ancestor of traditional crafts of Vietnamese villages;

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harvest festival of the Tay and San Chay people; ancestors of Then, Môt, Mỡi of the Tay, Thai, Muong people. *In short, the traditional festival is a typical ritual practice associated with religious and belief forms of ethnic groups in Vietnam in general.*

*The concept of belief:* So far, the concept of belief has many different interpretations. This article introduces it in a simple way: *belief is the faith in the patronage of worshiped objects associated with ritual practices of ethnic groups in Vietnam.* Accordingly, belief consists of faith, objects of worship, places of worship such as altars, communal temples, temples, pagodas, shrines, etc... and related ritual practices. Specifically, it can be called the agricultural belief, Thanh Hoang worship belief, Ancestral worship belief, Four palaces belief, etc.

### ***1.2. Some schools of study festival***

There are two prominent trends in festival research since Doi Moi associated with the period of strong restoration of monuments and festivals throughout the country as follows:

*Studying festivals as a folklore cultural element:* A typical example of this research is the Institute of Folklore Culture (founded in 1983, the Institute of Cultural Studies at present). As a specialized Institute on folklore culture, the festival is considered as an overall folklore cultural phenomenon that has been studied in many articles, conferences and seminars, and publications. It can be said that the book *Traditional Festivals (Lễ hội cổ truyền)* and the Proceedings of the International Conference *Traditional festivals in modern social life (Lễ hội truyền thống trong đời sống xã hội hiện đại)* organized by the Institute of Folklore Culture under the chairmanship of the National Center for Social Sciences and Humanities in 1993 are two typical works of the Institute of Folklore Culture on festivals in the early period<sup>1</sup>.

According to this approach, the study of festivals is a subject, separated from the study of religion and belief in some Training

Institutions for Culturology. Therefore, a number of doctoral theses and many master's theses on festivals associated with worshipping relics such as communal temples, temples, shrines, pagodas were completed.

*Studying festivals under the multi-dimensional viewpoint of the authors.* These are studies carried out mainly in the period from the beginning of the 21st century to the present. The highlights of these works are paying more attention to the contemporary social context, focusing on various aspects of the festival such as cuisine, the impact of the market economy, the structure and elements of the festival, management of festival, cultural heritage, etc. Accordingly, these studies do not only recognize the festival as an important element of folklore, but they also show the structure and characteristics, the role and value of the festival in social life associated with contemporary issues. With a variety of perspectives and approaches, these works have important contributions to in-depth research on the festival and show theoretical and practical issues as well as the political, economic, cultural, and social contexts for the study of the festival<sup>2</sup>.

It can be said that they have been two main trends of research on festivals in Vietnam in recent years. It also shows an inevitable change in the approaches and methods of festival study, meeting both scientific and practical requirements for research on festivals.

In general, the study of festivals in relation to religion and belief has not been paid enough attention in the past. Although some studies have indicated the role of belief in the festival, they have not deeply analyzed and clarified the relationship between belief and festival. For example, based on the point of view of "Religion - the environment that produces, integrate and preserve many folklore activities" (Tín ngưỡng - môi trường sản sinh, tích hợp và bảo tồn nhiều sinh hoạt văn hóa dân gian), the author Ngo Duc Thinh said that "Festival, a popular cultural activity of the community village (làng, buôn, plây, bản) of most ethnic groups in

our country, is also formed and shaped on the basis of a religious ritual such as the festival of Buddhist temples (worshipping Buddha), the festival of temples (worshipping gods, the festival of communal temples (worshipping the tutelary deity...’’<sup>3</sup>. However, Belief and festival were even presented in two separate contents in his book *Research on Belief and traditional festivals (Về tín ngưỡng và lễ hội cổ truyền)*.

Thus, this article focuses on analyzing festivals in relation to belief and studying festivals in contemporary life.

## **2. The relationship between religion and festival**

### ***2.1. Elements of the festival***

In my opinion, a festival is constituted by five main elements as follows:

#### *1) Cultural space of the festival*

The concept of “cultural space of the festival” means the sacred space where the main rituals of folk festivals take place. It may be the worship facilities of gods in Vietnamese villages such as communal temples, temples, shrines, palaces, etc. For the ethnic minorities like the Tay, Nung, Thai, Dao people, it can be temples worshipping village gods, or temples worshipping local gods. For example, among the Tay and Nung people, there are shrines to worship Thổ Công, which are clans established villages. Or the White Thai people in the Northwest have temples worshipping Nàng Han who is a heroine against foreign invaders. It can also be the altar for worshipping the profession’s ancestors of the shamans as Then, Put, Mo of the Tay, Nung; Mo, Môt of the Thai people) or Mo, Mỡi, Trượng of the Muong in the stilt houses. For some ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, there are communal houses, long houses, gươl houses where the rituals of community often take place.

Related to the sacred space, there are shrines or altars with statues, paintings, incense bowls, symbolic objects, etc.

## 2) *Objects of worship and belief*

Depending on each locality and ethnic group, a place of worship is often associated with an object of worship that reflects their religious life. This article provides a temporary classification of festivals in relation to belief as follows:

### *Agricultural belief and festival*

This is an ancient Vietnamese belief associated with worshipping gods in nature in order to meet the needs of agricultural production. Over time, the agricultural belief can be covered with new religious beliefs such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism. However, it is still possible to recognize the primitive belief of agriculture as the core of the festival. This belief includes the Giong temple's festival, the Four Dharmas (Dharma goddesses of Cloud, Rain, Thunder, and Lightning) temples' festivals associated with praying for rain and water, Tan Vien temple' festival associated with fighting against floods; Chu Dong Tu temple' festival associated with fishing, etc.

### *Belief and festivals of worshipping the tutelary deity*

This is a popular belief in Vietnamese villages. People mainly worship the meritorious deities to patronize a peaceful life for the villagers. These deities can be a human deity of locality or a popular deity who is honored by many localities as the tutelary deity. For example, national heroes such as Hung Dao Dai Vuong and his generals; gods of natural origin such as the Mountain deity (Cao Son Dai Vuong), the Water deity (Linh Lang Dai Vuong).

### *Belief and festivals of worshipping ancestors*

This is a popular belief, it reflects the Vietnamese mentality of "drinking water, remember the source". This type of belief can be temporarily divided into the following forms.

(1) Worshipping national ancestors and dynasties. The kings in the legend can be grouped into this belief. The worship consists of Kinh Duong Vuong, Lac Long Quan, Hung Kings, Hai Ba Trung, kings of Dinh, the Early Le, Ly, Tran, Mac, the Later Le, Nguyen

dynasties. Today, the worship of President Ho Chi Minh as the founder of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam can also be classified in this form. Festivals as well as the worship of this object are often associated with the spirit of national pride and the mind of “drink water, remember the source”. In particular, the Hung Temple’s festival is considered as the worship of national ancestors and a national holiday.

(2) Worshipping the ancestor of the profession: In each Vietnamese village, besides farming, people also do secondary jobs such as bronze casting, silver carving, carpentry, embroidery, etc. Each ancestor corresponds to each profession, people worship the ancestor as the protective deity for their profession. For villages with developed traditional professions, the ancestor of the profession can be the tutelary deity or co-worshiped with the tutelary deity of the village. For example, villagers of Chau Khe village, Thuc Khang commune, Binh Giang district, Hai Duong province worship Mr. Luu Xuan Tin, a mandarin of the Later Le dynasty as a founder of the village’s gold and silver craft. He is worshiped in the communal temple along with the tutelary deity of the village. Chau Khe village’s festival is called the death anniversary of gold and silver craft ancestor<sup>4</sup>.

(3) Worshipping the ancestor of the shaman profession (tổ nghề cúng bái): The ethnic minorities such as the Tay, Nung, Thai, Muong people have the worship of shaman ancestors. This worship is popular in families who practice the shaman profession. The main objects of worship are the ancestors through generations who practice the profession, the deceased master of the profession, and the generals of the profession associated with religious elements of each ethnic group. Depending on each locality or ethnic group, the festival can be held annually or every 3 years, or every many years in the families of the shaman. The White Thai people call this festival “Kin pang then”, the Black Thai people call it “Kin pang lâu nó” or “Kin pang Môt”, the Tay people in Yen Bai province call

it “Tồn Phi Then” or “Buron Chiêng”. The Tay people in Ha Giang province call it “Kin then biooc mạ”, the Tay people in the provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Can and Lang Son call it “Lầu Then”; the Muong people called it “Lễ Mời”.

(4) The festival is associated with the belief of the Four Palaces: Heaven, Land, Water, Mountains, and Forests are taken as the symbol of worshipping the mothers, the residential space of the gods. The Four Palaces belief is the worship of the sacred gods in the Four realms like Thiên (heaven), Thoải (water), Địa (earth), Nhạc (forests and mountains) in order to towards happiness, fortune, and longevity associated with human life cycle's rituals.

The Four Palaces belief has absorbed a large number of gods, including Taoist gods, natural gods, human gods such as heroes and heroines. This worship is popular in the North. The shrine is in the order including the father (kings) such as Ngọc Hoàng - Bát Hải Đông Đình - Long Vương, the mothers such as Thiên- Địa- Thoải- Thượng ngàn, the mandarins. In some localities, the commemorating festival of the Four Palaces' goddesses has become a large festival of the whole region such as the Phu Day festival in Nam Định, the Kiep Bac temple's festival in Hải Dương, Song temple's festival in Thanh Hóa, Ông Hoàng Mười temple's festival in Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh.

### *3) Festival time*

Traditionally, the festival is held in spring and in autumn, people call it “spring and autumn two periods”. Presently, it is often held at the beginning of the year. For ethnic minorities, the festival usually takes place at the beginning of the year. This is probably related to leisure time before the planting season (in spring) or after the harvest (in autumn).

### *4) Subjects of the festival*

For every ethnic group, the inhabitants play an important role in the subjects in all types of festivals. For festivals of Kinh people,

whether before or after 1945, the main subject is still a large number of people under the direction of an organizing committee and the authorities of the village, district, or province depending on the scale of each festival. People participate in sacrifices, processions, art performances, games, security protection, etc,... For ethnic minorities, festivals may be presided over by shamans (thầy cúng), however, the inhabitants are still the main subjects participating in festival activities. They prepare offerings, decorate festival space, music and dance shows, games, etc,...

#### *5) Art performance*

For any traditional festival, whether Kinh people or ethnic minorities, there is a common process with the participation of various art forms to create the festival art performance. For the festivals of Kinh people, it is a closed process including main activities such as processions, sacrifices, performances, games, cultural exchanges, etc. For the community rituals of the indigenous people of the Central Highlands, performances of gong music and dances<sup>5</sup> intersperse with rites. And for the profession's ancestor's festivals of the ethnic minorities, it is a spiritual performance with the participation of various art forms such as singing, dancing, music, and the incarnation of ancestors.

Among the five elements of festivals as mentioned above, the object of worship is central, it defines the festival's content and form of the festival. Accordingly, although the Kinh's village festivals have common characteristics, they depend on the features of each god, there will be different content and form of the festival, it reflects the different beliefs of the people. For example, the festival of worshipping the village's tutelary god often has a solemn ritual (to imitate "a small Court") to honor the patron deity of the village. The festival of worshipping ancestors is often associated with the characteristics of the ancestors like the national ancestor, the dynastic ancestor, the profession ancestor, the shaman ancestor, etc,... The festivals of the Mothers worship

(Four Palaces) usually have a procession to the Buddhist temple (for the festival of worshipping Mother Lieu Hanh) and the votive dance rituals (nghỉ lễ hầu đồng). In addition, for each belief, each deity, there are different regulations corresponding to the arrangement of shrines, offerings, rituals, etc... Accordingly, understanding the origins of each belief and festival will explain cultural phenomena such as rituals, totems, taboos, symbols, performances, and games, etc... They reflect the concept of human life, cosmology of the ancients.

Thus, it can be said that belief is the core factor that governs issues related to the festival, from the organization and rites to the participation of artistic elements (decoration, aesthetics, dance, music, art performances, games). Studying festivals in relation to beliefs contributes to having a deeper understanding of the festival, thereby giving a suitable orientation in preserving and promoting the festival in contemporary social life.

### **3. Belief and festivals in contemporary social contexts**

Since 1945, along with the impact of historical, political, economic, cultural and social factors, festivals of the Vietnamese in general have undergone many changes. First, it was the absence of the festival for a long time from the 1960s until 1986. Then, there has been the recovery of the festival associated with the restoration of historical and cultural relics. The festival can be studied in relation to belief in the context of contemporary society.

#### ***3.1. The fading of belief and the festival of worshipping the tutelary deity***

The organizational structure was one of the biggest changes in Vietnamese villages after 1945, which led to a change in many aspects of village culture, including the position of the gods - the main object of worship and honor in communal temple festivals. Accordingly, through vicissitudes, the communal temples have lost their function as the administrative center and collective activities

of the village, they have become the cultural heritage of the village. Therefore, if the gods in general and the tutelary deities in particular in the ancient villages belonged to the deified system of the kings according to the levels of Upper - Middle - Lower deity (Thượng- Trung- Hạ đẳng thần). It means the deities took care of the spiritual life of villagers on behalf of the court. Today, the status of the deities is the Certificate of Cultural and Historical Relic (*Bằng chứng nhận di tích lịch sử văn hóa*) at all levels like province, city, nation. Thus, the position of the tutelary deities was changed from the role of representing the feudal court to the role of the cultural heritage of the new society. Presently, the festivals worshipping the tutelary deities are restored for the purpose of preserving and promoting traditional cultural heritage rather than religious belief. It can be seen through studying changes in the tutelary deity's belief in Vietnamese villages today.

It can be said that some communal temples are considered to be sacred or famous for their artistic value, attracted many people, most of the communal temples have been restored and rebuilt with a large scale, spacious campus, however, they are often deserted and only becomes lively on holidays, Tết and festivals. Therefore, the position of the god that protects the villagers' lives has gradually faded in many places. The emergence of other gods that are closer to people such as the ancestor of a profession, or the gods of the Four Palaces. Likewise, along with the secularization of religious activities, the position of Buddhist temples or temples of the Mother Goddesses often overwhelm the position of communal temples in many places. This fact leads to the "desacralization" of worshipping the tutelary deity's festival activities in some places such as reducing taboos in the preparation of offerings, simplicity in choosing the ritual performers, and lack of seriousness, respect in processions, rites, etc... Accordingly, attendance at the village festival today is not only the religious needs, many people also attend the festival to exchange or reminisce.

In that context, many communal temples and temples today have added new deities such as President Ho Chi Minh, General Vo Nguyen Giap, or set up altars to worship national heroes and martyrs. Since the rite has also changed. Besides preservation the traditional rituals of some of the communal temples, there has been a reduction, the greetings in Chinese characters have been replaced by the greetings in Nom with new contents in many communal temples. For example, the congratulatory text of the festival of Chau Khe village, Thuc Khang commune, Binh Giang district, Hai Duong province is written in rhyme form, words are easy to remember, memorize. Likewise, besides processions of the tutelary deity, many communal temples have the procession of the image of President Ho Chi Minh. The costumes of the participants in the procession are also diverse such as traditional costumes, the vestments of veterans, uniforms of the youth union, etc,... Similarly, in addition to the rituals to worship the tutelary deity of the village, there are also new ritual practices associated with the new gods such as incense offerings ritual on the date of birth or death of President Ho Chi Minh, the day of war invalids and martyrs, on July 27.

Thus, the belief of worshipping the tutelary deities is tending to add the other gods which are clearly reflected in festival activities, making the Vietnamese festivals today like a living museum of the village's cultural heritage rather than the traditional cult of the tutelary deities.

### ***3.2. The rise of the Four Palaces belief***

Since Đổi mới, along with the rise of the market economy, the belief of the Four Palaces with the blessing of fortune through life-cycle rituals has developed, attracted the attention of many people. The festival of this religion can be examined some aspects as follows:

Firstly, the restoration and expansion of famous relics of the Four Palaces such as phủ Dày, phủ Nấp in Nam Dinh province, phủ Tây Mỗ, Sòng temple in Thanh Hoa province, Bắc Lệ temple in Lang Son province, phủ Tây Hồ in Hanoi, etc,.. have led to the

revival of festival activities, attracted disciples and believers all over the country. Besides, there is the restoration of relics and festivals of famous deities in the sanctuary of the Four Palaces throughout the country such as the temple of Ong Hoang Muoi in Nghe An, Ha Tinh provinces; the temple of Ong Hoang Bay in Lao Cai province; the temple of Bát Nàn in Thai Binh, Hung Yen provinces; the temple of Mother Thac Bo in Hoa Binh province; the temple of Mother Thac Ba Yen Bai province, etc,...

In addition, the phenomenon of “temples for worshipping local deities have become the Four Palaces” (Tứ phủ hóa điện thờ) is also a popular trend since Đổi mới, which has led to restructuring festivals. The phenomenon is the establishment of a sanctuary to worship the Four Palaces (also known as the Mother's altar) in a temple or shrine to worship local deities. For example, it is the temples of Tay Thien Mother in the villages of Tay Thien, Tam Dao, Vinh Phuc province. It has led to restructuring the relic system and the festival according to a new model associated with temples such as Trinh temple, Mau Sinh temple, Mau Hoa temple. Accordingly, the festival of the Quoc Mau Tay Thien temples was the rite of worshipping the tutelary deity in the past. Presently, the festival is organized on a common day for the whole region under the leadership of district leaders. This can be considered as a typical transformation of the Quoc Mau Tay Thien worship, the belief of the tutelary deity of the San Diu people, to the worship of the Mothers of the Four Palaces. It leads to promotion for monuments and festivals<sup>6</sup>.

The phenomenon of “temples for deities became the Four Palaces” has also occurred in Bach Ma Temple and Kim Lien Temple of the “*Tứ trấn*” worshipping system of Hanoi. It led to the restoration or appearance of ritual practices related to the Four Palaces’ belief in the festivals. For example, the Kim Lien temple festival has the participation of the votive dance performers with the name “Hội Quần tiên” in costumes of “kings”, “queens” such as ông Hoàng Ba, ông Hoàng Mười...<sup>7</sup>.

Besides the expansion of the Four Palaces belief, there is a rise of the votive dance ritual (nghĩ lễ hầu đồng)- a typical practice of the Four Palaces. This is a unique ceremony and it is considered as a living museum of Vietnamese society through history or its value of preserving traditional art and culture. It also has limitations such as the issue of burning votive papers, prophecy.

The rise of the Four Palaces belief also led to the appearance of specialized festivals like the Ba Chua Kho temple's festival with "borrowing and paying" activities at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year. It attracts the attention of many people in society, especially businessmen.

In addition, the expansion of the Mother Goddesses' worship of the Four Palaces is also reflected in the gathering of the Four Palaces sanctuary in the Buddhist temples. The votive dance ritual has taken place in the Buddhist temple, the monks even perform the votive dance ritual.

Thus, the rehabilitation of belief and ritual practices (including festivals) of the Four Palaces has been a strong reflection of Vietnamese social life since Đổi mới. There are many uncertainties and risks in the context of the outbreak of the market economy.

The belief of the Four Palaces is the worship of the goddesses in the Four Realms such as Thien (heaven), Thoai (water), Địa (land), Nhạc (forests and mountains). It meets the needs of happiness and fortune in the life cycle of Vietnamese people. Therefore, studying the rituals and festivals of this belief in relation to religion and belief can explain its problems in contemporary society.

### ***3.3. The secularization of festivals associated with Buddhist relics***

Buddhism is one of the religions introduced to Vietnam for a long time and has a profound influence on people's lives. Accordingly, in addition to the temples of villages, there are many large Buddhist centers such as Yen Tu, Huong Tich, Tay Thien,

etc,...Buddhist temples are pure places, suitable for the cultivation practiced of Buddhists (in the past, these places were familiar for middle-aged women).

Today, Buddhists belonged to many classes and they attend the Buddhist temples for many purposes. Besides the need for cultivation, spiritual needs and the need for pilgrimage as tourists, etc,... The trend of secularization is expressed through the activities of offering stars to relieve tribulation, selling children to the Buddhist temple at the beginning of the year (related to the purpose of praying for happiness and longevity of the Four Palaces belief), or rituals honoring filial piety (belonging to the ancestors' worship) in the Ghost Festival (also known as the Zhongyuan festival), weddings (at the temple called Hằng thuận ceremony). These ritual activities and festivals have attracted a large number of believers, creating a new look for ritual activities in Buddhist temples.

In some localities, there is also an intergration of indigenous beliefs in the festival activities of the Buddhist temples. For example, Sơn Dược pagoda in Binh Thuan commune, Dai Tu district, Thai Nguyen province has a palanquin procession festival belonging to the cult of the tutelary deity. And Hang pagoda in An Khang commune, Tuyen Quang city, Tuyen Quang province has a New Year festival with the imprint of agricultural belief (the custom of carrying water from the river to the temple).

The secularization of Buddhist cultural activities is also reflected in the ritual practices at pilgrimage festivals of Buddhist centers such as Bai Dinh, Yen Tu, Huong Tich, Tay Thien, etc. This is an increase in altars, donation boxes. In addition, people go to the Buddhist temples for the purpose of worshipping rather than a pilgrimage to meditate. It leads to phenomena such as jostling to offer joss-stick, offerings and burning votive papers, etc.,

### ***3.4. The transformation of festival functions in some mountainous localities***

Festivals of ethnic minorities in mountainous areas have also been restored, however, their functions have been changed.

A typical example is the *lồng tồng* festival (going to the field) of the Tay people in the northern provinces. In the past, the festival was held within the village with rituals for Thổ công (The God of Land) at the beginning of the year. Today, this festival is held on a regional scale (district, province) with the participation of many ethnic groups. It becomes the cultural festival of the local ethnic groups. For instance, ATK festival in Dinh Hoa district, Thai Nguyen province, *Lồng tồng* festival in Ba Be district, Bac Kan province, rituals for crops in Tan Trao communal temple, Tuyen Quang province.

In addition, the *xên mường* festivals of the Thai people were voluntary contributions organized by the people with strong spiritual elements. Presently, some festivals are funded by the state to restore, they mainly meet the needs of cultural exchanges and art performance. In particular, the profession's ancestors festivals of shamans Then, Mọt such as "Kin pang Then" or "Xên lẩu nó" have been restored with the support of the state. The spiritual festivals transformed into cultural exchanges. The restoration of the "Kin pang then" festival of the White Thai people in Phong Tho district, Lai Chau province is a typical example<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, there is some relics and festivals of ethnic minorities becoming spiritual tourist destinations, the ritual practices, and festivals take place in association with the Kinh people's belief in Mother Goddesses worship (the Four Palaces) such as the Nàng Han temple of the White Thai people in Quynh Nhai district, Son La province<sup>9</sup>.

It can be said that the beliefs and festivals of the Vietnamese today are a strong reflection of the spiritual life as well as the

aspirations and needs of the people with diversity and complexity of the contemporary Vietnamese society.

#### **4. Some problems for the study of beliefs and festivals at present**

There are some problems for the study of festivals in contemporary social life as follows:

*Firstly, the study of festivals needs to be approached systematically in relation to the custom of worshipping.* Accordingly, the study of festivals needs to be placed in the economic, political, cultural, and social contexts through each historical period in order to analyze and recognize the layers of beliefs hidden in festival practices. For example, despite being Buddhist temples, the festivals of Four Dharmas pagodas (Tứ Pháp) has the custom of worshipping natural gods such as Cloud (Phap Van), Rain (Phap Vu), Thunder (Phap Loi), Lightning (Phap Dien) belong to the agricultural beliefs of the Vietnamese people. Specifically, when there was a drought, people in Thuan Thanh, Bac Ninh often carried the statues of Phap Van, Phap Loi, Phap Vu out of the temples to take them to On Xa Pagoda where worship Phap Dien to pray for rain<sup>10</sup>. Accordingly, the agricultural religious element of the Tu Phap pagodas' festivals is stronger than the Buddhist element so these festivals can be classified as agricultural festivals instead of Buddhist festivals.

Likewise, studying festivals in the custom of worshipping means the festival in relation to its constituent elements such as cultural space (relics), the object of worship along with legends and myths, sanctuary, and rites and especially the role of the subjects-organizers and participants of the festival, thereby clarifying the specific features of the festival in each locality.

*Secondly, the study of beliefs and festivals is placed in transformation.* As mentioned above, although festivals basically exist as a traditional model, however, the transformation of

religious needs and beliefs in gods has led to the change of the nature and function of festivals. Therefore, almost of current festivals are cultural heritage performances rather than practices of religious rituals. The exchange of positions of the gods or the addition of new gods shows the efforts of the people on the way to find new cultural and religious symbols.

On the other hand, the rise of the Mother Goddesses worship (the Four Palaces) with its negative aspects related to supply and demand shows a panorama picture of the spiritual life of Vietnamese people in the economic market context with many risks and unpredictable changes. Therefore, the study of the transformation of beliefs and festivals must explain the causes and consequences of this change. Understanding the belief of the Mother Goddesses worships about “happiness, fortune, longevity”, it can be explained why people are willing to spend hundreds of millions in Vietnam Đồng to organize a ceremony to avoid risks or cure diseases according to a statement of a votive dance performer.

In the future, studying the change of beliefs and festivals is aimed at improving people’s understanding of beliefs and festivals, thereby contributing to the healthyization of religious practices in general and festivals in particular in contemporary society.

*Finally, research on beliefs and festivals needs to be associated with the construction of a new countryside.* Along with the change of political institutions after 1945 and the impact of the current trend of urbanization, the village and village culture of the Vietnamese people have rapidly changed. The change is not only in the environmental landscape, worship space but it also comes from villagers- the subjects participating in beliefs and festivals practices.

Presently, there are no longer the organizations of males (phe, giáp), which were considered the nucleus of traditional agricultural activities in the Vietnamese villages. The Vietnamese villages do

not only have farmers but there are also businessmen, retirees, veterans, intellectuals, etc... Besides, the main labor force including both men and women is often absent from the village due to working away from home. Since the behavior relationship in the village is also more diverse and complex, it affects the mobilization of forces to participate in the festival. On the other hand, the new rural construction program has been changing the rural landscape and environment. The new cultural establishments have appeared such as cultural houses without effective function, while many traditional cultural establishments are abandoned because of obsolescence such as communal temples.

It can be said that new rural construction still lacks preparation for the restructuring of the inner core of cultural institutions. Therefore, research on beliefs and festivals associated with the new rural issue is the study of the restructuring of beliefs and festivals in rural Vietnam in contemporary society. In fact, some localities have an effective link of old and new cultural institutions in organizing festivals. For example, in the festival of Ong Hoang Muoi temple in Hung Nguyen, Nghe An, there is a procession from the Nguyen clan's temple in Xuan Am village to join the palanquin procession of President Ho Chi Minh from the cultural house of the village, then go back to the temple<sup>11</sup>.

In short, beliefs and festivals are an important part of the village culture in the past, at present, and in the future. The study of beliefs and festivals in contemporary social life, especially in the current context of building a new rural program, is a necessary work to contribute to the theoretical basis for understanding the cultural change of Vietnamese people in contemporary society.

#### NOTES:

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