

FOLK RELIGIONS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN SEA REGION OF VIETNAM

***Abstract:** The southwestern sea area of Vietnam is the residence of ethnic groups such as the Vietnamese, the Cham, the Chinese, and the Khmer. Therefore, folk religions are a mixture of ethnic cultures. Under the influence of the folk religions in Central Vietnam, those cultural elements have been indigenized when they have been introduced into the Southwest part of Vietnam. With the historical conditions and ecological culture, the folk religions of the inhabitants in the southwestern sea area of Vietnam have created a diversity with many different objects of worship.*

***Keywords:** Folk religions; marine culture; Southwest; Vietnam.*

1. Overview of natural and social conditions

The southwest coast is 600 km long, stretching over 7 provinces such as Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Kien Giang; from Tien Giang province bordering the Southeast to Kien Giang province lying on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand, bordering Cambodia. The Tien and Hau rivers flow through the area into the East Sea with 9 outfalls like Tieu, Dai, Ba Lai, Ham Luong, Co Chien, Cung Hau, Dinh An, Bat Xac and Tranh De (Tran De).

This region has 3 island districts such as Kien Hai, Phu Quoc, Tho Chu. These districts belong to Kien Giang province with 195 islands, an area of 693 km², divided into 4 groups of islands as Hon

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Khoai, Kien Hai, Kien Luong-Ha Tien, Phu Quoc. Particularly, 43 islands of 5 archipelagos are inhabited, Phu Quoc is the largest archipelago with an area of 573 square kilometers¹.

Residents of the Southwestern sea area are mainly Kinh people, a few Khmer, and Chinese people. The Kinh who originated from the South Central region like Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh always do the marine profession. A small number of Khmer people live in coastal communes of Vinh Chau town (Soc Trang), Bac Lieu, and Kien Giang. The Chinese who originated from Chaozhou and Canton live in coastal areas of Ben Tre, Soc Trang, and Bac Lieu. The Chinese who originated from Hainan is present in the communes of Binh An, Binh Tri (Kien Luong district), Ham Ninh commune (Phu Quoc district, Kien Giang province). These Chinese communities do nearshore fishing².

2. Folk beliefs of residents of the Southwestern sea region

As a new land, the Southwestern sea region converges many cultures. They are not only of the Vietnamese in the Central region but they are also absorbed from the Cham, Chinese, and Khmer cultures through the changes of history. Folk beliefs of island residents clearly show the integration. The integration, interweaving, and mixing of beliefs have created a spiritual life diversity of the coastal communities there.

The worship of Bà Chúa Xứ (Holy Mother of the Realm)

The temple of Bà Chúa Xứ Mỹ Long in My Long town, Cau Ngang district, Tra Vinh is an important spiritual place of fishermen in Tra Vinh and neighboring provinces. The former temple was called Lau Ba, located in Ben Cat (Vam Lau) and a big fish's skeleton was worshiped there. Around 1920, as a result of a landslide, this temple was moved to Bai Bun and renamed Vân Sanh Miếu. In the past, people only worshiped the Cố Hỷ goddess. At present, they also worship the goddesses of Xứ Nguyên Nhung, Thủy Long. Then, Ba Chua Xu became the main goddess and Vân Sanh Miếu is considered as “Miếu Bà Chúa Xứ”³.

Ba Chua Xu My Long festival still has a ceremony of Ông Nam Hải, a ritual to exorcise evil spirits, pray for peace for seafaring men, and pray for souls⁴. It shows that, even in the coastal area, the belief of agricultural residents still outweighs the belief of fishermen, even in communities of marine workers.

There is a model of Thien Y Ana goddess and her two sons transformed into other types of goddesses such as Bà Cậu, Chúa Tiên, Chúa Ngọc, Chúa Ngung Man Nuong, Bà Chúa Thượng Động (also known as Bà Cố Hỷ or Cố Hỷ Tiên Phi), Thủy Long Thánh Phi, Bà Chúa Hòn in the folk beliefs of the Southwest coastal residents. However, the belief of Ba Chua Xu is the highest level and most popular. Ba Chua Xu is considered as a goddess that governs the land, rivers, seas, islets and blesses residents.

The worship of Bà Cậu

Vietnamese fishermen in the South strongly believe in Ba Cau's beliefs so they call fishing as Ba Cau's profession (*nghề Bà Cậu*). Fishermen worship the Ba Cau goddess as the ancestor of fishing at sea.

At Ba Thuy temple in An Thuy commune, Ba Tri district, Ben Tre province, when fishermen go fishing, build a new boat, or repair an old boat, they often make offerings to Ba Cau. The offerings must have a pair of ducks because they believe that *the offerings to the male god are chickens, and the offerings to the goddesses are ducks (Ông cúng gà, Bà cúng vịt)*. When there is a storm, crop failure, and death, they often worship Bà Cậu to ask for blessings⁵.

According to the legend of Tắc Cậu Temple, in the 10th century, during the Song Dynasty (China), a young man crossed the sea to Annam to trade in forest products. In the area, there was an old farmer and his wife who planted melons, they had no children. The couple's melon farm was often stolen, then they saw a girl covered in sheepskin to pick melons and adopted her. The old man named

the girl Y Ana (meaning Jade). Hearing rumors about a filial, beautiful girl, the young man came to propose. They had three sons. One day, due to homesickness, while her husband was away, the wife took the children back to her hometown. On the way, the mother and three children died in a shipwreck by a fierce storm. Y Ana's corpse drifted into Nha Trang Bay. She was ordained as a deity, people built a shrine and worship the death anniversary on the 23rd day of the third lunar month.

The eldest son drifted into the cape of Ne (Mũi Né, Phan Thiet), people built a shrine to worship him. Seafaring men have been blessed by god. The second and youngest children drifted into the southern sea. The older brother drifted into Phu Quoc island, the youngest brother drifted into the Cai Lon River. People of Phu Quoc island built a temple to worship him (dinh thờ Cậu). The youngest son got stuck on a piece of board in the river and couldn't go. He showed and told the people to dig a canal from the Cai Lon river to the Cai Be River. People dug a canal and built a shrine to worship him as the water god of the Cai Lon River.

There are huge waves and strong wind in the sea from Nha Trang to the main southern cape in the middle of the third lunar month. People believe that the three sons come to their mother's death anniversary. The western sea is in heavy swell in the middle of the 7th month of the lunar calendar, that's time the youngest son goes to visit his brothers. Although this god is young, he is often naughty, so he creates huge waves in this area⁶.

This legend is a variation of the legend of Thien Y Ana in Am Chua (Dien Khanh, Khanh Hoa) with its variations to explain the presence of Cau shrines (miếu Cậu) in the South such as Dinh Cau in Ham Tan district, or Dinh Cau near Ong mountain in Ham Thuan Nam district, Binh Thuan province.

The following legend of Dinh Cau (Phu Quoc, Kien Giang) provides another example of the influence of the worship of Thien Y Ana as well as the relationship with the goddesses in the South.

This island was called Xích Tho (Xích Thồ) before the name Phu Quoc because the land there was completely red. At the Ong Cop cape (Ông Cọp), there is a sacred temple called Dinh Cau. The island is governed by Thuy Long Goddess (Thủy Long Thần Nữ), often called Ba Chua Dao or Ba. Her husband is General Dong Hai (Đông Hải). They have a son, fishermen call him Ông Cậu who gets angry suddenly.

Although it is called Dinh Cau, but the tablet in the main hall is written as *Tien Nuong Nuong Lord (Chúa Tiên Nương Nương)*. It shows the penetration of Thien Y Ana belief's into the southern land through a new form called Bà Cậu belief. Or Bà Thủy in the U Minh area (Kien Giang province) is a version of Thien Y Ana although the tablet of the shrine is written as *Ngoc Nuong Nuong Lord (Chúa Ngọc Nương Nương)*. Due to the influence of coastal inhabitants' beliefs, the custom of worshipping Ba Cau was overlapped with the custom of worshipping Ba Thuy. People who come here to worship still pray to Ba Cau⁷.

The worship of Đại Càn

Tứ vị thánh nương, a sea god in Nghe An province, becomes the protector of fishermen in the the Southern delta, in Dong Thap Muoi and in the fishermen area (Ho Chi Minh City at present) in particular. The god *Po Riyak* has been transformed into *Tứ vị thánh nương*.

Among the gods worshiped in the temples of the South, *Đại Càn Nam Hải* is ranked in the first place then *Thien Hau Thien Phi*, *Nam Hai Long Vương*, *Bach Ma Thai Giam*, *Cao Cac*, *Duong Phi*, *Thien Y Ana Dien Ngọc Phi*, *Dong Nam Sat Hai*, *Thuy Long*, *Nam Hai Cu Toc Ngọc Lan*, *Duong Canh Tho Dia (Lord of the Soil and the Ground)*.

The belief of *Đại Càn Nam Hải* thrived in the area of My Tho (former Dinh Tuong) because the Minh Huong people led by Duong Ngan Dich had reclaimed this area since 1679, they

maintained this custom and considered Dai Can as a guardian god of the sea along with Thien Hau holy mother.

Ben Tre, a coastal province, has the custom of worshipping Dai Can in some communal temples such as Long Dinh, Hang Thanh (Binh Dai district), An Hoi (Ben Tre town) ⁸. In which, the communal temple of An Hoi has 2 decrees of the king for the god Dai Can (the 5th year of King Tu Duc, on November 29, 1852).

There are communal temples to worship Dai Can on the island of Phu Quoc, in Ha Tien, and Rach Gia (Vinh Thanh Van, Kien Giang).

The worship of cá Ông

Toan Anh recorded the legend of the festival in Vam Lang (Go Cong Dong district, Tien Giang): “The legend indicated that the whale was a previous life of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who once saved human beings. He incarnated to Ông Nam Hải and traveled to the Nam Hải Sea and the seafaring men prayed to the whale every time they were in trouble. According to fishermen along the coast of Binh Thuan, they had 12 prayers called Thập Nhị đại nguyện. The legend told that Avalokitesvara taught them to call for the help of Nam Hai Dai Vuong when they were in accidents”⁹. Thus, the explanation of the origin of Ong fish (cá Ông) according to the Buddhist concept in Binh Thuan (Southern Central Coast) and Tien Giang (Southwest region) is similar.

In addition to the altar of the god Nam Hai, there are also altars of Lang Lai great generals (otter), Bach Ma (white horse) in the mausoleum of Vam Lang (Go Cong Dong, Tien Giang). Because according to local legend, otters and white horses used to help Nguyen Anh.

In the mausoleum of Binh Thang (Binh Dai, Ben Tre), Nam Hai is worshiped in the middle of the main sanctuary. There are altars to worship Tả đạo and Hữu xạ in the two sides, the back of the main sanctuary is dedicated to Tiên sư, Hậu hiền and Tiên hiền.

The god Nam Hai is also worshiped in temples of historical figures such as Long Thuan mausoleum (Go Cong town, Tien Giang) dedicated to Vo Tanh, Nguyen Trung Truc temple (Rach Gia city, Kien Giang province), Tran temple (Long Son Commune, Vung Tau City).

The number of shrines worshipping the whale (cá ông) in the Southwest region is the same in the Southeast region. For example, there are temples in Vam Lang, Tan Thanh, Tan Phuoc (Go Cong Dong district), in Tan Long, Dieu Hoa (My Tho city), in Hoa Khanh (Cai Be district) in *Tien Giang province*. *Ben Tre province* has temples in An Thuy, Bao Thanh, Tan Thuy (Ba Tri district), Thoi Thuan, Thua Duc, Binh Thang, Vang Quoi Tay (Binh Dai district); Thanh Phong, An Thuan, Thanh Hai (Thanh Phu district). *Tra Vinh province* has temples in My Long town (Cau Ngang district), Long Hoa commune (Chau Thanh district), etc. *Soc Trang province* has temples in Trung Binh commune (Long Phu district), Vinh Chau commune (Vinh Chau district). *Bac Lieu province* has temples in Hiep Thanh commune (Bac Lieu city). *Ca Mau province* has temples in Song Doc town, Khanh Binh Tay commune (Tran Van Thoi district), Vien An commune, Phu Tan commune (Ngoc Hien district), Khanh Hoi commune (U Minh district), Rach Cheo commune (Phu Tan district). Although Tan An commune (Ngoc Hien district) does not have a shrine, people hold a ceremony to pray for fish and sing with the participation of some fishermen from other provinces.

Kien Giang province has the most shrines for cá ông in the Southwest Sea. There are shrines in Dai Kim Du (Ha Tien City), Duong Dong, Duong To, Duong Bao, Duong Xanh, Tau Ru, Dat Do cape (Phu Quoc district), Ha Tien, Tac Cau (Minh Hoa commune, Chau Thanh district), Ganh cape (Tay Yen commune, An Bien district), Son Rai island (Lai Son commune, Kien Hai district), Tre island (Hon Tre commune, Kien Hai district), Mau island (Nam Du commune, Kien Hai district), Ben Trong (Vinh

Bao ward, Rach Gia city)... Nguyen Trung Truc temple in Rach Gia city was Lăng Ông communal temple before 1840. Nam Hai temple in Hamlet 2, Hon Tre commune, Kien Hai district (Kien Giang) also has a photo of Nguyen Trung Truc. It shows that the worship of the natural gods has been integrated into the worship of the human gods¹⁰.

The Khmer people have the *Chrôi rumchek* festival on February 14-15 of the lunar calendar. It is a festival praying for peace at Srei Krosăng Buddhist temple (Cà Săng temple, Vinh Chau commune, Vinh Chau town, Soc Trang province) and at the grave of the whale (cá ông) in Dai Bai Buddhist temple (Day Tapay Buddhist temple, Lac Hoa commune, Vinh Chau town). It shows the cultural exchange and transformation of the two ethnic groups through this custom (although the Khmer community does not have a maritime cultural tradition)¹¹.

The worship of bà Thủy Long

An Thanh temple in An Thanh hamlet, An Thuy commune, Ba Tri district has a tablet of the goddess “Thuy Long Thanh Mau Thien Nuong”. There are statues of Bà Thuy and Bà Chúa Xứ in An Thanh and An Thuan temples. The goddess of Thuy Long is mentioned in the praying text of Ông Bình Thắng mausoleum (Binh Dai district)¹².

The temple of Ba Chua Xu is located in the Hamlet 4 (My Long town, Cau Ngang district) also worship Co Hy Tien Phi and Thuy Long Than Nu. In the temple, there is a sanctuary and a statue of Thuy Long Than Nu, the praying text mentions “Hạ Động Thủy Long Thần Nữ Thánh Nương Nương”¹³.

Soc Trang province has temples worshipping Thuy Long Thanh Mau in Long Phu, My Xuyen. They show the marine culture. The death anniversary of Thuy Long takes place on the 5th day of the 5th lunar month. The boats of fishermen who attend the ceremony are parked at the estuary. According to custom, before going out to

sea, fishermen come to worship the shrine of Ba Cau and her two sons cậu Tài và cậu Quý¹⁴.

In Kien Giang, people believe that Thuy Long Than Nu/ Thuy Long Thanh Mau is a goddess with a snake body and a dragon tail, has supreme authority over marine animals. She is the first daughter of King Thuy Te, along with 8 brothers, each person defends one direction. Fishermen and people who live near the river built shrines to worship the goddess and make offerings on the festival days of May, December, and January. The goddess Thuy Long in the U Minh area is a version of the goddess Chua Ngoc (Thien Y Ana), although there is a tablet “Lord Ngoc Nuong Nuong” in the shrine, people still called Ba Thuy¹⁵.

In the island district of Kien Hai (Kien Giang), the cult of Thien Y Ana and her two sons transformed into other types of goddesses such as Ba Cau, Chua Tien, Chua Ngoc, Chua Ngung Man Nuong, and Ba Chua Thuong Dong (Ba Co Hy/Co Hy Tien Phi), Thuy Long Thanh Phi, Ba Chua Hon. However, the most popular is the belief of Ba Chua Xu, the goddess governs the land, rivers, seas and protects residents¹⁶.

The worship of Thiên Y Ana

Residents of the river basin in the Southwest region strongly believe in worshipping Ba Cau, those who do fishing, fishery services, and trading on the river in particular so they call fishing is the career of Ba Cau.

The book *The career of Ba Cau, fishing culture in An Giang/ Nghề Bà Cậu văn hóa đánh bắt ở An Giang* wrote that **Ba Cau** is “Ba Chua Tien, Ba Chua Ngoc, Ba Chua Xu, Ba Chua Dong, Ba Co Hi, Ba Thuy, Ba Hoa; Cau Tray and Cau Quy. They are children of Ba Chua Ngoc, a friend of a Chinese prince who gave birth to all gods. There is a place to worship five Ba and two Cau - although the number of gods is different, the objects of worship are Ba and Cau”¹⁷.

In fact, Huynh Tinh Cua did not mention Ba Cau in the aforementioned book, he just explained the idiom “*Seven Ba and three Cau*” like the content Nguyen Huu Hiep presented¹⁸.

In addition to the legend of the origin of Thien Y Ana handed down in Tac Cau temple as mentioned above, the legend of Dinh Cau (Phu Quoc, Kien Giang) shows the influence of Thien Y Ana belief from the Central region to the goddesses worship in the South. The temple at Ong Cop cape called Dinh Cau is famous and sacred. Inhabitants believe that they are under the rule of Thuy Long Than Nu and they often call the goddess of the island (Ba Chua Dao or Ba). Her husband is Dong Hai general. They have a son, known as Ông Cậu, who is unusually angry.

Although the temple is called Dinh Cau, the tablet in the main sanctuary is written as Lord Tien Nuong Nuong (Chúa Tiên Nương Nương). It shows the strong penetration of Thien Y Ana’s belief into the southern land through a new form as Ba Cau’s belief. The goddess Thuy Long in the U Minh area is a version of the goddess Chua Ngoc (Thien Y Ana). Because people still call the goddess is Ba Thuy although there is a tablet that says “Lord Ngoc Nuong Nuong” (Chúa Ngọc Nương Nương) in the shrine¹⁹.

The legend of Ba Chua Hon in Lai Son commune (Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province) told that a woman went to Hon Ngang mountain to cut firewood, left her two sons at the bottom of the mountain. The mountain god did not agree to let her cut firewood, so he made a storm. She vowed to dedicate herself after cutting wood. In the afternoon, the two children waited and did not see their mother, they went to the mountain to look for their mother, found their mother crushed by a fallen tree, they cried and died after their mother²⁰. This legend may be a version of the legend of Thien Y Ana that has been “localized.

The worship of Thiên Hậu thánh mẫu

The coastal region from Ben Tre, Tra Vinh, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu to Ca Mau, is the area with the largest number of worshipping Thien

Hau establishments among the Chinese and Vietnamese communities. The temples of the Chaozhou people account for nearly two-thirds of the Thien Hau temples in the Southwest. Ben Tre province has 4 shrines to worship Thien Hau: 1 temple in Giong Trom district, 3 temples in Ba Tri district. Tra Vinh province has the largest number of Thien Hau shrines in the Southwest region with 11 temples worshipping Thien Hau and about 15-20 temples dedicated for gods and Thien Hau in Tra Vinh city and Tieu Can, Cau Ke, Cau Ngang, Tra Cu, Chau Thanh districts, Duyen Hai town. Soc Trang province has 16 temples for Thien Hau, most of them are in Vinh Chau town, the rest are in Soc Trang city, Long Phu, Chau Thanh, My Xuyen, Tran De, and Thanh Tri districts. Bac Lieu province has 9 Thien Hau temples located in Bac Lieu city, Gia Rai town, districts of Hoa Binh, Hong Dan, and Dong Hai. Ca Mau province has 9 places to worship Thien Hau in Ca Mau city, Thoi Binh, Song Doc, Phu Tan, Cai Nuoc, Dam Doi, Nam Can, Phu Tan districts²¹.

In the western coastal region from U Minh, over Rach Gia to Ha Tien and Nam Du, Tho Chu and Phu Quoc archipelagos, there are the Chinese groups living such as Chaozhou, Guangdong, Fujian. This area has temples worshipping Thien Hau in Rach Soi, Tac Cau, Vinh Thuan, and some male gods temples also worship Thien Hau such as Quan De temple in Rach Gia city, and Nam Du archipelago (Kien Giang). On Phu Quoc island, the Hainan and the Chaozhou people built the Quan De temple in Duong Dong town, it is also dedicated to Thien Hau. The Cantonese Chinese have Thien Hau Palace in Rach Gia city. The Fujian Chinese have two places of worship as Nhi Phu in Rach Gia and Quan De in Ha Tien. Previously, the Hakka people in Ha Tien had Thien Hau temple, but it was collapsed due to war Thien Hau so the statue was put into Quan De temple of the Fujian people²².

The belief of Thien Hau Thanh Mau (Ba Ma Chau) plays an important role in the Chinese and Vietnamese communities in the

Southwestern seas and islands such as the ceremony to worship Thien Hau in Song Doc town (Ca Mau) attracting a large number of people to attend, or in some places where a large number of Chinese people living such as Ben Tre, Bac Lieu. Temple of Ba Tiem Tom in An Thuy commune, Ba Tri district, Ben Tre province worships Thien Hau Thanh Mau that organizes a very solemn ceremony (vía Bà), where there is the rich Chinese²³.

The Hainan Chinese in the South also worship *Thuy Vi nuong nuong* and *Y Vi nuong nuong*, two sea goddesses with unknown legends. They are worshiped along with Thien Hau Thanh Mau. People believe that these three sea goddesses bless the Hainan Chinese to immigrate by sea, or fish, trade.

The worship of the goddess Kim Giao

The goddess of Khmer origin was associated with the reclamation of Cua Can land in Phu Quoc, Kien Giang province. In the beginning, people on the island planted rice, she sent people to the mainland to buy about 50 buffaloes to reclaim Phuoc Loc area. The legend is told as follows: *An Annamite woman named Kim Giao, very wealthy, lived in Phu Quoc with the Cambodian and Annamite servants she hired. This new immigrated area is called Phuoc Loc (Cua Can). People started to grow rice from the beginning because the land was fertile. She sent some of her servants inland to buy buffalo. About 50 buffaloes were moved to Phuoc Loc. People used them to reclaim large areas of land. Kim Giao never left the island and died in Phuoc Loc at the age of 70. A few days before she died, she called all the servants and said that “I will leave you all my wealth, however, you promise me that after my death, please release my buffaloes goes to the mountains, and do not grow anything on my rice fields”.*

Currently, there are rice fields on the island that people call Ba rice fields (Đông Bà). People in Phu Quoc respect her very much and consider her as a pioneer to reclaim the island, and the worshipping text of Cua Can communal temple also mentions her name.

Kim Giao Than Nu Palace is located next to Ong Bon Palace, Nam Hai Mausoleum, faces Cua Can river. Every year, the people of Phu Quoc celebrate Ba's ceremony on the 15th day of the 11th lunar month. During the annual Nghinh Ong ceremony at the Nam Hai mausoleum on December 24-25 of the lunar calendar, a procession her tablet to the mausoleum to worship"²⁴.

The belief of the goddess Kim Giao is considered as the worship of the founder of the village (the early days of reclamation in Phu Quoc with Khmer origins).

The worship of Bà Cố Hỷ

The Lord Dong Nuong Nuong (Bo Bo Dai Vuong), a Cham goddess, originated from Central Vietnam, protects the forest profession. This worship was from Binh Thuan by sea to Ba Ria - Vung Tau, so coastal areas such as Loc An commune, Dat Do district, Ba Ria, Can Gio have shrines to worship the goddess. The ceremony day is on March 15 of the lunar calendar. The Lord Dong Nuong Nuong is mentioned in the liturgy at Dinh Co (Long Hai)²⁵.

About Ba Co Hy, Vuong Hong Sen wrote that "The name of a goddess in Ba Ria area, in the past, people were afraid, did not dare to call her name"²⁶. The Lady Co Hy temple is located on Co Mountain (Ba Ria), commonly known as Dinh Co.

In Tra Vinh, the Lady is often known as Ba Co Hy, Co Hy Tien Phi, the name is written the worship text as Thuong Dong Co Hy Thanh Nuong Nuong. In the shrine of Co Hy in Ba Dong, the statue of Thuong Dong Co Hy is placed to the left of the altar to worship the Lord Nguyen Nhung.

According to Son Nam, this custom was recorded in *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* (Binh Thuan province), Tra Vinh sea area has the land named Ba Dong, it is evidence that the first people who went to reclaim this sea came from Binh Thuan and they brought this custom.

In Tra Vinh, people believed that Ba Co Hy Thuong Dong Nuong Nuong supports fishermen to catch fish in the sea. The temple in the sea area of Ba Dong hamlet, Truong Long Hoa commune, Duyen Hai district, Tra Vinh province is called Ba Co Hy palace, it was built a long time ago.

Ba Co Hy palace also worships Trieu Thi Trinh. Legend told that: in the past, there were 2 decrees of the King for Trieu Thi Trinh and her brother Trieu Quoc Dat. These decrees drifted from the North due to a big storm North. As a result, people returned them to the sea but they drifted again. People went to Thanh Hoa and took the model of Trieu Thi Trinh's temple to build and worship.

In the temple of Ba Co Hy, there are statues of Ba Co Hy, Ba Chua Xu, Ba Thuy, and Ba Hoa. Ba Chua Xu temple in Cau Ngang town also worships Lady Co Hy²⁷. In Tra Vinh, there are 10 shrines or used to be shrines to worship Ba Chua Dong, Ba Co Hy. These shrines are mainly in coastal communes²⁸.

On the waters of Kien Hai district, Kien Giang province, Ba Chua Thuong/ Ba Chua Thuong Dong is worshiped in a cave on Lai Son commune (Son Rai island)²⁹. Hon Tre commune has the temple of Ba Chua Thuong Dong, which is also known as Ba Chua Hon by the people here³⁰.

Conclusion

The folk beliefs in the Southwest Coast show cultural exchanges and acculturation among ethnic groups such as the Viet, the Cham, the Chinese, and the Khmer. They are not only absorbed from the Central region's culture like the worship of Dai Can and Ca Ong, but they are also influenced by the Cham and the Chinese culture. The external cultural and spiritual factors such as Thien Hau, Ba Co Hy, Ba Kim Giao have been strongly "localized" and modified to suit the residents' minds. In which, the most prominent is the belief in goddesses with diverse and vivid expressions through legends,

rituals, and worship facilities. Historical factors have also affected the spirituality of the coastal communities there to create a spiritual life to balance, help them to hold on and thrive in new lands. Thus, the picture of folk beliefs there has contributed to the rich colors in the spiritual life of the inhabitants of the Vietnamese sea and islands in general and the Southern Seas and islands in particular.

NOTES:

- 1 Phan Thị Yến Tuyết (2014), *Đời sống xã hội - kinh tế văn hóa của ngư dân và cư dân vùng biển Nam Bộ (Social- economic and cultural life of fishermen and residents in the Southern Sea region)*, Nxb. Đại học Quốc gia Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, pp. 20, 31, 38, 39; Nguyễn Đoàn Bảo Tuyền (2006), *Văn hóa ứng xử với môi trường sông nước của người Việt miền Tây Nam Bộ (Culture of behavior towards the river environment of the Vietnamese in the Southwest region)*, Luận văn thạc sĩ chuyên ngành Văn hóa học, Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn Tp. Hồ Chí Minh, p. 23.
- 2 Phan Thị Yến Tuyết (2014), *Đời sống xã hội - kinh tế văn hóa của ngư dân và cư dân vùng biển Nam Bộ (Social- economic and cultural life of fishermen and residents in the Southern Sea region)*, *ibid*, pp. 56-57.
- 3 Trần Dũng, Đặng Tấn Đức (2012), *Diện mạo văn hóa tín ngưỡng và lễ hội dân gian Trà Vinh (Culture, folk beliefs and festivals of Tra Vinh)*, Nxb. Văn hóa - Thông tin, Hà Nội, pp. 367-368.
- 4 Phan Thị Yến Tuyết (2014), *Đời sống xã hội - kinh tế văn hóa của ngư dân và cư dân vùng biển Nam Bộ (Social- economic and cultural life of fishermen and residents in the Southern Sea region)*, *ibid*, p.379.
- 5 Dương Hoàng Lộc (2010), “Tín ngưỡng thờ bà Thủy của cộng đồng ngư dân An Thủy, huyện Ba Tri, tỉnh Bến Tre (Belief in worshipping Ba Thuy of An Thuy fishing community in Ba Tri district, Ben Tre province)”, *Nguồn sáng dân gian*, No.2, p.63.
- 6 Nguyễn Thị Diệp Mai (2011), *Sắc thái văn hóa sông nước vùng U Minh (Features of river culture in the U Minh region)*, Nxb. Dân trí, Hà Nội, pp.193-196.
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- 9 Toan Ánh (1993), *Nếp cũ Hội hè đình đám (Traditional Festivals, Customs)*, Quyển hạ, Nxb. Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, pp. 131-133. Về sau, Lê Quang Nghiêm trong *Tục thờ cúng của ngư phủ Khánh Hòa* (Sài Gòn, 1970) cũng ghi lại một truyền thuyết tương tự như vậy. Bộ sách trên của Toan Ánh được in lần đầu ở Sài Gòn vào năm 1969, do Nam Chi tùng thư xuất bản.
- 10 Nguyễn Thanh Lợi (2015), *Tín ngưỡng thờ thủy thần ở Nam Bộ (Belief in worshipping the Water god in the South)*, Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, pp. 39-46. Many religious establishments in the Southwest region, especially communal temples in Soc Trang, Ca Mau, Hau Giang, Kien Giang, Tien Giang, and Long An, etc.. worship Nguyen Trung Truc.
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- 12 Dương Hoàng Lộc (2008), *Văn hóa tín ngưỡng của cộng đồng ngư dân ven biển Bến Tre (Culture and beliefs of the fishing community in the coastal area of Ben Tre)*, Luận văn thạc sĩ Văn hóa học, Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn Tp. Hồ Chí Minh, pp. 47, 49, 83, 141, 155.
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- 18 Nguyễn Thanh Lợi (2015), *Theo dòng văn hóa dân gian (folk culture)*. Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, p. 27.
- 19 Nguyễn Diệp Mai (2011), *Sắc thái văn hóa sông nước vùng U Minh (Features of river culture in the U Minh region)*, ibid, p. 172, 177-178.

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- 21 Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ (2017), *Tín ngưỡng Thiên Hậu vùng Tây Nam Bộ (Belief of Thien Hau in the Southwest region)*, Nxb. Chính trị Quốc gia, Hà Nội, pp. 91, 92, 94, 96, 99, 101.
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