

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

NGUYỄN HỮU THỤ. *Philosophical aspect in Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta**Specialization: Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism.**Code: 62 22 80 05*

Mother Goddess worship is a type of folk belief of Vietnam people, which is the integration of three layers including Goddesses, Mother Goddesses and Three-Region and Four-Region (Tam phủ-Tứ phủ) worship. With adjustment and acceptance of impacts from various religions and credences, Mother Goddesses worship belief has defined its position in the spiritual life of Vietnam people in general and of Vietnam people in the Northern Delta in particular. In addition to positive cultural values, Mother Goddesses workshop belief also consists of many factors that facilitate superstition, affecting the formation and development of an advanced culture which is imbued with national identity that Vietnam is implementing.

The research on Mother Goddesses worship in the Northern Delta under the aspect of philosophy shall partly clarify philosophical values of this type of credence, bringing the more objective vision about Mother Goddesses worship belief among various different opinions at the present. For such reason, the writer chooses the issue “Philosophical

aspect in Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta” for his dissertation.

Beside the Introduction, Conclusion, Reference, main contents of the disseratation are prescribed in 4 chapters.

In chapter 1, the writer *provides the research status and clarification of some theoretical issues.*

Folk belief, according to the writer, is a type of credence that was formed very early in the history, exists mainly in the village community and is able to automatically adjust depending on situations due to the addition of visual and daily-life knowledge by the workers (firstly by farmers) during their daily living and production activities. It is usually in association with cultural and custom activities of that community. Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta illustrates the sacred belief in the power of the Mother Goddesses who create and protect for the existence and growth of the nature, society and human being.

Among layers of the integrated belief which formulated Mother Goddesses worship belief, the Goddesses worship appeared in the earliest and subjects to feminine gods. Mother Goddesses worship appeared later; it derived from the Goddesses worship and was subject to feminine gods who were honored as Mother Goddesses by people. Tam phủ-

Tứ phủ worship was created in the XVI century, illustrating the relative completion of Mother Goddesses worship belief. From litany of Goddesses and Mother Goddesses, Vietnamese people summarized into three or four Mother Goddesses to govern three or four regions: Mẫu Thượng Thiên governs the Sky (Thiên phủ), Mẫu Thượng Ngàn govern the Forest (Nhạc phủ), Mẫu Thoải govern the Water (Thoải phủ) and Mẫu Địa govern the Land (Địa phủ).

Chapter 2 provides the overview on Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta.

Mother Goddesses worship belief appeared very early in the social life of Vietnamese people. Time by time, the layer of Mother Goddesses worship was created and has developed more and more. In the XVI century, with the appearance of Mother Goddess Thánh Mẫu Liễu Hạnh, Mother Goddesses worship belief developed to a new level via the layer Tam phủ-Tứ phủ worship.

Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta was formed and existed under the impact of various factors, the first of which was the geographic-cultural and socio-economic conditions. In addition, Mother Goddesses worship belief in this region was also remarkably affected by other religions and credences.

Mother Goddesses worship belief during its development accepted many contents of nature god and fertility worship belief. This is demonstrated via the feminization for nature gods and

summarization into 4 Mother Goddesses including Mẫu Thượng Thiên, Mẫu Thượng Ngàn, Mẫu Thoải, Mẫu Địa. Meanwhile, the imprint of fertility belief is presented through the prominence to “femininity” in the worship area. Buddhism is also one of the religions putting much impact on the development of Mother Goddesses worship belief, which is illustrated by the legend about Man Nương and Liễu Hạnh; in worship areas (many temples worshipping Mother Goddesses currently worship Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva beside sets of three Mother Goddess); and in worship ritual (the worship activities in Mother Goddesses worship belief are carried out on the first and fifteenth of lunar month, etc). In addition, Mother Goddesses worship belief is also affected and dominated by Confucianism and Taoism.

The places where Vietnamese people commonly worship Mother Goddesses is shrines and temples, etc. At the beginning when Mother Goddesses worship was first created and layers of Tam phủ-Tứ phủ did not appear yet, Goddesses and Mother Goddesses were worshiped in saperated shrines. Later, the trend of Tam phủ-Tứ phủ spread over shrines worshipping Goddesses and Mother Goddesses popularly (though the saperated altar for original gods still remained beside the altars of Tam phủ-Tứ phủ worship. The trend even appeared in many pagodas in the Northern Delta with the structure “Buddha first, Mother Goddesselater”.

Among the system of Mother Goddesses worship rituals, lễ Đội bát nhang and Lên đồng (Hầu đồng, Hầu bóng) ceremony are the most typical and distinguished.

In chapter 3, the writer *analyzes the concept of human and nature in Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta.*

According to the concept of human being in Mother Goddesses worship belief, a man is composed of two parts including physical and spiritual parts. When he dies, his spirit shall move to other world and still impact to alive people's life. The concepts of human being in Mother Goddesses worship belief carries misteries, basing on which many people have made use of Mother Goddesses worship belief for non-religious purposes including disease treatment, ghost exorcism, and holy selling, etc. For the relation between human beings, concepts in Mother Goddesses worship belief indicate the desire for human liberation (firstly women) from the constrain and domination of social institutions, particularly the feudal Vietnam in the XVI-XVII centuries. At the present, Mother Goddesses worship belief remains and develop more and more in spite of significant innovations comparing with feudal period. This means that Mother Goddesses worship belief is still a spiritual shelter where desires are entrusted of many Vietnamese people.

According to the concept of nature in Mother Goddesses worship belief, natural space is divided into four regions governed by four Mother Goddesses. Assistants of the four Mother Goddesses include five entities Quan Ông, Tứ Phủ Châu Bà (Tứ Phủ Thánh Bà), Ông Hoàng, Vương Cô and Cậu Quận. In general, the concept of nature in Mother Goddesses worship belief carries the natural, mysterious and idealistic features which present the limited level of awareness of farmers in the Northern Delta. For the concept of the relation between human being and the nature, Mother Goddesses and others who govern and dominate the nature (living space) are in consistence.

Although being a folk belief only, Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta partly reflects (even just sentimental) explanations of Vietnamese people about nature, society and human being through its content, ritual and altar space.

In chapter 4, the writer *clarifies the orientation of movement and mentions some recommendations to enhance positive values and limit negative impacts of Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta nowadays.*

Basing on the analyses to clarify factors affecting the movement of Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta nowadays, the writer believes that this movement contains three major features. Firstly, modernization is found in worship

rituals implementation via modern technologies. Secondly, it has become a spiritual service which include changing money and supplying accomodations and offerings for worship rituals, etc, for believers. Thirdly, superstitions in Mother Goddesses worship belief have developed with activities such as joss paper burning, fortune telling, necromancy, ghost exorcism and disease treatment, etc.

Accordingly, the writer proposes some solutions to promote positive values and limit negativeness of Mother Goddesses worship belief of Vietnamese people in the Northern Delta nowadays, including:

- Strengthen the state management and complete the legal system for the adjustment of religion and belief in

general and Mother Goddesses worship belief in particular.

- Enhance the dissemination of Mother Goddesses worship belief and related legality, not only to people but also to those who work in religion and belief management at all levels and sections.

- Promote responsibilities of the state and social organizations in Mother Goddesses worship belief management.

The thesis was sucessfully defended at thesis Assessment Council of National University level, at Hanoi University of Social Sciences and Humanities and Vietnam National University in November 2013.

*Introduced by
HOÀI PHÚC*