

BUDDHISM AND TAOISM IN THE WORSHIP OF THE SOULS OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

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Van, VH, Buddhism and Taoism in the Worship of the Souls of Vietnamese People-
Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(7),ISSN 1567-214x

Abstract: In Vietnam, many folk beliefs exist. However, not many of these beliefs have become customary. Among those that have is the belief of worshipping souls. Similar to other folk beliefs, in the constant exchange and changes of cultural flows, this belief has been influenced by foreign religions, including Buddhism and Taoism. During the development process of the Vietnamese nation, Buddhism and Taoism had a great influence on the spiritual life, traditions, and culture of the nation, especially in the lives of working people. At the beginning of their introduction in Vietnam, Buddhism and Taoism had similar long-standing beliefs. The belief in liberation and the cult of magic, witchcraft, and talismans of ancient Vietnamese people created favorable conditions for the cultivation of Buddhism and Taoism. On the basis of studying ancient bibliographies and learning about the facts in some localities in Vietnam, this article systematically presents the custom of worshipping souls and identifies the influence of Buddhism and Taoism on this belief in Vietnam.

Keywords: Buddhism; Taoism; custom of worship souls; Vietnamese people

1. Introduction

The custom of worshipping souls is a kind of folk belief that has existed for a long time and is very popular in the spiritual life of the masses in North, Central, and South Vietnam. Thanks to the recognition and clear rules of the custom in the legal documents of feudal dynasties throughout the historical periods of the nation, this belief was strengthened, maintained, and developed until today.

During the course of existence and development, like other forms of folk beliefs, the acquisition, adjustment, and use of the world's cultural movements, beliefs, and religions are inevitable. In Vietnam in particular and in East Asian countries in general, Buddhism and Taoism have a major influence on all aspects of people's lives, especially in religious activities (Giau, 1973; Hinh, 2003). In traditional Vietnamese thoughts, along with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism were introduced at a very early point in time (around the end of the second century) (Thu 1997). These religions did not face native beliefs, developed freely,

and have had a great impact on the religious life of Vietnamese people from their introduction until the present (Binh, 2005).

The Vietnamese nation has a democratic tradition, which promotes harmony and desire for discovering new things. The ideology is not bound to a certain framework. Therefore, since Buddhism and Taoism were introduced in Vietnam, ancient Vietnamese people have actively opened the door; welcomed the essence of that ideology; and filtered, integrated, and transformed it into a unique ideology suitable for the nation's living conditions to serve the common interests of the nation. One of these harmonies can be clearly shown in the custom of worshipping souls, which is popular in almost every part of Vietnam.

Buddhism and Taoism were introduced in Vietnam at a very early point in time, around the 2nd century (Giau, 1973; Thu, 1997; Hinh, 2003). Throughout the development process of the Vietnamese nation, along with Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have had a significant influence on the spiritual, traditional, and cultural life of the Vietnamese nation, especially in the life of the Vietnamese working people (Thu 1997; Hinh 2003). In the early days of spreading into Vietnam, Buddhism and Taoism found that the analogy had long been established in the beliefs of Vietnamese people. The cult of magic, sorcery, enchantments, Feng shui, divination, compassion, filial piety, etc. of the ancient Vietnamese became a fertile ground for the sowing of Buddhism and Taoism. As stated by them, "Therefore, it is easy to understand why Taoism, first of all, the witch Taoism penetrated quickly and merged so easily with the ancient magic tradition that there were no boundaries" (Them 2000). Additionally, it has expressed stated that "It's like having a familiar land, people don't study but already know all" (Hinh, 2007, 215).

In addition to Buddhism and Taoism, Vietnamese beliefs are also influenced by other international religions, such as Christianity, Protestantism, and Islam. However, the most powerful influence on the religious life of Vietnamese people is probably Buddhism (Tien Duc Association, 1931; Giau, 1973; Lang, 1974) and Taoism (Ngoc, 2002; Hinh, 2007; Van, 2020), especially in the custom of worshipping souls of Vietnamese people.

As a kind of folk belief of Vietnamese people (Anh, 2005; Ngoc, 2002, Van et. al., 2020), the custom of worshipping souls not only contains cultural and moral values, but also demonstrates the outlook on life and the world of a large number of Vietnamese people. Despite its certain negative effects, the custom of worshipping souls has a positive influence on the life of each individual, community, and society. Apart from typical forms of folk beliefs, such as the worship of mother goddesses and the worship of village tutelary gods, which are very popular in the lives of the Vietnamese people, the worship of souls is also a way of displaying the good values of Vietnamese people and satisfying the spiritual needs of each individual, family, and community.

2. Research Methodology

The author of this paper is a person who was born and brought up in the rural areas of Vietnam. Since being a child, the author has witnessed funeral rituals in their family: worshipping the deceased (grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles,

etc.) and worshipping the souls of people who died in rivers, markets, wars, etc., in communal temples and pagodas. Due to their innocence at that time, the author thought that the dead members of their family were not gone, still existed, and sometimes visited living family members on the fifteenth day of the lunar month (the full-moon day), the first day of the lunar month, Lunar New Year's Day, and especially their death anniversary (the date when they died). For those who were not worshiped, there would be one day when they were "offered food"; that was the wandering souls' day (the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the lunar calendar) every year.

When the author grew up and started to choose their career, they decided to study philosophy and religion and had better conditions to further study such rituals. In order to search for the materials to write up their article, apart from studying ancient bibliographies, the author also conducted practical surveys in many localities and was directly involved in the worshipping rituals in the Northern, Central, and Southern regions of Vietnam.

Regarding the location in Vietnam, the author surveyed 10 provinces and cities, including Hanoi capital, Hai Phong City, Thai Binh province, Nam Dinh province, Bac Ninh province, Nghe An province, Thua Thien Hue province, Khanh Hoa province, Ho Chi Minh City, and An Giang province.

Regarding ancient bibliographies, the author has studied the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* book (Complete Annals of Dai Viet), which is a book containing a brief history of Vietnam; documents of famous authors studying Vietnamese culture (Phan Ke Binh, Tran Van Giau, Nguyen Tai Thu, Nguyen Lang, Toan Anh, Phan Ngoc, Nguyen Dang Duy, Nguyen Duy Hinh, etc.); and epitaphs kept in pagodas, temples, and communal houses, including Thay pagoda, Tay Phuong pagoda, Tran Quoc pagoda, Tay Ho realm (Hanoi capital), Hang Kenh pagoda, Le Chan temple (Hai Phong City), Keo pagoda (Thai Binh province), Day realm (Nam Dinh province), Dau pagoda, Dinh Bang communal house (Bac Ninh province), Con temple (Nghe An province), Thien Mu pagoda, Hon Chen palace (Thua Thien Hue province), Po Nagar tower (Khanh Hoa province), Vinh Nghiem pagoda, Ngoc Hoang pagoda, Thong Tay Hoi communal house (Ho Chi Minh City), and Chua Xu temple (An Giang province).

The author has interviewed the abbots of the above-mentioned pagodas, the elderly in the village, people who specialize in worshipping, and many people living in the provinces and cities in which the author conducted the survey.

Based on the survey results, the author's own understanding of Buddhism and Taoism, and the research results on the worship of souls of Vietnamese people, the author conducted the study titled "Identifying the Influence of Buddhism and Taoism in the Custom of Worshipping Souls of Vietnamese People".

3. Literature Review

3.1. Vietnamese Conception of the Soul

In the folk belief of Vietnamese people, a living person is a combination of two parts: the "body" and the "soul". The body can be understood as the physical,

visible part of a human being. The soul is an immaterial, abstract part related to people's spirit, thoughts, and feelings (Van et. al 2020).

According to that folk belief, human beings have two groups of souls: three souls and seven spirits. Women have two spirits more than men, so they have nine spirits in total. These souls settle in human beings and mingle with the bodies to form living human beings. Humans (bodies) receive the souls on the date of their birth or conception.

Souls are only spiritual souls and spirits are material souls. Souls are more sacred than spirits, so when someone is alive, due to respect, people avoid talking about his or her soul. Spirits can be both beneficial and harmful in everyday life. Spirits have different characteristics, depending on whether a person has a good or bad spirit. Some people have good spirits, while others have bad and evil spirits. Good spirits bring happiness and good luck, so people try to meet people with good spirits. Bad spirits have negative effects on everything, so people try to stay away from people with bad spirits.

There are also different viewpoints about souls among researchers studying Vietnamese folk beliefs. The Dictionary of Vietnamese Culture and Traditional Customs defines souls as "the souls of the dead in the underworld, which are possible to stay around their living relatives" (Y & Huy, 2011, p. 17). Souls may also be the souls of the dead drifting from other places, whose identities are unknown and are buried by the villagers. Additionally, souls are "the wandering souls of all kinds from kings to common people, from the rich to the poor" (Trang & Tuong, 1999, p. 138). As stated by Binh, "People believe in ghosts and gods, so they think that the dead have souls and senses like the living, and in the underworld, there are also happy or unhappy people like on earth. Those whose children keep worshipping will have a place to come back whereas unfortunate or heirless people who are not worshiped will feel distressed in the underworld" (Binh, 2005, p. 151).

According to Buddhism, human beings consist of five elements, known as Skandhas (five aggregates), including form, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Of these elements, form is the tangible element (material element) that makes up the physical part of a human being. The remaining elements, including sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness, are invisible elements, corresponding to the elements of feeling, perception, reason, and awareness. The combination of these four invisible elements makes up the spiritual part of a human being.

In its philosophy, Buddhism believes that life is a cycle with the unit of "kalpa" (a cycle of birth and death). All conditions of happiness or suffering of earthly people are the effects of corresponding causes, known as "sowing what you reap". "Causes" can be created from previous kalpas or in the present kalpa. If people do not take enough "effects" while they are alive, they will take them in their next kalpa (Lang, 1974).

According to the law of cause and effect in Buddhism, after people die, their souls leave their bodies. Their souls, depending on their karmas (created when they were alive), will be reborn according to "sixth paths" (six ways), including the

following (Hinh, 2003, Van, 2019): Celestials (the realm of gods): Buddha, Bodhisattva, etc.; human beings: people (rich, poor, happy, unfortunate, etc.); asuras: ghosts and spirits (intermediary level); animals: buffaloes, cows, pigs, etc.; hungry ghosts: often live in wet, dirty places; hells: way of the wicked (the underworld, corresponding to 18 layers of hell).

Furthermore, from Buddhism's point of view, after death, people's right-doings and wrong-doings will be judged by "Ten kings of the hell" (ruled by Earth-Store Bodhisattva) within seven weeks, corresponding to the seven gates of hell. Therefore, in the funerals of Vietnamese people, there is a forty-nine-day worshipping ceremony, in which the souls are sent to pagodas, where the monks will pray for their freedom from suffering. According to the concepts of "samsara- cause and effect", after forty-nine days, the souls will be under the control of the officials in the underworld. These officials will carefully consider all big and small things that people did when they were alive, in order to decide how they will be reborn: become human beings, become animals, or be exiled to the underworld and subject to severe punishment.

Through the above study (Lang, 1974; Thu, 1997; Hinh, 2003; Van, 2020), it can be seen that although there are different interpretations of the "body" and "soul", they are similar in one viewpoint: When people die, there will be a separation of their souls and their bodies. All of the conceptions show that when a person dies, his or her body will dissolve over time, whereas his or her soul will continue to exist.

Considering the theory of "samsara - cause and effect", it is obvious that Buddhism indicates an infinite cycle of the existence of souls. This is the basic difference between the Buddhist concept and the belief of worshipping souls of Vietnamese people. Based on the viewpoints of Buddhism, when grandparents, parents, and relatives die, their souls must follow the samsara, life after life. All of the credit-sin, good-evil, and good-bad of each individual when he or she was alive will lead to how his or her soul goes into the next life. According to Buddhist teachings, with the unlimited power of Buddha Dharma, the ten kings of hell will not miss any souls. Accordingly, it is impossible for ancestors' souls to "go home" with their descendants or forsaken souls or hungry ghosts to wander on earth.

Despite the contradiction in whether souls exist around the living, over the thousands of years since Vietnamese people accepted Buddhism in their religious life, they have maintained both philosophies of life, interweaving and blending them into a collection of mixed beliefs which show the harmony of Vietnamese people through many generations.

It can be seen from the above analysis that souls are divided into two types: souls with owners (relatives) and souls without owners (forsaken souls). Souls with owners, i.e., those with usual death (death due to old age, sickness, or the standards of longevity on earth specified in Crux's book) are worshiped by their relatives and descendants. Forsaken souls are lonely souls that are not worshiped by anyone. The Vietnamese Dictionary says, "A forsaken soul is the soul of a dead person without being worshiped by his or her relatives" (Phe, 2005, p. 87).

All of the above biochemical viewpoints have created the existence of souls after death in the minds of Vietnamese people. Therefore, a long time ago, the habit of

worshipping the dead (souls) was formed in the daily spiritual activities of Vietnamese people. This habit has lasted for a long time, passed through many generations, and become the custom of Vietnamese people. However, with changes of time and the exchange and adaptation of cultural flows in the world during the integration period, this worship custom has changed compared to the original form and both positively and negatively affected the awareness and social behaviors of some Vietnamese people.

3.2. Appearance of the Custom of Worshipping Souls of Vietnamese People

Nguyen Lang, in the book titled *Vietnamese Buddhism History*, said that “The ceremony for freeing hungry ghosts from sufferings originated from India and was introduced and prevailed in China in the Tang dynasty by Bất Không Kim Cang (Amogha), also known as Bất Không Tam Tạng, from North India, a famous Dharma heir of Mật giáo (Kim Cang Thừa - Vajrayāna) disseminate” (Lang, 1974, p. 412). Considering the above comments, that ceremony was actually the Ghost Ceremony (the ceremony for freeing hungry ghosts from suffering), not the offering ceremony for souls in general.

However, we have not seen any documents showing exactly when the ceremony for freeing hungry ghosts from suffering appeared in Vietnam. According to Nguyen Lang, this ceremony was widely disseminated in the Tran dynasty. It is written in *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* that this food offering ceremony was introduced into *Đại Việt* in 1302 by a Taoist named Hứa Tông Đạo: “At that time, there was a Taoist from the North called Hứa Tông Đạo following a merchant ship to our country and stayed at Yen Hoa wharf. The witchcraft and worship became popular since then” (*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, 2004, p. 92).

In 1320, the monk Phổ Huệ organized an altar at Pho Minh Pagoda in the palace to pray for Emperor Tran Anh Tong to live longer: “Then queen mother Bao Tu asked Phổ Huệ to come to Phổ Minh Pagoda to open the hội Quán Đĩnh (Abhiseka), a Buddhist ritual, which use water or shampoo to wash the top of one’s head. “When the illness of Emperor Anh Tông just became worse, Phổ Huệ wanted to meet to present the life and death” (*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, 2004, p. 115).

According to *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, in Nghệ An and Quảng Bình provinces, “In 1449, the temples for worshipping souls were built but no one made offerings. In 1464, the offerings were prepared to sacrifice to souls and were divided into upper, middle, and lower levels like the offerings made to all gods; every year, the mandarins were ordered to make offerings in three seasons (spring, summer, autumn) and this became the custom” (Hinh, 2007, p. 75). According to Phan Huy Chú, “This ceremony began from the beginning of the Le Dynasty, continued and remained unchanged” (Chu, 1992, p. 143).

In Hue, on the 23rd of the fifth month of the lunar calendar, people in Hue solemnly organize a ceremony to worship souls. This ritual is organized for both family and community members in the same area, ward, district, etc. The ceremony of worshipping souls in Huế is organized in such a solemn manner because, in 1885, the citadel was lost to the French. The period of 1883–1885 (the Nguyen Dynasty) was the most sensitive period in the history of Vietnam. In 1883, after the French fired a gun into Thuận An of Huế Citadel fell into a dangerous position and the court was afraid and nervous. At this time, only Ton That Thuyet

was determined to maintain the standpoint of fighting the French. According to some records, it seemed that most families suffered from loss after the event. About 9300 soldiers and civilians were killed on the spot. They were soldiers, officials, teachers, and so on, dying for many reasons. They might have died due to the guns and bullets of the French, or due to jostling and stomping on each other while running away. They also might have fallen when trying to climb out of the citadel or accidentally stepped into the numerous lakes in the citadel, especially Tinh Tam Lake.

Therefore, souls (spirits) are souls of people in the family and clan (ancestors, those who are dead). Forsaken souls can be understood as the souls of the dead that are not worshiped. They may be the souls of homeless people, people with no relatives, or people who had families and relatives but had to leave their homeland and died while fleeing from war in troubled times. They can be merchants who travelled everywhere and soldiers on battlefields who unfortunately died and could not find their relatives and no one knew their names to worship every year. Additionally, they can be coastal fishermen, whose lives were associated with the sea, and who floated and wandered on the waves, but unfortunately died because of storms and their souls wandered everywhere. They then became lonely souls that had no one and no place to worship.

4. The Custom of Worshiping of the Souls of Vietnamese People

4.1. *Custom of Worshiping Souls in Families (Worship of Ancestors)*

“According to ancient Vietnamese people, death is not the end. A person is dead but his or her soul still remains and usually “frequents” the family. The body dissolves, but the soul is immortal” (Anh, 2005, p. 11). Family members (grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, etc.) who are dead still have needs and desires like the living: “People also believe that life in the underworld is the same as life in on earth. The dead also need such things as when they were alive. In other words, the dead also need to eat, drink, spend money and live in houses like the living” (Anh, 2005, p. 11).

Right after a person’s death (when the soul has left his or her body) (Van, 2019), to lighten the steps of the soul when leaving the body, the living people (relatives in the family) have to light candles, burn paper money or gold to pay for the soul’s travel expenses to the underworld, and make offerings of food and drinks to reduce the hunger and thirst of the soul.

People burn things made of paper that living people need, such as furniture, horses, servants, etc., for the souls. Rich people even burn paper bicycles, motorbikes, cars, and sometimes planes. In current society, people also burn mobiles and tablets for the souls. The sacred duty of a filial son is to meet all the needs of his deceased ancestors (Van & Long, 2019). In Vietnam, the person who performs the above rituals is usually the eldest son (or religious grandson) of the family. In addition, children and grandchildren can also set up their own altars at home. However, on important days, such as a death anniversary, grave transfer, etc., they must gather at the eldest son or patriarch’s home (Van & Long, 2019).

It can be said that “The custom of worshipping ancestors is the most popular belief of Vietnamese people. It comes from the conception that the souls of the dead still

exist in this world and affect their descendants' lives" (Ngoc, 2002, p. 189). The worship of ancestors often takes place on the death anniversary, holidays and Lunar New Year, to commemorate the dead, show admiration and respect, and pray for all good things to come. Vietnamese people take gratitude as their moral foundation; that is, descendants must be grateful to those who gave birth to them. The death anniversary of ancestors reminds descendants of the date when they died and creates the basis for family relations. Nobody knows whether there are souls or not, but one certain thing is that descendants must be grateful to their ancestors.

Vietnamese people make offerings to their ancestors' souls on their date of death (death anniversary), which is usually calculated according to the lunar calendar (Giau, 1973; Hinh, 2007). Descendants believe that it was the date when their ancestors' souls passed into the afterworld. The worship of ancestors is also carried out regularly on the first and fifteenth of lunar months, and holidays. When there are important events in the house, such as getting married, giving birth, building new houses, going away for work, taking examinations, etc., Vietnamese people also make offerings to their ancestor souls to report and pray for good luck or to show gratitude when their work is successful.

The nature of the worship of ancestors' souls of Vietnamese people originates from the belief that the living and the dead have a close relationship with each other (Van et al., 2020). Descendants pray for their ancestors and ancestors protect and guide their descendants. Therefore, the worship is considered a connection between the living and the dead.

Beliefs in death suggest that “tử tuất quy thổ, cốt nhục tê u, hạ âm vi giả thổ, kỳ phí phát dương u thượng vi chiêu minh” (“the dead people were buried in the ground, their bodies were decomposed, melted, buried in the ground were only fake, the soul was allowed to fly to the sky”). This means that people who die will surely return to earth; their flesh and bones dissolve into the ground and their souls fly high in the air: “The worship of ancestors is a belief since people consider their ancestors' souls as tutelary deities that protect them in their whole lives” (Duy, 2002, p. 191).

4.2. Custom of Worshipping Souls outside of the Community (Worshipping Forsaken Souls)

In the mysterious world, there are abandoned souls that wander or have no relatives and friends (Anh, 2005; Binh, 2005). These are the souls of unlucky people who died in accidents or from poverty on roads or at markets and their bodies were not buried, worshiped, and looked after. These souls wander behind dark clouds, in drizzles, or lie on tree branches. These are also the souls of people who drowned in rivers and seas, hanging about the places where they died to wait for others to die. These are called forsaken souls. This led to the custom of worshipping souls outside of the community (Binh, 2005).

The worship of souls outside of the community also originated from the belief that these souls can adversely affect the lives of living people (Binh, 2005; Van et al., 2020). With the fear that these souls will ruin their business, people worship them so that they will create favorable conditions for their work. In addition, the

worship of forsaken souls is also a form of seeking security, praying for good crops, and praying for peace in the country and village.

According to the folk concept, since they are worshiped by no one, these lonely souls are left hungry and cold and often wander and spread woes to earthly people (Van et. al., 2020). In particular, for people who die from injustice, their souls still bear a lot of anger, so they become part of the group known as “*ôn hồn dịch lệ*” (“those who die without anyone worshiping, the soul wanders in the earthly realm to ask for food”) to harm people. Therefore, earthly people must make offerings to them: “It is believed that those who are not worshiped must rob the porridge put in banyan leaves in the soul offering ceremony which is often held in summer or after summer, as well as on the full moon of July or the end of the year. Robbing porridge in banyan leaves is a misery of the souls of the dead; people without children are often insulted by enemies to be robbers of porridge in banyan leaves” (Anh, 2005, p. 51). Additionally, as mentioned by Binh, “In three summer months, on the first and the full moon of each lunar month, people cook porridge, wrap it into banyan leaves and leave these leaves with porridge inside along the roads, which is called worshiping all souls. So the customs of the Vietnamese people said that robbing porridge of Da leaves is saying people without children” (Binh, 2005, p. 149).

Therefore, this belief has a great humanistic meaning. It is a deep sympathy of the living towards the dead and gratitude towards the ancestors who contributed to reclaiming land, building villages, and keeping the villages peaceful. There are many different forms of worshiping forsaken souls. Many people just make offerings but do not worship, which is often common among families and individuals. There are forms of worship with worship places (small temples), which are often popular in villages and communes: “The souls and hungry ghosts that are not worshiped often wait at these offerings and rob some porridge to eat. At pagodas and temples, people who do charity often organize worshiping ceremonies for forsaken souls so that these souls have a place to enjoy” (Anh, 2005, p. 51). Furthermore, “In many places, every year on the full moon in July, or in the communal house, or in a voluntary association, set the colon to make a vegetarian offering, offering two, three or five days” (Binh, 2005, p. 149).

This viewpoint has created a belief in the reward and punishment of good souls and evil souls in the mind of some Vietnamese people. If people do good things, “improve themselves”, and “accumulate virtues” when they are alive, their souls will be returned to the Buddha realm (Lang, 1974), “stay at pagodas”, or be reborn as human beings again. For those who do bad things, “harm others”, and create “evil karmas”, their souls will be exiled to hell or punished based on their crimes (Van et. al., 2020).

5. Buddhism on the Custom of Worshiping Souls of Vietnamese People

Ullambana Festival originated from the legend of Maudgalyāyana's filial piety. Maudgalyāyana was originally a monk who took refuge and became one of the best disciples of the Buddha. After attaining Arhat, Maudgalyāyana missed his mother, so he used his eye of wisdom to look down at the miserable world and

saw his mother, Mrs Mogallāni, falling into the hungry ghost world in Avici (the hell of uninterrupted sufferings).

Buddha told Maudgalyāyana that due to the karma in her previous life, his mother was exiled to the evil place and became a hungry ghost. The Buddha said that Maudgalyāyana alone could not save his mother, and he had to ask monks everywhere to pray with him to save her soul. Maudgalyāyana had to respectfully invite monks from all directions, especially those who had acquired six supernatural powers. Only thanks to the prayers of these monks could the soul of Maudgalyāyana's mother escape from suffering.

Ghost Festival is related to the story of Ananda and Ulka-mukha (flaming mouth ghost). One evening, Ananda was sitting in his Vimala when he saw a hungry ghost with a dry and thin body, a small and long neck, and a flaming mouth enter. The hungry ghost said that three days later, Ananda would die and be reborn as a hungry ghost, and his face would be as burnt and black as its face.

Ananda was so afraid that he asked the hungry ghost to show him away to avoid such misery. The hungry ghost said, "Tomorrow, if you give each of the hungry ghosts a meal and make offerings to the Triratna, you will be given longevity and I will be reborn to the heavenly realm". Ananda told the Buddha this story. The Buddha gave him the sermon called "Dhāraṇī Sūtra for saving the flaming-mouth hungry ghosts" (Lang, 1974, p. 256). Ananda chanted this sermon in the offering ceremony and achieved more longevity.

The custom of worshiping forsaken souls originated from this story, so nowadays, people still say that the worship of forsaken souls is conducted to free the flaming mouth, with the original meaning of "releasing the flaming mouth". Later, this custom was widely understood as having other meanings: Forgiving all of the dead (absolution of the dead) or making offerings to wandering souls (forsaken souls).

Worshiping Mông Sơn thí thực: The objects of this ritual are souls that have not been freed from sufferings after taking their last breath on earth. There are six basic causes, and in order for there to be the best results, the monks must focus on those causes:

- If there is a feud in war and the death suddenly happens, that feud will increase. People who die in such a feud are difficult to free from suffering;
- Unexpected death includes sudden deaths when the karma or longevity is not over, such as death from natural disasters, earthquakes, floods, droughts, diseases, traffic accidents, etc.;
- Death from suicide: when they face adversities, they fall into despair and suffer from severe depression and decide that death is the only way to liberate their suffering;
- Death in injustice: people have to choose death to prove their innocence;
- Death in inconsolable love: when the husband or wife dies, the other person hastily remarries within a year to create a safe time for the salvation of his or her dead husband or wife;
- Regret of property, career, social position, and honor.

When they are dead, the souls of these people do not vanish, but wander on earth, and sometimes harm people who are living. In the Mahayana sutras, these six dead objects often need to eat and drink in the evening. However, it should be noticed that souls do not eat like earthly people. They just enjoy the flavor of the offerings made by the living. The souls have no mouths to put the food in, no throats to swallow, no stomachs to contain food, and no digestive system to digest food. However, based on the offerings, such as rice, porridge, incense, lights, etc., they can feel fullness. Therefore, in the offering rituals, the offerings are very simple. It is important to understand that the hunger and thirst of souls are different from those of living people, so people do not need to offer what they liked when they were alive. Such offerings are not only valueless, but also costly.

From the Buddhist point of view, the whole perception of souls can simply be felt by one's mind. Therefore, the most important thing for people who participate in making offerings to souls and forsake souls in the evening is the ability to think and practice. Considering this, when carrying out the worship or requiem, it is necessary to highly concentrate on the worshiped objects and avoid distraction which can lead to meaninglessness of the worship or requiem and the souls not feeling the sincerity.

Worshiping Tiệp linh, Triệu linh, Chúc thực, Phát tấu, and Cúng đàn kết (also called Giải oan cắt kết):

The common purpose of these rituals is to pray for the souls to be liberated and the owners of the house to be safe and sound. This means that the rituals are created to enhance the close relationship between Buddhism and the spiritual life among the common people, namely funeral rituals, souls, graves, etc.

Some theories suggest that the requiem originating from the sects of Buddhism is influenced by Taoism and Chinese culture. In Vietnam, it is said that one of the people who greatly contributed to the development of the above-mentioned offering rituals is Zen Master Huyen Quang (1254-1334) (the third of patriarch Truc Lam Zen Sect). From an artistic perspective, the offering rituals represent the convergence of all elite values of Vietnamese Buddhist dance and music. With great techniques and methods of building tones, Buddhist music is considered to keep pace with professional genres in national folk music.

Here, all the values are handed down in professional training schools with the coordination and transfer between monks and folk shamans. This means that when pagodas train their successors, they have to send young monks out to study from the shamans, whilst shamans can also go to pagodas to improve their talents and skills.

In the funeral rites of Vietnamese people, the influence of Buddhism is also evident. In addition to families of other religions (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Cao Dai, etc.), for families who are either Buddhist or non-Buddhist, Buddhist funerals have a lot of value. About funeral forms: Usually, when a person is about to die, their relatives often invite monks and nuns to come to recite. After preparing the necessary procedures and supplies, the monks are invited to "khâm niệm" (change new clothes) for the body to die. After "khâm niệm", an altar is set up in front of the coffin. One thing that is indispensable for Buddhism is setting

up the Buddha altar to chant prayers. Therefore, formally, the funeral manifests the influence of Buddhism through three factors, including the image of the Buddha or the Bodhisattva, the presence of monks and nuns, and the chanting of prayers. Of the three factors, the presence of monks and nuns is the most important factor indicating the influence of Buddhism in funerals. Then, there are monks and nuns, and finally, there is the image of Buddha or Bodhisattva. Normally, the image of Buddha is only adorned in the presence of monks and nuns, so this element of the ceremony is always decided.

Regarding the content: A more important factor showing the positive influence of Buddhism in funerals is its contribution to the content. When a relative dies, the family often becomes confused, partly influenced by emotions and partly because they are not familiar with the prescribed customs. Moreover, grief or filial piety always urges them to do something useful for the deceased, and reincarnation or rebirth is what they desire. Therefore, monks and nuns are always the first agent they come to rely on. The presence of monks and their enthusiastic, wise guidance will give some comfort to the family and provide them and those around them with beautiful images of Buddhism. That is the content of the "living Dharma" of Buddhism being praised.

During the funeral, from the time of shrouding and offering rice to bringing down the grave, many prayers are chanted (Thu, 1997). It may not be wrong to say that few people are focused enough to hear and fully understand the meaning of Buddhist prayers recited during the funeral, even if they are translated into Vietnamese. In the case of recitation, the recitation sutras are usually Sino-Vietnamese and often monks and nuns do not explain the meaning before reciting. Therefore, the influence of Buddhism is not due to the content of the chanting, but the "living sermons" presented by the monks and nuns themselves through their three types of karma (Lang, 1974). If the three types of karma are pure, they will be able to sense both the living and the dead; otherwise, the effect is difficult to predict.

6. Taoism in the Custom of Worshiping Souls of Vietnamese People

Worshipping "Trai tiếu bạt độ" (exculpate for the dead): This ceremony is not used regularly and is only used when there is "tremor under the ancestors' graves" of the family, causing many disasters which are believed by family members to be related to the deceased ancestors. When there are bad omens in the family, people often carry out worshipping "Trai tiếu bạt độ" (but people only practice some of the rituals, not the entire ceremony) (Hinh, 2003, Van et. al., 2020). The original worshipping "Trai tiếu bạt độ" of Taoism may have had a slightly different implementation. A ritual in this ceremony is described as follows: the rite of worshipping "khai ngục trị đàn" (open the hellish door).

The night of "khai ngục trị đàn" is regarded as a play with many performances, and many roles in different classes. To convince those who witnessed the ritual, Taoism had to coordinate with the method of calling the soul of the deceased to carry out the main ritual in the great ceremony. Taoists and magicians must accept ritual transformation. Most people often have creed. However, the shadow itself cannot celebrate if the ceremony is unjust. Therefore, it is necessary to pray for

witchcraft. If using the main Taoist method, it is not suitable for the tastes of the people. Therefore, in this case, the Taoists accept the method of cooperating with the creed (to call the soul of the dead) to conduct a major ceremony of Taoism, but are brought to ancestor worship.

Considering this, descendants in the world, according to each term and each specific condition, perform a worshipping ceremony. These ceremonies are entirely made up of Taoist magi, Taoists, or Buddhist monks in charge of the ceremony. Goofy Feast is conducted according to the protocol of the main Taoist teacher. However, to adapt to the folk beliefs, very few Taoists and shamans maintain the righteous tradition presented in the Taoist scriptures, which are often flexible to suit the tastes of the people. After preparing all of the necessary procedures, the festival is listed with Gods, Buddhas, Saints, and Thành Hoàng (Tutelary god) to obtain their blessing.

Conception of Life and Death: After their souls leave their bodies, the dead have to go through ten great hells ruled by the kings in the underworld, known as the Ten Kings of Hell (Hinh, 2003, Van et. al., 2020). Vietnamese people use the punishment of souls after death to encourage good actions and suppress evil ones. The encouragement of well-doing and punishment of wrong-doing are conducted by the kings in the underworld. For Taoism, this governance is carried out by the “Phong Đô Bắc Âm Đại Đế” and the 88 mandarins (Vinh, 2005, p. 78).

When family members die, their funerals are held very carefully. Depending on the richness of the family, the funeral is organized on a large or small scale, but the organization is always carried out very well. Beliefs about death suggest that “tử tuất quy thổ, cốt nhục tê u, hạ âm vi giả thổ, kỳ phí phát dương u thương vi chiêu minh” (“the dead people were buried in the ground, their bodies were decomposed, melted, buried in the ground were only fake, the soul was allowed to fly to the sky”). This means that all dead people return to earth; their flesh and bones dissolve into the ground, while their souls fly high in the air. Along with the meaning of life and death above, Confucianism also includes filial piety with the concept of “sự tử như sự sinh, sự vong như sự tồn” (“death as well as birth, death, and existence”). Being grateful to one’s parents when they are dead is like being grateful to them when they are alive.

Conception of Holding Funerals: According to Taoism, every living person is associated with a star in the sky. When the star is off, that person will die. The Crux and The Plough (the Big Dipper) are responsible for looking after life and death on earth. The Crux records the birth and The Plough records the death. Therefore, when talking about death, there is often the phrase “erasing names from the Crux’s book” or the sentence “bút chú tử trách Nam Tào sớm định” (“Nam Cao determined to die, he will surely die”), which blames the Crux for using his pen to record the date and time of death of a person (father, mother) so early. The conceptions of Taoism also show that being dead means going to the fairy realm. Therefore, on the hangings at funerals, people often see the word “Fairyland”.

According to the conception of the existence of souls, the dead (in the family) are like the tutelary deities who bless and protect their children and grandchildren throughout their lives. That concept creates the initial premise for forming thoughts about a new force that contributes to preserving good things in society.

7. Discussion

From time immemorial, filial piety has been evaluated through gratitude and care for parents and worship of their ancestors (Binh,2005; Anh,2005). This is an important virtue, and the core of human morality. The wise men in the world once discussed how to establish a good society using the principle of filial piety. Filial piety has played a central role in the moral philosophy of Buddhism and throughout the spiritual life of Asians from past to present (Lang,1974). In this modern age, filial piety is still considered an important human quality.

The history of the cultural and ideological development of humankind has shown that filial piety means being kind to your parents; taking care of your parents; displaying good behaviors, not only for your parents, but also for outsiders, to bring a good reputation to your parents and ancestors; performing tasks well and working to ensure material support for parents, as well as for ancestor worship (Ngoc,2002); showing love, respect, and politeness; promoting brotherhood among brothers; advising parents wisely, including keeping them from unethical behavior; expressing mourning, expressing sadness when your parents die, and performing funeral ceremonies seriously and solemnly; and thoughtfully worshipping after your parents pass away (Anh,2005).

Since ancient times, Asians have had a filial tradition. The annual Vu Lan festival (on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month) is a holiday to honor the ancestors of one's parents and grandparents, including grandparents and parents for many lifetimes (Lang,1974). In Vietnam, the Vu Lan festival is considered to be an important holiday for parents, and it is a day focused on ancestors, families, and lineages. The Vu Lan festival has a sacred meaning in expressing gratitude to ancestors, parents, and grandparents, and in practicing filial piety according to the Buddha's teachings through practical and valuable practical works for relatives of oneself (Lang,1974; Hinh,2007). Through the Vu Lan festival, the people themselves have the idea of committing to live well, in accordance with traditional morality and in accordance with the Buddha's teachings, in order to deserve the thanks of their parents, worthy of a true filial son.

Many Vietnamese people think that July is the devil's month, which does not bring good luck, so most weddings, building of a house, shopping, traveling, etc., are avoided in July. According to many researchers (Giau, 1973; Duy, 2002; Ngoc, 2002; Hinh, 2007; Van, 2019), the origin of the month of the soul comes from the King of Hell opening the "Devil Gate" on the 2nd of July (lunar calendar) every year, so that the hungry ghosts can return to earth and then return to hell on the day of the Full Moon in July. After coming out of hell, hungry demons will wander around, harassing people and cattle and poultry. People who are harassed by demons may get sick, suffer, take business risks, trade, travel, may face accidents, etc., and pets that are disturbed by demons can get sick, die,

etc. Therefore, according to folklore, earthly people must offer rice porridge, rice, and salt to the hungry ghosts so that they do not disturb everyday life.

For Vietnamese people, ancestor respect goes deep into their hearts. When there is a full moon, especially on Lunar New Year, on the ancestral altars of every Vietnamese family, a lot of flowers, fruits, etc. are offered, to show their gratitude (Binh, 2005). Families offer their thanks and remember their ancestors, desiring that the ancestral souls bless their descendants. The spirits of ancestors always bless their children, wishing them health, happiness, luck in life, etc. However, ancestors will punish the descendants if they do not worship well and live without morality. Therefore, in order for their ancestors to bless them, the descendants have to worship very carefully. There are many large and small rituals involved in worshipping the spirits of ancestors and living morally. The ancestor is worshiped on a very solemn altar with re-plants, flowers, incense, etc. Every year, on the death anniversary and Lunar New Year of Vietnamese people, the graves of ancestors are taken care of very carefully.

Therefore, belief in the punishment or blessing of the soul helps people adjust themselves, live more ethically, and love each other. The ultimate goal is to create good social relationships.

8. Conclusion

Originating from different beliefs in souls, Vietnamese people have different ways of worshipping these objects with various forms of performance and practice. However, when entering different classes of people, these forms of worship have changed and become profound folk beliefs. Through studying the custom of worshipping souls and the influence of Buddhism and Taoism on this belief, the following can be concluded.

The worship of souls is a socio-historical phenomenon. It includes not only the behavior of the living towards their ancestors and the homeless dead, but also the behavior among those who are still living in this world.

It is a humanistic belief, demonstrating the good nature of Vietnamese people: respecting affection, loving people, and feeling pity for unfortunate fates. This belief has integrated four immeasurable aspects of Buddhism to form an extremely humanistic custom.

Apart from being a traditionally spiritual ritual, with the influence of Buddhism, the worship of souls has many other meanings, including the thoughts of praying for peacefulness and good crops for inhabitants in the past and today. In human life, people always face risks, uncertainties, and catastrophes, so they need to be blessed by the dead.

The worship of souls still plays a very important role in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Along with the development of society, this custom has changed in both positive and negative ways. However, the values that it brings are undeniable, in which there are factors of Buddhism and Taoism. Knowing how to select and integrate the progressive elements of foreign religions (including Buddhism and Taoism) into folk beliefs, including the worship of souls, makes the beliefs more abundant and diverse.

This is a unique feature in the cultural tradition and habits and customs of the Vietnamese nation. Together with other folk beliefs, the custom of worshipping souls has become a beautiful aspect of the diverse beliefs of Vietnamese people. Therefore, in order to study the folk culture of Vietnamese people, it is necessary to study the forms of folk beliefs and the worship of souls is a typical example.

Acknowledgments

This research is funded by University of Transport and Communications (UTC), Vietnam.

Declaration of ownership:

This report is my original work.

Conflict of interest:

None.

Ethical clearance:

This study was approved by the institution.

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- Article History: Received on 15, August 2020, Revised on 25, December 2020, Published on January 15, 2021.