



Contributing to Understanding Mother Goddess Worship in Vietnam

Ngo Thi Phuong Thao

Faculty of Philosophy, Hanoi National University of Education

ABSTRACT

Published Online: September 15, 2023

Mother Goddess worship is one of the important types of spiritual activities, reflecting the aspiration of Vietnamese people for abundant clothing and food, timely rains and favorable weather. Along with the flow of time, the belief of Mother Goddess worship has certain changes, increasingly meeting the diverse and rich spiritual needs of Vietnamese people. The article presents an overview of the situation of this worship in Vietnam, as well as some values and limitations.

KEYWORDS:

Contribution, belief, inquiry, Mother Goddess worship.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, awareness of the spiritual world is expressed quite clearly through many types of beliefs. In particular, Mother Goddess worship has a long history, changing to adapt to the modifications of Vietnamese society. Over a long period of time, there has always coexisted in parallel and organic attachment in the spiritual life of the people, expressing the philosophy of worshiping women and mothers and also reflecting the people's desire such as breeding lineage, praying for a peaceful, warm, and happy life. Therefore, in the current period of national renovation, the orientation for the development of Mother Goddess worship in the right way is a particularly essential issue to realize the right to freedom of belief and religion set forth by the Communist Party of Vietnam. It is also one of the ways to contribute to the preservation and development of the nation's cultural capital.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Overview of the situation of Mother Goddess worship in Vietnam

When people learned to observe and become aware of the world around them, the germs of early spiritual life began to appear. Since then, special forms of religion have been born such as natural worship and ancestor worship. Amidst that process, Mother Goddess worship was born and is closely linked to the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. In the early days, starting from living mainly on nature, the ancient

Vietnamese had to cope with negative phenomena of nature such as storms, floods, droughts, wild animals. In the minds of the people, therefore, always pray for the blessing and assistance of the "Mother Nature". Thus, the Mother of Angelic Origin was born. Mother Goddess worship at this time is the belief, admiration, honor and worship of Goddesses who are said to have superhuman abilities, can control normative natural phenomena to protect people to have a peaceful life. That is also the basis of the awareness of "animistic things" in the process of developing the cultural thinking of Vietnamese people.

In the process of fighting the invaders, after the rebellion of Hai Ba Trung failed, our country entered the period of colonization of nearly a thousand years of northern feudalism. They ruled the Vietnamese people with draconian and brutal policies, so the people realized that in order to be free and happy, they not only prayed for spiritual forces, but also for the human factors. This period experienced stories of spiritual motherhood. However, later in the process of clearing wasteland and expanding the realm, the Vietnamese brought their cultural elements to the new land; therefore, in the course of time, the belief of Mother worship was spread throughout the country. The belief of Mau worship in the Northern region of Vietnam consists of 3 successive layers and is organically related to each other. These are "Goddesses, Mother Goddess and Three Palaces, Four Palaces... The relationship between these three classes of worship is a two-way relationship. One way according to history, from worshipping Goddesses and Mothers to worshipping Mother Three Palaces, Four Palaces. In the same way, when the Mother Three and Four Palaces are shaped and developed, it will have the opposite effect on the worship of the Mother Goddess and Goddess so that the layers are more systematic in terms of the name of the god and worship

Corresponding Author: Ngo Thi Phuong Thao

**Cite this Article: Ngo Thi Phuong Thao (2023). Factors Contributing to Understanding Mother Goddess Worship in Vietnam. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 3(9), 1889-1892*

rituals". According to the summation of author Ngo Duc Thinh, "The Northern Plain is an ancient but always fluctuating people, culture; an original land but dispersed..., always absorbing external influences but recreating its own values and identity". In Central Vietnam, the basic characteristic of Matriarchal worship is only the presence of Goddess and Matriarch. For the Southern region, due to the socio-economic conditions, population, migration and cultural acculturation of the inhabitants of the new land, the distinction between Goddess and Matriarch is not clearly shown. Goddesses who are proclaimed as Mother Gods are worshiped in Southern Vietnam such as: Mrs. Thien Hau, Nine Heavenly Mysteries, Lady of the Jade Queen, Lady of the Realm, Linh Son Holy Mother.

It can be said that, regardless of the locality in our country, the belief of mother worship has common characteristics such as trust, admiration, honor and worship of goddesses associated with natural phenomena, the universe, which people believe to have creative power, support and protect human life such as heaven, earth, rivers, forests and mountains...; Worship the Queen Dowagers, Queens and Princesses who, when living brilliantly, have merit to the people and the country, when they lose their epiphany to support the people of peace and prosperity. The belief of Mother Goddess worship in our country is very diverse and rich in forms of expression, but it is highly unified in indigenous nature and the basic content is to help the country, help people fight natural disasters and foreign invaders to win, keep and independently protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation.

Through the ups and downs of historical time, the belief of mother worship in our country has developed to form the belief of the Three Palaces: Heavenly Palace, Mountain Palace, Water Palace; The Four Palaces, however, in addition to the above three, have Earth Palace. Mau worship is close to nature, heaven and earth, associated with the status of Vietnamese women... People come to the Mother to seek spiritual support, to find the protection of the mother, knowing that when people come to this belief they pray from the invisible, so that they can hope to receive the tangible. Mother worship is preserved through festivals, beliefs and through spiritual life to perpetuate in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Vietnam is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country with many different types of beliefs. However, since its inception, Vietnamese culture has been unified, but there are still cultural characteristics of each ethnic group living in the Vietnamese territorial community, marking the difference between one ethnic group and another. Mau worship is a relatively complex and difficult social phenomenon to study, as it combines many faiths and religions and manifests itself in many different forms. On the divine side, Mau worship has formed a divine system with many different functions and tasks. In terms of divine power, Mau worship initially formed a system of worship space and

had typical rituals such as most shadows (servants) ... which other folk beliefs do not have.

2.2. Positive values and limitations of Mother Goddess worship in Vietnam

2.2.1. Basic positive values

First, the value of world perception.

With Matriarchy, Vietnamese people not only anthropomorphize nature but also feminize nature, making the cult of nature into a feminine cult of people. In other words, with the Mother religion, the worship of the mother is not only as the embodiment of the natural being (Mother Rain, Mother Cloud, Mother Thunder, Mother Lightning Mother of the Four Dharmas or Mother Light, Mother Wood, Mother Water, Mother Fire, Mother Earth - Mother Five Elements), but also as the governing force of nature (First Mother Goddess of Heaven rules the sky, Second Mother Goddess of Earth rules the land, Third Mother Goddess of Water rules the waters of rivers and seas, Fourth Mother Goddess of Mountains rules the mountains and forests). Therefore, she is the embodiment of the Mother of Nature, who can protect and bring good things to human life.

This "unitary" way of perceiving the world has helped people to be properly aware of the role of nature, thereby living in harmony with nature, protecting and improving nature to serve people's lives better and better. In particular, in the current conditions of scientific and technological development, nature is being exploited, exhausted and heavily damaged, climate change, threatening humans themselves and human civilization, the protection of nature and respect for nature is very necessary.

Through the Matriarchy, it can be understood how people previously sanctified nature, the cult of nature was to protect nature. And at some point that cult was transferred to the goddess cult, which is, after all, just a natural way of deifying. Because, between nature and femininity there are common characteristics, that is, procreation, preservation and protection.

Second, human values.

Unlike some religions such as Buddhism, Christianity ... Mother worship does not direct people and their beliefs to the world after death, but to the present world, earthly life, in which people should have health, wealth and wealth. It is a positive anthropological outlook, consistent with the "existential" conception of man in the modern world. At this time, belief in the supernatural that the Holy Mother represents, is the means, and the purpose of human life is important. This is also a way of thinking that expresses the "practicality" and "pragmatism" of Vietnamese people.

The worshippers of *Mother Goddess* express their respect and sincerity when they make offerings, pray, dance, and sing to offer flowers and sacrifices. Those who come to *Mau* should be pure-hearted people who are well-mannered and worship their ancestors sincerely and respectfully; they should provide meritorious services to the people and the country "*Lunar*

August for the King, Lunar March for the Mother Goddess". Therefore, it is more of great importance to promote worthy values of the worship of *Mother Goddess* to guarantee the freedom of religion and contribute to enhancing citizens' spiritual life, aiming at national integrity – compassion – and excellence, especially the religious needs of the citizens have now been increasing, while "Promoting right and moral factors of religions. Criticizing and preventing negativities and superstitions".

Thirdly, the custom of worshipping *Mother Goddess* and the nation is unattachable, which shows the spiritualization of patriotism.

The worship of the *Mother Goddess* has embodied its historical and social sense through memories, folklore, legends, rituals, and festivals.

In the shrine of the worship of *Mother Goddess*, most Goddesses have already been historicized. In fact, many Goddesses were born from real historical characters. Then they were idolized to become goddesses, which means that there were "real" historical goddesses (Tran Hung Dao – Tran Goddess, Mother Au Co – Mother Thuong Ngan, Le Khoi/Nguyen Xi – Uncle Hoang Muoi, the first doctoral candidate Phung Khac Khoan – Uncle Hoang Bo, Le Chan – Mother Goddess Bat Nan...). Also, it is common for goddesses who were originally angels or goddesses of nature to be "anthropomorphized" or "historicized". In other words, those goddesses are said to have had their careers and provided meritorious services to the country or each region, which is not arbitrary but stems from the historical and social sense. It is the sense of "gratefulness" and glorifying those who provided meritorious services to the nation. That way, the unattachment of the worship of *Mother Goddess* and national origin and history has become the patriotic symbol of Vietnam, the patriotism that has become the creed and spiritualized, in which the Mother – Mother Goddess is central.

Fourthly, the custom of worshipping *Mother Goddess* is a unique cultural heritage.

The creed of worshipping *Mother Goddess* holds an essential position in the Vietnamese's spiritual life; it is a spiritual need of a part of the citizens in history and also in this day and age, in which "Mau" is an iconography, a symbol, and the vivid combination of the Vietnamese's cultural and spiritual life, while the creed of worshipping *Mother Goddess* is a rich and attractive phenomenon of folk cultural activities. Those who come to "Mau" are in sympathy with the cultural values and contribute to consolidating the Vietnamese's sense of community.

The worship of *Mother Goddess* and different types of trance ceremonies all contain rich artistic and cultural values. Not only are they the treasure trove of folklore, tales, and legends about the goddesses, but they are also forms of word-of-mouth literature, musical performances, singing, dancing, decorations, architecture, etc. The trance ceremony of the worship of *Mother Goddess* has combined, distilled,

and created a spiritual space containing majesty, lavishness, overflowing joy, and the beauty of the spiritual stage, which is a living museum in traditional Vietnamese culture. Therefore, it is essential to "Inherit and promote the spiritual, moral, and aesthetic values, and cultural, and artistic heritage of our nation; preserve and embellish national historical, cultural, and scenic monuments" so that we can preserve and promote the positive impacts regarding cultural values of the worship of *Mother Goddess*.

2.2.3. Limitations

The *first* limitation is the lack of insights or misunderstandings of the values and rituals of the worship of *Mother Goddess*. The lack of understanding among mediums, instrumentalists (for a trance), and a variety of people is not uncommon. Since these people apply the creed mainly through word of mouth and observation from person to person, their perception of the worship of *Mother Goddess* is natural, self-inferring, and needs adjusting.

Second, the commercialization of the worship of *Mother Goddess* is the burdensome and painful reality that inexorably erodes the aforementioned worthy values of the creed. Many temple lords and mediums have taken advantage of the belief, temple and palace monuments, and ritual activities and festivals for the sake of their profit. The restoration and construction of temple and palace monuments have many inadequacies.

Third, disturbances and changes in the rituals of the worship of *Mother Goddess* are quite common, especially when a trance ceremony consumes an unnecessarily larger number of votive offerings than the actual demand and requirement of a traditional ceremony, causing it to lose its sacredness. Also, the general public gets angry because some fake and attention-seeking mediums go into trance in a very disturbing way. Forms of theatrical half-spiritual, half-performance art also distort this ceremony, leading to complaints from the general public.

Fourth, the dispersion, dispersal, and loose management of many authorities and leaders also create a mess and even chaos of religious activities in temples and palaces, causing the breach of the peace, environmental pollution, encouraging superstitious activities, and going against the national fine customs.

Thus, regarding the concepts of world perception, the concepts of human life, patriotism, and national harmony, through trance ceremonies, and ritual singing... have been standardized to be the way to organize the worshiper community. It can be said that the worship of *Mother Goddess* shows the attachment of folk and communities, the adaptability to social changes, and the norm of a traditional creed, which is the unique trait of the worship of *Mother Goddess* in Vietnam.

Over the past 37 years of national renewal, our country has made significant accomplishments in all fields of social life. Religion and belief have also undergone fundamental changes regarding perception and practical activities. The

Ngo Thi Phuong Thao, Contributing to Understanding Mother Goddess Worship in Vietnam

worship of *Mother Goddess*, just like other religions, has made an influential contribution to the protection and promotion of Vietnamese national cultural values throughout the history of constructing and defending our nation. Hence, on the first day of December 2016, at the 11th session of the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage taking place in the city of Addis Ababa – the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Vietnamese's heritage "The Practice of Worshipping *Mother Goddess* of the Three Palaces" has been officially inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Therefore, it is vital to study the traditional cultural values that were built with our ancestors' efforts in the market economy and expansion of international exchange relations. By doing so, we will contribute to learning about the positive sides and negative sides of the worship of *Mother Goddess* in our country, aiming to apply the positive sides to building and enriching the new Vietnamese culture "advanced, and imbued with national identity".

3. CONCLUSION

In this day and age, the citizens' religious needs have been increasing constantly. Every Vietnamese has the right to have religion and belief. Therefore, it is necessary to harness and apply the worthy values and factors of the creeds and religions, especially the humane and worthy values of the worship of *Mother Goddess*, to the new cultural life to not only preserve the cultural identity of our nation but also promote indigenous values, as well as the worthy values of the worship of *Mother Goddess* in carrying out national unity and developing humanitarianism, humanity, and progress in building and protecting the country during the current period of international integration.

REFERENCES

1. Communist Party of Vietnam (1996), *Documents of the eighth National Party Congress*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
2. Communist Party of Vietnam (2021), *Documents of the thirteenth National Party Congress*, volume I, Truth National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
3. Hoang Tan Phan (2022), *Cultural metaphors in the worship of Mother Goddess*, Language and Life Magazine, no.7 (328).
4. Duc Thinh Ngo (2004), *Regional culture and cultural zoning in Vietnam*, Youth Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City.