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## VIETNAMESE PEOPLE'S CUSTOMS OF WORSHIPPING THE SOUL: CONCEPT, CONTENT AND CURRENT CHANGES

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**Abstract.** Besides the types of folk beliefs, such as the belief in worshipping Mother Goddesses, the belief in worshipping of village's tutelary god, the belief in worshipping ancestors, etc. which are very popular in the religious life of Vietnamese, the belief in worshipping the soul which is also prevalent, occupies an important position in the spirit of Vietnamese. However, in the constant exchange and change of cultural flows and other Vietnamese folk beliefs, this belief has changed in modern life. The basis of this article is studying ancient bibliographies as well as conducting *Điền dã* in some localities across Vietnam, interviewing a number of prestigious elderly people in clans, villages, and people who specialize in worshipping. The study also showed that, despite many changes in society, many new ideological and religious trends appeared; along with it are negative things that arise, but basically, the Belief in worshipping the soul still has specific values in the spiritual life of Vietnamese.

**Keywords:** folk beliefs of the Vietnamese people, soul worship, abandoned souls, funeral rituals

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## ВЬЕТНАМСКИЕ НАРОДНЫЕ РИТУАЛЫ ПОКЛОНЕНИЯ ДУШЕ: СУЩНОСТЬ И СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ

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**Аннотация.** Наряду с такими широко распространенными народными верованиями, как поклонение Богиням-Матерям, богу-покровителю деревни, предкам и т. д., важное место в духовной жизни вьетнамцев занимает поклонение душе. Однако в условиях изменений культурного ландшафта, отразившихся на народных верованиях, претерпела перемены и эта часть религиозной жизни. В статье предпринята попытка проследить эти изменения на основании изучения древних текстов, а также проведения практики *Điền dã* в некоторых населенных пунктах Вьетнама, интервью со старейшинами и служителями культа в кланах и деревнях. Исследование показало, что, несмотря на перемены в обществе, появление множества новых идеологических и религиозных течений, не всегда несущих добро, поклонение душе все еще имеет особое значение для духовной жизни вьетнамцев.

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**Ключевые слова:** народные верования вьетнамцев, поклонение душе, покинутые души, похоронные ритуалы

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## Introduction

The belief in worshipping the soul is a type of folk belief that has existed for a long time and is popular in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people (from the past to the present). Thanks to the recognition and fairly clear regulations on sacrifice and worship in legal documents of Vietnamese feudal dynasties, through historical periods, this belief has been consolidated and maintained until today [Trần Văn Giàu 1983; Phan Ngọc 2002].

According to Vietnamese folk beliefs, people have two groups of souls: *hồn* (psyche) and  *vía* (astral). For each person, there are three *hồn* (psyche), but there are many  *vía* (astral). Men have seven astral, and women have nine astral, the astral is also known as *phách*, so in folk, it is often called *hồn vía* or *hồn phách*. These souls reside in the human body while alive. The body receives the soul on the day of birth or conception. The concept of *hồn* and  *vía* is specifically expressed as follows:

*hồn* (psyche) refers to spiritual souls, and  *vía* (astral) refers to physical souls. The astral is envisioned as an intermediary between the body and the soul. Three *hồn* include *Tinh* (the subtlety in perception), *Khi* (the energy that makes the bodywork), and *Thần* (the spirit of life). Seven  *vía* (astral) of men beings rule two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, and a mouth. The nine  *vía* (astral) of women rule over seven things as in men plus two more. There are many explanations for the woman's two astral, but it is widely accepted that they can be the woman's two nipples, which play an important role in child-rearing [Phan Ngọc 2002; Phan Kế Bính 2005].

According to the Vietnamese folk concept, the *hồn* is more sacred than the  *vía*, so when someone is still alive (a blend of both body and soul), out of respect, people avoid talking about that person's *hồn*. The  *vía* can be both beneficial and harmful in everyday life. The  *vía* has different properties, depending on whether the person has bad  *vía* or good  *vía*: there are people with good  *vía*; there are people with bad  *vía* and evil spirits. Good  *vía* brings good fortune, and good luck and people find a way to meet good  *vía*. The bad  *vía* has a harmful effect, in all affairs, one tries to avoid the bad  *vía*.

Death is the separation of the astral soul from the body. The *hồn* and the  *vía* leave the body at a person's last breath. They are carried away by spirits sent by the gods, and from there, continue to live independently of the body. The soul, after death, has the same needs and desires as the living person. To illuminate the steps of the *hồn* and the  *vía* when leaving the body, people light candles (or oil lamps); people give souls money to pay for the ferry ride to the underworld; people offer food and drink to quench the soul's hunger and thirst. The soul is burned with votive paper that imitates what the soul needs: furniture, horses, servants, etc. Rich people also burned bicycles, motorbikes, cars, and sometimes even airplanes. It is true that the sacred filial duty of a son is to provide for all the needs of his deceased ancestors. For the Vietnamese, the person who performs the above rituals for the ancestors is usually the eldest son in the family [Phan Kế Bính 2005].

But in the occult world, abandoned souls have to wander or have no relatives or friends. These are the souls of unfortunate people, who died in accidents or poverty on the roads, whose bodies are

not buried, and who have no one to smoke incense, sacrifice, and take care of. These souls wander after dark clouds, deep drizzle, or lie on tree branches. It is also the souls of those who drowned in rivers, in the sea, hanging around the places where they died, waiting for someone else to die, that is the spirit. To appease all those miserable souls, people sometimes burn gold and silver paper, offer rice porridge, etc., especially on the first and full moon days.

All the above-mentioned views of life and death have caused in the minds of Vietnamese people the existence of the soul after a person dies [Nguyễn Duy Hinh 2007; Vũ Hồng Vân 2017; Vu Hong Van 2022]. Therefore, from very ancient times, in the daily spiritual activities of Vietnamese people, the habit of worshiping the dead (souls) has been formed [Phan Huy Chú 1992; Vu Hong Van, Nguyen Trong Long 2019; Long, Van 2022]. That habit for a long time, over many generations, has become the custom and belief of the Vietnamese people [Phan Ngọc 2002; Toan Ánh 2005]. However, along with the change of time and the exchange and absorption of cultural flows in the world during the integration period, this worshiping custom has changed compared to the original one both positive and negative effects, adversely affecting the perception as well as social behavior of a part of Vietnamese people.

### Research methods

Methods of studying ancient texts and bibliographies: for the study of general culture and Vietnamese folk beliefs, including worshiping the soul, the study of ancient texts and ancient bibliographies is very necessary. However, due to a limited understanding of Hán Nôm, the Hán Nôm versions that the author has are mainly thanks to translations from the Institute of Hán Nôm or those who are good at this language.

The practical penetration method (*điền dã*) is an essential method in the process of studying Vietnamese folk beliefs. For the study of Vietnamese folk belief activities, to have their assessments of cultural phenomena, belief activities, religions, cultural values, etc. researchers are required to carry out *điền dã* and penetrate the daily life of those activities.

### Literature review

“Primitive Culture” by E.B. Tylor [2000] acts as laying the first foundation for the study and understanding of the spiritual world, religion, and belief; including worship of the soul. The ancient animist theory of life explained much of the physical and mental states by the view of the flight of the whole soul. This theory occupies a very important and sustainable place in the life of wild people. Tylor also extends to the souls of animals, plants, objects, etc. The ghosts are classified into sage and evil, which gives rise to the doctrine of hauntings, incantations, sacrifices, antidotes, doctrines of cults, animal worship, gods, etc.

In the Vietnamese folk concept, a living person combines two parts: the body and the soul. The part body can be understood as the physical, visible part; in other words, it is the body, the human body. The soul is the immaterial, abstract part related to people’s spirits, thoughts, and emotions.

Buddhism believes that human beings are synthesized from five factors called the *Ngũ uẩn* (Pañca-khandha): *Sắc* (Rūpa – form), *Thọ* or *Thụ* (Vedanā – feeling), *Tưởng* (Saññā – perception), *Hành* (Sañkhāra – mental formations), and *Thức* (Viññāṇa – consciousness). In which form is the tangible element that makes up the body? Perception, action, and consciousness are the invisible elements corresponding to the elements of feeling, reason, and perception; if these invisible elements

are combined, it is the soul [Nguyễn Lang 1974]. According to the Buddhism doctrine of causality, after death, the soul, depending on karma, will be samsara according to the six paths:

- Heaven Realm (Deva realm): Heaven like Buddha, Bodhisattva, etc;
- People Realm: people (luxury, lowly, rich, poor, happy, unhappy, etc.);
- Asura Realm: demon god (intermediate level);
- Animals Realm: animals such as buffaloes, cows, horses, goats, etc;
- Ghosts Realm: hungry ghosts often live in dirty, wet places;
- Hell: the return of the wicked (the underworld).

According to Taoism, human beings in addition to the body also have a soul (three souls, seven astral beings – for men, nine astral – for women). When you die, the body and the astral are no longer there, only the soul [Trần Ngọc Thêm 2000; Nguyễn Duy Hình 2007; Vũ Hồng Vân 2017].

For researchers of Vietnamese folk beliefs, there are also different views on the soul: according to the Vietnamese dictionary, “sung soul means the soul of the dead” [Hội Khai Trí Tiến Đức 1931: 13]. According to the Dictionary of Vietnamese Culture and Traditional Customs, the soul is: “the soul of the dead person is in the imaginary realm of the human, possibly hanging around with living relatives” [Nguyễn Như Ý, Chu Huy 2011: 17]. The soul is also “a community of spirits of all kinds from kings and mandarins, from rich to poor” [Huỳnh Ngọc Trảng, Trương Ngọc Tường 1999: 138].

Through the above study, we can see that, although the explanations between the views are slightly different about the “body” and the “soul”, they are similar in concept: when a person dies, there will be a separation between the “soul” and the “body”. Here both the folk concept, in Taoism holds that when a person dies, the body will dissolve over time, while the soul will continue to exist.

Thus, from the above analysis, we can see that the concept of the soul, is divided into two types: the soul has a worshiper (with relatives), and the soul has not a worshiper (*cô hồn* – hungry ghosts). The soul has a worshiper, that is, those who have a normal death (death due to old age, illness, or due to the standards of life expectancy in the mortal world specified in the book of birth-death of *Bất Đẩu* (this is a Taoism god who rules over the birth) and *Nam Tào* (this is a Taoist god who rules over the death) are worshiped by relatives and descendants. The *cô hồn* (hungry ghosts) is a lonely soul. In the Vietnamese Dictionary it is recorded: the *cô hồn* (hungry ghosts) is “the soul of a dead person who has no relatives to worship” [Nguyễn Như Ý, Chu Huy 2011: 29].

### **The time when the custom of worshipping the soul of the Vietnamese people appeared**

Talking about the belief in soul worship in Vietnam, Nguyễn Lang in his work on Vietnamese Buddhism history wrote: “The ceremony of transcending the hungry ghosts and spirits originating from India was transmitted to and prevalent in China and flowers in the Tang Dynasty were propagated by *Bất Không Kim Cương* (Amogha), also known as *Bất Không Tam Tạng*, a northern Indian, a famous transmission of tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana) [Nguyễn Lang 1974: 41].

However, we have not seen any documents indicating the exact date of the ritual of the super-solution in Vietnam. According to author Nguyễn Lang, the ceremony of super-solution was popularized in the Trần Dynasty. According to the book *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* [2004-1], this *thí thực* (almsgiving) was introduced to Đại Việt (the name of Vietnam during the Trần Dynasty) in 1302 by a Taoist named Xǔ Zōng Đạo (許宗道). This phenomenon was developed in folklore and became a funeral rite with the aim of making the soul of the dead “salvation”.

In 1320, Pháp Loa (monks) held a ceremony at Phổ Ninh pagoda in the king's palace to pray for Emperor Trần Anh Tông to live longer [Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư 2004-1]. In large “Trai đàn” (altar), the ritual of diagnosis used is the ritual of the “Du Già Khoa Nghi” (a kind of Buddhism ceremony to make offerings to hungry ghosts), filled with seals and mantras.

In Zen Buddhism, the afternoon recitation session usually has a short ritual of giving food to the soul, called “Mông Sơn thí thực văn” (The worship of the Mông Sơn sect). Both rituals are heavily tantric [Nguyễn Lang 1974: 412].

According to the book of Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí the part about Quảng Bình and Nghệ An provinces: “Regarding the sacrifice of the soul, in 1449, a temple to sacrifice the soul was established, no one worshiped. It was not until 1464 that the new meat and wine offerings were determined to be sacrificed to the soul, divided into three levels: upper, middle, and lower, all according to the sacrifices to the gods. Every year, government officials ordered the three seasons (spring, summer, and autumn) to make sacrifices into law” [Nguyễn Duy Hình 1996: 75]. Phan Huy Chú commented: “This ceremony has been around since the beginning of the Le Dynasty, and has been followed since then” [Phan Huy Chú 1992: 143].

Particularly in Hue, every year on the occasion of the 23rd of the May lunar month, people in Huế Citadel solemnly hold a festival to worship the soul (Huế people call it's *giỗ chung*). This is a ritual that is both family and community in nature in a union, organization, or in a collective of residents living in the same den, ward, communal house, etc. was held in such a solemn way related to the event of *Kinh đô thất thủ* (the fall of the capital) in 1885.

The period 1883–1885 was the most sensitive period in Vietnamese history during the Nguyễn Dynasty. In 1883, after the French shelled Thuận An, Huế Citadel fell into danger, and the court was confused and afraid. At this time, only Tôn Thất Thuyết was still resolute in his stance against the French. According to some records, it seems that there is no family that does not suffer loss after the event. About 9,300 soldiers and civilians suffered casualties. They were soldiers, people, mandarins, teachers, etc., who died for many reasons. Either they died because of the French enemy's guns or by jostling and stamping each other. It is also possible to fall when trying to climb out of the citadel or stumble into the dense ponds and lakes in the imperial citadel, especially Tĩnh Tâm lake. Those who survived the event were shocked and mourned for those who died unjustly, so they set up an altar to worship. From then on, the 23rd day of the May lunar month every year also becomes the “common death anniversary” (*giỗ chung*) of the whole Huế citadel. On this day, people in Huế City again make offerings to the dead, regardless of whether that person is a family member or not.

Thus, the souls of family members, clans (ancestors, deceased people) have worshipers. The *cô hồn* (hungry ghosts) are the souls of the deceased (the dead) who have no place of worship, no worshipers. They may be homeless, have no relatives, or still have family and loved ones, but in times of turmoil, they have to separate from their homeland, in chaotic situations that cascade away; merchants wandering everywhere, soldiers on fierce battlefields unfortunately passed away without being able to find their relatives, no one knew their names to offer annual anniversaries, they accidentally became alone souls, no people smell smoke, no place of worship; or coastal fishermen all their lives are attached to the sea, floating and roaming on each wave, unfortunately in a storm, their bodies and souls are lost.

### Why should the Vietnamese worship the soul?

There are two explanations for the custom of worshiping the soul of the Vietnamese people:

*first*, the Vietnamese believe that worshipping the souls of parents, grandparents, and ancestors in the clan, looking forward to blessing and sustaining so that people on earth can have health, trade, and sell expensively; or worshipping people with evil spirits and night demons to avoid calamities.

In general, the Vietnamese believe that people after death will live forever with the presence of an immortal soul through the system of graves containing remains and bones [Toan Ánh 2005; Phan Kế Bính 2005; Vu Hong Van, Nguyen Trong Long 2019]. With that concept, the custom of worshipping ancestors and taking care of graves is considered an indigenous belief, showing respect to the deceased, and the ethics of remembering *uống nước nhớ nguồn*. Here, the world of the spirits of the dead always exists in parallel with the world of the living, which can directly or indirectly affect each human condition. That means spirit forces can help or harm mortal people. The concept of *mồ yên mả đẹp* (when ancestors died, they were carefully buried) is one of the important expressions, showing the good reciprocal relationship between the earthly and the underworld. Therefore, it is assumed that all the effects of the forces of spirits will depend on the behavior of the living person.

Along with the worship of ancestors, the custom of worshipping *cô hồn*, in general, is also evident in the fact that people can set up small shrines to worship those who died unexpectedly at the *đầu đường xó chợ* (only those who live without homes or relatives; when you die, you should not be buried carefully). With the belief that any spirit can affect the real world, many localities in the country still have the custom of worshipping the spirit in front of the house twice a month on the evening of the fourteenth and thirtieth of the lunar calendar.

According to folk beliefs, anyone who dies has supernatural powers that affect anyone alive around the world. This probably explains why the Vietnamese can worship a bandit, a thief, a beggar, etc. becoming the village god to patronize the village community. As analyzed above, all those “sacred souls” are mostly the same in that death meets the sacred hour, so it is considered an epiphany, which can cause harm or bless the community. By default, they become “human gods”.

In many places in Vietnam, over time, worshipping such “human gods” may not be very proud, so on the one hand, people have combined to worship new and more majestic saints (Âu Cơ, Hai Bà Trưng, Trần Hưng Đạo, Liễu Hạnh, etc.), often historical figures with meritorious services to the country; on the other hand, people have phony the gods, that is, they are not afraid to “create stories” to “grace” the god to be worshiped. This is the difficult story of many researchers when trying to approach the source of folk beliefs in Vietnamese communal houses and villages [Trần Văn Giàu 1983; Nguyễn Duy Hinh 2007].

It will not be surprising that today there are many gods attributed to the Hung King era. According to unofficial sources, the *chạy thần tích* (bribe the officials to acknowledge the miracles of gods) has happened since the French colonial period [Phan Đăng Duy 2002; Nguyễn Khắc Thuần 2004]. When the Institute of the Far East of the Ancients conducted a statistical review of the collection of Vietnamese religious myths, there were local mandarins who sent to Hanoi new “created” miracles, in order to honor the name of the god of the local village. Therefore, the phenomenon of mixed truth and falsehood is something that people today have to accept and worship into the rules of worship and behavior of the living;

*second*, perform the ceremony to pray for pardon for the souls who are being exiled in hell. Those are the cases when people were still living on earth, they did bad things when they die, and they will suffer many punishments in hell.

Those gruesome scenes were painted at the entrances of large temples or spread among the people by folk paintings, making the living fearful, etc. Everyone wishes for their loved one to have a quick reincarnation (samsara) or a comfortable life in the afterlife. To do so, everyone agreed to pray to the Buddhas, mainly to make offerings to Guanyin, the Bodhisattva who during his visit to hell, asked for a pardon with his benevolence.

### The month of worshipping the soul

The origin of soul month originates from the concept that *Diêm Vương* (King of Hell) opens the Hell's Gate on July 2 every year so that the hungry ghosts can return to the world and then return to the full moon. That is why, according to folk custom, earthly people must offer porridge, rice, and salt to hungry ghosts so that they do not disturb their daily life. In some places, people call hungry ghosts "good brothers", or "back door gods" to please these hungry ghost souls. Every year, Vietnamese people conduct worshipping spirits on July 14 of the lunar calendar.

According to ancient beliefs, hell opens once a year from the 2nd to the 15th day of the July lunar month to let hungry ghosts in the underworld and helpless ghosts come to earth to find food. Therefore, almost every house worships the spirit on any convenient day. However, most people choose the 14th day of the lunar calendar.

With the mind of helping the poor souls, the house-made soul offerings usually have basic items such as incense, flowers, fruits, oil lamps, rice, salt, paper gold, etc.; many well-to-do families often offer savory dishes: chicken, duck, and pork, especially some houses offer whole roast pigs and sometimes even real money with small denominations.

But it is also believed that, with filial piety, it is possible to obtain the mercy of the gods to judge all human actions. For example, Maudgalyayana (*Mục Kiền Liên*) saved his mother from the torments of hell. Sino-Vietnamese legend turns this character into a symbol of filial piety.

According to the book "Tùng Thư Tam Bách đề" of China, legend has it that, *Mục Kiền Liên* (Maudgalyayana) was a disciple of Buddha, full of filial piety to his mother, whom he knew was wandering in hell, one day he went down there to find a way to free his mother. When he saw his mother standing among the hungry ghosts, he immediately filled a bowl of rice and gave it to her. But before she could bring the bowl of rice to her mouth, the rice turned into charcoal, making her unable to eat. *Mục Liên* cried out and ran to tell the Buddha.

The Buddha said, "Your mother was severely punished. You alone will not be able to do anything for your mother, but it takes all the monks in the world to work together to save your mother. On the full moon day of the seventh month, for all those who are suffering, you should prepare all kinds of delicious food and fruits to offer to the great masters of the ten levels of hell" [Nguyễn Lang 1974; Vũ Hồng Vân 2019].

Then the Buddha asked the monks to gather together to recite sutras for their disciples. After that, *Mục Liên*'s mother was completely free from the sufferings that the hungry ghosts had to endure.

Of course, according to the folk beliefs, if salvation is achieved for the souls, it is possible to at least pray for that deliverance at all times of the year, by chanting at the temple for the next 50 days when people die.

But it is the full moon of July when, following the example of *Mục Kiền Liên*, thanks to all the monks gathered, people, have the greatest chance to ask for forgive for the souls in hell.

### Changes in Vietnamese people's worshipping the soul customs today

Some issues to discuss:

*First*, the Vietnamese people's belief in worshipping the spirits of ancestors and clans is a reflection of the spiritual needs of the Vietnamese people that exist in an objective way that needs to be respected. Ancestor worship beliefs contain the principle of "grateful" (Vietnamese idiom is "*uống nước nhớ nguồn*"). Filial piety, as one of the values of traditional culture, has become the life philosophy of Vietnamese people. The construction and development of an advanced culture imbued with national identity require the Vietnamese to have new and correct thinking about the Vietnamese ancestor worship beliefs. It is necessary to investigate, research and systematize cultural, ethical, and filial values in ancestor worship beliefs, on that basis, make an objective assessment, clearly affirming the good values that are still relevant and suitable for modern society to preserve and promote; outdated values that need to be changed; factors that are transformed by being taken advantage of for profiteering purposes and elements of "parasitic" (living on) superstition and superstition in ancestral worship to eliminate them.

*Second*, the practices *Đạo hiếu* (filial piety) in soul worship. In the family, the role of parents in maintaining filial piety is very important. If parents create a family environment with order and dignity, the family life will be happy and children will be filial to their grandparents. On the contrary, if parents do not set a good example for their children in behavior, do not pay attention to care, or even mistreat grandparents, it will cause their children's unfilial behavior [Nguyen Thi Hong Hoa, Vu Hong Van 2022]. Filial piety is the origin of every human being. Filial piety is a valuable moral value in Vietnamese ancestor worship. Even rebuilding their church, rewriting genealogies, digging graves, and burning incense on New Year's Eve are all practical in educating filial piety for children and grandchildren.

*Third*, the worship of the soul creates moral values, meaning preserving and promoting those values in the social life of general beliefs and ancestral spirits worship in particular. In the past time (starting from the innovation period in 1986), the Party committees and authorities at all levels promoted propaganda so that cadres, party members, and people have the right awareness of the good and positive values of ancestor worship as well as the type of religion except for outdated and inappropriate elements [Long, Van 2022]. At the same time, propagandize so that cadres, party members, and people clearly understand the Party and State's policy of respecting freedom of religion, thereby raising awareness of preserving the positive values of beliefs as well as participating in religious activities fighting against activities that take advantage of beliefs for bad purposes. In propaganda, along with promoting the role of mass organizations, it is necessary to pay attention to maximizing the role of the mass information system to orient values and public opinion in the protection and promotion of public opinion good moral values as well as criticism of illegal religious activities.

*Fourth*, in the past time, the State of Vietnam developed and promulgated laws and policies on religion and beliefs in general, including the belief in worshipping ancestors' souls to gradually renew social life, contributing to maintaining and promoting the positive moral values in ancestor worship of the Vietnamese people today. The reality of recent years has shown that the organization of ancestor worship at family level, especially at the level of clans, villages, and festivals; the use of land to build graves, temples, pagodas, and worship centers sometimes happens in many places. One of the reasons leading to the above situation is that the legal basis is still loose, many issues of management, law enforcement, and policies on belief, religion, and culture are both rigid and



moderate, are showing signs of relaxation, or lack of synchronization, not in accordance with the reality of life. In that situation, it is important to develop laws, ordinances, legal documents, and policies regulating activities of beliefs, religions, and ancestor worship.

Over the years, in Vietnam have improved, and traditional beauty and moral values have been promoted. However, due to the impact of the negative side of the market economy, the trend of regionalization and globalization in all aspects of social life, including culture, morality, soul-worship, and other values, there have been the following changes:

*First*, since *Đổi mới* (Renovation) (1986), various religions and beliefs have become active. Establishments for worshipping beliefs and religions were built and renovated. The number of followers participating in religious ceremonies is more. The soul-worshipping beliefs also blend in with that general trend, increasingly focusing on both width and depth; the form of the soul-worship is more diverse and richer. With the growing society, people's incomes and living standards are increasing, creating favorable conditions for restoring customs and beliefs. Besides, better economic conditions make the descendants organize more full anniversaries, festivals, and ancestor worship ceremonies. Since then, ancestor worship has become more interconnected and systematic, connecting kinship relationships. However, since then, many new ritual forms have emerged that are not in accordance with the ethics and traditions of the Vietnamese people.

*Second*, the majority of Vietnamese, including cadres and party members, tend to uphold the worship of ancestral spirits by organizing worship in more ostentatious forms. "More and more monumental, superficial, marble tombs are being built in cemeteries. There are more and more anniversaries where guests are up to several dozen or even hundreds of people. In doing these things, besides the remembrance and gratitude to the ancestors, there is also the honor of living people" [Việt Văn hóa 2013: 725]. Many well-to-do families burn millions of *dong* in votive papers on the anniversary of the death and Tet with all kinds of things. The ostentatiousness in ancestor worship has led to rivalry and competition among families and clans to prove their economic well-being, leading to disunity, jealousy, and mutual envy.

*Third*, the belief in worshipping the soul is deformed, and there is no longer the original meaning of the principle of "gratitude". Currently, many people, including cadres and party members, worship their ancestors out of habit, even for self-seeking purposes, praying to the gods and ancestors to give them money, titles, positions, etc. Many cadres, party members, and people have not been able to distinguish between true cultural values and elements of customs that are distorted or taken advantage of, so they cannot promote good cultural and moral values. The phenomenon of moral decay still exists, such as unfilial children, when parents live without care and care, when they die, worshipping the family; children and grandchildren are indifferent, not interested in the anniversaries of ancestors, grandparents, and parents, pushing the responsibility of mourning, burying grandparents and parents, etc.

### **Conclusion**

Stemming from different beliefs about the soul, the Vietnamese have a variety of ways of making offerings to these objects with various forms of performance and ritual practice. However, when going deep into the classes of people, it has changed and has the resonance of a rather deep folk belief. Through the study of the soul-worshipping beliefs of the Vietnamese, it can be concluded that this is a humanistic belief that shows the nature of the Vietnamese people – respect and love for people, and knowing how to pity their unfortunate fate.

Up to now, soul worship still plays a very important role in the spiritual life of individuals and communities in Vietnamese. Thus, obviously, wanting to study the folklore of Vietnamese requires us to study folk beliefs, of which soul worship is a typical example.

To sum up, soul worship is a socio-historical phenomenon, and in order for this belief to be practiced in a progressive direction, it is necessary to implement synchronously sustainable solutions. Because soul worship is not only the behavior of the living towards the unfortunate fates that have died but also the behavior among those who still exist in this world. This is a unique feature in the, fine customs and cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people.

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