

Traditional Religious Culture in the Spiritual Life of Ethnic Minorities in the Mountainous North of Vietnam Today

Le Van Loi*

Department of Scientific Management, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, Hanoi, Vietnam

*Corresponding author: Levanloinpa@yahoo.com

Received September 29, 2018; Revised October 27, 2018; Accepted October 31, 2018

Abstract Traditional religious culture is a constituent element of the national culture. Under specific historical conditions, traditional religious culture has a great impact on people and society, contributing to the creation of special nuances for the spiritual life of humanity. The traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the mountainous north of Vietnam, that is reflected in various forms of relics, customs, traditions, ethics, performance, literature - art, scripts, festivals, etc. has been playing an important role in the spiritual life of people here, contributing to the unique cultural nuance of each ethnic group and the diversity of Vietnamese culture.

Keywords: beliefs, Traditional religious culture, spiritual life of ethnic minority people, the mountainous north of Vietnam

Cite This Article: Le Van Loi, "Traditional Religious Culture in the Spiritual Life of Ethnic Minorities in the Mountainous North of Vietnam Today." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 6, no. 10 (2018): 1421-1429. doi: 10.12691/education-6-10-13.

1. Introduction

Vietnamese culture is a unified and diverse culture created by the culture of the 54 ethnic groups. Traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities is an integral part of ethnic culture in particular and the whole national culture in general. Living and developing in the organic bond with the belief in the supernatural, traditional religious culture has come into the life of each ethnic minority community the mountainous north of Vietnam, contributing to the unique cultural nuance of each ethnic group and the diversity of Vietnamese culture. Traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the mountainous provinces of North Vietnam is studied by scientists. So far, there have been many studies on different aspects of traditional religious culture in Vietnam in general and traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the mountainous provinces of North Vietnam in particular.

Ngo Duc Thinh in *Beliefs and Traditional religious culture in Vietnam* has studied the spiritual life, religious beliefs and traditional religious culture of the Vietnamese people. The author studied in depth the folk beliefs of the peoples such as worshipping ancestors, Mother goddess, Holy Ghost Tran, worshipping Hung King, etc. These are beliefs not only popular in Vietnamese, but also in some other ethnic groups such as Muong, Thai, Dao, Tay, Nung etc. At the same time, the author referred to the concept of traditional religious culture expressed in various forms of spiritual activities of the community such as ceremonial

music, worship singing, sacred dancing, worship paintings, pen dancing, ritual performances, festivals, etc. to see the organic relationship between folk beliefs and folk culture, etc. [1]. Nguyen Tho Khang in the article *Cultural characteristics and values of folk beliefs in Vietnam* analyzed five traditional cultural value characteristics of Vietnamese folk beliefs. In which, the author emphasized: "Traditional cultural values in Vietnamese folk beliefs are reflected through the system of myths, legends, deities, temples, rituals, customs and festivals that are very close and easy to understand and carry but also very deep and educational and has become a physical and intangible traditional cultural system. This traditional cultural system is closely linked to the cultural life of the community, ensuring its durability and adaptability to the changes of society. Many forms of Vietnamese folk beliefs such as the worship of ancestors, Mother goddess, the City God, worshipping primogenitor, etc., are capable of adapting to changes in all periods of Vietnamese history to survive and develop" [2]. The author affirmed: "The traditional cultural value system in folk beliefs in Vietnam is very rich in content and form of expression" [2]. Dang Van Bai in the article *Cultural values in the folk beliefs and festivals* believes that the folk beliefs is a vivid expression of regional cultural nuances and national cultural identity. The author asserted "since ancient times, Vietnamese have had strong faith and divine devotion to the divine or supernatural forces, believed in life after death and believed that their ancestors and family line is also the spiritual support for the living. The folk beliefs often has common characteristics: belief in supernatural forces; high

sacredness; fame and fear; which are the interaction between human and divine, human attitude to nature; love for humanity and fellow human beings" [3]. The author also mentions the practice of folk beliefs, consolidation, maintenance and transmission of religious beliefs, religion as well as cultural and moral values. Human beings have created two types of cultural heritage "the material cultural heritage/religious institutions (temples, shrines, pagoda, churches, tombs, etc.) that is a sacred space of culture and spirituality gathering the human heart. Intangible cultural heritage / traditional cultural festivals, rituals of worship, kinds of offerings offered in religious belief institutions, local customs and traditions, myths, legends, divine, ordinances" [3]. In particular, the traditional festival plays a large role in social life, capable of meeting the needs of cultural and spiritual activities of the most people and at the same time affecting the socio-economic and political development of the country and "the essence of the traditional festival is the spiritual nucleus/object worshiped in a respectful and divine way" [3]. Hoang Luong in *Traditional festivals of the ethnic groups in the northern Vietnam* introduced the traditional festivals of the ethnic groups in the northern Vietnam. The author presents in detail the contents of four chapters: Concepts of festival and folk beliefs; Sacred time and space of the festival; Activities of festival and folk beliefs; Values and roles of festivals in the community life [4] The work *Contribution to the study of culture and ethnicity* by Nguyen Tu Chi is the synthesis of 21 topics on issues such as spiritual culture, the art of floral print of the Muong people, the organizational structure of the villages and communes, the agricultural rituals of the Muong ethnic group (Mang U), Gianai and Bana [5]. The author Phan Ngoc in *Vietnamese Cultural Identity* researches in depth on traditional Vietnamese cultural values. In which, the author presents the culture of traditional religion and emphasizes the role of festivals in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people: "Actually, the festival is to create the ideal life in a life full of struggles, fights, injustices, so that the life is cyclical, which suffering goes as a pair with pleasure, hardness goes as a pair with rest, oppression goes as a pair with freedom as the birds, etc. In fact, the ritual and festival are often intertwined. The ritual is the work of the individual or family for the purpose of blessing or thanksgiving to the temple goddess, Catholic compatriots. The festival is the work of the community whose main purpose is to refine the equal status and appearance respected" [6]; 370].

When researching on the traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the mountainous region of North Vietnam, researchers have introduced and studied in depth the typical traditional religious cultural values in the spiritual life of the people here as: *Culture of ethnic minorities* by To Ngoc Thanh [7], *Characteristics of traditional culture of ethnic groups in Vietnam* by Hoang Nam [8], *Some theoretical and practical issues about ethnicity and ethnic relationships in Vietnam* by Nguyen Quoc Pham, Trinh Quoc Tuan [9], *Customary law, traditional customs and transformation*, by Ngo Duc Thinh [10], *Culture of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam* by Ngo Van Le, Nguyen Van Tiep, Nguyen Van Dieu [11], *Cultural Traditions of Vietnamese Ethnic Minorities* by Vu Ngoc Khanh [12], *Picture of ethnic cultural language*

in Vietnam and Southeast Asia by Pham Duc Duong [13], *Ethnic minorities in Vietnam* by the Institute of Ethnology [14], etc.

Ngo Duc Thinh in *Regional Culture and Cultural Zonation in Vietnam* [15] and in *Regional Cultural Identity in Viet Nam* [16] argued that the cultural region is a certain cultural space, made up of residential units within a geographical range of one or more ethnic groups, creating a system of cultural forms with a deep sense of community, expressed in the social and human environment through the forms of human behavior with nature, society and their own behavior to the other on a long historical process. The author mentions the different cultural regions in Vietnam, including the cultural regions of ethnic minorities in the mountainous north of Vietnam with the characteristics of geography, population, ethnicity, cultural symbols, customs, habits, beliefs, etc. In *Cultural identity of ethnic minorities in Vietnam*, through cultural and ethnic characteristics including belief and religious characteristics, Nguyen Dang Duy points out the cultural characteristics that make up the ethnic identity of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam [17]. The author Lan Anh in *Worship painting of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region* has provided an overview of the worship of the mountain people in the north: "The worship painting of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region is mostly religious paintings, associated with the Buddhist or Taoist beliefs, but they still imprint the art of each ethnic group, formed from the origin of specific culture and custom. Each ethnic group has a line of worship painting with the different characteristics from painting stroke, color to the number of paintings in each set. In the northern mountainous region, ethnic groups such as Tay, Nung, Dao, Cao Lan, San Diu have a habit to use worship painting in the worship, funeral. In particular, the ethnic groups Tay and Dao own a large number of worship paintings, etc. The mountainous worship paintings presenting in the funeral are to express the folk wishes of the family of the dead for their souls of relatives to escape hell, reach Nirvana or immortality" [18] and to confirm: "The mountainous worship paintings serve the spiritual life of ethnic minority people in mountainous provinces in the North so the colors are usually dark, deep or with the characteristic colors as red, blue, white, yellow. The mountainous worship paintings are kept carefully by the people. Today, despite the development of life, the line of worship paintings of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region still remains of cultural value" [18]. In *Unified but diversified culture of ethnic groups in Vietnam*, Nong Quoc Chan and Huynh Khai Vinh mentioned the universality and specificity of religious beliefs in the spiritual life of Vietnamese peoples. At the same time, the authors also analyzed some of the traditional religious cultures in Vietnam in general and the traditional religious culture expressed in a number of festivals of ethnic minorities in the mountainous region of North Vietnam: "The festivals consist of two parts: the ritual performed by the worshiper with a ritualistic meaning and a sacred and sanctified meaning in order to send a belief that will be blessed by the gods to the whole community; The festival consists of folk games that are actively engaged with fun" [19]; 208-209]. In which, "The Tay, Nung people have

the festival Lung tung (Long tong). The Thai people have the festivals Xen Ban, Xen Muong with the festival Nem Con, collective dance. People in the Northwest (Hmong, Dao) have festivals such as “Gau tao”, “Nao Xong”, “Nhiang cham dao” with the purpose of praying and swearing to protect the forest and practice martial arts” [19]; 209] In *Basic Vietnamese culture*, the authors studied the cultural characteristics of belief in each region in Vietnam. In which, the traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam express “the belief of human beings to patron saint, heaven – earth and ancestors. Their gods are very diverse, sometimes there are many gods such as mountain god, river god, land god. There are also kings, Giang Then, community consciousness is strengthened through the worship of the patron saint of the hamlet or the village. The awareness of the family and family line is reinforced through ancestor worship. Each family has an ancestral altar placed in the most formal position in the home. In addition, they worship the king of the kitchen in house” [20]; 246]. At the same time, traditional religious culture of the people here is also expressed through the system of temples, pagodas and scripts of some ethnic minorities, folk literature works such as proverbs, fairy tales, puzzles, children's song, folk songs written on elaborately clothed paper, folk festivals. In particular, the researchers mentioned some typical festivals of some ethnic minority communities in the North: “The festivals of Tay - Nung people are very rich. Festival of the whole community is Long tong (festival of starting a plow season), took place in two parts: Ritual and Festival. The main ritual is the procession of the Village hall god and the agricultural god to the place of the festival in the field. A meal is served right here. The basic festival part consists of games such as Danh quay, Danh yen, Tung con, magic, etc.” [20]; 247]. Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet in *Preserving and promoting the cultural values of the ethnic groups in Northern Midland and Mountains regions in the present context* introduced the material and spiritual culture values of the people here. In which, the author affirmed: “The ethnic groups in the area live in the attachment to the natural environment, they naturally believe in fate, supernatural forces that is the basis of their religious beliefs. For example, in the belief of Tay and Nung people, the Agricultural god is in charge of farming, He sets crops and keeps water for crops. He plays a very important role in the agricultural production of the inhabitants. Every year, the ethnic groups held solemn rituals to worship the Agricultural god to look forward to good weather, less natural disaster. Ethnic minority people also have the idea that all things have souls, ghosts, gods. All are divided into two types: good and evil. This is the reason for the formation of a series of shrines to worship Land Genie, Tudigong, Earth genie, village halls to worship the village god, as a reason for ethnic people to organize ceremonial festivals” [21].

In addition, researchers are also interested in intensive research on the religious culture of each ethnic minority community living in the mountainous provinces of northern Vietnam to see the general and particular cultural identity and of each ethnic minority community here. In *Chu Dong tree in the mythology of Muong and To Tem tree in the religion of some ethnic groups in our country*,

Phan Huu Dat has studied the beliefs of worshipping trees in the lives of ethnic minorities in the mountainous region of the north Vietnam [22]. The author Vuong Duy Quang in *Traditional and modern spiritual culture of the Hmong people in Vietnam* has clarified the economic, social and cultural characteristics of the Hmong people. The author also refers to the birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies of the Hmong people in Vietnam [23]. Vuong Anh in *Mo and Muong ethnic epic* has studied in deep the Muong ethnic epic with mo in funeral rites containing many traditional cultural values [24]. In *Ethnic culture of the Northwestern Vietnam*, the authors mentioned the cultural characteristics of the Northwestern ethnic groups, pointing out differences in the culture of some ethnic groups and in-depth analysis of the cultural characteristics of the ethnic minorities in the Northwest Vietnam [25]. Nguyen Thi Thanh Nga in *Some basic issues of ethnic groups in northwestern Vietnam* mentioned the material and spiritual culture characteristics of ethnic minorities in northwestern Vietnam. In which, the author emphasizes the spiritual culture characteristics of some ethnic minority communities: “Most of the ethnic minorities living in the Northwest are polytheistic with perception of the universe around humans made up of many layers of the world. The Hmong, Dao people all say that the world is made of heaven, earth, water, underground. The Thai people claim that their own heaven is made up of three layers of the world” [26]. In *Northwestern Ethnic Culture (Northwestern Culture)*, the author presents the unique cultural values of the ethnic minorities. In particular, when introducing the religious culture and belief of the Northwestern ethnic minority people, the author emphasized: “The ethnic groups in the Northwest have the belief “all things have soul” (animism), a kind of belief that all peoples on the planet experience. There are all kinds of “souls” and types of rivers, streams, rocks, trees, animals, natural forces such as thunder, lightning, rain and wind. The parts of the human body also have soul. The Kinh people believe that there are Three souls - Seven envelopes of the divine (male) and Three souls - Nine envelopes of the divine (female). Thai people have 80 souls such as soul of hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, ears, nose, forehead, etc. The dead do not disappear but return to live in the village of their ancestors. Since everything has soul, it is necessary to treat them as in relation to people. There are good and bad souls depending on the way people treat them, etc. In that way, the people establish a relationship with all things and with their ancestors, placing man in the totality of the space and time environment, creating a balance in the mind. Human beings converge in their present life by time domains: past, present, future; and dimensions of space, nature, environment, people and society. This is a multi-faceted and multilateral relationship that guarantees the rationality and indispensability of human life” [27]. Ban Tuan Nang in *Na Nhem festival in Tran Yen commune, Bac Son district, Lang Son province* introduced the details of Na Nhem festival and highlighted the basic values of the festival in the life of people here: historical values, cultural values and development value [28]. In *Lai Chau and Lai Chau ethnic groups*, the researchers gave an overview of the cultural picture of ethnic minority communities in Lai Chau province. When studying the culture of each ethnic

group, the authors explored the cultural characteristics of the traditional culture of each ethnic group [29].

In general, the studies have addressed various aspects of ethnic culture in Viet Nam in general and in the Northern mountainous region in particular. In particular, researchers have highlighted some of the unique cultural values in the culture of the folk beliefs of ethnic minorities. Inheriting the research results of previous scientists, the article focuses on clarifying the characteristics, types of culturally outstanding folk beliefs and the influence of traditional religious culture in the spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the mountainous north of Vietnam.

2. Content

2.1. Overview of Traditional Religious Culture of Ethnic Minorities in Mountainous North of Vietnam

Ethnic minorities in Viet Nam mainly live in mountainous, remote, border areas which are large in size, occupying $\frac{3}{4}$ of the country. The Northern Midlands and Mountainous Region of Vietnam is the largest area in Vietnam, comprising 14 provinces with a population of 11,290,500 people, with a diverse population of over 30 different ethnic groups, among whom Ethnic minorities make up more than 60% of the population; The crowded ethnic minorities include Tay, Thai, Muong, Hmong, Nung, Dao [30]. The traditional cultural life of ethnic minority people here is very rich, diverse and boldly unique identity of each ethnic group.

Regarding religious and spiritual life, most ethnic minority groups follow the polytheism and various worshipping ceremonies. It is possible to divide the beliefs (also called the folk beliefs or traditional religions) of the ethnic minorities into forms: ancestor worship beliefs, community-related beliefs, natural-related beliefs, production-related beliefs, and life-cycle-related beliefs. In each type of beliefs of each ethnic group, it contains the rudimentary but unique universe and human life, expressing the aspirations of people about a good life, emotional attachment to the homeland, the village, the organic link between the human and nature, the intimate affection between people living with the deceased, etc.

Traditional Religious culture of ethnic minorities is the form of mental activities that arise and integrate many valuable literary and artistic values. Folk literature works for rituals and beliefs of ethnic minorities are quite rich such as myths, legends, ancient stories, proverbs, epic, poetry, funeral oration, the system of Mo; The Thai people have a system of literary works, books on history, society, on customs and traditions; The Muong people have Mo, Mo includes all the rituals and lyrics in Muong people's funeral controlled by the voodoo. Mo has two parts: rituals and lyrics controlled by the voodoo. Muong people's Mo includes funeral Mo, Mo to worship envelopes of the divine, etc. [31]. The poetry of ethnic minorities is not for reading but mainly for singing and reciting in festivals associated with sacred space. In particular, with the reservation of many literary and artistic works, religious culture contributes to preserving and enriching the language of ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minority's traditional religious culture integrates many forms of aesthetic and humanistic choir expressed in speaking, telling, Vi, Ve (Ve is written in rhymes, using many different forms: four-word sentences, five-word sentences, six-word sentences,) [32], singing, Chanty, playing games, dancing, festival, music, etc. Most ethnic groups have extremely rich choir arts, which are reflected in ritual sacrifices, marriage, weddings, funerals and festivals. In ritual sacrifices, the worship orations are often read by worshipers, voodoos narrated or sung. Particularly in the choir arts of ethnic minorities, ceremonial dancing is also included, this is a form of dance to offer gifts to pray and thank to the god or through dance so that the worshipers, voodoos reach the state of escape to be connected with the spirit, the devil. Traditional religious activities of ethnic minorities are always associated with music. Musical instruments of the ethnic minorities include: pan, flute, drum, beat, gong, bugle, and hand shaker, etc. Music plays an important role in ritual sacrifices, marriages, funeral and in festivals of ethnic minority people. Covering all in traditional religious life in particular, the spiritual life of ethnic minorities in general is traditional festivals, expressing their notions of the universe, nature, people and human life. Each ethnic minority has unique festivals associated with their beliefs. Thai people have the festivals of Xuong Dong, Xen Ban, Xen Muong, etc.; Muong people have the festivals of Xuong Dong, Thuong Dien, Ha Dien, harvest festival, etc.; Hmong people have ancestor worship ceremony, swearing ceremony, praying ceremony, soul call ceremony, "Sai San" (Choi Nui), Gau tao ceremony; The Tay and Nung people have a festival Long tong (Xuong Dong), etc.; The Dao people have the festivals of Cap Sac, Tet Nhay, etc.

Each ethnic minority community in the Northern Mountain Region has a belief system that expresses a particular cultural identity and contains many traditional cultural values of each ethnic group. However, the traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the region still has common characteristics due to the regulation of the economic, cultural and social conditions of the region. It is possible to generalize some cultural characteristics of ethnic minority people in the mountainous region of North Vietnam as follows:

Traditional religious culture of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces is marked by the Animism and partly Totemism and shamanism.

Totemism is a form of primitive religion that reflects the thought of the Clan society with human belief in the close and bloodline relation between a group of people and an animal, plant or thing, considering it as their ancestors and protect worship it. Animism was born at the end of the Clan commune with the concept of the existence of the spiritual world, the afterlife and the soul. In which, the soul can bring benefits, harm to people and other objects; Things have the same attitude and behavior as humans. Shamanism is the popular form of religion at the end of the clan, with the notion that someone is capable of mediating between the mundane and the supernatural world, the human and the devil and evil through the act of dancing, singing, howling, etc. in order to ask the gods to help people escape the tribulation, disease or achieve the desire.

These primitive forms of religion are still visible in the religious cultural life and beliefs of the Vietnamese people,

especially in the religious cultural life of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous area. Thai people believe that all things in nature have souls (ghosts), so they worship a lot of ghosts (land ghost, field ghost, stream ghost, cockatrice ghost, banyan-tree ghost, etc.). Muong people believe that the natural phenomena as well as things around them have souls, envelopes of the divine so they also worship a lot of gods, saints, ghosts like Hill ghosts, water station ghost, the envelope of the divine of Mr. Ba Muoi, etc. Every tree has a spirit and is reigned by the god. Therefore, the Muong people have tradition to worship the envelope of the divine and the soul in the Na Mu ceremony, garage ceremony in the traditional funeral, in the traditional wedding, etc. Agricultural cultivation of the Muong people is upland rice, so they believe that if they continually pray to the rice, the rice mother will call rice paddies to help the rice to multiply, helping the people of Muong life more abundant. Therefore, in the celebration of new rice, Muong people continue to worship rice. In addition, the Muong also worship many gods such as mountain god (Tan Vien), land god, stone god, Moraceae tree god, Chu dong god, water god, etc with many worshipping rituals. Similarly, the Hmong people believe that all things have souls. So, the Hmong people also worship a lot of ghosts: house ghost, column ghost, door ghost, kitchen ghost, pig ghost, etc.

In addition to the imprint of animism, religious culture of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces are influenced by Totemism and Shamanism. Muong people believe that their ancestors originated from Si and Chu dong trees. In folk-literary works of the Muong ethnic group, such as *The Birth of Soil and Water* appeared by Moraceae tree, Chu dong tree and other important rituals of the human life, such as the ceremony Keo Si to pray for the elderly to live for centuries. Some Hmong families still worship the animals as ancestors such as the Xong family line worships the bear, the Vu family line worships the wolf, the Va family line worships the eagle, the Lau family line worships the tiger, the Ho family line worships the monkey, etc. The traces of Shamanism also exist in many ethnic groups, which are manifested most clearly in rituals of worshipers, voodoo is in Thai community, Muong people, Hmong people, Dao people, Tay people, Nung people, etc. In some rituals, when worshipping, the worshipers, voodoos often read or sing prayers, while dancing to communicate with the gods. Shamanism is most evident in the Cap Sac ceremony of the Dao people, Then ceremony of the Tay people, etc.

Traditional religious culture of each ethnic group has its own characteristics and clear interference.

In the northern mountainous region, the traditional religious culture of each ethnic group has its own nuance, creating the unique cultural identity of each ethnic group. The traditional religious culture of the ethnic minorities in the area have mutual interference. Most of the ethnic groups follow polytheism, believing that all things have souls, so they worship a lot of different gods. In addition, in most ethnic minorities, the role of the worshiper, voodoo is very important in the community. Ritual sacrifices in religious activities and festivals can not lack the presence of worshipers and voodoos.

In the wedding ceremonies of ethnic minorities also have very clear interference. Weddings of all ethnic

minorities have to go through such steps as: matchmaking, pre-wedding ceremony, wedding and many different rituals with the characteristics of each ethnic group. In wedding ceremonies, the role of matchmaker is very important. Another common point which is easy to see in the wedding ceremonies of ethnic minorities is that choir singing is widely used. In each specific ritual, the ethnic minority people have their own words such as singing at the ceremony of opening the gate from the boy's family, singing for the betel invitation, singing to thank, singing to respond from the girl's family, etc.

Funerals of some ethnic groups also have similarities in some rituals. For example, the mo funeral night of the Thai people, the Muong people have the same meaning is to help the dead review the history of the nation, bringing the dead souls to different worlds. Or the ritual of fresh ghosts, dry ghosts of the Hmong people, Tay people, Nung people and Lo Lo people, etc, although the manner of carrying rituals is different in the ethnic group, but most of these rituals have the same meaning as the final farewell of the living with the dead, etc.

Most ethnic groups have a tradition of worshipping ancestors, the same- bloodline people. Most of the ethnic groups have the idea that the ancestors' souls are still watching and blessing their descendants. However, the way of showing respect to ancestors in each ethnic group is different. Some ethnic groups set up their ancestors' altars, placed in the most important places in the house (Muong, Tay, Nung people, etc.), but some ethnic groups set up their ancestors altars whenever worshipping (some family lines of the Hmong people). Some ethnic groups worship the ancestors on the death anniversary of the dead and the holidays, Tet holiday, but some ethnic groups just worship their ancestors on holidays, Tet holiday, etc. The interference in the ancestor worship of the ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces is also reflected in the fact that most of the ethnic groups believe that their ancestors have not stopped at a generation of parents but extended to the 3-4 generations that worship grandparents, parents and the same- bloodline dead.

Traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the North is less compatible with regional and world religious cultures.

In the age of globalization, cultures of nations, regions have a strong impact on each other. Vietnamese culture is also moving in the trend of preserving traditional cultural values, while also absorbing selective cultural values of humanity. The trend of integration and exchange among ethnic groups, regions and area has strongly influenced the perception as well as the cultural and religious activities of ethnic minority people. However, in general, the traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces are less compatible with regional and world religious cultures. While regional and world religions nowadays are trying to simplify as much as possible the most complicated rituals to adapt to industrial and post-industrial societies, most ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces still follow the theory of animism, worshipping many different deities with many cumbersome customs that create a burden on the life of the people. Therefore, when religions was simplistic ritual, elements that fit the new way of life that have the opportunity to enter the ethnic minority community.

Traditional Religious culture of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces, in addition to preserving good values, still remaining many backward customs and habits.

In recent years, the religious life of ethnic minorities has changed in the direction of progress, many traditional cultural values are preserved, promoted and many cumbersome rituals and heavy customs have been gradually eliminated. However, traditional religious activities of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous provinces still have many backward habits and customs. For ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous area today, the woman's birth still has to perform too many complex rituals. In many areas of ethnic minorities, the marriage rituals today are still too many cumbersome and costly procedures in terms of time, money and materials. The costly offerings for the rituals in the wedding ceremony are still a burden for the lives of ethnic people. When being sick, most of ethnic people in remote areas still rely on the voodoo, the worshipers and spend money and time on praying, calling soul by magic method. In addition, the custom in funeral, following to the tradition of ethnic minorities in some localities still maintain many complex rituals, etc.

2.2. A number of Traditional Religious Culture Types of the Mountainous Ethnic Minority in Northern Vietnam Today

Throughout the long history, ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam have created many types of folk beliefs through the process of practicing divine worship. Traditional religious culture of the people here is diverse, rich in both the material culture and non-material culture.

Relics: Religious relics include family altars such as ancestral altars (Thai, Muong, Hmong, Dao, Tay, Nung people etc.), Tudigong altar, Land Genie altar, Tan Vien altar (Muong ethnic group), temples and shrines in public places; paintings, statues, etc.

Customs, habits, ethical traditions: The customs, habits, ethical traditions of the people are very rich. Each ethnic group has its own customs, habits of living, even in the same ethnic group, the people live in different localities have differences in their customs and habits. Many customs and practices formed by religion and associated with religious activities. Traditional religious culture expresses that the worldview and human life of the people are very rustic and plain and especially the code of conduct among members of the family, the community and nature is expressed. In the religious culture of the people here still retain the good customs, habits, ethics.

Choir singing: traditional choir singing is the entertainment activities of people creating in the process of labor, contacting with nature. By speaking, telling, Vi, Ve, singing, Chanty, dancing, festival, music, painting, etc., people here express the fun or sad mood of the of daily life. Most of the ethnic minorities in the mountainous region of Northern Vietnam perform extremely rich choir singing, which are reflected in rituals of praying, weddings, funerals, festivals, etc.

In sacrificial rituals, funeral orations are often read by worshipers or voodoo by narrating or singing. This art is featured in the Mo funeral nights of the Thai, the Muong

people. In traditional weddings of the majority of ethnic groups, there are many folk songs with distinctive ethnic cultural identity. These are the songs to welcome the bride, welcome the soul of the bride, bridegroom, singing to ask for asset, singing to give asset, etc. in the Thai wedding; singing to ask for opening the gate, delivering gifts, singing to ask for the bride, etc. in the wedding of the Hmong; singing to greet, singing to invite betel, singing to thank, singing to ask for spreading mat, etc of the Tay people; singing to welcome the bride in the wedding of the Muong people, etc.

Similarly in the wedding ceremony, in the festival of ethnic minority here, in addition to the ritual part, the festival part always has the happy show and singing as responsive folk singing and dancing Xoe by Thai people; dancing for farming kaingin, sowing, harvesting, grinding, cooking, catching Turtle, etc by Dao people; playing flute, playing lip lute by the H'mong boys and girls; dancing fish, dancing towel, choir singing as love singing, etc. by Kho Mu people. In particular, in the choir singing arts of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces, it also includes ceremonial dancing, which is a form of dance offering gifts to pray and thank the gods, or through dance so that the worshipers and voodoo reach the state of escape to be connected with the spirit, the devil. It can be described as Mo dance (funeral mo dance), Moi dance (dancing to exorcise evil, heal), Sac bua dance (New Year's dance) by Muong ethnic group; Then Dance by the Tay people; Nung (Then dance to pray for the good, Then for divination, Then to farewell to the dead, Then to pray for rain, Then to praise, Then to ordain the Then dancers, etc) Dance for ordination (dancing in maturity ceremony for the man) and the Tet Nhay (dancing in worship ritual of Ban Vuong - Primitive ancestor of the Dao ethnic group) of the Dao ethnic group.

In the traditional religious culture activities of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous provinces also have music. Musical instruments of the ethnic minorities include: pan-pipe, flute, drum, beat, gong, bugle, and hand shaker, etc. Music plays an important role in ritual sacrifices, marriages, funeral and in festivals of ethnic minority people.

Art and literature: The folk literature works for rituals and religion of ethnic minorities are quite rich, such as myths, legends, ancient stories, proverbs, poetry, funeral oration, Mo, etc. In particular, the system of literary works, historical, social, and scriptural books are included, etc. by Thai people; Mo includes funeral Mo, Mo to worship envelopes of the divine by Muong people (Mo of the Muong people including ghost mo, house ghost mo) praying mo. Ghost mo include Muong mo: *The Birth of Soil and Water, Dang Van Va, Thousand family-line Mo (Mo to receive relatives)* with tens of thousands of sentences. House ghost mo includes a system of prayers. Praying mo has thousands of sentences (praying soul and envelope of the divine) [21]. In addition, Muong people also have *Dang* (singing poetry). *Dang* of Muong people are also very diverse, including *Dang Van Va* (singing in flower garden), *Dang Moi* (singing in Moi ceremony), *Dang Nep* and *Dang Ang* (love singing), in which, religious activities are notable is *Dang Moi*. In particular, the poetry genre in religious and cultural activities of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces is

not for reading but mainly for singing in ritual sacrifices, wedding ceremonies, medical treatment, funeral, etc. The folk literature works of the people here are used in festivals, customs and habits.

Language, writing: Ethnic minorities the northern mountainous region has their own language. Thai people's language is Thai, Kho Mu people's is Kho Mu, Ha Nhi people's is Ha Nhi, etc. According to linguists, at present, among ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region, only some have their own writing, such as the Thai people have the ancient Thai scripts; The Tay, Nung, Dao people have Nom scripts. These types of words are mainly used by voodoos and worshipers and transmitted through cultural activities. At present, some texts are still remained (mo, worshipping) and the ethnic worship paintings written in ancient Thai scripts, Nom scripts so religious culture plays an important role in preserving the writing of ethnic minorities.

Festival: Ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous region have a rich and varied folk festival treasure. Thai people have the festivals Xuong Dong, Xen Ban, Xen Muong, etc; Muong people have the festivals Xuong Dong, Thuong Dien, Ha Dien, Harvest festival, etc.; Hmong people have ancestor worship ceremony, swearing ceremony, praying ceremony, soul call ceremony, "Sai San" (Choi Nui), Gau tao ceremony; The Tay and Nung people have a festival Long tong (Xuong Dong), etc.; The Dao people have the festivals of Cap Sac, Tet Nhay, etc. Some typical festivals of some ethnic minorities include:

Xen Ban, Xen Muong festival of Thai people: Every year, when the spring comes, it is also the time for the Thai people to perform Xen Ban festival (Village worshipping), Xen Muong (commune worshipping). During Xen Ban festival, Thai people worship the gods of protection for the village, such as the river god, mountain god, tree god, etc. The Thai worship the twelve souls, each soul corresponds to a part of the human body and also symbolizes twelve months in a year, offering the ghosts (souls) of the village to pray for the blessings from the gods and the ghosts for good crops, healthy children.

Gau Tao festival of Hmong people: The festival takes place from January 1 to January 15, for the purpose of praying for happiness or praying for fate. This is the largest festival with the participation of crowds of people and contains many special rituals of the Hmong people. During Gau Tao festival, the Hmong people perform the rituals of thanksgiving to the heaven, earth, gods, and Tu Di Gong for their healthy children, and for families with sons to follow the lineage and take care of their ancestors and family lines. At the same time, the Hmong people also bless for fortune and happiness and thank heaven and earth for blessing the villagers have a wealthy life, abundant harvests, full rice and corn, etc. This festival is a chance for everyone to meet, play and sing the love songs, and play trumpet, drink the cup of wine in the spring.

Long tong festival of Tay, Nung people: Long tong festival which is also known as Xuong dong festival, is a unique festival that brings together many cultural values of the Tay ethnic group, as well as a convergence of the most typical cultural nuances of some ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous areas such as the Nung ethnic group, the Dao ethnic group, the San Chi ethnic group, etc.

Long tong festival is religious activity off the ethnic minority held in the first of January in each year to wish the Agricultural god, Mountain god, River god for good weather, fresh trees, bumper harvests, wealthy life. In this festival, apart from the ritual, the festival often has games such as: Plowing, Tug of war, pushing sticks, throwing the orb, etc. attracted the participation of many people.

Cap sac festival of Dao people: Cap sac or Lap tich festival of Dao people is essentially a mature festival for men. Dao people believe that if a man has not passed Cap sac festival, he is not considered a mature adult despite his high age. The man passing Cap sac festival will be involved in the important work of the village, be assisted for the worshiper. Cap sac festival is usually held in November, December or January each year. At the close of the festival, the person joining in the festival must abstain from singing, quarreling, sleeping with others, etc. Every festival must have 6 worshipers undertaking various tasks and rituals. When performing the ceremony, the worshipers have to perform a lot of offerings, dances and magic by Cap Sac book. At the Cap Sac festival, the clans, the villagers will be invited to witness and join in wine party to share the joy.

Harvest festival of the Muong people: Muong people celebrate the Harvest festival in October of the lunar year, after harvesting. In many villages and communes, after harvesting rice, farmers choose good days (even days to pound rice, cook sticky rice, chicken and go fishing in the streams. On this day, the family must cook more rice than that of usual days. People think that it will help the next crop more productive. Before celebrating the new season, the Muong people do not forget to share with the domestic animals of the family such as buffaloes, dogs, chickens and pigs. If the house has guests, Muong people absolutely do not allow them to eat new rice for fear that rice will go with them, the next crop will fail. New offerings of rice are offered at the communal house, then the Muong people offer new rice at the altar of the ancestors in their family. In the celebration of new rice, in many villages, Muong people also organize community activities such as Tet holiday with many games, singing, dance lasting from 2 days to 7 days.

2.3. The Role of Traditional Religious Culture in the Spiritual Life of Ethnic Minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam Today

Spiritual life is a very broad category, expressed in many aspects such as spirituality, psychology, politics, ethics, customs, culture, arts, etc. These are direct products of the process of history and social communication. From spiritual activities, the spiritual value system is created to meet the spiritual needs of the people. For ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region, traditional religious rites follow throughout the human life from birth to death. Since they are fetuses in the mother's womb, their mother had to abstain from many things. At birth, every human being of different ethnic backgrounds has to undergo life-cycle rituals such as week-fullness, naming, when they reach adulthood, they will pass maturation and marriage ceremony. When being sick, there are praying ritual for healing, and being in old age, there are funeral

rituals, etc. Along with rituals throughout the life of each individual, in each family, ethnic minority people are immersed in community rituals with distinctive festivals, featuring the culture of each ethnic group. Along with rituals are the forms of choir singing, dancing, music, Vi, telling, etc. are spiritual cultural activities that are indispensable in the lives of ethnic minorities. Thus, religious culture plays a very important role in the lives of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces.

Traditional religious culture contributes to the formation of personal feelings, raising the awareness of people here about family, community, ethnicity with the moral values of "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls" etc. One of the typical values of traditional religious culture types in Vietnam in general and in the Northern mountainous region in particular is to contribute to the formation and raising of people's awareness of their families, communities and nation. In which, customs with worshipping beliefs have a great influence on education and raising awareness of the origins of human beings here. The worship religion of each family, family line and community helps individuals to recognize their origin, to understand their relationships with other members of the family, family line, and community. At the same time, worship religion makes it possible for each person to become more aware of traditional ethical values such as gratitude to the generations who have given birth and raised them, showing the filial piety of the offspring to the deceased, which is the attachment with those of the same bloodline, etc.

Traditional religious culture affects human behavior in family, community, and nature relationships. At varying levels, traditional religious culture influences the human behavior in family and community relationships. It is a habit of polite and respectful behaving to the older people in the family, family line and the society. At the same time, the traditional religious culture also affects the behavior of protecting the ecological environment, respecting nature, living in harmony with nature in order to avoid facing the anger of the gods.

Traditional religious culture contributes to promoting human responsibility, consolidating the community, strengthening the national spirit, contributing to social stability. Since ancient times, the people of Vietnam in general and ethnic minorities in the North of Vietnam in particular have used religious culture values to serve the need to consolidate the mind and strengthen the community. Forms of traditional religious culture, at various levels, have promoted their role of consolidating and connecting the community. Religious culture as a link to individual - family - family line - village - ethnic group/nation, which is a bridge between past and present, among generations and is the cultural characteristics of each ethnic community. Through the forms of religious culture, people are proud of their families, family lines and more responsible for their homeland and country.

Traditional religious culture contributes to helping the people here reserve, preserve and promote the good ethical values of the nation. In the course of their existence and development, the forms of religious culture continue to maintain the values of culture, ethics, customs and habits of the community. Therefore, the traditional religious culture has long life in the heart of the people

and become a place to keep and promote many special traditional ethical values of the nation.

Traditional religious culture contributes to creating an environment for ethnic minority people in mountainous regions of northern Vietnam to absorb and create new and progressive moral values. Traditional religious culture is a cultural component that durably maintains core values, expressing the cultural identity of each community. Traditional religious culture is always the spiritual support for generations of people here to confirm cultural identity and refine to absorb the new things. In the process of developing and enhancing exchanges and integration between different cultures, the traditional religious culture has a certain effect, creating resistance for ethnic minority people in the north to the impact of the impact of cultural factors and antiprogressive moral values.

Traditional religious culture is a conservation environment, conveying folk artistic and cultural values in the lives of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous areas. Cultural and artistic activities, despite being derived from religion or incorporated into the religious environment, many values of folk art and culture are preserved in this environment as the derivatives of a overall folk cultural phenomenon. Religious activities and festivals are not only a sustainable environment for preserving traditional cultural and artistic values, but also as an environment for effectively conveying and transferring traditional cultural values through generations. Through traditional religious culture activities, people are re-living with the living values of the previous generations, gaining access to traditional cultural values and being educated continue the spirit of family, family line and community.

However, at present, some traditional religions are no longer suitable and have a negative impact on the spiritual life of ethnic minority people in the mountainous north of Vietnam such as: Some types of traditional religious culture has negative influences on the cognitive and self-evaluation ability of individuals, making people here often rely on the help and shelter of the divine forces. A number of traditional cultural and religious activities are no longer suitable, the spontaneous and deviant activities of folk religion have adversely affected people's psychology and ideology, affecting social security, order and safety. In addition, the status of commercialization in traditional cultural activities, abusing religious culture for profiteering, etc. has lost dignified and casual appearance of various forms of religious culture. Therefore, people here need to promote the good values of traditional religious culture to serve the life, enrich the spiritual life of the people. At the same time, harmonizing the relationship between preserving, promoting and receiving new cultural values in the process of developing the culture and people of Vietnam today.

3. Conclusion

From the past to the present, the forms of traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous areas are always preserved and strongly promoted in the spiritual and social life by the people. The revitalization of forms of cultural activity of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous areas has

contributed to reviving the values of the ethnic identity, contributing to the prosperity of Vietnamese culture. However, along with the restoration of traditional cultural values, traditional religious culture activities of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous areas also increased and rose many obsolete customs that are no longer suitable for new social conditions. Many types of traditional religious culture activities of the ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous areas, though having made significant changes in the more civilized direction, still remain and tend to recover cumbersome and costly ceremonies. Besides, together with the process of exchanging and integrating culture, some traditional religious culture activities with characteristic of traditional culture are not interested in sustaining and recovering and are tending to be lost, replaced by the unfamiliar values with the traditional culture of ethnic minorities. Many of the customs of traditional religious activities of the community are gradually lost, commercialized, and have lost the identity of ethnic group culture. Therefore, in the exchange and integration of culture with the world, people here need to gradually eliminate backward customs, strengthen internal strength and resistance for culture of ethnic minorities, filter and inherit to strongly promote traditional religious culture values; acquire the quintessence of human culture to enrich the religious culture of ethnic minority people in the northern mountainous region of Vietnam in particular and Vietnamese culture in general.

References

- [1] Ngo Duc Thinh, 2001, Beliefs and Traditional religious culture in Vietnam, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [2] Nguyen Tho Khang, 2013, Cultural characteristics and values of folk religion in Vietnam, Journal of Religious Studies, 6, 27-32.
- [3] <http://www.vtr.org.vn/gia-tri-van-hoa-trong-tin-nguon-dan-gian-va-le-hoi.html>.
- [4] Hoang Luong, 2002, Traditional festivals of the ethnic groups in the northern Vietnam, Hanoi National University Press.
- [5] Nguyen Tu Chi, 2003, Contribution to the study of culture and ethnicity, Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Journal of Arts and Culture, Hanoi.
- [6] Phan Ngoc, 2002, Vietnamese Cultural Identity, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [7] To Ngoc Thanh, 2001, Culture of ethnic minorities, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [8] Hoang Nam, 2002, Characteristics of traditional culture of ethnic groups in Vietnam, Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [9] Nguyen Quoc Pham, Trinh Quoc Tuan, 1999, Some theoretical and practical issues about ethnicity and ethnic relationships in Vietnam, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [10] Ngo Duc Thinh, 2001, Customary law, traditional customs and transformation, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [11] Ngo Van Le, Nguyen Van Tiep, Nguyen Van Dieu, 1998, Culture of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, Education Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [12] Vu Ngoc Khanh, 2004, Cultural Traditions of Vietnamese Ethnic Minorities, Youth Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [13] Pham Duc Duong, 2007, Picture of ethnic cultural language in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, Hanoi National University Publishing House.
- [14] Institute of Ethnology, 1996, Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam, Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [15] Ngo Duc Thinh, 1993, Regional Culture and Cultural Zonation in Vietnam, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [16] Ngo Duc Thinh, 2001, Beliefs and Traditional religious culture in Vietnam, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [17] Nguyen Dang Duy, 2001, Forms of Religious Belief in Vietnam, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [18] <http://vovworld.vn/vi-VN/viet-nam-dat-nuoc-con-nguoi/tranh-tho-cua-cac-dan-toc-thieu-so-o-mien-nui-phia-bac-472297.vov>.
- [19] Nong Quoc Chan, Huynh Khai Vinh, 2002, Unified but diversified culture of ethnic groups in Vietnam, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [20] Tran Quoc Vuong, 2014, Basic Vietnamese culture, Vietnam Education Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [21] <http://baovinhphuc.com.vn/xa-hoi/tin-tuc/45132/giu-gin-va-phat-huy-gia-tri-van-hoa-dan-toc-thieu-so-vung-trung-du-va-mien-nui-phia-bac-trong-boi-canh-hien-nay.html>.
- [22] Phan Huu Dat, 2005, Chu Dong tree in the mythology of Muong and To Tem tree in the religion of some ethnic groups in our country, Journal of Religious Studies, 4, 37-44.
- [23] Vuong Duy Quang, 2005, Traditional and modern spiritual culture of the Hmong people in Vietnam, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [24] Vuong Anh (editor), 1997, Mo and Muong ethnic epic, Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [25] Hanoi University of Culture, 2005, Culture of the ethnic groups in the Northwest Vietnam, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [26] <http://bienphongvietnam.vn/nghien-cuu-trao-doi/thong-tin-tu-lieu/1460-ddd.html>.
- [27] <https://vanhoanvietnam.blogspot.com/2016/04/vung-van-hoa-dan-toc-tay-bac-van-hoa.html>.
- [28] Ban Tuan Nang, 2017, Na Nhem festival in Tran Yen commune, Bac Son district, Lang Son province, Ethnic Culture Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [29] Hanh Lien (Editor), 2007, Lai Chau and Lai Chau ethnic groups, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [30] https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trung_du_v%C3%A0_mi%E1%BB%81n_n%C3%BAi_ph%C3%ADa_B%E1%BA%AFc.
- [31] <http://thegioidisan.vn/vi/bao-ton-va-phat-huy-gia-tri-di-san-muong.html>.
- [32] <https://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A8>.