

Religious Life of the Christian in Bui Chu Diocese - Nam Dinh Today (From the Influence of Beliefs in the Tutelary God of a Village in Vietnam)

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Abstract Traditional Vietnamese beliefs are an integral part of national traditional culture, nurtured and protected in Vietnamese villages. When Catholicism was introduced into the Bui Chu - Nam Dinh area, there were changes in the religious life of the Catholic Bui Chu in accordance with traditional Vietnamese beliefs, including the belief in the tutelary god of a village. Every year, Bui Chu diocese celebrates two important ceremonies, one of which is the Feast of St. Dominic. This ceremony clearly demonstrates the influence of beliefs of Vietnamese in the Tutelary gods on the life of the Catholics in Bui Chu. The article is based on a number of studies on Vietnamese traditional beliefs in Bui Chu - Nam Dinh diocese such as "Hai Hau Geography Book" of Hai Hau District People's Committee, Nam Dinh Province, "the History of the Parties in Xuan Truong district, 1930-2000" by the Executive Committee of Xuan Truong district, "Nam Dinh Geography Book" by the provincial Party Committee, the People's Committee of Nam Dinh province, "History of Bui Chu diocese" of Tran Duc Huynh, "Vietnamese history considered by the King". In this paper, the writer will focus on two periods Before and After Vatican II to portray the profound changes in the religious life of Catholics Bui Chu due to the influence of the belief in the village tutelary, expressing a gratitude to those who had the merit of establishing and setting up villages and participate in festivals which boosts the cohesion of the community more tightly.

Keywords: vietnamese traditional beliefs, beliefs of the village tutelary, Dominican fraternity, Bui Chu-Nam Dinh, Vatican. II

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1. Introduction

1.1. About the Beliefs in Village Tutelary of Vietnamese People

In Vietnam, indigenous beliefs are an integral part of the national culture, and the village is the place to nurture and protect those cultural values. The concept about traditional beliefs has not been fully specified yet. However, it could be understood that the traditional beliefs are a religious form created by working people on the basis of knowledge which is reflected and experienced through sentiments of the spiritual life of oneself and the whole community.

Traditional beliefs are prime beliefs only in the minds of people in a daily life and primarily manifested in customs and habits. Vietnamese community also has a system of traditional beliefs. Thus, beliefs can be understood as a category of beliefs by traditional Vietnamese residents created in the process of living and working. The northern delta in general, Bui Chu diocese in particular, is the area in which the local beliefs of the Vietnamese are typical.

One of the typical beliefs in the villages in the Northern Delta is the belief in the village tutelary.

The ancient Vietnamese, when approaching the Northern Delta, have gathered into the stable villages. Vietnamese villages in the northern plains have a close structure and are regarded as the economic - society - military and cultural complete units. Temples, pagodas, temples, churches and such are the public worship centers of the village. Thus, the village plays an important role as the cradle forming, nurturing and preserving the traditional cultural values.

In the beginning, the technical level is still very limited. To achieve higher yield cultivation, they must grasp the characteristics of growth and maturing operations for each cultivar. Therefore, it is important that workers must learn from their predecessors and the experienced, hereby formed in their minds such a respect to the village elders, who were much knowledge and experienced in production.

Regarding to wet rice farming, the irrigation becomes critical to the ancient Vietnamese residents located in the northern plains. However, given the structure of the terrains where floods occur every year, this problem has become a persistent concern in the material and spirit life of the people here. Although agriculture is the main

occupation, but the Vietnamese in the northern plains are not all agriculturally originated. Many traditional villages have risen. The socio-economic base has shaped the beliefs of the Vietnamese to worship the Village Deity in the northern plains.

In Vietnamese, Tutelary God is called "Thanh Hoang", which is a Sino-Vietnamese: Thanh means a great wall surrounding a land, Hoang means a trench around wall; Tutelary God means the God who protects the whole land in China. But when it came to Vietnam, Tutelary God in the beliefs of the Village Tutelary God was a Vietnamese concept, no longer the same as the original meaning in China. As the researcher Nguyen Duy Hinh commented, "There are clearly two distinct lines in the Vietnamese Tutelary God.

One line: particularity near the original Duong – Minh model: the system all over the country, province, and district: these are the dark gods, no god, cloning, not even an angel... The second line is the Village Tutelary. That is the subject line reflecting the nature of religions and beliefs in Vietnam [[1]; p.97].

So, after this word being introduced to Vietnam, "Thanh Hoang" became the name for the worship of the god who guard and decide the fate to the villagers. Each village has a village tutelary. Despite the origin, once regarded as the village tutelary, he will be highly respected and honored by the whole village.

Most of the village Tutelary Gods usually resides in the communal house of the village which becomes the sacred land (sacred time is on village business day). The communal house of the village appeared a long time ago and has existed in centuries, though; it was the end of XVI century that the role of the house was truly appreciated in the physical and spiritual life of village community. Although built far from the residential area, the communal house remains the center of community life where village administrative issues are dealt with, and keeps its proper functioning as the place of worship the Tutelary.

Not only worshipping the tutelary, there is a festival to celebrate on the Tutelary Ceremony. On the festival day, depending on the origin and status of the god, the rituals are organized accordingly. If the tutelary is a hero against foreign aggression, the choir will describe the fight scene to keep the country. If He is the god of clouds, rain, thunder, lightning... then there will be a scene to pray for the rain and wind to calm down which benefit the crops.

Thus, the belief of the village tutelary is a reflection of the human world in traditional Vietnamese society, with a wide variety of people from all walks of life. Carrying rituals of worshipping the village god brings to Vietnamese village residents a rich cultural life and identity. The beliefs have become a symbol of community cohesion, a key role in the spiritual life of Vietnamese villagers, especially in the villages of the Red River Delta.

1.2. About the Great Celebration of St. Dominic in Bui Chu Diocese - Nam Dinh Province

Nam Dinh is a sacred land called "holy land, extraordinary people" of the Northern delta region. Having undergone thousands of years for the Chinese Domination, the history has recorded numerous glorious

signs of the struggles against the domination and assimilation of the invaders.

Nam Dinh people had to gather in a cramped space and bonded together into a village community to extend their living area and resist the oppression and assimilation of the enemies.

Nam Dinh in particular and the Northern plains in general can be considered as typical areas of Vietnam with many features of which other lands have little without boldness.

In the spiritual life of the community here, Vietnamese traditional beliefs play a central role and a key element. Vietnamese traditional beliefs have been completely preserved in this area all over time.

Vietnamese people in Nam Dinh in particular, the northern plains generally live mainly on agriculture. This is an ancient land, forming many traditional Vietnamese villages including Dao Khe, Hai Lang Thuong, Long Dien (Nghia Hung district); Bach Tinh, Thuong Nong, Si Quan, Ngoc Tinh, Thach Cau, Dong Quy, Xoi Tay (Nam Truc district); Kien Lao (Xuan Truong district).

There are conventions in ancient villages, in which stipulates a strict way of the production, social organization and management, spiritual and cultural life of the residents in the village.

Along with the traditional wet rice cultivation, there is a stability in traditional beliefs of the ancient village of Nam Dinh. Thus, their belief systems including ancestor worship, worship of gods who protect the families, villages and Mother Goddess. In this article, the authors have selected village's tutelary belief.

The residents in Nam Dinh also believe and practice the religious rituals to the Village's tutelary. This belief is very popular in this area. The ancestors of the people here have put an effort to maintain the belief for the future generations until now. The System of temples and shrines are set up everywhere in the area like the Temple of Hung Dao Vuong and Trieu Quang Phuc, Hai Hau Martyr's Shrine, Tien Thien, ...

The gods are also separated in a specific way, such as the forefathers who clear land and set up villages: Tran Vu, Vu Chi, Hoang Gia, Vu Duy Hoa, Pham Cap (Hai Anh, Hai Hau district), Pham Van Nghi, Nguyen Dien, Pham Thanh (Hai Lang, Nghia Hung district), Corn Free (An Cu, Xuan Truong district), etc... And also there are the ancestor of jobs like the Six Ancestors (Van Chang, Nam Truc district), To Trung Tu who did flower cultivation (Vi Khe, Nam Truc district) ...Furthermore, there are poinsettias and doctors who create academic traditions of the village like Pham Bao, Pham Dao Phu (Duong Pham, Nghia Hung district)...

It is such a significant lack of knowledge if the Great King Hung Dao Tran Quoc Tuan (1232-1300). He was such a well-known national hero as well as historical person. Since his early life, Hung Dao Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan has been regarded as the Saint in the hearts of people in Nam Dinh and spreaded the nationwide influence.

In the villages, there are multiple locations (from the house, shrines, temples, pagodas) that have been dedicated to Saint Tran. Every year, on the fifteenth day of January, at the Rat hour, people from Nam Dinh and all over the country returned to the Tran temple to practice a humane cultural custom: Commemorating the Kings from the Tran

dynasty had sacrificed God and the Land and the Ancestor to express their devotion to the country and the ancestor in New Year.

Bui Chu diocese is located in Nam Dinh province in the northern delta, including six districts - Xuan Truong, Giao Thuy, Hai Hau, Nam Truc, Truc Ninh, Nghia Hung and the area of Khoai Dong in the city center. In this diocese, the location in the south-east by the sea and between the Red River and the Day River, making the Diocese of the area "the young river delta of the Red River Field" [[2]; p.75], which is a favorable environment for receiving and developing the Gospel. Not to mention the Ninh Co River - a tributary of the Red River - located on the center of the diocese, though not as large as the two rivers but a very convenient transportation axis. Those rivers boldly trace the missionary evangelistic journeys of missionaries.

The history of Catholicism in Vietnam admitted that Bui Chu diocese - Nam Dinh is the first destination of Western missionaries to spread this religion. The history of the curator wrote "Christian: According to the book of Da Luc (a kind of annals), on March 1, Nguyen Hoa first (1533), the Le Dynasty named Trang Tong, a western man named Yneku surreptitiously went to Ninh Cuong commune, Quan Anh commune, Nam Chan district and Tra Luy commune, Giao Thuy district, implicitly evangelizing the Christian" [[3]; p.301].

In the diocese today, there are 167 priests, 150 parishes, five congregations, and a major seminary which has been supervised by Bishop Joseph Hoang Van Tich since 2001. On the religious side, Bui Chu is one of the 26 dioceses of the Vietnamese Church. It is the smallest diocese with the fourth largest Christians in 26 dioceses.

Then, the Catholic life of the Catholics "is the whole of the behavior towards the spiritual and social life formed in the process of evangelical history, the development of Catholicism in Vietnam on the basis of The Bible, the Catholic philosophy, the canon law, the commandment and are governed by the lifestyle, customs, customs and religious spirituality - traditional culture of the Vietnamese" [[4]; p.287-288].

Thus, the religious life of Catholics is formed on the basis of interference between religious belief and traditional culture.

The religious life of Catholics is expressed in two aspects: "First, the practice of Roman ritual; Second, it is expressed through the relations between Catholics with the clergy, the clergymen, the co-religionist, the other religious, as well as the psychological model" [[5]; p.65].

The religious life of Catholics in Bui Chu - Nam Dinh diocese is also based on the interference between doctrine and specific cultural features of Bui Chu - Nam Dinh diocese. Vietnamese Catholics usually think, "Before being a Catholic, I am Vietnamese." It is true that the particular historical point of view holds that "each culture has its own development path, its particularity and its value. Cultural change of the nation is due to the interaction between cultures in a certain geographic and historical environment. This process is extremely complex without any general rule. Therefore, not all nations with lower civilization degree are forced to give up their culture in order to receive passively the culture of the nation with higher civilization" [[6]; p.73-74].

Bui Chu-Nam Dinh diocese has two solemn celebrations, one of which is the great feast of St. Dominic. Every year, on August 8, as a long tradition in the diocese of Bui Chu - Nam Dinh, Christian people residing inside and outside the diocese are gathering at Bui Chu cathedral church to attend the feast of St. Dominic –The patron saint.

2. Content

2.1. Before the Vatican II Council (1962-1965)

Catholics believe that there is a Creator who created everything and man, called God.

According to the Catholic conception, "during the course of human life, every Catholics is born, growing up, becoming old, and dies and returns to the kingdom of God. Death is inevitable rule. Catholics believe that death marks the fulfillment of human life in dust, returns to dust, to life in glory. For the Catholics, the eternal world is a beautiful world that they always aim for after death" [[7]; p. 108]. Thus, initially when Catholicism was introduced into Vietnam, clergy recognized traditional Vietnamese beliefs as heresy, superstition.

However, when Catholicism began to be introduced into Vietnam, the Vietnamese people established their indigenous belief culture for thousands of years before. Thus, from the very beginning of the mission to our country, clergies recognized the important role of Vietnamese traditional villages to socio-political and economic institutions. They are also places to store and preserve the habits, customs and folk beliefs of the nation. "During the evangelization of Catholicism in Vietnam, foreign missionaries have discovered the particular type of administrative unit in this country, the traditional Vietnamese village. Self-defense, self-contained, economically self-sufficient, is organized in a special setting of the Vietnamese village where missionaries have the opportunity initial mission" [[8]; p.49].

Therefore, the clergies have directed the organization of the religious land as the village model, making the Catholic village institution closely associated with the organization of the land. The spiritual life of the Catholics is therefore strongly influenced by traditional Vietnamese cultural beliefs, including worshipping "Patron Saint" of the Catholic village.

According to the Catholic conception, the "Patron Saint" is the patron saint who guards the life of a believer or community of believers. With a full Catholic village, the land is closely associated with the village of the boundary, in the name. And all the inhabitants of the village are also believers. Therefore, "Patron Saint" plays the same role as the village tutelary in the mind of the Christian here. As perceived clearly by the Christians, the tutelary has the same role so the transformation does not lose the power of the Christian saint but make the saint more intimate with the spiritual life of the believers who have bold indigenous cultural beliefs. In the village of non-Catholics, the communal house is a place of worship where the village festival takes place, meanwhile; in the Catholic village, the ceremony is held in the church. The parish church is the center of the festival. The form of the feast is like a

village festival. With the laity in Bui Chu diocese, the Dominicans have great a merit. St. Dominic is considered to be "Patron Saint". Therefore, the ritual of commemorating "Patron Saint" is spectacularly celebrated on August 8 annually in Bui Chu parish.

It can be said that the Catholic Bui Chu has two forms of "Patron Saint" commemoration. One is the commemoration of the parish priest (Patron Saint of the religious village) and the other of the patron saint (Patron Saint of the whole religion). If the formal is a festival of the village, the latter is a festival of a large area (Diocese). Therefore, "Patron Saint" became the great patriarch of a large area. This can be seen in the village festival, the regional festival of the residents of the Red River delta, such as the festival 5 Moc villages (now in Thanh Xuan district, Hanoi).

The feast has been carried out on a large scale for hundred years according to the elderly. Although the ritual that takes place during the Mass is less likely to change, its appearance always change over time.

The influence of the belief in the village tutelary gods to the life of Catholics in the Diocese of Bui Chu - Nam Dinh is also reflected in the ceremony of "Ancestral feast" - which is the feast for the village builders or the people with meritorious contribution to the villagers, also known as the Ky ceremony (Call the soul). Article 26 the village rule of Vinh Tri (Nam Dinh) mentions the following: "The whole Catholic village has one Cathedral and four chapels of the four churches... At the main church: Ancestral feast, 3.00 Vietnam Dong, Patron Saint feast, 3.00 Vietnam Dong" [9].

Influenced by the belief in the village tutelary, the village festival also presents in religious life of the Catholic in Bui Chu diocese. Village festivals in Catholic villages are usually held on the feast day of the patron saint but through the convention system of Catholic villages, which is quite evident. Article 94 the convention of Thuy Nhai hamlet (Nam Dinh province) stipulates: "Every year on September 12, the Westerner organizes the solemn Mass with cost from the village budget at 3.00 Vietnam Dong [10].

It should be added that the cultural contact between Vietnam and the West through the introduction of Catholicism into Vietnam "has helped the Vietnamese nation, whose representative was the State Senator Nguyen, expanded the vision to a different culture with different expressions from the Chinese culture that the nation of Vietnam exposure from thousands of life. It is the culture of science and technology not hackneyed writing" [[11]; p.259]. Thus, the introduction of Catholicism into Vietnam has contributed significantly to the development of Vietnamese culture in particular and to the development of Vietnam in general.

2.2. After the Vatican II Council (1962-1965)

In 1962-1965, the Catholic Church organized the Second Vatican Council. This council was considered "a turning point in the Roman Church because it had truly followed the path of renewal and adapted with many new theological solutions, adapting to modern society in the context that Catholic was still in recession, the church loosed its place in every fields, in a "post-Christian era" [[12]; p.97].

In fact, a slight decline in religious belief is taking place in many places of the world. "There are strong differences between people who often attend for church ritual, their rates in excess of 50% in all variables (Except those practice in church per month and the church's response to social, family and moral problems). In another extreme, non-practicing Christians are less than 50% of all variables (except those associated with religious services and belief in God) and so the Christianity of these people can be characterized as an "optional" (à la carte). This is, however, a sign of change: religious preference is declining among young people, although it is still a predominant tendency" [[13], p22].

According to researcher Congar: "Many people consider a saint not in a strange person but a helpful one with neighbors who help unlucky people. The church is also complained about slow adaptation and too rigid in recognizing the problem of human subjectivity. Because this is an important thing that allows people to discover new forms, new values and new possibilities" [[14]; p22].

In Vietnam, under the influence of the Second Vatican Council, after the unification of Vietnam, especially after our country entered into a comprehensive renovation, including the renovation of religious work to develop the land, the concept of Vietnamese traditional beliefs of Catholics have changed significantly. They are free to follow their religious beliefs, including the belief of the village tutelary. Thanks to that, the village festival of Catholicism in Bui Chu diocese has a chance to be restored and developed much stronger, first of all the festival commemorates "Patron Saint". As mentioned above, the Feast of St Dominic's Basilica in Bui Chu was held in the cathedral, which is considered as a great memorial to the Village Tutelary of a large area where the participants are the entire Gong in the villages of the Diocese of Bui Chu. This celebration reminds us of the non-Catholics' festivals, such as the festival of 5 Moc villages of the Thanh Xuan district in Hanoi, but the scale is much larger.

Before the festival, the believers prepared very carefully from the reparation to the road, the parish, the church to building the greetings, flowers, lights, from decorating the church, parish, to practicing trumpets, drums, rituals performed during the holidays.

From the afternoon of March 7, the parishioners covered the cathedral for the opening Mass. The procession of the patron saint takes place around the cathedral, starting with the church and ending up in church. With indigenous culture, the ceremony is often associated with the feast (festival) which is highly appreciated for the community cohesion. The Catholics pay more attention to the ceremony, but the feast is called the procession (Carrying with high respect). In Bui Chu diocese, the characteristic of this sphere is the diversity of many kinds of processions such as flower procession, God procession and such. Procession is a typical cultural art form in Bui Chu. In the procession during the Feast of St. Dominic, if that of traditional culture is led by a peacock, Sa Tang and Teu puppet who free the crowd, that of the Catholics is led the drum group instead. The procession was arranged in a certain order, preceded by a drum team of about 30 healthy young adults with a leading drum. This drum association is called the drumbeat. (Unlike the indigenous

culture, the drum beat has the gentle sound, but in the Catholicism, has very strong beat of Spain). So the form of the drum was also modified. The drum beat, drum rotate, popping up, rattling, buzzing a region create an excitement for the participants.

Behind the drum team, it is the Cross. In Europe, a cross made of bronze or iron is used. When it is brought to Vietnam, the cross is made of fine wood and meticulously sculptured. The followers are soldiers, children angels, youths, sisters, fraternity, patriarchs, patriarchs, choir, trumpet, ceremony groups... Finally, the gold palanquin is also the main one. In Europe, the palanquins are usually quite simple but in Vietnam, the palanquin becomes a sewing bowl - a traditional palanquin bought or made in the traditional way. The palanquin is painted with gold trim, on which the statue of Dominican is placed, surrounded by flowers and leaves. In particular, the statue here is usually dressed in traditional costumes, arranged with servile servants to serve to increase the reverence. Europeans consider this is the dominant belief of Vietnamese believers.

At last, it is the rite of the diocesan Bishop of the diocese, with the diocesan priests standing in line showing the respect to the "Patron Saint".

On the feast of St. Dominic, besides a solemn ritual in the form of the Roman rite, there are traditional forms of singing and music performed during the great festival having Vietnamese festival origin as based on traditional folklore culture.

It should be added that in some parishes like Trung Lao, there are both Western and Vietnamese bands. The latter band consists of instruments such as flute, delicate, 16-chord zither instrument, drums.

The great ceremony takes place in the morning but before and after the festival, cultural performances are held on two evenings. Actors are Catholics. The content is usually taken from the Bible or it can be about St. Dominic's or songs and dances with religious melody.

As a regional festival, many Catholics have to go early in the morning, sometimes from midnight to attend the ceremony. In the old hard times, the Catholics from far away had to prepared rice from the day before and hired a place to stay for the night. Before, during and after the Mass, the Catholics often go to church praying and ask for blessings.

The great festival is where the Catholics of the diocese have the opportunity to meet, exchange and share their religious life. It is also the occasion for men and women to meet and find their half.

In addition to worship the "Patron Saint", the Catholics also honor the martyrs - those who died to keep the religion (especially during the Le and Nguyen dynasty) - which are similar to traditional Vietnamese worshipping the heroes of the fabled.

So, worshipping the "Patron Saint" or celebrating the Catholic martyr, Bui Chu Catholics were greatly influenced by the values of the belief in the village tutelary, expressing a gratitude to those who had the merit of establish the village and participate into the festivals which boosts the cohesion with the community more closely. This leads to the aesthetic value of the religious life of Bui Chu Catholics in particular, Vietnamese Catholics in general. "The aesthetic value in the human

way of life in addition to the beauty of the community behavior also shows in the beauty of typical Catholic figures from Jesus, to Mary, the Saints, to the monastic life, the vows to keep... The beauty here shows not only the way of life, the virtue of the characters but more important that it creates optional patterns for the majority of believers. They look at the examples of predecessors, not only the beauty of their lifestyle, but also their inspiration to the motivation for them to describe these qualities in everyday life. The beauty of the mirror has created value for believers' action patterns [15]; p. 62-63].

It must be said additionally that the great celebration of St. Dominic in the diocese of Bui Chu also has the participation of many Catholics in Thai Binh diocese. Although separated from the Bui Chu diocese in 1936, the religious life of the diocese has stabilized substantially, but influencing from the Dominicans, which tend to favor "popular piety", the Catholics of Thai Binh diocese continue to visit Bui Chu to attend the feast with the spirit of deep integration [see: 16]; p.92-93]. This is in according to today's context, where "globalization and international integration promote intercultural exchanges, nations and nations. In this context, new religions, denominations of religions, and new religious phenomena outside of Vietnam are being brought into Vietnam, creating a picture of religious diversity in this country" [17]; p.31].

3. Conclusion

The diocese of Bui Chu is located on the land where Vietnamese cultural traditions have existed for a long time. This is a land covered with many forms of folk beliefs, including the belief of the village tutelary.

Interestingly, in that geo-cultural land, there is a part of the Catholic population under Dominican domination. This is a missionary line in which missionaries tend to support religious activities of the community through parades, festive events and rituals other than Mass.

As considering "Patron Saint" (a saint) as a village tutelary, the anniversary of "Patron Saint" is regarded as the feast day of the village and gradually becomes the village festival of the Catholics in Bui Chu diocese. This transformation enriches the spiritual and cultural life of the Catholics. When joining the Catholic, due to the strict prohibition of the Church in the early days, the Catholics were forced to give up many cultural activities. If the Mass were only taking place in the church, it would certainly not be able to meet the mind living in cultural diversity and being into the festivity. This awakens the Catholics returning to the traditional cultural beauty, the beauty of community cultural life. And so, the belief in the tutelary village returned, but was transferred to the memory of the patriarch "Patron Saint". In addition to the ritual (Mass), the communal cultural activities inherent in their consciousness are awakened. Thanks to this form of activity, the religious life of the Catholic Bui Chu became rich, over time creating values that contribute to the national culture. This can be seen as the interaction between culture, traditional beliefs and Catholic culture.

Thus, traditional beliefs have profoundly influenced the different dimensions of the religious life of the Catholic Bui Chu. In other words, the Bui Chu Catholics have lived

the faith not only in the Catholic culture but also in the religious life with the content of traditional culture where traditional faith is an important one.

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