

Value and solution for promotion of the current Saint Tran worship belief in Nam Dinh

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Abstract

Grand Prince Tran Quoc Tuan (1228 - 1300) - Tran Hung Dao is a prominent politician, national hero and prominent military figure and cultural celebrity of the Vietnamese nation. With strategic military skills together with the will to fight and the genius leadership, Hung Dao Dai Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan led the Dai Viet army and people three times to defeat the Mongol army. Holy Tran is the eternal symbol of the long anthem of patriotism; is a model of sacrifice and dedication tirelessly for the people and for the country. The Holy Tran Hung Dao is an eternal shining example of personality, morality, bravery, intellect, energy and talent for future generations to follow. The belief in worshipping the Holy Tran is to abide by the rule of "live as a general, die turning into a saint" in Vietnamese culture, with great value in personality education and human morality; education, nurturing the love for the homeland, loving the race, the lesson of the sense of national self-reliance, about building the great national unity among the people, contributing to raising the awareness of the lesson "take people as the basis"

Keywords: Belief, the Thanh Tran Worship Belief, Nam Dinh.

1. Contents

1.1. Concept

1.1.1. Concept of belief

Belief and Religion are multidimensional social phenomena. In terms of connotation, belief is the trust and admiration of one person about a force, a theory. It is commonly understood that force can dominate, even determine the destiny of humans. Therefore they must worship and revere. In terms of denotation, belief implies a trust (faith) - the most important component for the constitution of religious consciousness. Belief is the trust, the hope of humans in the so-called "supernatural", also known as "holy". The term "tín ngưỡng", in English, is called *beliefs/faith* or *to believe*, which means the general trust or trust in somebody or something. The Vietnamese dictionary defines that the belief means the trust and worship of a religion¹. According to that, the belief only exists in religion and also means religion. Dao Duy Anh, in the Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary, gave the understanding that "a belief is the superstitious admiration of a religion or a doctrine"².

¹ Vietnamese Dictionary (2004), Nguyen Nhu Y (chief author), Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.

² Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary, Dao Duy Anh (chief author) (2005), Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi.

According to the Law on Religion and Folk Belief in 2016, "belief is the trust of humans characterized by rites attached with traditional habits and customs to bring the spiritual peace for individuals and community"³. Therefore, belief is the concept used for religious phenomena occurring in clan commune, tribe; folk worship acts, polytheism and does not comply with a certain rite. In Vietnam, belief activities are the ones showing the worship of ancestors, adoration, commemoration, and honor of people who contribute considerably to the country, community; gods worship, traditional symbols and other practices of folk beliefs that are typical for good values of history, culture and social ethics.

1.1.2. Concept of the Saint Tran Worship Belief

The Saint Tran Worship Belief is a Vietnamese Folk Belief that is formed from the process of apotheosizing a real character in the history - the national hero, Grand Prince Hung Dao, Tran Quoc Tuan, who is the god blessing for the career of resistance against foreign invaders, national defense, country protection and making the people feel secure, evil spirits extermination, and disease treatment. Saint Tran's real name is Tran Quoc Tuan, who died on August 20th, 1300. He is the son of Tran Lieu, who is the elder brother of Emperor Tran Thai Tong (Tran Canh) and is An Sinh Vuong Tran Lieu. Tran Hung Dao is the eminent national hero, politician, brilliant military commander and the cultural celebrity of our nation.

The Saint Tran Worship Belief is the form of expressing belief, the trust of the people from the Tran Dynasty to the current days with a national hero, a brilliant politician - military commander, imperator who excelled as both a scholar and a warrior. He is Tran Hung Dao. Tran Hung Dao was considered a Saint by the People and became a symbol blessing the People for resistance against foreign invaders, heresy and evil spirits. From a national hero with many remarkable feats, Tran Hung Dao became a sacred Saint and the main character of a kind of folk belief.

Until now, not many authors, researchers have mentioned the concept of Saint Tran Worship Belief. Based on the concept of national hero worship belief, we generalize the Saint Tran Worship Belief as follows: *The Saint Tran Worship Belief is a kind of folk belief, saint worship belief when being alive, the character had a huge contribution to the country, nation and when passing away, the character was divinized along with regulations on detailed worship institution.*

The Saint Tran Worship Belief is a kind of national hero worship belief and a kind of mother goddess worship. Grand Prince Tran Quoc Tuan is the hero who contributed greatly to the country. In the consciousness of the people, he is the Saint blessing for the career of national defense, resistance against foreign invaders, disease treatment and evil spirits extermination. The Saint Tran Worship Belief originates from the folk and is a native belief that tends to strongly develop and spread.

1.2. Research of the current Saint Tran Worship Belief in Nam Dinh

1.2.1. The formation of the Saint Tran Worship Belief in Nam Dinh

In the 13th century, our Dai Viet People repelled the Mongol Invasions three times. The creative military strategy that is appropriate for small countries in the struggle against the enemy that is stronger by many times is a genius strategy of Tran Quoc Tuan. Tran Quoc Tuan is not only an excellent military theorist but also a brilliant

³ Law on Religion and Folk Belief, (2016), Religious Publishing House, p. 4.

general on the battlefield. He was the man who proposed the advanced political policy named "looking after the people is essential" of the Tran Dynasty. On August 20, 1300, the Grand Prince Hung Dao passed away at his Mansion in Van Kiep. Tran Emperor ordained him as Patriarch Thuong phu, Thuong quoc cong Northern Settlement Lord nguyen suy, Vo liet Hong huan Nhan Vu Hung Dao Lord and set up the temple to worship Him on the foundation of the ancient mansion, named Kiep Bac Temple.

The Grand Prince Hung Dao received holy top class ordination many times issued by different reigns, or the State officially worships him. Saint Tran has a huge influence on the lives and the consciousness of the people named "live as an excellent general, die turning into a saint". The Tran Dynasty reigned nearly two centuries from the 13th century to the 14th century, nearly two hundred years with 12 orthodox emperors, 2 emperors in the post-Tran Dynasty period, so there were 14 emperors in total. Most of the Emperors in the Tran Dynasty enjoyed tranquility, meditation, poetry, teaching for successors. The outstanding feature in these emperors of the Tran Dynasty is to give the top priority to the country's benefits, which means they understand their careers are for the people, they wholeheartedly contribute to the country. With "People-friendly Policy", the Tran Dynasty established a flexible political regime.

Nam Dinh is a well-known place for the dawn of a ruler of The Tran Dynasty, Saint Tran, one of the most prosperous reigns throughout the feudal history of Vietnam. Many relics here belong to the Tran Dynasty such as: Tran Temple, Pho Minh Temple, the relic of the Grand Prince Tran Quoc Tuan, etc. Tran Temple is the temple area for the worship of Emperors in the Tran Dynasty, located in Loc Vuong Ward, Nam Dinh City. At the hour of the rat (zodiac sign), on day 15th of January of the lunar calendar, the Seal-opening ceremony is held. Legend has it that the emperors of the Tran Dynasty enjoyed annual Tet holidays until the Lantern Festival when they opened the seal to resume their work. Annually, the Seal-opening ceremony in Nam Dinh attracts many tourists from many provinces to attend and pray for fortunes of the emperors in the Tran Dynasty.

The Tran Dynasty made a strong impression on the consciousness of folk. It is not only the remarkable victories under the brilliant leadership along with proper tactics of the Grand Prince Hung Dao who repelled the Mongol Invasions three times in the 13th century. The Saint Tran Worship Belief results from the process of apotheosizing a historical character, a national hero named the Grand Prince Hung Dao, Tran Quoc Tuan. Achievements of the Tran Dynasty can be told such as advanced policies in economy, politics, and culture and especially, it cannot help mentioning the three-time remarkable victories of the Tran Armies against Mongol Invasions. This was the most aggressive army when they conquered a huge territory spreading from Asia to Europe, but under the genius leadership of Grand Prince Hung Dao, Tran Quoc Tuan and great fortitude, the unity of our armies played a significant role in the nation's history. That he was apotheosized was the conformity to the consciousness of Vietnamese People – apotheosizing the persons who contribute greatly to the country, the defense of the country's independence. The Tran Dynasty was both talented and skillful when ascending to the throne and quickly became more competent and became the lucid leaders guiding Dai Viet to gain multi victories.

The survey states that in the whole country, there are about nearly 30 main temples for the worship of Saint Tran. Moreover, there are other temples, Shrines, pagodas with the combination of incense procession or worship. In Nam Dinh and Ha Nam- the origins of the Tran Dynasty, there are over 200 relics. Thai Binh has nearly 40 relics; Hung Yen and Hai Duong have nearly 80 relics. Hanoi has over 50 relics, etc. In the documents of Sino-Vietnamese characters, the main temples are: the first is Kiep bac, the second is A Sao, the third is Bao Loc- also the most famous temples for the worship of Saint Tran. In Nam Dinh, according to the statistics in 2015, there were over 160 places (temples, shrines, halls, pagodas) for the worship of Saint Tran. Aside from the two main places, which are Co Trach and Bao Loc Temple, other places use “incense procession” or “worship”. In 2019, myriads of people and tourists attended the Seal-opening ceremony (spring festival) at Tran Temple. The Saint Tran Worship Belief becomes an intangible cultural system. This system is strictly attached to the cultural life of residents so it is enduring and adaptable to the social changes.

The Saint Tran Worship Belief carries the material and spiritual cultural heritage. Therefore, everybody from any walks of life whether they are commoners or elite, all has the consciousness of preservation of the national quintessence. Tran Temple was recognized by the State as a special, historical, cultural relic at the national level in 2012 – a unique heritage of Nam Dinh. The Saint Tran Worship Belief is a purely Vietnamese kind of belief, carrying the native characteristics of water procession, fish worship, etc. expressing the ancient origin of the Tran family when they settled in Tuc Mac – Thien Truong, which is the home of fishing trade occupation.

The Tran Dynasty gave prominence to the rule of law. The Emperors of Tran Dynasty were the first persons to implement those rules as role models for the people to follow. The Tran Dynasty also paid attention to agricultural matters, gave policies of agriculture extension such as tax reduction, sale of communal land for the people for private land and traffic development. The Dynasty dredged canals, built roads, opened waterways, implemented embankment to both extend highway and avoid flood, protect property, crop and people's life. Those work above made the political-social status of the country stable, which facilitated the development of culture, economy, and military.

More importantly one of the monumental values, which is the People-friendly Policy of the Tran Dynasty, means talents are used regardless of their social class. The People-friendly policy was one of the valuable lessons that the Tran Dynasty successfully implemented. A dynasty that was at risk of foreign invasions also upheld the democratic right. The Tran Dynasty hosted Binh Than Conference to discuss with generals, opened Dien Hong Conference with the participation of the elders arguing whether they should draw or fight. Before leaving this world, the Grand Prince Tran Hung Dao still tossed and turned and recommended the Emperor: “looking after the people is essential, that is the best policy for the country protection”. This is also the policy that helps the Tran Dynasty to obtain unite power, which makes the throne of the Tran Dynasty stable, elevating the position of Dai Viet Nation in comparison with other nations in different continents. The folk regards the Grand Prince Tran Hung Dao as an immortal role model who always has a special place in people's hearts and deserves to be apotheosized. Saint Tran destroyed the plot of invasions from the Yuan Dynasty to eliminate not only the harm for Dai Viet but also subsequent

catastrophe for Asian, European Countries. He is Dong A hero. He is regarded as the Commander-in-chief “fighting a hundred battles to make feats”. These are all monumental spiritual and cultural values.

1.2.2. Festival and practice of the Saint Tran Worship Belief at Tran Temple, Nam Dinh City

1.2.2.1. Festival

Tran Temple Festival - the national intangible cultural heritage is held at Tran Temple in Nam Dinh. Tran Temple Festival in Nam Dinh includes Lunar January Festival (also known as spring festival) and Lunar August Festival (also known as Autumn Festival), is held at Tran Temple and Pho Minh Pagoda relics in Tuc Mac Village, Loc Vuong Ward, Nam Dinh City. The Spring Festival is held in Lunar January and the festival mainly takes place in 03 days, day 14th, 15th and 16th with activities such as palanquin procession, Seal-opening ceremony, water procession – fish worship, etc. Of those activities, the Seal-opening ceremony is a custom that is first implemented in 1239 of the 13th century. The Tran Dynasty implemented ancestor worship. Emperors of the Tran Dynasty hosted parties, which had a simple meaning that, after Tet holidays, the emperor would open the seal to resume the work. The Seal-opening ceremony is re-held and usually held on the Lantern Festival at the hours of the rat (from 23:00 of day 14th to 01:00 of day 15th). This is a humane cultural custom that prays for peaceful nation and people, prosperous country, expresses the sincerely reverent, gratefulness of the country, commemorates the contribution of Emperors in the Tran Dynasty who repelled the Mongol Invasions three times, protected the country and educated the successors about the patriotic tradition, resistance against foreign invaders, national protection. The Seal-opening ceremony is held formally, ensures the traditional rite and is increasingly expanded to become a big festival that attracts myriads of attendees. People who collect the word “diep” stick it at clan ancestral house, shrine, temple or their own houses to hope for evil spirits extermination, everything going according to their wills.

Lunar August Festival, used to be held formally by the local residents, focusing on 3 days from day 19th to day 21st of Lunar August at Co Trach Temple to commemorate the naming taboo day of Grand Prince Hung Dao. This day is also considered the date of “father’s death anniversary”. This festival dates back to the Nguyen Dynasty, the Emperor Tu Duc. The Lunar August Festival lasts throughout August. However, activities mainly take place in 10 days, from day 10th to day 20th of Lunar August. Rites mainly taking place in the Lunar August Festival are procession, incense-offering ceremony, and worship.

The long-lasting festival is held to commemorate and find out about how to rule the country and make the people feel secure, the political theories, military, policies of training, talents used at important functions, physiocracy policies, land reclamation, etc. of emperors in the Tran Dynasty and the National Hero named Tran Quoc Tuan. These are valuable lessons in the current business for the country’s development and protection. This festival demonstrates the affection of the people for the persons who contribute greatly the country, the national hero. That is the tradition named “when drinking water, think of its source” featuring prominently the Vietnamese Culture identity, which then encourages the national unity spirit.

1.2.2.2. The practice on the Thanh Tran worship at Tran temple in Nam Dinh

The Thanh Tran worship at Tran temple in Nam Dinh took place on August 20th, yet it is usually opened earlier on the 10th. The festival consists of procession, sacrifice, swing, martial arts and some other folk games, connecting folklore with spirituality, creating a space that helps tourists to take the worry out of their daily lives. Belief and festival at Tran temple in Nam Dinh often attract a large number of people throughout the country to attend since many previous generations. When we go to Tuc Mac Thien Truong, we return to the Dong A spirit to see our patriotism, national strength, and the merits of our predecessors. People cherish, appreciate, and witness the intangible cultural heritage through the epitaphs, architectural works, bibliographies to understand the cultural value of this place.

In addition to the procession, sacrifice and some folk games, some people also go to Bao Loc and Co Trach temples for other purposes such as: to mount the medium, capture evil spirits, ask for amulets, consecrate the children to god. In the past, there was a custom of driving out demons by pretending to be officials carrying gongs across the village. Therefore, people often ask for amulets at the temple to paste at the door of the house to prevent evil spirits from entering the house. In the past, there were also some forms of exorcism such as: tongue incision, use sharp iron rods to pierce cheeks and mouth, witchcraft, ... people with illnesses (suspected to be haunted, infertile or have children but cannot raise them, have mental problems) came to the Tran temple and prayed. Then, if sowing the hexagram is accepted, it would be sealed by a red bronze coin on the yellow paper at the incense table, go back, and submit to the altar of Thanh Tran. After finishing, it would be burned with wine and worship water, take clear water to drink, and ash is applied to the temples or rubbed down from the chest. The elderly said, many people recovered from the disease by this method. Amulets, trigrams or people asking for peace by pasting at home or taking with them.

The Tran Dynasty followed the Luc Bo Thanh Ong with the title and red shirt, Ms. Thai Binh with the blue, Ms. Doi Dai Hoang with the yellow. Duc Dai Vuong will not put on the upper belt or the sword dance, it is opened in the spring so he will wear the pink flag to cover the face. The Tran Dynasty almost used the command flag granted by the king to "protect the country". Before supplication or chau van singing, it would do prostration to invite the First King and Thanh Tran and the servants. At Co Trach temple, according to the previous rules, mounting the medium will select people around 11, 12 years old. The chosen one must eat vegetarian food, dream for a month and must be a descendant. This activity at the Thanh Tran festival also aims to preserve folk forms of singing such as chau van, the kind of spiritual playing and dance.

1.3. The value of the Thanh Tran worship - The value of national culture

The Thanh Tran worship has shown a strong belief and devotion of the people into the deification of a real historical figure. Organizing the Tran temple festival contributes to preserving and promoting the national cultural heritage value. Today, the Tran temple festival in Nam Dinh is still maintained and increasingly spreading to become a major, regional and national festival; It is on the list of the national intangible cultural heritage, which has far-reaching influence on the life

and cultural and religious activities of a large part of the people.

The Tran Temple Festival in Nam Dinh brings deeper human values, at the festival, it usually honors the achievements in political activity of the Tran Dynasty. In particular, it is likely to mention the great merits of Quoc Cong Tiet Che Hung Dao Dai Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan, the person honored by the people as Cuu Thien Vu De, or Duc Thanh Cha – Vietnamese folklore belief. There are lots of unique and various religious, cultural and belief activities at the Tran temple festival in Nam Dinh such as procession, ceremony-opening, sacrifice, trance singing and dancing, mounting the medium, etc. which reflect the habits, customs and sentimental thoughts of a rice-farming population, express grateful to people with meritorious services to the country, pray for good harvests, good weather, happy family, peaceful nation. The Tran temple festival in Nam Dinh is also an intangible cultural heritage of custom, tradition and belief; at the same time, it demonstrates the awareness and thinking of the community about the worldview and the human outlook. People come to the festival with the hope to be protected, tolerated and helped before the worries of daily life, after attending the festival, it will help them regain confidence and balance in the daily life, overcome difficulties and obstacles; have faith in the future. Therefore, the Tran temple festival has become a bond of community, love, solidarity and mutual assistance. That is the deep human value that brings people to the values of truth-goodness-beauty.

- *The value of traditional ethics and education*

The festival has shown the deepest gratitude of the people to the eminent kings of a glorious Dynasty with the proper deeds and policies and strategies, which have great meaning in national history. Through the festival, it helps us to recall the glorious victory of Dai Viet with three great victories against the Yuan-Mongol invasion of our country, reliving the glorious period of the nation. Through the historical war, our people have learned profound lessons about the solidarity of the people, the plan of national defense after gaining independence, and the lessons on building the country of the Tran Dynasty with the strategies on “to take great care of the people is a long-term plan”, “the king and servants agree together, brothers get along with each other, the whole country contribute”, ... up to now, they are still valid and valuable lessons for our people throughout the process of building and defending the country.

Coming to the Tran temple festival, we all know how to rule our nation, important policies on the training and respect the talented, policies on land reclamation, and policies on encouraging agricultural expansion, especially the orientations in military and political thought, ... these are useful experience and lessons in building and defending the country today. This is also an environment with great effect in exchanging and conveying traditional cultural and ethical value. Human value, the tradition of “when you drink water, think of its source” are continuing, passing down to future generations. This is a traditional cultural activity with a spiritual element but also a profound historical education, showing the morality of “when you drink water, think of its source” of our nation. People express their respect and gratitude to their predecessors, remember the merits of building and defending the country, land reclamation, expanding the border and defending Dai Viet with Dong A spirit in three great victories against the Yuan-Mongol army, nurturing the patriotism of

the nation.

To commemorate the merits of the Thanh Tran, the State has invested billions of Vietnamese dong to make a bronze statue of Tran Hung Dao in some provinces such as Nam Dinh and Hai Duong, build infrastructure in Con Son – Kiep Bac and many other temples. The Thanh Tran has a long-lasting vitality, affirming a sustainable position in the spiritual life of contemporary Vietnamese society as he is a shining symbol of patriotism, strengthening the great strength of the nation before all events of society, a talented leader; a historical figure, a model to educate future generations on tradition; more importantly, he is a symbol of the superpower in disease treatment, eliminating evil spirits, and assisting human health to meet the people's needs.

1.4. Solutions to promote the value of the Thanh Tran worship in Nam Dinh

In recent years since the Law on Belief and Religion was enacted, the Thanh Tran worship has been nurtured and spread in contemporary Vietnamese society, the thinking of the Party and State about belief has become open and created the conditions for the development in the society. In order to promote positive value in the Thanh Tran worship, the author would like to propose some specific solutions as follows:

- First, enhance training and foster officials involved in religious work. It is necessary to foster the officials' knowledge of belief, religion and religious work in the locality. In addition, there should be more scientific works based on the practical basis of the Thanh Tran worship, so that there will be many synchronous solutions in Nam Dinh province to further promote the value of the Thanh Tran worship, to be worthy of the dedication that the Tran Dynasty brought to the nation.
- Second, promote the planning, conservation and restoration of relics at the cluster of Tran temple historical relics

Regarding the planning, in order to effectively exploit the value of the Tran temple sustainably, it is necessary to invest, plan and build the plan in order to exploit effectively in the long term. It is necessary to determine the specific scope of the planned area to protect the land and historical space of the Tran temple and avoid the encroachment.

Regarding the conservation and restoration, the restoration of relics must respect and preserve the original elements, restrict the replacement with new materials, avoid the construction and repair of these architectural works without the similarity at the relic. In the underground area surrounding the Tran temple relic, there are many relics and antiques, so it is necessary for the archaeological work and excavation on the ancient relic or around the relic. The archaeological work should be conducted quickly in a large area, avoiding the free excavation to alter the cultural layer and the loss of some ancient relics.

- *Third, focus on the construction investment of technical facilities and social infrastructure. To ensure the best service quality, attract a large number of visitors to the festival, promote local culture, attract the foreign investment capital, it is necessary to invest in material and technical infrastructure such as constructing the accommodation in both Nam Dinh city and resorts; food service; planning of restaurants, parking lots in the relic area in a reasonable way.*

- *Fourth, combine educational propaganda with administrative organization and management. Propagate, educate and help the people to have the right attitude towards the Thanh Tran worship. Local people should be targeted first so that they can see all the spiritual value. In addition, it is necessary to improve the professional quality of the cultural staff at the locality working in the fields of belief and religion, it is also an important problem in administrative management. Preserving and restoring in order to promote the positive value of the Thanh Tran worship to remind us of a Dynasty with valuable contributions in the national history.*
- *Fifth, raise awareness about the value of the Thanh Tran worship in Nam Dinh for local socio-economic development. Coordination of propaganda measures helps people understand the value of Thanh Tran worship. The Tran temple festival activity in Nam Dinh also brings a large source of spiritual tourism services to contribute to the development of the local economy and attract investment capital, so there should be investment plans in services to improve the quality of local services*
- *There should be regularly organized activities and contests to understand the local history, to help younger generations understand the great meaning of the Tran Dynasty, thereby to arouse the national pride of the younger generation and create awareness to protect and preserve the national independence.*
- *Sixth, improve the physical and mental life of the people. In order to improve the physical life of people, it is necessary to pay attention to job creation, support people the loans to develop their economy, reduce hunger and poverty. Raising awareness of scientific and cultural issues, promoting positive elements in the Thanh Tran worship, while eliminating outdated customs and superstitious actions.*
- *Seventh, propagate and educate about the Party's viewpoints and State policies on freedom of belief and religion. Propagating the people; local authorities to be aware and understand that the issue of freedom of belief and religion has a significant meaning to eliminate superstitious activities. It is necessary to restrict harmful, superstitious activities, taking advantage of beliefs to profiteering.*

Conclusions

The Tran Dynasty has left beautiful ideas on kindness, human life, how to treat the scholars, showing us a typical nation of national harmony, the spirit of solidarity of the whole people, achievement in political activities. The Tran temple relic area of Nam Dinh is a cultural treasure with high human values. In recent years, the departments of Nam Dinh province have paid much attention to religious activities of the Thanh Tran worship. However, in the implementation process, there are still many problems and obstacles in practice. In order to preserve and promote further the core values of the Thanh Tran worship, we have proposed some solutions to effectively promote the positive elements of the Thanh Tran worship on the basis of ensuring the proper implementation of the Party's guidelines and policies and the laws of the State. At the same time, it is necessary to focus on synchronously implementing the proposed solutions to have effective strategies to develop the values in the Thanh Tran worship at Tran Temple in Nam Dinh.

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