

The Universality of Belief of Worshiping Hung Kings in the Cultural Life of Vietnamese People



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ABSTRACT: Vietnamese people have developed a kind of ancestor worship since the beginning of time and regard it as a benchmark of the spirit of “filial piety” to the nation, ancestors, grandparents, and parents. Worshiping the Hung Kings is an obvious example of this standard of filial piety. A unique form of belief, culture, and religion in the spiritual lives of centuries of Vietnamese people, the establishment and growth of Hung Kings worshiping beliefs is a process that moves from low to high and is consistently maintained through many generations. The great strength of national unity and the pride of the Vietnamese people throughout their past historical adventures are created by this spiritual fulcrum. The article draws the conclusion that the Hung Kings worshipping belief is widespread throughout Vietnam by discussing more about these beliefs and their history of origin, worshiping practices, distinctive values, and contemporary nature.

KEYWORDS: Hung Kings, belief, worship, culture.

1. CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The Vietnamese and Vietnamese people now regard “filial piety” as their way of life, a cultural ideal, and a conviction that contributes to the development and perfection of the human being. Vietnamese people celebrate those who have contributed to the establishment of villages and hamlets in addition to being grateful to their parents, grandparents, ancestors, and clans according to their bloodline. Vietnamese people now possess a sense of patriotism, national consciousness, bravery, and unshakable courage to dedicate themselves to the quest of national security and peace. The Vietnamese build communal houses, temples, fanes, and shrines in order to worship them as gods, to show their admiration for them, to commemorate their accomplishments, and because it is the most effective method to carry on their culture to coming generations. “The ancestral sacrifice also demonstrates that although the dead are not real, they are always remembered in sacrifices and that the connection between the living and the dead is not broken” [1]. All important events of individual and community life are venerated to the ancestors. That religious consciousness strongly manifests and dominates the entire life of Vietnamese people in every daily or important act, in all social strata, in different localities and areas of residence. In the area of the ancient capital of Van Lang, The Hung Kings selected Nghia Linh Mountain, the highest mountain in the area, to conduct sacrifice ceremonies in accordance with the folk beliefs of the agricultural locals that time such as worshiping God of Rice, God of Sun to pray for favorable weather, good crops, all things to multiply and flourish, and people to be satisfied. Later, on that particular mountain of Nghia Linh, the people and the court constructed a temple to honor the Hung Kings in memory of their outstanding virtues. King Le Thanh Tong (1460–1497) permitted himself to exercise the right to sacrifice heaven and earth and to regulate the worship of the country's kings in order to assert his supreme political power, considering it as an important national charter. Le Thanh Tong formed the Hung Kings genealogy in 1470, 10 years after assuming the throne, to confirm the legitimacy of the dynasties in Vietnam. The genealogy’s full name is “Traditional genealogy of 18 genera of the Holy King Dynasty of Hung Kings.” The worship of Hung Kings has become orthodox since then. The original location to worship the nation's Hung Kings is now the historical site of Hung Temple at Nghia Linh Mountain (Phu Tho province). The belief in worshiping the first Hung Kings gradually spread to other areas from this center of worship. Nevertheless, the worship of the Hung Kings dates back in time. We do not categorize the Hung Kings period in any period of the history of the country because of this, in addition to the mythological origin narrative of the Hung Kings. Every country in the world frequently dons a fantastical “clothing” during its formative years. Around 1184 BC, the Greeks wrote two epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey of Homère, in which they portrayed the Trojan War. [2]. The Book of Genesis [3] in the Old Testament Bible, which is full of enigmatic colors, provides another account of the history of the Jewish people. Outstanding characteristics of the widespread and long-standing tradition of honoring Hung Kings include the Vietnamese community's active involvement in preserving the vitality of Hung King worshiping beliefs across the nation and the Vietnamese community's influence in overseas Vietnamese communities as a traditional cultural identity is affirmed, passed down, and encouraged. This is another reason why the worship of the Hung Kings has to be further researched and explained in terms of its origins and the significant role it has played throughout Vietnamese history. As a result, the role of Hung

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Kings worshiping beliefs in the development of cultural identity, the building of the Vietnamese people, and in the great national unification plan for the aim of bringing the nation into integration with the developed world continues to be affirm.

2. HISTORY OF PRACTICE OF WORSHIPING HUNG KINGS IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

The first kings of Van Lang State were known as Hung Kings. According to legend, the ancestors of the Hung Kings originated from the tribes of the Bach Viet people in the South. Legend has it that the ancestors of the Vietnamese people, Shen Nong, surnamed Khuong [4], when they died, were buried in Thuong Ngo mound, Changsha (China). That region was home to the Vietnamese (Bach Viet) ethnic tribes prior to the Qin and Han empires. With a focus on managing agriculture, the ancestral Shen Nong is revered as a god (Scorpio), and is the god who bestows blessings on those who live in wet rice farming regions in the South. About history, in the books Selection of Strange Tales in Lĩnh Nam (Lĩnh Nam chích quái) by Tran The Phap; Collection of Stories on the Shady and Spiritual World of the Viet Realm (Việt Điện u Linh tập) by author Ly Te Xuyen, especially the Complete Annals of Đại Việt (Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư) series [5] recorded by the authors Le Van Huu & associates about the family origins of the Hung Kings, De Minh, the third grandson of King Shen Nong, was on a patrol of the South when he arrived at Ngu Linh Mountain, which is now in the Chinese province of Hunan. There, he encountered Vu Nu, a fairy, who he later married and had a son named Loc Tuc. After De Minh passed the throne to his eldest son, De Nghi, as king of the North (from Ngu Linh Mountain to the North), and ordained Loc Tuc as King of the South (from Ngu Linh Mountain to the South), proclaimed Kinh Duong Vuong, the national title is Xich Quy. Kinh Duong Vuong became King of the Xich Quy in the year of Ren-Xu 2879 BC, married the daughter of Dong Dinh Ho Quan (also known as Than Long) who was Long Nu and gave birth to Sung Lam, succeeded him as king, claiming to be Lac Long Quan. Lac Long Quan married the daughter of King De Lai (the son of De Nghi), named Au Co, and gave birth to one hundred children at once. One day, Lac Long Quan said to Au Co: "I am the origin of the Dragon, you have the origin of the Fairy, the fire and water are different, it is difficult to get along". Following their separation, Lac Long Quan and Au Co divided their children into two groups: 50 went with their mother to the mountains and 50 went with their father to the coastal region (although there is a copy that says they went to Nam Hai). The oldest son was then assigned as Hung Vuong, who would take over the throne.

The Hung Kings' inhabitants attained a fairly high degree of thought in terms of the spiritual and spiritual life, which is combined with complex religious forms and interlaced between the remnants of basic polytheism, beliefs from the metal era, and wet-rice agriculture. According to ancient historical documents, the Van Lang State was created during the Hung King era and had its capital in Phong Chau (Phu Tho province) between 4000 and 3500 years ago. The Dong Son culture period began around 2000 years ago. The inhabitants of King Hung are the owners of the Red River and Ma River civilizations; in fact, this is an agricultural civilization that cultivates wet rice. Therefore, wet rice farming is the basis for all conventions, habits, living traditions, culture, forms of belief, festivals, rituals of spiritual activities, etc. These reflect the way of life, perspective, style, and traditions of the agricultural population. In terms of society and social organization, the agricultural civilization that grows wet rice can be characterized as a village civilization, based on the Asian rural commune structure: Family - Village - Super village (Country). First of all, because the village's people are related by blood, it is simple to function and maintain as a unit of government with a stable framework. Even villages have their own rules and authorities over which the state authority is not allowed to meddle: "Imperial power bends to suit local customs." The villages, however, did not exist independently or individually; rather, they soon needed to be connected to form a national community. The family (household) is an economic unit, but the village is a social organization that is crucial in cultural and religious activities as well as in operations like reclamation and irrigation as well as defense against foreign invaders. The invention and development of metal marked a turning point in the development of productive forces, along with the needs of wet-rice agriculture. At the time, the Hung Vuong period's inhabitants' predominate and widely held belief was the worship of nature, which took the form of ritualistic worship (ancestors, gods), such as worshiping God of the Sun, God of Rivers, God of Ocean (Ha Ba, Long Vuong, Thuy Tinh, God Kim Quy...), God of Mountain (Son Tinh), ... The struggle to form the tribe and the first state took place under the reign of the Hung Kings. The belief in ancestor worship, hero cults, leaders (Phu Dong Thien Vuong, Tan Vien Son, Cao Lo, Chu Dong Tu...), and mother worship (Ba Chua Thuong Ngan, etc.) emerged from a sense of community in order to affirm the community's shared origins and ancestors and to honor the achievements of those who have contributed to its development and defense. These figures are frequently elevated to divinize and unified with the earlier mythological system.

The Hung Kings' Van Lang state was founded and flourished until the 18th Hung Kings dynasty. Thuc Phan, a member of a Vietnamese tribe living in the northeast of Van Lang country, succeeded as king of Shu state united Van Lang with Western Europe (home to the Au Viet people), founded the Au Lac State, claimed the title of An Duong Vuong, and set up its capital in Co Loa (258 BC), bringing an end to the Van Lang State era of the Hung Kings. Because all Vietnamese people share a birth mother or other compatriots, it can be deduced from tales, myths, or historical data that all ethnic groups in the country of Vietnam have a common ancestor. As a result, the Vietnamese people's cultural practices, spirituality, social norms, and beliefs are all of the same origin and expression. Every family has an altar for the ancestors, which is a place where people can worship their parents, grandparents, and ancestors in accordance with Vietnamese spirituality and customs. This altar serves as a reminder of one's ancestry and a way to honor heroes who have made contributions to the nation and its people. The Hung Kings (they are known as the "Nation's Ancestor" in Vietnamese culture), the men who gave birth to Vietnam as a family, are revered and respected by the entire nation of Vietnam

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for their lofty significance. As a result, on the anniversary of the death (March 10 of the lunar calendar every year), people all over the nation turn to the source to declare a national holiday, burn incense, remember the Dragon's father and the Fairy's mother, and make wishes to create a prosperous and prosperous nation as a whole.

It can be said that the majority of the ethnic groups in Vietnam practice ancestral worship. This tradition has been upheld for a long time, especially among the Kinh (the majority ethnic group). It has been profoundly embedded in their consciousness from generation to generation. "The sacrifice to ancestors is not only to save the ancestors' souls from suffering, but also has a deeper meaning, which is to remember the birth of ancestors and transmit the lineage forever. Therefore, it can be said that ancestral sacrifice is the purpose of maintaining the race," says researcher Dao Duy Anh [6]. According to researcher Nguyen Van Huyen, this custom's significance lies in the fact that it is tightly regulated from generation to generation and maintains its viability over time: "No matter their social status within Vietnamese society, everyone adheres to this kind of religion without any reluctance. Making no offerings to one's parents and grandparents is the most serious act of disobedience a son may commit. Vietnamese people honor their parents, both living and dead. Children continue to revere and adore their parents even after they pass away" [7]. The clan is made up of numerous families having a common ancestry and bloodline. They collectively make up a village by residing nearby and in large numbers. The country is made up of many villages inside a national border as well as other towns and ethnic groups. People who coexist in an area known as a country are compelled to work together as a nation to protect itself from external invasion risk, pandemic threats, and other natural disasters. As a result, the urge to organize and unite a nation is a constant endeavor throughout history. Having a national symbol is necessary in order for people to unite under that shared flag. For Vietnamese people, that emblem represents their devotion to Hung Kings, who are considered to be the nation's National Ancestor. Both current and former feudal regimes have discovered it through ancestor worship, which is encapsulated by a particular image, the Hung Kings. The most majestic and revered Hung Kings in Vietnam today are worshiped at the historical relic site of Hung Temple in the province of Phu Tho, which has a total natural area of over 1000 ha and is located on land that is part of the administrative boundaries of seven communes: Hy Cuong, Chu Hoa, Thanh Dinh, Tien Kien, Phu Ninh, Kim Duc, and Van Phu... "The Hung Kings are referred to as the National Ancestor by the government at large, and our people built temples to worship in every region of the nation" [8]. Since the Nguyen Dynasty, when the feudal state carried out a sacrifice (national ceremony) with the custom of once every five years in an even year termed the major festival, the Hung Temple Festival has continued to develop into a national holiday.

3. THE BELIEF OF WORSHIPING HUNG KINGS THROUGHOUT THE CULTURAL LIFE OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

3.1. The belief of worshiping Hung Kings is the source of national culture

In Vietnamese cultural history, ancestor worship is one of the specific beliefs of Vietnamese ethnic communities. This belief is considered to be a special form of human's cosmology and outlook on life since prehistoric times, from the worship of natural phenomena, the worship of animals to the worship of the deceased. The most important basis of ancestor worship is the belief in the immortal existence of the spirit world, especially the existence and power of the souls of the deceased who have blood relations with the living. In Vietnam, for thousands of years, ancestor worship has always been considered a very important element in the spiritual life of each family and clan. The basic form of this belief is the establishment of altars in each family, at the ancestral house of each clan and the practice of worshipping rituals on the death memorial day of each year, in all life cycles such as childbirth, adulthood, marriage, mourning... and all natural cycles such as welcoming the new year, entering a new crop. Ancestor worship ritual has also become an indispensable daily activity to gain more support and luck in cases of starting to do something like construction, manufacturing, healing, studying, exams, buying and selling... with the desire to reduce misfortune, or share joy, thank the deceased's soul for contributing to creating results, successes... Thus, for Vietnamese people, ancestor worship is not a religion but a traditional custom, a basic morality of each person and each family. In Vietnamese traditional society, due to the peculiarities of geo-politics and geo-culture, for thousands of years, village has been a basic administrative unit that plays a very important role in creating, preserving and transmitting traditional cultural identities. As a symbiotic and sympathetic unit, from ancestor worship belief according to blood relationship of each family and each clan, village community also creates the ancestor worship belief of the whole village community - of all people living in the same area, who have blood and none-blood relation. The objects to be worshiped of village community are not only the people who directly gave birth to them, but the characters who are recognized and revered by the whole community as tutelary gods. Among these, there are angels and human gods - historical celebrities, cultural celebrities, heroes who have built and defended the country or real characters in history who have established villages, passed on professions, etc. At the same time, many village's tutelary gods are symbols built from legends. They are assigned by the community and built into divine characters, into cultural symbols of the community with unique characteristics of the locality in terms of nature and society. These cultural symbols are also realized and materialized to suit the characteristics of natural conditions and social characteristics of the community, such as having a specific date of birth and death to celebrate the anniversary of each year and other memorial rites. Village's tutelary god is worshiped at the village hall - a communal house of the community, whose scale is superior to that of the clans' own ancestral houses, where common worship rituals and many other socio-cultural activities of the

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village community are practiced and implemented. The basic purpose of worshipping the village's tutelary god is to show admiration and acknowledgement of the community for the merits of the objects to be worshiped; At the same time, people pray for the blessing and support for the entire community or the members who practice these rituals. Due to the size of village halls and temples, and the level of objects to be worshiped, unlike those held in families, the rituals and methods of worshipping in the community adhere to strict conventions which combined with the organization of village festival - a community cultural activity with bold folklore, showing the unique cultural identities of each locality. Stemming from the geo-political and geo-cultural characteristics, in Vietnam, ancestor worship is also developed into National Ancestor worship. This is a rare, if not unique, phenomenon in the world when the whole nation considers themselves to have a common origin (compatriots), then establish a common ancestral grave and set a common ancestral anniversary to practice worshipping and memorializing Hung Kings - the common national ancestry of the whole nation of Vietnam.

3.2. Belief of worshipping Hung Kings, from the object to be worshiped of the nation to the contemporary Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Up to now, the whole territory of Vietnam has 10 localities with Hung Kings' Temple, namely Phu Tho, Ha Tinh, Binh Thuan, Lam Dong, Ba RIA - Vung Tau, Dong Nai, Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho, Ca Mau, Kien Giang. As for worship sites, according to statistics from the Department of Grassroots Culture under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, by 2021, the whole country have 1,417 relics worshipping Hung Kings and characters related to the Hung Kings era [9].

So far, in Ho Chi Minh City alone, there are at least 11 places to worship Hung Kings, which are: Hung Kings' Temple in Tao Dan Cultural Park (District 1); Hung Kings' Temple at No. 261/3 Co Giang, Phu Nhuan District; Temple of National Ancestor Hung Kings at No. 166/33 Doan Van Bo extension, District 4; Temple of National Ancestor Hung Kings at No. 2 Nguyen Binh Khiem, District 1; Hung Kings' Temple in Suoi Tien Cultural Tourist Area; Hung Kings' Temple in Dam Sen Cultural Park; Tran Hung Dao Temple at No. 189/1 Ton Dan, District 4; Cuu Tinh Temple at No. 96/24 Ton Dan, District 4; Tu Quang Phu (Quang Phu Palace) at No. 384/105/31 Ly Thai To, District 10 and Dinh Hoa Thanh (Hoa Thanh Village Hall) at No. 378 Luy Ban Bich, Hoa Thanh Ward, Tan Phu District.

Or as in Binh Duong Province, the belief of worshipping Hung Kings has long been set in people's minds, creating beautiful images in the cultural and spiritual life of the local ethnic communities. "Hung Kings worshipping places in Binh Duong Province are distributed evenly throughout the province, such as: Hung Kings High School for the Gifted (in Hiep Thanh Ward, Thu Dau Mot City); Dai Nam Tourist Area (in Hiep An Ward, Thu Dau Mot City); Bung Cu Village Hall (in Tan Phuoc Khanh Ward, Tan Uyen Township); Lien Hoa Vihara (Bach Dang Commune, Tan Uyen Township); Di An Village Hall (Tan Binh Ward, Di An City); Binh Duong Cemetery Park (Ben Cat Township)" [10].

Up to now, ancestor worship has been the most popular form of belief in Vietnam. It still exists in the minds of every family and becomes one of the indispensable spiritual needs to unite family members by blood relationship in each family - the cells of society. Belief of worshipping Hung Kings has been gradually restored through activities of repairing and embellishing public architectural works of villages (village halls, temples, shrines) and organizing folk festivals in almost all localities nationwide. In general, these activities have been contributing significantly to fostering the feelings and responsibilities of community members in villages and grassroots administrative units of the nation. In the contemporary society in Vietnam, the worship of the National Ancestor Hung Kings is not only maintained but also expanded in both scale and form associated with the support and investment of central agencies and the voluntary participation of many domestic organizations, individuals and overseas Vietnamese. Vietnamese people in the country as well as abroad have a very cultural behavior that is to go to Hung Kings' Temple in Phu Tho to get land and water, then bring to the place where they live, considering it as the sacred existence of Hung Kings. Many streets, avenues, squares, parks... in big cities are named as Hung Vuong (Hung Kings). Vietnamese people living in countries around the world are also building temples of Hung Kings with the mind towards their fatherland and ancestral land [11]. The people of Vietnam, despite different ideals or aspirations, recognize that they are descendants of the Hung Kings, sharing the same ancestry and bloodline. All these activities show that the worship of Hung Kings has been promoted and affirmed as a national symbol, a common and only Ancestry of the whole country of Vietnam.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam has, so far, issued a document guiding the commemoration of the Hung Kings. Accordingly, every year, the Hung Kings' Anniversary will be held on March 10 of lunar calendar with an offering of 18 'banh chung' wrapped in fresh phrynium leaves, tied with bamboo strings; 18 'banh giay' with the word "fortune" on the wrapper; flowers, incense; betel and areca; wine, water and five fruits. According to Decree No. 82/CP dated November 6, 2001 of the Government of Vietnam [12], the scale of Hung Kings' Temple Festival - Hung King's Anniversary is organized at the national level. The Hung King's Anniversary is held by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in even-numbered years, and by the People's Committee of Phu Tho Province in odd years. Since 2007, Hung Kings Anniversary has been regulated as a major national holiday and employees are entitled to a day off with full salary. Especially, in 2010, according to Decision No. 2069/QD-TTg dated December 10, 2009 of the Prime Minister on the organization of Hung Kings Anniversary - Hung Kings' Temple Festival 2010, Hung Kings Anniversary - Hung Kings' Temple Festival 2010 was held on a national scale, taking place in 10 days, from April 14 to April 23, 2010 (ie., March 1 to March 10 of the lunar calendar) at the historical relic site of Hung Kings' Temple, Phu Tho

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Province. Every year, on Hung Kings Anniversary, along with the organization of official ceremonies at Hung Kings' Temple in Phu Tho Province, activities to worship and commemorate Hung Kings are also held in almost all localities nationwide where the nucleus is the space of these memorials. In response to the needs of millions of domestic and foreign tourists making pilgrimages to find their roots on the occasion of Hung Kings' Temple Festival, since 2005, according to provisions of the Government's Decree No. 82/CP, the National Hung Kings Anniversary is held on March 08 of lunar calendar every year (the State holds the festival in even-numbered years and the People's Committee of Phu Tho Province holds the festival in odd years). On the Hung Kings Anniversary Day and the rest of the year, millions of people from all over the country make pilgrimages to the sacred mountain of Nghia Linh - Hung Kings Temple to commemorate Hung Kings - to commemorate the merits of building and keeping the country from the early days of the country's founding. For the community of villagers around the area of Hung Kings Temple, Viet Tri, Phu Tho - the center of this special traditional belief, Hung Kings are also considered the ancestry associated with farming, having merit in teaching the people to plow fields and plant rice, giving sacred energy to the land, houses, crops and livestock to multiply, flourish, and create a bountiful harvest. For these profound meanings, on December 6, 2012, UNESCO officially recognized the worship of Hung Kings in Phu Tho as a representative intangible cultural heritage of humanity [13]. This heritage is a symbol of Vietnamese people's spirit of great solidarity and moral tradition of "when drinking water, think of its source". This is the basis for standardizing Hung Kings worshipping rituals to practice at Hung King worship sites in Phu Tho and across the country. The competent agencies continue to collect legends, ordination, royal genealogy, Sino-Nom documents; restore and well organize a number of folk festivals related to the belief of Hung Kings worship such as: Tro Tram festival, He Village festival, King procession to the village to celebrate Tet, procession of 'Ong Khiu' and 'Ba Khiu', fishing festival, farm-work initiation ceremony, breeding fertility belief, 'Banh Chung' - 'Banh Giay' offering ceremony...

Up to now, it can be affirmed that the worship of Hung Kings is a unique intangible cultural heritage of humanity. On the path of renovation and economic integration into the present world, more than ever, Vietnamese people need to continue to preserve and promote precious cultural values and outstanding global values of Hung Kings worship in contemporary life in order to continue promoting the cause of national renovation and development, maintaining the sovereignty and independence of the nation and people.

4. CONCLUSION

From ancestor worship belief to Hung King worship belief is a process of forming and building a national symbol. This symbol is to strengthen the community in the face of the need for national existence and development. Moreover, this symbol is a necessary and topical need, especially in the context of the current world instability and the policy of national reconciliation and harmony of Vietnam today. The belief in worshipping Hung Kings has really become a national symbol that gathers together all communities and ethnic groups living on the land of Vietnam today. Furthermore, it is reaching out to all parts of the world where Vietnamese people live as a symbol of community cohesion, uniting all people with different opinions towards the Ancestral Land. In the national aspect, whether we like it or not, there is always a political will covered in the desire to unify the nation through a certain symbol. Therefore, when that political will is integrated into a cultural phenomenon, it is nonetheless more readily accepted voluntarily from minority communities. The formation of a unified nation in the name of all people (whether belonging to any ethnic group) living in that territory with the same ancestor - Hung Kings - an enduring value of worshipping Hung Kings - a national symbol of Vietnam. The universal value of the Hung King worshipping belief is the traditional moral education value that endures over the time and with the nation's history, just as the folk verse has been handed down for many last centuries in Vietnam: "Dù ai đi ngược về xuôi - Nhớ ngày Giỗ Tổ mừng mười tháng ba ("Whoever goes back and forth - Remember the Tenth of the third lunar month").

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