

Preservation and protection of Cultural values of traditional beliefs of Ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

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Abstract

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At present, traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are undergoing changes to adapt and match the real life better. In the article, the author focuses on studying the situation, pointing out achievements and limitations in the preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam in recent years, clarifying some problems posing and proposing a number of solutions and recommendations to better carry out the preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs in order to meet the spiritual needs of ethnic minorities in the context of market economy development and extensive international integration.

Key words: preservation, protection, cultural values, traditional beliefs, the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam today, the researchers have different concepts and definitions of the phenomenon of beliefs.

Previously, many researchers used to consider beliefs as folk beliefs, but recently many people disagreed with that consideration. One of the reasons for opposing this approach is that some types of beliefs, such as Ancestor Worship, that is not only spread among folk but practiced even in the former court as well as in the current State official rites. Some researchers believe that beliefs are a type of religion (traditional religion or ethnic religion). This can lead to the understanding of beliefs including some long-standing religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, or endogenous religions such as Cao Dai, Hoa Hao. Some others believe that the beliefs of Vietnamese people are a form of demi-religion (undeveloped religion). This may result in religious understanding that includes new religious phenomena. In the scope of this article, we use the

concept of “traditional beliefs” to refer to a social phenomenon different from religions, both traditional religions (such as Catholicism, Buddhism,...) and new religious phenomena. Accordingly, “Traditional beliefs are a social entity, belonging to the spiritual life, existed for a long time, with the core of belief, admiration and adoration of the divine mother, the sacred object or the soul of the dead that people imagine or give a worship, attribute supernatural qualities with the purpose of praying to avoid all disasters, bringing happiness to people’s lives.” (Le, 2015 b). Traditional beliefs have similarities with religion, such as their objects of worship being supernatural forces, but with their own laws of existence, development and characteristics: (i) through thousands of years of existence, they do not tend to form doctrine, canon law, and coherent organization; (ii) if religion is directed to the world after death, beliefs are directed to the existing life in mortality. Law on Belief and Religion of Vietnam 2016 also

differentiated between traditional beliefs and religion and defined “Beliefs are the human belief expressed through rituals associated with traditional customs and practices to bring spiritual peace to individuals and communities”; “Religious activities are the ancestor worship activities, sacred spiritual symbols; commemorate and honor people with their meritorious services to the country and the community; Folk rituals represent historical, cultural, and social values.” Religion is defined as “human belief” that exists with the system of concepts and activities including objects of worship, doctrine, canon law, ritual and organization.” (Law of beliefs, religion 2016)

With the understanding above, Traditional beliefs are an integral element of the national culture. Formed for a long time in history, along with the time, different types of traditional beliefs have entered into the lifeblood of each ethnic group, contributing to creating the unique cultural nuances of each ethnic group and the diversity of Vietnamese culture. Traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region contain very various, diverse values and are rich in ethnic identity. Types of Traditional beliefs have a close relationship with social activities of people and in specific historical conditions, they have made significant impacts on people and society in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, contributing to creating the unique cultural nuances of each ethnic group and the diversity of Vietnamese culture. (Ngo, 2020) Since the 1990s, along with drastic socio-economic changes as a result of comprehensive national renewal, traditional beliefs in Vietnam have also tended to recover and develop. In recent years, the Government of Vietnam has made new perspectives and new policies on religion and traditional beliefs, which recognize that religion and traditional beliefs are a legitimate spiritual need of a part of the people and promote positive cultural and ethical values in

2. Methods

The current issue in preserving and promoting the cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of

religions and traditional beliefs in the nation-building cause. (Hoang, 2016) The renovation policy of the Government of Vietnam on preserving cultural values of traditional beliefs that aims to increase resistance to the national culture in the context of integration, openness and international exchange, has contributed to making many types of traditional beliefs, especially traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities that have been revived. (Mathieu Bouquet, 2010)

In the general trend of traditional beliefs and religion’s development, traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region have also been strongly restored and revived. The revival of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam over the past time has contributed to reviving values of ethnic identity, contributing to the cause of building an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with the national identity. (University of Culture, 2005 b) However, along with the restoration of traditional cultural values, practices of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region have also increased and raised many backward customs which are no longer suitable with new social conditions. Many worship rituals in traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have undergone significant changes in the direction of more civilization but they still maintain and have a trend to restore cumbersome and costly rituals. (Ngo, 1999) In addition, along with the process of cultural exchange and integration, some religious activities in traditional beliefs bearing the characteristics of traditional culture are tending to disappear and be replaced with unfamiliar values with the community’s traditional culture. On the other hand, many traditions in the community’s traditional beliefs have been commercialized and lost their inherent identity.

Vietnam is how to preserve and promote fine values in different types of traditional beliefs; at the same time, gradually eliminate backward customs, strengthen internal resources and resistance to the

culture of ethnic minorities, contributing to building an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with the national identity. In this article, the author uses some basic methods such as: Analytic and Synthetic Methods, Anthropological fieldwork method, Statistical method and Comparison method to survey, assess the status of preservation and

3. Research Results

3.1. Overview of traditional beliefs and cultural values of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region

The Northern Midlands and Mountains of Vietnam includes 14 provinces: Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, Hoa Binh, Cao Bang, Lang Son, Bac Giang, Thai Nguyen, Bac Kan, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Phu Tho, Lao Cai, Yen Bai. (The Government of Vietnam, 2006) This is the largest territory in Vietnam with an area of 100,965 km², accounting for 28.6% of the entire country's area, the total population is 13,853,190 people. (General Statistics Office, 2019) The Northern Midlands and Mountains of Vietnam is a home of 30 ethnic groups such as: Muong, Kho Mu, Xinh Mun, Mang, Khang, Hmong, Dao, Pa Then, Tay, Thai, Nung, San Chay, Giay, Lao, Lu, Bo Y, La Chi, La Ha, Co Lao, Pu Péo, San Diu, Ngai, Ha Nhi, Phu La, La Hu, Lo Lo, Cong, Si La, etc. The cultural traditions of local groups are very different, in many cases, although they are groups of the same ethnic group, they do not understand each other's language. Ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam do not have separate geographic territories, as well as inter-communal and communal conditions are common. In many districts, it is not only the inter-communal and communal conditions within the district and commune levels but even at the village level. The number of communes with one ethnic group only is very small, accounting for less than 3% of the area's communes. Moreover, an ethnic group also resides in many communes, for example: the Tay live in 1,385 communes, the Nung live in 988 communes, the Dao live in 938 communes, the

promotion of positive cultural values of traditional beliefs. Since then, the author provides some recommendations and solutions for preservation and protection of positive cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam today.

Hmong live in 745 communes and the Muong live in 439 communes. (Khong, 1995).

In association with the natural environment with high biodiversity, ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have long ago maintained models of livelihood diversification. Ethnic groups living in the low mountains or in the valleys (such as Tay, Nung, Thai, Muong, etc.) both cultivate wet rice fields and terraced rice fields while taking advantage of upland fields on hillsides near their places of residence to grow crops to support the family's self-sufficient economy. Ethnic groups living in the upland areas (Hmong, Dao, Lo Lo, Phu La, Ha Nhi, La Hu, etc.) are shifting cultivation. In addition to cultivation, ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam also have other supplementary livelihood activities such as breeding, family crafts, hunting, gathering and bartering goods. Cattle and poultry are raised not only for food but also for cultural and religious activities of the family and community.

From the perspective of ethnic culture, the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam forms three distinct landscape areas. Those are low valleys inhabited by ethnic groups of the Vietnamese – Muong and Thai - Kadai languages. The middle or the slopes are inhabited by ethnic groups of Mon - Khmer language and the upland areas are inhabited by ethnic groups of Hmong - Dao and Tang – Mien languages. These are the landscape areas that have formed the cultural and religious traditions of ethnic groups in the process of adapting to the environment, survival and development with many cultural characteristics in this area.

The people of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have a

rich spiritual and religious life. Most ethnic groups follow the polytheism, the worship of a lot of different gods. In the article on *Beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam*, the author – Hoang Thi Lan commented that the spiritual life and beliefs of ethnic minorities in this region are quite rich and diverse. The author affirmed: “The majority of ethnic minorities in the region follow polytheism beliefs. Each ethnic group has its own nuances in religious activities, but we can identify their beliefs through several types, such as ancestor worship, community-related beliefs, nature-related beliefs, beliefs related to production and beliefs related to the human life cycle.” (Hoang, 2016) In particular, traditional beliefs and festivals are a unique form of folklore activities that are important and indispensable in the lives of people of all ethnic groups. Traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are very diverse and exist alternately and harmoniously, including typical types: Ancestor worship, community-related beliefs, production-related beliefs and life cycle beliefs. (Le, 2018) Ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have many different rituals that are practiced many times in a year and take place everywhere, from the house of every citizen to the village community, from the field to the forest and mountains, making people’s lives covered with sacred space. Activities in traditional beliefs are deeply humane, leading people to remember their roots, and are a deep bond of community, desiring for good things and warding off evil. The traditional beliefs of the people here have created a unique cultural identity for the ethnic minority communities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam.

Ancestor worship is a common belief in the life of Vietnamese people. (Vu, 2019) Authors Vu Hong Van and Nguyen trong Long said that ancestor worship beliefs in some countries played a weak role in the spiritual life of community, especially countries, ethnic groups with a single religion worship. However, in Vietnam, most people also have ancestor worship activities, including followers

of some religions. People perceive this belief as a traditional and ethical human custom as well as a form of spirituality. “Ancestor worship has an important place in family and society of Vietnam. This is a way of expressing gratitude and tribute to the deceased. According to the concept of Vietnamese people, the deceased often engage in the present life, they guide, direct, protect, and bless us, etc.” According to the people of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, ancestors were family and lineage members who have died. They were the ones who made the career for their descendants. The ancestors died but their souls still exist in another world and always supervise, care for and protect the descendants from evil spirits and they also bless their descendants healthy and have good luck in business. (Thich, 2007) Therefore, every family has to remember the merits of ancestors and worship them. Researcher Tran Quoc Vuong affirmed: “The traditional beliefs’ culture of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam shows their belief in fate, heaven - earth, ancestors. Their gods are very diverse, sometimes many gods such as Mountain God, River God, Earth God. In addition, there are kings, Giang Then, and while the sense of community is strengthened by the worship of Fates of a mountain village, the sense of family and lineage is strengthened through ancestor worship. Each family has an ancestral altar placed in the most solemn position in the house. Besides, people also worship the Kitchen God in their house.” (Tran, 2014, p.246) On Tet holiday, every family performs the ritual to invite the ancestors to enjoy the holiday and the descendants sit beside to wish the ancestors to bless their descendants healthy and have good luck in business and away from the bad things. Ancestor worship is a belief maintained by many ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, such as: Thai, Muong, Hmong, Tay, Nung, Dao, Giay, Si La, Lao, Cong, La Hu, Lo Lo, Kho Mu. However, the way to show respect to ancestors in each ethnic group has some certain differences. In some ethnic groups, the ancestor altar

is set up and placed in the most solemn place in the house (Muong, Tay, Nung), but there are ethnic groups who only set up an ancestor altar upon worship or death anniversary (some lineage of the Hmong). There are ethnic groups that worship ancestors on the death anniversary of the dead and on holidays and Tet holidays, but there are ethnic groups that only worship ancestors on holidays and Tet holidays. During the worship ceremony, each ethnic group will practice the ritual and decorate the ancestor altar differently, for example: On the ancestor altar of the Hmong people, *Giay ban* is applied on the wall and three feathers of chicken are stuck on it. (Vuong, 2005) The Dao people use many paintings in worship and have their own types of paintings in worship during Tet holiday. (Dam, 2014) On the ancestor altar of the Lo Lo people, wooden figures with faces painted in black charcoal and offering gifts to ancestors were placed on the ancestor altar on important holidays.

Community-related beliefs are those that worship the gods and saints in the area, or the ancestors of each ethnic group. The people in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam worship God of Earth, God of Mountain, God of Land, Village Tutelary God and God of Forest. (Hoang, 2015) In the article titled *Some basic issues on ethnic areas of ethnic groups in the Northwestern Border in Vietnam*, the author Nguyen Thi Thanh Nga emphasizes the cultural and spiritual characteristics of some ethnic minority communities: “Most of ethnic minorities living in the Northwestern region in Vietnam follow polytheism beliefs and believe that the universe around people is created by many layers of the world. The Hmong, Dao all believe that the world is made up of heaven, earth, water, and underground. The Thai people believe that the heaven alone is composed of three layers of the world.” (Nguyen, 2015) In addition, each ethnic group also worships the gods and ancestors of the community, for example: The Thai people have the worship of Village ghost [*Phi ban*], Muong ghost [*Phi Muong*], God of Earth, God of Mountain, God of Land, the worship of the saints in

the region and the ancestor of each ethnic group. Those are gods who look after and protect the lives of people, and are the gods that protect all the mountains and fields in the region, as well as the animals and plants that live in there. (Cam, 1978) The Muong people worship The Goddess and mother of mountains and forests who the Muong respectfully call as *Bua Tho, Pua Ba Vi* (the king in Ba Vi Mountain). (Tran, 2004) The Tay people worship *Muong Pha Han, Man Phia Tien*,... The Dao people worship the ancestors of the community that is *Ban Ho*.

The people here believe that “everything is spiritual” thus they worship natural phenomena and practice beliefs related to natural phenomena. (Roszko Edyta, 2012) The Thái people worship land owner ghost [*Phi chau đin*], upland ghost [*Phi hay*], field ghost [*Phi na*], cemetery ghost [*Phi đong heo*], banyan tree ghost [*Phi đon, Phi co ba*], serpent-like monster ghost [*Phi nguoc*], stream ghost [*Phi huoi*]. (Ngo, 1999) When spring comes, the Thai people celebrate a ceremony named village worship [*Xen Ban*], the Muong people worship [*Xen Muong*] and make rituals to worship the guardian spirits of the village, Muong and worship ghosts (spirits of the dead) of the village to pray for the blessings of the spirits and ghosts for good crops and healthy descendants. The Muong people worship natural phenomena like God of Earth, God of Tree and God of Fruit. Sacred trees that are worshiped as: Chinese Banyan, Chu Đông tree, Banyan tree and Red Silk Cotton Tree. After harvesting the crop in October on the lunar calendar, the Mường people organize a *Mung Com moi* ceremony and worship the Rice fields. (Nguyen, 2017) In drought years, the Ha Nhi people, Thai people, Lo Lo people also organize *Le Cau mua* and *Le Cau mua* to pray for the blessing of Gods for good weather, good crops, for the lives of people to be full. Researcher Nguyen Thi Minh Nguyet affirmed: “The ethnic groups in the area closely live with the natural environment, thus they believe in fate and supernatural forces, and that is a basis of belief, religion, etc. For example, in the concept of the Tay and Nung ethnic groups, the

Agricultural deity is the god in charge of farming, season designation and water retention for crops. The God has a very important meaning to the productive life associated with the agriculture of inhabitants. Every year, all ethnic groups hold solemn rituals to worship the Agricultural deity in order to pray for good weather and natural disaster reduction. Ethnic minorities also think that everything has a soul, a ghost, and a god. All are divided into two categories consisting of good and evil. That is the cause of forming a series of shrines to worship Kitchen God, Earth God, village halls for worship of tutelary god, as well as the reason for ceremonial festivals organized by ethnic minorities.” (Nguyen, 2017)

The ethnic minorities in the the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam mainly earn their living from cultivation and animal husbandry. Therefore, the types of traditional beliefs related to agricultural production are present in the religious life of the people here. The Muong people have their religious rituals related to crops according to the growth cycle of rice such as: worship of *the Agricultural god King Dol* and *Vía Lúa* beliefs. The Thai, the Tay, the Nung, the Dao, the Giáy and the San Chi all believe that everything has a soul and that the gods support the crops thus in the spring (before the production season), they all have a ritual named *Xuong đong* (also known as *Long tong* festival, *Le Cau mua*). (Le, 2015 c) *Long tong* festival is held in the first days of January to wish Agricultural god, God of Mountain and God of River to bless for favorable weather, growing trees, abundant crops, and for the lives of people to be full. In *Unified but diversified culture of ethnic groups in Vietnam*, Authors Nong Quoc Chan, Huynh Khai Vinh analyzed the traditional belief culture expressed in some festivals of ethnic minority communities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam: “Festival consists of two parts: the ritual part performed by a priest is ceremonial, in which implying a sacred and solemn meaning to convey a belief that will be blessed by the gods for the whole community; the festival part consists of many folk

games participated actively and happily by people.” In which, “The Tay and Nung people have the Lung Tung festival. The Thai have Xen Ban, Xen Muong with the festival named “Nem Con (throwing cotton ball)”, collective dance. The people in the Northwestern highlands (Hmong, Dao) have festivals “Gau tao”, “Nao xong”, “Nhiang cham dao with the purpose of praying for a child, taking an oath to protect forests and practicing martial arts.” (Nong, 2002, p 208-209) Researcher Tran Quoc Vuong also affirmed: “Festivals of the Tay – Nung people are very rich. The festival of the whole community is the Long Tong festival (farming encouragement), in two parts: Rituals and Festival. The main rituals is to invite the village hall God and Agricultural God to the festival place in the field. A meal is held right here. The festival part mainly includes games such as Danh quay, Danh yen, Tung con and prestidigitation, etc.” (Tran, 2014, p. 247)

Life-cycle beliefs related to humans from birth to death are performed by families, lineages, and communities through stages, for examples: During the birth period, there are taboos before and during pregnancy, there are rituals before, during, and after birth and various rituals up to adulthood; During adulthood, there are also ceremonies to mark the maturity stage and wedding ceremonies; During the death period, there are rituals for the dead, funeral and post funeral rituals. The ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces have a diverse system of life cycle rituals. Every ethnic group has certain taboos and rituals that revolve around important milestones in a person’s life cycle from birth to death. (Le, 1999) Author Nguyen Khac Duc, in his research on *Protestantism in the Hmong and Dao ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces* has introduced an overview of traditional beliefs and religions of the Hmong and Dao in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces. In particular, the Hmong have beliefs, and polytheistic religions, with forms such as Worship of Ancestor, House God, Door God, having the beliefs related to lineage and Samanism and he affirmed:

“The traditional beliefs and religions of the Hmong play a great role, satisfying the great spiritual needs of the people.” (Nguyen, 2017, p.11) The author also generalized traditional beliefs and religions of the Dao as many other ethnic minorities with their trust in primitive beliefs such as: “Ban Vuong” worship, ancestor worship, “Cap Sac” festival (recognition of male maturation). The author affirmed: “The existence of traditional belief forms has met the spiritual needs of the people.” (Nguyen, 2017, p.16) Ethnic groups in the Northwestern Region all have a belief “everything has a soul” (animisme), a kind of belief that all peoples on the planet experience. There are all kinds of “soul” and kinds of Gods, rivers, streams, rocks, trees, animals, and natural forces such as thunder, lightning, rain, and wind. The parts of the human body also have their souls. The Kinh people believe that there are three souls and seven spirits (for male) and three souls and nine spirits (for female). The Thai people have up to 80 souls, such as souls of hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, ears, nose, forehead, etc. The dead do not disappear but return to live in their ancestral village. Because everything has a soul, it is necessary to treat them as in relationship with people. Therefore, there are good souls, bad souls, evil souls, fine souls depending on how people treat them, etc. By doing so, people can establish relationships with everything and with their ancestors, put people in space and time environment, creating a balance in mind. Human beings converge into their existing life in time domains: past, present, future; and dimensions of space, nature, environment, human, and society. That is a multifaceted, and multilateral relationship that ensures the reasonableness and inevitable stability of human life. (Tran, 2014) The Ha Nhi people think the Heaven and *Tho Po Mother* will assign jobs for each person, decide whether it’s a good life or a poor one. Therefore, from birth to death, every human being is performed rituals related to important stages of each person’s life by his/her relatives. On Tet holidays, all families perform rituals to *the Heaven* and *Tho Pho Mother* with an offering as a chicken or a bowl of water.

(Institute of Ethnology, 1996) The Hmong people have their life cycle beliefs, including: Naming ceremony for children of 1 month of age, Entry to husband’s house ceremony when the boy selects the girl to marry and reports to the ancestor to choose the wedding day and wedding rituals. When the Hmông people feel insecure or worry about some problems of their life, they will perform Ancestor worship ceremony and god worship ceremony to call the soul back and show the way the ghost has to go through, specify what the ghost has to do, and persuade the ghost and spirits to allow them to return to their ancestors. (Vuong, 2005) Besides, the Hmong people have a ceremony named *Gau Tao* that takes place from the first day to the full moon day of January. During the *Gau Tao ceremony*, the Hmông people offer thanks to heaven and earth, gods and the god of land who have blessed that their descendants are healthy, their sons follow the lineage and take care of their ancestors, and they also pray for fortune, offer thanks to heaven and earth that have helped the people to live a prosperous life with abundant crops, and corn and rice to be filled the floor. During the life cycle of the Mang, Nung and Dao people, many different rituals are practiced such as: Naming Ceremony, Adulthood Ceremony and Funeral Ceremony. In particular, the most important ritual of the Dao people is *Cap sac* ceremony (*Lap tinh* ceremony), an adulthood ceremony for men is usually celebrated in November, December or January. The *Red Dao* and *Dao Tien* often perform *Cap sac* ceremony from 12 to 30 years old, the *Dao Áo dài* often perform *Cap sac* ceremony from 11 to 19 years old.

Funeral is a ritual in family and social activities, but it is also a unique cultural phenomenon that includes many different rituals reflecting the concepts of social history and ethnic communities. The people of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam believe that each human has a body and a soul, and when a person dies, his/her soul still exists. Therefore, funeral rituals of the people of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are

performed meticulously and attentively with the rituals of coffin entry, rituals of the dead worship and burial rituals. However, each ethnic community has its own methods of funeral ceremony, for example: the Thai and Muong people organize their funeral nights with the meaning of helping the dead review the history of the ethnic group, bringing the soul of the dead through different worlds. The Hmong, Tay, Nung, Lo Lo people organize rituals of fresh ghosts and dried ghosts. The manner in which the rituals are performed varies in each ethnic group, but most of these ceremonies have the same meaning as the last goodbye of living people, expressing the views and respect towards the dead. (University of Culture, 2005 b)

Most of the ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have a rich performance art showed in rituals of worship, weddings, funerals, and festivals. Folk performances are cultural activities of people created during the labor process, in contact with the nature, used for worship activities in traditional beliefs. By way of speaking, telling, singing, dancing, ceremony, music and painting to express all the moods in the happy and sad times of daily life. In rituals of worship, worship texts are often read or told by magicians and sorcerers. This art is deeply expressed in the funeral nights of the Thai and Muong people. In traditional weddings of ethnic groups, there are many folk songs with deep cultural identities, for example: At the Thai weddings, there will be a song to celebrate the bride, a song to celebrate the soul of the bride, a song to celebrate the soul of the groom, a song for asset pleasing and a song for asset giving. At the Hmông wedding, there will be a song for opening the gate, a song for delivering gifts, a song for the bride. At the Tay weddings, there will be a song for greetings, a song for betel inviting, a song for grace, a song for mat placing. At the Mường weddings, there will be a song to celebrate the bride. Music plays an important role and is an obligatory element in the practice of god worship rituals, weddings, funerals, and festivals of ethnic minorities here. The prominent music types of ethnic groups in

the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are often used in rituals such as *Then* singing with the gourd lute of the Tay, Nung, Thai, and Gongs of the Muong. Music in practice of traditional beliefs must be strictly conducted in accordance with the songs and music used to start and end the ceremony: drumming, burning firecrackers, *Phong ong*, burning incense, burning incense in five directions, singing to praise the gods, emperors and the community, inviting deities or performing songs, burning talismans as prescribed before the place of worship or at the venue where the official process of the ritual takes place, for example: a lullaby during an entrance ceremony of the Tay, Thai, Nung, Phu La or the gongs, congratulation songs in *Sac bua* singing and in wedding ceremonies (ceremonies of reporting and bowing to the ancestors) in the Tay and Nung wedding ceremonies.

Besides, in traditional beliefs, there is a type of sacred dance art which is a ceremony of an institutional and mandatory ritual. There are two main types of sacred dance: The dance before Spirits and The dance of Spirits. (Ngo, 2001, p. 479) For the dance of Spirits, the clairvoyants just the body for the spirits to enter and dance. For the dance before Spirits, the worshipers, the Tao, Mo, Then magicians perform the rituals as “intermediaries” and “bridges” between ordinary people and spirits, they dance to communicate with the spirits. The typical sacred dances are: *Mo dance* (*Mo* funeral dance), *Moi dance* (dance to exorcise ghosts and cure diseases), *Sac bua dance* (dance to celebrate the New Year) of the Muong people. *Then dance* praying for the goodness of the Tày and Nùng ethnic groups (*Then* dance for fortune telling, *Then* dance to see off the dead, *Then* dance to pray for rain, *Then* dance for congratulation and *Then* dance to award title for person making the *Then*). *Cap sac dance* in adulthood ceremonies and for men *Tet nhay* in the ritual dance of worship of the *Ban Vuong* ancestors of the Dao ethnic group. Besides, in festivals, there is also a part of playing and singing such as: folk repartee singing and the *Xoe* dance of the Thai. Dances about the Dao people’s cultivating, sowing,

harvesting, grinding, cooking and catching turtles. Flute dancing, playing the flute and trumpet lip of Hmong boys and girls. Gliding fish dance, scarf dance, chorus singing like the love due singing of the *Kho Mu* people.

Ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountains have their own languages and some ethnic groups have their own scripts handed down over the centuries such as the Hmong, Thai, Tay and Nung. In the religious activities of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, folklore works are used to read or sing in rituals for the sacrifice of spirits, in weddings, cures, funerals: myths, legends, fairy tales, proverbs, poetry, prose, sacrifices and a system of “mo” songs. Typically, there are literary works, historical and social books and customary books of the Thai people. The *Mo* songs for funeral and worship of the Muong people such as: *Dang* (poetry singing) including *Dang Van Va* (garden flower singing), *Dang Moi* (singing at the “moi” ceremony), *Dang Nep* and *Dang Ang* (love duet singing). (Ngo, 2001, p. 638-666) The *Mo* songs of the *Muong* people are cultural foundations, reflecting the ethnic ideals by oral method and

funerals. In particular, the Tay and Dao are two ethnic groups that own a large number of types of painting in worship, etc. The mountainous paintings in worship are present in funerals, signifying the folk wishes of the dead’s family to pray for the dead’s manes to escape from the hell world, to reach the Nirvana or the Immortal Realm.” and the author affirmed that: “The mountainous painting in worship serves the spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces, thus their colors are often bold, dark, with typical colors such as red, blue, white, and yellow. Mountainous paintings in worship are carefully preserved by people. Nowadays, notwithstanding the development of life, lines of painting in worship of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region still remain their cultural value.” (Lan, 2016) The paintings in worship of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam are gathered in the hands of the worshipers and have

melody transmitting and from the beginning of the twentieth century and they have been gradually documented.

In rituals of worship, some ethnic groups still use different kinds of paintings in worship such as those of the Dao, Tay, Nung and Cao Lan. Author Lan Anh in the article on *The painting in worship of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam* gave an overview of the painting in worship beliefs of the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s people: “The painting in worship of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam mainly are religious paintings, associated with Buddhist or Taoist beliefs, but paintings in worship still clearly bear the artistic mark of each nation, formed from their own cultural roots and customs. Each ethnic group has a line of paintings in worship with different characteristics from drawing lines, colors to the number of paintings in each set. In the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, ethnic groups such as the Tay, Nung, Dao, Cao Lan, and San Diu all have the custom of using painting in worship in rituals

and different names: *Tao*, *Then*, *Put* masters (The Tay, Nung), and *Tao* master (The Dao). When performing the rituals of worship, the worshipers bring paintings in worship and there must be someone to carry the paintings in worship for them. After performing the rituals of worship, some of the paintings were burned but most of them were kept. Many paintings in worship were passed on from this *Tao* master’s generation to another one in the same lineage. The content of the painting shows the primeval concept of human beings about the universe and the philosophy of the relationship between human life and everything in the universe according to Taoist worship. At the same time, it creates a pervasive power in educating people to raise awareness about the worldview and the spiritual things, to bring people to believe in the natural world and to guide goodness for people.

Traditional beliefs culture plays an important role in the community life of ethnic minorities in The

Northern Mountainous Region. Each ethnic minority community here has a belief system that expresses the unique cultural identity and contains many traditional cultural values of each ethnic group. However, the cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the region still has common characteristics and interplay due to the regulation of economic, cultural and social conditions of the region. These ethnic minorities have traditions of ancestor worship and practices of life cycle beliefs and polytheistic beliefs, they worship many different gods. In the practice of rituals in traditional beliefs, worshipers have a very important role in the community. Rituals follow throughout one's life from birth to death. Since a fetus in the womb, the mother had to abstain a lot. When being born, every person, whether of different ethnic communities,

3.2. Achievements in the conservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam today

In the renovation period of the country, with a focus on developing a market economy, promoting industrialization and modernization of the country and strengthening international integration, the Government of Vietnam advocates building an advanced culture, imbued with national identity and along with the goal to build the Vietnamese culture and people to develop comprehensively, towards truth, goodness and beauty, imbued with the national, humanistic, democratic and scientific spirit. Culture truly becomes a solid spiritual foundation of society, an important internal power that ensures sustainable development and firmly defends the Fatherland for the goal of wealthy people, strong country, democracy, fairness and civilization. (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014) The Government of Vietnam affirms, "Beliefs and religions are the spiritual needs of a part of the people, (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1991) everyone has the right to freedom of belief and religion (Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013) and everyone is created favorable conditions to exercise their freedom of belief. (Law

undergoes rituals of full month and naming ceremonies. When reaching adulthood, there are adulthood and wedding ceremonies. When getting sick, there are rituals to pray for cures, and in old age, there are funeral rituals. At the same time, ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam also have community ceremonies with special festivals full of cultural characteristics of each ethnic group. Moreover, the people here also have many types of singing, dancing, playing music and telling, which are indispensable cultural and spiritual activities in festivals and practicing traditional beliefs in the life of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam's provinces.

of beliefs, religion 2016) Accordingly, the Government has advocated promoting positive values and factors in religious and belief culture. Religious activities closely linked to the nation, with the ideology of goodness, humanity, manhood, progress and "good life and good faith" are encouraged. (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014)

With the policy of building a culture "united in the diversity of ethnic group communities in Vietnam", the Government of Vietnam has issued many policies, schemes and solutions to preserve and promote the cultural values of ethnic minorities such as: Scheme on *preserving and promoting the culture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam* with the mission to preserve and selectively inherit and promote the quintessence of traditional culture, to build and develop new cultural and artistic values of ethnic minorities. (The Government of Vietnam, 2003) Project of *Collecting, preserving and promoting the intangible cultural heritages of the Vietnamese people*. Project of *Investigating, researching and preserving a number of typical villages and festivals of ethnic minorities* (The Government of Vietnam, 2005, p. 408) Scheme of *preserving and promoting the culture of ethnic minorities in Vietnam till 2020*. (The Government of Vietnam, 2011) Programs, schemes and projects

have identified general goals, specific goals and key missions in conservation and promotion of positive values in traditional culture of ethnic minorities. Besides, *National Cultural Heritage Laws* (amended and supplemented in 2009) (Congress, 2009) and guidelines on implementing the *National Cultural Heritage Laws* have been issued. Although the programs and projects of preservation of traditional cultures of ethnic minorities and Law on Cultural Heritage have not directly mentioned traditional beliefs culture as a system to be preserved, they also introduced the regulations on preservation and promotion of some traditional cultural values inherent in the traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities, such as language, literature, performing arts, paintings in worship, festivals,... This is an important legal basis to carry out the State's management role for cultural heritage, including cultural heritage in traditional beliefs, to create unity in all activities in order to increase the effectiveness in protecting and promoting cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region. Thereby, the localities have applied in accordance with the specific situation of ethnic minorities to flexibly preserve and promote traditional beliefs culture.

The local authorities in the Northern mountainous provinces have always been proactive in implementing the State's policies, issued many legal documents and developed orientation programs, plans and schemes for each specific period in the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural values. Researcher Hoàng Thị Lan affirmed: "Over the past years, along with the guidelines and policies of the Party and State, cultural activities and festival beliefs of ethnic minorities have been paid attention to rehabilitating and promoting vigorously." (Hoang, 2020) As a result, the preservation and promotion of cultural values of traditional beliefs have achieved some initial results:

3.2.1. Having implemented statistics, reviewed, classified and made documents about festivals linked with traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities

The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam's provinces have clearly identified the number and types of intangible cultural heritages, including the existing traditional religious festivals in the province for the management, conservation and protection of those values, contributing to the development of culture, tourism and socio-economic activities of the province. Having educated to improve the professional capacity of officials engaged in cultural work at all levels in identifying and evaluating the overall status of heritage festivals of ethnic minorities. Having unified the method of inventory, how to fill in the inventory sheet and make a list of inventory of festivals and cultural heritages in the locality.

According to the results of the general inventory, there are about 37 festivals in Dien Bien province currently stored in two forms: held regularly (21 festivals) and existing only in memory (16 festivals), and 94 festivals in Cao Bang province. In terms of names of festivals of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, they are called in ethnic languages - the subject of that festival heritage. The name often reflects the content, purpose and meaning of the festival such as the "Xen ban" (village worship) of the Thai people, village worship of the Hmong people and New rice celebration of the Si La people, drinking bamboo shoot wine of the Kho Mu people. In terms of scale, the majority of religious festivals linked with traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in this area are in small and medium scale, taking place in the village and lineage space, organized by each village in a separate way, suitable to the conditions of the village or lineage. (Le, 2015 a)

Based on the survey, Cao Bang Province has restored a number of traditional religious festivals of the Tay and Nung people, such as: *Nang Hai* Festival the traditional wedding ceremony of the red Dao. Son La Province has restored and organized a number of festivals: *Khai hạ* festival of the Muong people, *Buffalo Fighting Festival* of the Hmong, Thai people, *Traditional Boat Racing Festival* of the Thai people for the entertainment needs of the people

during holidays. Dien Bien Province has completed a scientific dossier to propose the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to consider and put 3 festivals on the list of national intangible cultural heritage, including: *Hoang Cong Chat* Temple Festival, *Kin pang then* Festival of the white Thai, *Tet Nao pe chau* of the black Hmong. At the same time, Dien Bien province has proposed the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to consider and put 9 festivals on the list of intangible cultural heritage: *Xen Muong festival* and *Han Khuong festival* of the Thai, *Tu Su festival* of the Hmong, *Praying for rain ceremony* of the Kho Mu, *Cam ban ceremony*, *Cam muong ceremony* of the Lao, *Ga Ma Thu ceremony* (village worship) of the Hà Nhì people, *Xên Pang A ceremony* of the Khang, *Cung bản ceremony* of the Cong, *Hoang Cong Chat temple festival*. (Le, 2015 a) At the same time, collect and study festivals in need of urgent protection such as: *A Lenh Ghi Po festival* (village sweeping ceremony) of the Phu La, *Cung Ban Vuong ceremony*, *Fire jumping festival* of the Dao, *Gau Tao festival* of the Hmong, *Uych bich giac festival* (drinking bamboo shoot wine) of the Kho Mu, *Pang Phong festival* of the Khang. These are festivals that are no longer held and only kept in the memory of very few artisans, the restoration and conservation will face many difficulties if the artisans die.

3.2.2. Having well guided, managed and ensured the security for religious activities in traditional beliefs

Along with propaganda and thorough understanding of the regulations on the management and organization of festivals, the Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism of the provinces in coordination with departments, agencies, branches and functional units have strengthened and organized inspections and examinations of provincial-level festivals. Having promptly rectified inadequacies and negatives in religious festivals linked with traditional beliefs such as superstitious activities, fortune telling, card shaking, hustling and burning incense indiscriminately at the monument. In general, festivals take place according to

regulations, most of them has reduced the cumbersome rituals, attracted many artisans to participate in, contributing to preserving and promoting the traditional cultural beauty of the ethnic groups. (Le, 2015 a) Many Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam's provinces have done a good job of protecting the landscape and environment of relics and landscapes where the festivals take place. Having ensured the security, order, and absolute safety in terms of fire and explosion prevention at the relics during the festivals and practices of traditional beliefs.

3.2.3. Having ensured a space for cultural activities and a festive environment to help people psychologically stabilize, to make the spiritual life diverse and healthy and to promote cultural traditions of ethnic groups

To practice traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities to show the tradition "when drinking water, remember its source" and satisfy the needs of healthy beliefs of the people such as: nature-related beliefs and fertility beliefs that are manifested through rituals of worship, festive activities, cultural games, and cuisine. Forest worship is manifested through *Worship of the forest god ceremony* of the Phu La, *Xen ban* and *Kin Lau No ceremonies* of the Thai, *Worship of the water god* of the Lao people in the *Water Splashing* festival, customs for feeding labor tools or worship of buffaloes's souls during the *Cau mua* ceremony, etc. Activities of the festivals satisfy the spiritual, entertainment needs, needs for enjoying culture and arts of the people. Coming to festivals, people are allowed to create and enjoy special art and culture forms associated with religious and community activities of the people of ethnic minorities. With the trend of socializing conservation activities, promoting festive culture, the people have organized and created community cultural activities and enjoyed cultural values such as singing folk songs and *Then* in *Kin Pang* ceremony of the Thai, *Xoe dancing* in the ceremony of *New rice celebration*, *Praying for rain* ceremony, jumping stalls during the *Praying for rain* ceremony of the Khơ Mú and folk games such as *Con*

throwing and *To ma lẹ* of the Thai, *Tu Lu* of the Hmong, *Hatching turtle* of the Lao. Therefore, the local cultural industry has built traditional festivals as an environment to preserve the traditional culture of ethnic groups such as beliefs, folk literature (legends, ancient stories), traditional costumes, national cuisine, folk art and theater performances (folk songs, folk dances), folk games and knowledge. In addition, localities have applied, exploited and promoted cultural values of festivals to enhance the solidarity and cohesion among members of the family, community, village and society. Through the meetings, preparing and conducting rituals in the festival, participating in community activities or folk games, people feel closer, more attached and united. Traditional festivals of ethnic minorities contribute to tourism development, creating jobs for employees, initially contributing to socio-economic development of the localities.

3.2.4. Having collected, compiled and published documents about music (ritual music), sacred dances and paintings in worship in practices of traditional beliefs

The spiritual and religious life of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam is very rich and colorful, so the types of music, sacred dances and paintings in worship in traditional beliefs are also very diverse. Types of music, sacred dances and paintings in worship directly serve rituals of spirit and soul worship, or are in a fixed order of cultural and spiritual activities related to beliefs. Many localities have collected and restored and published documents of some typical sacred songs and dances with high artistic value such as: *Then* singing of the Tay, *Bell and Turtle dances* of the Dao ethnic group. The restoration of sacred songs and dances in festivals linked with traditional beliefs makes the festival even more cultural. Many dances that have been revived now have vitality and are accepted by the community, like the dances in *Le tet nhay* of the *Dao quan Chet* (Dao with tight trousers), *Leave blowing festival* of the Hmong, *Moi dance festival* of the Muong and *Festival* of the Cao Lan.

Along with the inventory, many valuable artistic paintings of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region have been collected and stored carefully in museums. A number of paintings in worship have been displayed, attracting the attention of numerous researchers and the people, contributing to raising awareness of preserving this very unique type of culture. For example, some of paintings in worship of the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam's ethnic groups are kept at the Museum of Fine Arts or provinces' museums such as paintings of the Red Dao (Lao Cai province), paintings in worship of the Giay, paintings in worship of the San Diu in Thai Nguyen province.

Over the years, the authorities of the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam's provinces and districts together with the people began to develop the some types of musical instruments and restore traditional festivals such as the gongs of the Mùròng, the gourd lute of the Tay, Thai and Nung. During the *Khai Ha* Festival of the Muong (Hoa Binh province), more than 400 ancient gongs were played with the deep melodies of gongs. The gongs that resound during the festival have awakened the pride of the traditional cultural values preserved over the past of Muong Bi region.

3.2.5. Have made scientific researches and proposed practical solutions in preserving and protecting cultural values of traditional beliefs

The research, collection, classification and evaluation of traditional beliefs have been carried out by many localities. Many scientific works and projects have been researched and have proposed practical solutions, for example the project on Investigation, restoration and collection and preservation of Bell and Turtle dances and some local theatre performances related to the Dao festival in Phu Tho province; Project on Investigation, restoration and collection and preservation of the Muong folk theatre performances in Phu Tho province. The research results have established scientific arguments for the preservation and restoration of traditional sacred dances which have been lost or faded. The project on Inventory of Mo

Muong Heritage in Hoa Binh Province in 2012 aims to implement well the preservation and promotion of Mo Muong Heritage. The scientific project on “Studying and compiling program and textbook in Thai script in Son La province” and a number of educational seminars and experiments to maintain and develop the spoken and written language for the Thai have been organized. The project on Investing in building cultural institutions, public welfare works, tourist resorts, entertainment centers, squares, parks, libraries, museums and cultural houses in Son La province till 2015 and Translating, preserving and promoting the value of ancient Thai books in Son La province in the period of 2012-2014, and the project of ancient Thai books in 2012 at the Provincial Museum was implemented as well.

3.2.6. Have fostered and trained about different types of music, sacred dance, language and writing in traditional beliefs culture for the younger generations

Every year, the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces organize classes for fostering and training various types of music and sacred dances for the younger generations of the ethnic groups here. Encourage, favor and honor artisans, people with meritorious services, who are enthusiastic in preserving and transmitting ethnic minority cultural arts. Typically, artisans are invited to train in *Then* singing for the grassroots nucleus and to teach ancient *Then* songs. At the same time, in collaboration with districts and communes, there is a movement of *Then* singing, enthusiastic artisans with ancient *Then* have organized a training course for the younger generations. In addition, the Ethnic Arts delegation has researched and collected folklore materials of ethnic groups, *Then* songs and *Then* dances to build programs and performances in service of the people. Moreover, *Then* songs and *Then* dances are also taught in the school’s curriculum. The Faculty of Culture and Tourism of Viet Bac College of Arts and Culture (Thai Nguyen Province) teaches traditional *Then* music in parallel with *Then* with popularized new lyrics and (original) classical *Then*. In recent years, applying the

research, collecting, and oral methods combined with modern teaching methods, the Faculty has trained effective courses, exploiting many typical *Then* songs, music and dances.

Some unique arts values of sacred dances have been taught or associated with cultural activities, tourism and created the consensus of the people involved. Luong Van Tri High School (Lang Son Province) has invested in the purchase of 18 gourd lutes, 2 sets of music bumpers and invited officials at the District Cultural Center to teach *Then* dance and *Then* songs to grade 10 and grade 11 students in extracurricular activities. The cultural performance team of Tan Lap Tourism and Cultural Village (Tuyen Quang province) performs unique *Then* dances and *Then* songs for tourists. Besides, the language and writing of some ethnic groups are also studied, collected, compiled and put into teaching in schools such as: Books for learning the Hmong language, the Tay language and the Dao language which officials and public servants working in ethnic minority areas are the learners. The old Department of Northwestern Culture has collected and recorded nearly 2000 titles of the original Thai script with many extremely rich content.

3.3. Limitations in the preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in The Northern Mountainous Region today

3.3.1. Some policies and laws that are not clear, lack of synchronization, with many points that are not close to the practical religious life of ethnic minorities

The cultural values of traditional beliefs bring a very specific aspect, both in the religious structure and in the field of culture. In order to preserve and promote them in practice, it is required to have a clear and synchronous policy between the law on beliefs and the law on culture and in accordance with the practical beliefs of people. Although Law on Beliefs and Religions 2016 has mentioned the issue of preservation and promotion

of cultural values of traditional beliefs, they are still in general: "Religious activities and festivals must be preserved and promoted the fine traditional cultural values of the nation". The Law on Cultural Heritage defines intangible cultural heritage "is a spiritual product associated with the relevant community or individual, objects and cultural space, has historical, cultural and scientific values, shows community identity", however, while referring to different types of cultural heritages, there is no mention of cultural, religious heritage (Law on Cultural Heritage in 2013) In the policies of preserving and promoting traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities, there is also no direct mention of the issue of preserving and promoting cultural values of traditional beliefs. This creates a gap of legal corridor to manage and invest resources to preserve and promote traditional cultural and religious values of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam in particular and the country in general.

The lack of clarity of policies and laws on preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs is caused by awareness. Traditional beliefs are considered by the policymakers and managers to contain certain fine cultural values, but mainly contain superstitious elements, and backward customs of the ethnic minority people. In particular, the element of "belief in the supernatural" in traditional beliefs is often considered a wrong perception, anti-science, reflecting the backwardness of ethnic minority people. Due to this perception, the policymakers only mentioned the task of preservation of "fine cultural traditions", that is, a preservation of cultural values that they consider appropriate to modern society and are afraid of directly mentioning cultural values of traditional beliefs - which they consider to be associated with a wrong perception and backward practices. Meanwhile, the most important factor in traditional beliefs for ethnic minorities is belief in the supernatural. In fact, the cultural values of beliefs are created, preserved and used by them first of all to express their belief in the supernatural, to

show a respect for divine beings, ghosts, devils,... The policy makers advocate to preserve and protect cultural values of traditional beliefs, simultaneously stigmatize people's belief in the supernatural resulting in only preserving the outside aspect or body, without soul and, therefore, not attracting people to participate in. On the other hand, some policies are designed in the form "one intervention is suitable for all", while the characteristics of each region, locality, and ethnic group are very different. This not only reduces the relevance of the policies, but also limits the creativity and effectiveness of policy implementation at the local level." (Nguyen, 2019) "The institutional system and cultural officers in ethnic minority regions have been formed, but have not met the essential requirements for synchronous operation and management to promote and develop in wide areas with many difficulties on dispersed population and complex topography." (Ngo, 2004)

3.3.2. The inventory, review and management of traditional religious festivals of localities have not been effective

Investigating, collecting and gathering in writing, video tapes, films as a basis for restoring festive activities that have been faded, rituals that have been lost and are at risk of being lost face many difficulties. Some localities restore their festivals but lack of experience, do not have enough knowledge about traditional beliefs, or persons who know about these festivals are now old and do not remember. Due to the policy of preservation of cultural values of traditional beliefs that is not clear, and due to fear of restoring the elements considered "superstitious, backward customs", many local governments stepped forward to restore traditional religious festivals without any discussion and agreement with the communities. As a result, some festivals when restored, did not attract the participation of large numbers of ethnic minorities. For example, when the Dao ethnic people's buffalo sacrifice festival was restored in Lai Chau, because it was considered that the buffalo sacrifice to the gods was customary, not suitable for modern society, thus the festival

organizers replaced real buffalo with wooden buffalo to perform the ritual of sacrifice. The Dao ethnic people believe that action was deceiving the gods, thus they did not participate. (Le, 2015 a)

On the other hand, the team of cultural officials from district to commune levels is insufficient in number and lack of capacity to guide, organize and restore festivals and cultural and festive activities linked to traditional beliefs. Therefore, leading to the fact that the festival is not organized according to the traditional ritual, imbalance between the ceremony and the festival parts. Many traditional festivals do not pay attention to traditional folk games but games that do not follow the traditional customs, fading the traditional festival identity. The process of preserving traditional religious festivals to develop tourism in some localities in the region has not been carefully done, not selecting and conserving typical cultural values of the festival but restoring backward elements, making the festival become anti-cultural. The preservation process has not handled well the relationship between tradition and innovation, between nation and modernity in order to restore traditional humanitarian festivals, eliminate remnants and backward customs contrary to the national fine traditions and customs.

In addition, the management and organization of festivals and practices of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities also appear to be loose, unclear, ineffective and formalistic.

In festivals of a religious nature of ethnic minorities, there has not been close coordination between departments and branches and it reduced the effectiveness of the State management. The authorities of some localities have not done well in propagating and managing festivals according to the law, have no effective measures to prevent in time all superstitious activities, taking advantage of festivals to do business unjustly. In many festivals, activities of offering preparation, burning hell money, votive paper and purchasing costumes for festivals take place gimmily and formalistically. Many festivals have invested too much in the

performances, celebrated huge parties and playing for many days, affecting the production season, causing cost and waste, affecting the lives of people. In the days of the festival, a number of activities such as Fortune telling, hiring for praying, gambling games are organized, affecting the peace and freshness of the traditional festival environment. In the process of organizing and managing festivals, due care has not been paid to protecting the natural environment, ecological environment, and maintaining a healthy cultural environment. The sacred space of the festival is not kept intact as before partly due to the negative impact of the market mechanism, partly due to the demand for food, accommodation and travel and spiritual needs of the tourists participating in the festival. Large scale festivals attracting a large number of people participating face many difficulties in managing and organizing the festival. In addition, a number of bad elements take advantage of the festival to disrupt the social order, political security, causing disorganization within the village, and dividing the great unity block in the community.

3.3.3. The review and statistics of the values of folk arts in the traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous region are still sketchy and incomplete

The review and statistics of cultural values of traditional beliefs are still formalistic, not following clear criteria, some cultural and artistic values are gradually fading. The types of folklore, traditional art and literature have been researched and collected but have not been synthesized, compiled scientifically and systematically. According to the inventory and survey results in some northern mountainous provinces of the Departments of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the trend of *Then* singing is gradually fading. In Lang Son province, there was a lack of investment capital and no one can teach *Then* singing. Some communes of the province still maintain some traditional *Then* singing groups but each year these teams only perform 3-4 sessions. Every year, Tuyen Quang province organizes many classes for local Tay and Nung

children and invites artisans to teach but few participate, especially young people. Mr. Nguyen Vu Phan, Director of the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Tuyen Quang province, said: The Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Tuyen Quang province and he are very worried because Hát Then (Then singing) is gradually lost in oblivion in his homeland. For addressing this situation, every year, the province organizes many classes for children of the Tay and Nung ethnic groups in the locality and invites artists to teach them, however the number of learners are not much, especially very few young people. (Le, 2015 a) The *Mo* songs of the Mường are undergoing fading and going to be lost, especially the mode of performance, oral and melody transmission performance in funeral *Mo* songs. The *Mo* masters often manipulate the holy and devil spirits to important the content and action of their rituals, which is a limitation and the cause of backward customs.

Due to the time and the changes in history along with the low awareness of preserving the cultural values of the people, a huge number of paintings in worship of the people here are no longer available. Currently, due to the available materials, paintings in worship of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region (Giay, Tay, Nung) are no longer made from natural materials, the copying and remaking paintings in worship also decline. After worship, some paintings in worship were burned or buried in the worshippers when they died, so many old paintings in worship were gradually lost over the years.

At present, the language and writing of some ethnic groups have been narrowed in using. These types of folk literature and ancient books have been lost, many of which are only kept in the memory of the elderly or passed on by word of mouth. In remote areas, people speak Thai and Hmong languages but very few people know how to write and read Thai and Hmong words, so precious remedies and customs are gradually lost.

The number of artisans in the arts and culture fields related to beliefs is less and less and there is

no successor. The younger generation only incompletely knows or do not care, so they are unable to absorb and underestimate the ancestral cultural heritage. Old artisans able to play gourd lute and remember *Then* songs and ancient Thai translators are old and few in number. Tuyen Quang province has more than 40 cultural people of the Tay ethnic group who are responsible for transmitting and maintaining *Then* singing at the grassroots level, but very few people know how to sing *Then* songs. (Le, 2015 a) Besides, policies to support folk artisans and people doing ethnic cultural studies have not been given adequate attention. Staffs of functional branches such as culture, museum and library are still lacking and weak in professional knowledge. Forms of cultural and religious activities are simple and not widespread. Socialization and propaganda about traditional culture of ethnic minorities have not been really tight and profound.

4. Recommending solutions

Preservation and protection of the cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam in the current period are posing many issues that need to be resolved such as: To resolve conflicts between the requirements on preserving and promoting good values of festivals, traditional beliefs and the lack of uniformity in management institutions and low awareness of officials and people; resolve the relationship between preserving and promoting good values in festivals, traditional beliefs, and preventing and eliminating backward customs and practices. In order to improve the effectiveness of the preservation and promotion of traditional religious and cultural values of ethnic groups in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam, to overcome the limitations and resolve current issues, some basic solutions need to be implemented as follows:

4.1. To raise official authorities and people's awareness about preservation and promotion of traditional cultural and religious

values of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region

In order to promote the positive factors in the traditional religious culture in the coming time, first of all, it's necessary to raise *official authorities and* people's awareness about the beliefs of ethnic minorities and the awareness of preserving and promoting cultural values in religious life. (Stan Steven, 2016) It is necessary to delineate and eliminate backward factors and evil customs that hinder the development of beliefs and to ensure the freedom of belief of the people by fighting against plots to take advantage of beliefs into bad purpose. However, it is required to propagate so that the officials, especially those directly managing traditional beliefs, are aware of the significant role of belief in the supernatural force, respecting traditional beliefs, avoiding prejudice, and discrimination against beliefs. For ethnic minorities, to enhance propaganda to raise people's awareness and pride of the good values in religious culture, to raise people's sense of responsibility and enthusiasm in preserving and promoting good traditional cultural values. (Borrini-Feyeraben, 2004) At the same time, education for building a cultural and religious lifestyle, eliminating and improving the old and outdated lifestyle should be conducted regularly in family, lineages, schools, villages and markets. To pay attention to promoting the influence and spread of the village elders, village chiefs and prestigious people in the family and lineages.

4.2. To perfect mechanisms and policies on preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities in northern mountainous provinces

Mechanisms and policies are the legal framework for the State to carry out the management of preservation and promotion of traditional cultural and religious values of ethnic minorities. At the same time, it is also a legal basis for ethnic minorities to promote internal strength in maintaining, preserving and promoting the cultural identity of the nation in traditional beliefs. (UNESCO, 1982) In order for the system of

mechanisms and policies governing this activity to be increasingly completed, it's necessary to supplement the provisions on beliefs in general and traditional beliefs culture in particular in the State legal documents. At the same time, the policy of preserving and promoting cultural values of traditional beliefs is required to be in harmony with the real religious life and ensure the respect of people's right to freedom of religion.

The development of policies on preserving and promoting the traditional religious culture of ethnic minorities must be in line with traditional beliefs and serving ethnic minorities themselves in order to be accepted and come into the people's real life. (Sobrevila, 2008) The policy of preserving and promoting the cultural values of traditional beliefs needs to be supplemented with some additional contents in order to enhance the state management over this activity. The policy should pay attention to the coordination between state management agencies in terms of culture, religion and beliefs. "It is necessary to review, adjust and supplement to complete existing policies and survey and promulgate new policies, in order to meet the requirements of developing ethnic areas and ethnic tasks in the new period." (Nguyen, 2019) In addition, the issue of preserving and promoting the cultural values of traditional beliefs in ethnic minority communities in the northern mountainous region needs to have a policy of gathering and promoting the subject role of the people, village elders, village chiefs, "mo" masters and worshipers. (Francioni, 2004) At the same time, it is significant to develop policies to encourage research, collection, preservation, transmission and introduction of intangible cultural heritage of the Vietnamese ethnic minority community; to build a contingent of intellectuals, writers and artists in ethnic minorities and give policies to encourage them to return to work in their localities.

4.3. To strengthen and innovate the state management of traditional religion of ethnic minorities

The Northern mountainous region is home to 32 ethnic groups and each ethnic group has its own specific customs and beliefs that create a cultural and religious diversity, greatly impacting on the people's cultural life, productive labor and living. In order for the religious activities of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous provinces to promote its culture and positively affect social activities, the State needs to strengthen and innovate the State management more, from innovating the propaganda and raising people's awareness to organizing and implementing policies, innovating the State management mechanisms, methods and personnel in this field. (Rizzo, 2006) According to researcher Nguyen Thi Hong Yen, in order to promote education and propaganda for raising awareness for ethnic minorities, overcoming traditional and psychological barriers, it is necessary to "build communication programs suitable to factors of culture, gender, age and ethnic group; develop effective communication models in the communities; expand and diversify communication activities to raise awareness of party committees, authorities at all levels and people about education in poverty reduction, and socio-economic development; strengthen the dissemination of laws and information on ethnic minority policies and mechanisms in general and education-related policies for ethnic minority regions in particular." (Nguyen, 2019)

4.4. To train key human resources for the preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

To review and properly evaluate the actual status of the personnels engaged in preservation and protection of religious culture in ethnic minority areas as a basis for planning, creating sources, training, fostering, arranging and using officials. To implement the planning and create human resources for the preservation and promotion of traditional religious culture associated with the development strategy of strategic mountainous areas. In particular, it is necessary to select quality human resources, should be indigenous ethnic minorities who deeply

understand the traditional religious culture of their ethnic groups, overcoming the phenomenon of planning and focusing too much on a large ethnic group. "It is indispensable to attach importance to training and fostering teachers specializing in culture; to provide policies to detect, foster, use, treat and respect officers in the field of culture and art; employ talented and virtuous people; to adjust salaries and allowances for those who work in specific arts." (Nguyen, 2019) The training and fostering officials engaged in the preservation and promotion of religious culture of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region must be placed in relation to the psychological and cultural characteristics of ethnic groups.

Researcher Bui Quang Thanh - Vietnam National Institute of Culture and Arts Studies offers many groups of solutions, which emphasize the problem of respecting history, voice, writing and tangible and intangible cultural heritage of each community, in the spirit of considering the culture of the multi-ethnic national community of Vietnam as a unified and diversified culture, it is necessary to establish an urgent and definitive plan in investing in expenses, professional personnel to survey, list, classify and synchronously research on history, voice, writing, manners and customs, unique cultural values of the ethnic groups. Then, localities need to well implement bilingual teaching in ethnic minority schools (Vietnamese and ethnic minority language), focus on ethnic groups with large numbers of population, etc. (Mai, 2019) Therefore, it is important to strengthen bilingual education programs for ethnic minority children and local language training for the Kinh teachers in ethnic minority regions, recruit more ethnic minority teachers, allow ethnic minority languages to be taught and used as a medium of instruction in schools, support cultural education programs of ethnic minority groups. (Nguyen, 2019).

4.5. To enhance the coordination between agencies in charge of cultural activities and agencies in charge of religion and traditional beliefs in preservation and protection of cultural

values of traditional beliefs ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

Religious activities occupy a large part of cultural activities of ethnic groups, their daily activities are mostly “sacred” and are related to traditional beliefs. (Koichiro Matsuura, 2005) For ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam’s provinces, religious activities are an essential need. Researcher Tran Huu Son - Vietnamese Folklore Association has raised many lessons learned in the process of preserving and promoting cultural values of ethnic minority people on the basis of research in the Northwest region. According to him, it is required to respect traditional beliefs of the community of ethnic groups, not consider religious beliefs to be superstitions, prohibit learning ancient words, prohibit “cap sac” festival, etc. These abolishing actions break culture, etc. (Mai, 2019) Traditional beliefs have been deeply rooted in the way of thinking and customs, so they affect the material and spiritual life of ethnic minorities. In that way, activities of preservation and promotion of religious cultural values of ethnic minorities are closely related not only to the field of culture but also to the field of religion and belief. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this field, it is necessary for the state management to have close coordination between agencies in charge of cultural activities and agencies in charge of religion and beliefs.

4.6. To enhance the role of grassroots cultural institutions in preserving and protecting the cultural values of traditional beliefs ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam

To strengthen the building and development of material foundations in the system of grassroots cultural institutions. Grassroots cultural institutions should be built and developed in accordance with the characteristics of each region and each ethnic group in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam. The characteristic of the cultural and religious institution is to perform the dual function: to perform the cultural function, and to maintain and improve

the belief in the gods. Therefore, compared to other everyday cultural institutions (such as cultural houses, village halls, villages), religious cultural institutions have a unique characteristic. Thus, attention should be paid to building the operation regulations of this type of institution in order to maximize the effectiveness in the service of cultural development, preventing the intrusion or arising of superstitious and vulgar phenomena. At the same time, to fully exploit the frequency and efficiency of activities of grassroots cultural institutions in order to preserve and promote cultural and religious values.

4.7. To connect and integrate the tasks of preserving and protecting the cultural values of traditional beliefs in socio-economic development programs and target cultural programs in the Northern mountainous provinces

In the socio-economic development of ethnic minority areas, it is necessary to pay great attention to helping people reorganize their lives in the direction of civilization, creating conditions for the traditional beliefs to change to adapt to the times. In building a new countryside for ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region, it is necessary to pay attention to helping people reorganize their lives in the direction of ensuring the connection with tradition and towards the civilization values of the times. (Dudley, 2008) When the people’s life is properly organized, the material life is full and the spiritual life is abundant, the people will promote the role of a cultural creative subject, not only preserving traditional beliefs but also promoting them in community and social life. (Vander Auwera, 2013) And so, traditional beliefs will be able to transform naturally in the direction of preserving their identities but with more humanity and more advanced, both meeting the spiritual needs of ethnic minorities and contributing to enriching the national culture of Vietnam.

4.8. To promote the socialization of preservation activities, promote cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region

The socialization of cultural activities is aimed at mobilizing all social resources into cultural activities, meeting the increasing the people's demands of enjoyment and creativity, along with the country's socio-economic development and integration. (Peacock, 2008) For the *cultural values of traditional beliefs* of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region, the socialization of preservation activities is an activity to allow people to directly participate in the process of creating, preserving and enjoying material and spiritual values from thousands of generations through their types of traditional beliefs and folk festivals. At the same time, to strengthen the management of the socialization of preservation activities, promoting cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region. Mobilizing the socialization capital of the population community, especially the local people, encouraging the development of the socialization of cultural activities and mobilizing all classes of people to participate in preservation and protection cultural values of traditional beliefs with the motto "the State's support and the people's contributions" must ensure full and strict observance of all current provisions of law.

5. Conclusion

The traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam reflects the people's aspirations for a stable society and a prosperous life, containing many unique traditional cultural values of the ethnic minorities. In recent years, some types of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region have been strongly restored and revived. However, along with the restoration of traditional cultural values, traditional beliefs' activities of ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region have also increased and raised many backward customs which are no longer appropriate with new social conditions. In recent years, the provisions of law.

Government and authorities at all levels in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam have adopted many policies and measures to preserve and promote fine cultural values of traditional beliefs, and simultaneously eliminate any outdated customs and practices that are no longer suitable. As a result, many cultural values of traditional beliefs have been preserved, promoted vigorously and positively in the spiritual life of ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam. However, preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of the ethnic minorities in the Northern Mountainous Region of Vietnam still have many limitations, such as: lack of proper awareness of the important role of belief in traditional beliefs as well as incorrect identification of cultural values in many cases in traditional beliefs; some policies and laws that are unclear, have a lack of synchronization and are not suitable with the real life and religious needs of people; having an embarrassment in the restoration and management of religious festivals,... In order for preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs to be effective, it is required to focus on renewing point of view and awareness towards: Traditional beliefs and their cultural values are created by the ethnic minority, as spiritual asset of the people and of the ethnic minority communities, thus they must be the real subject in preservation and protection of their cultural values. On the basis of that perception, preservation and protection of cultural values of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities requires the implementation of a system of synchronous and real solutions, of which the most important is a solution to promote the subject role of ethnic minority communities. The State does not act on behalf of ethnic minority communities, but only supports and facilitates activities of people and communities as well as perfects the legal framework and guides people and communities to practice beliefs, preserve cultural values of traditional beliefs in accordance with the prov

6. References

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