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### Some Good Culture and Belief Values of the Mong People in Vietnam

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#### Abstract

The Mong people in Vietnam today are one of the ethnic communities that play a huge role in the strategy of protecting the homeland, territorial sovereignty, and have a rich cultural and spiritual life. In recent years, Mong people's culture has had a lot of influence and adaptation, creating richness and diversity, but also some complicated

developments. The work of preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of the people is considered one of the leading tasks and solutions of important significance, determining the success of the goal of sustainable economic - society development of ethnic minority areas.

**Keywords:** Values, Culture, Beliefs, Goodness, Mong People, Vietnam

#### 1. Introduction

Currently, the concept of belief is understood in different ways, but they all agree that belief is people's admiration and belief in supernatural, imaginary, sacred, and mysterious forces. In everyday life, when mentioning beliefs, people often think of social phenomena of sacred and mystical nature, expressing beliefs about an invisible world, about life after death, about the existence of the souls of the dead and the impact of this force on people's current lives. This phenomenon is associated with the customs, practices, habits, and traditions of a community or nation; reflects the lifestyle and behavior of people as well as the history of cultural development of that ethnic community.

From a psychological perspective, belief is a socio-psychological phenomenon that represents the belief of a certain community of people about the invisible world, about supernatural forces and the ability of this force to influence human life through the system of worship rituals; The process of forming and developing beliefs is closely linked to the historical development of the ethnic community, so it reflects the actual life of that community.

#### 2. Research Overview and Methods

##### 2.1 Research Overview

In Vietnam today, there are many research projects on the culture and beliefs of ethnic minorities in general and the Mong ethnic people in particular, specifically:

- The work "Preserving and protecting the cultural identity of ethnic minorities in Vietnam" compiled by the group of authors Nong Quoc Chan, Vi Hong Nhan and Hoang Tuan Cu was published by the ethnic culture publishing house in 1996 in Hanoi, collected many articles about the cultures of ethnic groups, the exchange and continuity between the past, present and future in the development process of ethnic cultures. Thereby, we provide suggestions on the issue of protecting and promoting cultural heritage, contributing to building an advanced Vietnamese culture rich in national identity.
- The work "Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam" is used as a textbook for students and trainees in the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities by author Tran Binh and published by Lao Dong Publishing House in 2014, mentioning the general issues about Vietnamese ethnic groups (From names (ethnic names) to economic life characteristics (livelihood), cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities, such as: South Asia, Thai - Ka Dai, H'mong-Dao... The work is the result of many years of field research by the staff and lecturers of Hanoi University of Culture.
- The work "Cultures of ethnic groups in the Northeast of Vietnam" by author Hoang Nam, published by the University of Culture in 2004, mentioned economic activities, material culture, and intangible cultural of the ethnic groups living in this region, from which the author has outlined the cultural development trend of ethnic groups in the Northeast region in the coming time.

However, with the desire to preserve and preserve the good values of culture and beliefs of the Mong people, the author chose this topic to clarify the rich development of Vietnamese ethnic culture in general and the culture and beliefs of the Mong people in particular.

## 2.2 Research Methods

The author uses a combination of theoretical research methods, collecting and synthesizing data from scientific works and articles related to the research issue published in scientific journals. At the same time, the author researches the work of preserving and promoting the traditional cultural values of the people, which is considered one of the leading tasks and solutions of important significance, determining the success of the goals for sustainable socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam today.

## 3. Research Results

### 3.1 Culture and beliefs of the Mong people in Vietnam

With a population of more than 800,000 people - ranked 8th in the list of ethnic groups and residing mainly in the high mountains in the North and West of our country, the Mong people have a very rich culture, rich in identity and long-standing tradition.

The Mong people living in Vietnam belong to the language group: Mong-Dao. The Mong people (from Guizhou - Yunnan - Guangxi - China) migrated to Vietnam about 300 years ago, divided into many waves until the end of the 19th century. The Mong people entered Vietnam for the following reason: In history, Chinese feudal dynasties, in order to gain the right to rule the country, caused many brutal and bloody wars, oppressing many ethnic groups (including Mong people), causing Mong people to migrate everywhere.

The first point they set foot on was Meo Vac on the Dong Van plateau (Ha Giang), the beginning of Vietnam. Therefore, the Mong people living in Vietnam consider the Dong Van plateau as their ancestral homeland. Mong people are divided into 4 groups: Hoa Mong (Mong Lenh), Black Mong (Mong Du), Green Mong (Mong Chua), White Mong (Mong Du). Although there are 4 different Hmong groups, their language and culture are basically the same. The differences between the groups are mainly based on women's clothing.

The Mong ethnic group is distributed throughout the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam: Quang Ninh, Lang Son, Bac Can, Cao Bang, Ha Giang, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and a few in Phu Tho. After the liberation of the South (1975), a part of the Mong people migrated to live in the Central Highlands provinces. The Mong people in Vietnam have a close relationship in origin, language, and culture with the Meo community in Laos, the Mong people in Thailand, the Miao people in China and Myanmar.

Although residing at altitudes from 700m to 1,500m, scattered everywhere in the mountains of Northern Vietnam and the Central Highlands, the Mong people still maintain their unique cultural identity in the national community in Vietnam.

Mong people eat twice a day, three times during the off-season; eating cornmeal is the main thing, eating rice is secondary. Food includes stir-fried beans and vegetables and

soup. During holidays, when there are guests in the house, they are often treated with chicken and wine. It is common for them to smoke waterpipe tobacco with hookahs. If the host personally puts tobacco into a cigarette and invites the guest to smoke, it is considered a gesture of respect for the guest. During the year, Mong people celebrate two big festivals: New Year at the beginning of the 12th lunar month (each month has 30 days, the end of 12 months is Tet), Tet on May 5 - Doan Ngo Festival. In Viet Bac, Mong people also celebrate Tet on March 13 and June 13 every year. In Lao Cai and Yen Bai, Mong people celebrate Tet on July 7 (burning votive paper for ancestors). Doan Ngo Festival (May 5) is the most important day, the day of family reunions and meetings with people at a lavish wine feast.

The areas where the Mong people live often have markets. The fair is scheduled to meet every 6 days (in some places, every 5 days). The exchange of goods is based on an object for an object, with very little use of currency. The market is both a place to exchange goods and a meeting place for ethnic people. The love market held once a year (Sa Pa love market, Khau Vai love market) is a beautiful and unique cultural feature of the Mong people.

Traditional costumes of Mong women include: Skirt, shirt with chest slit, camisole, with a cloth covering the front and a small square of cloth covering the back, belt, head wrap, and leggings. The skirt has a truncated cone shape, many pleats, and wide flares. White Mong women wear white skirts, low-cut shirts with embroidered patterns on the arms and back bibs. White Mong women shave their hair around it and leave it in a large crown at the top of their head, wrapped in a wide-brimmed scarf. Flower Mong women wear indigo-colored dresses with embroidered flowers on the hem. Wear a shirt with slits in the armpits, on the shoulders and chest with colored fabric, embroidered with snail patterns. Flower Mong women have long hair wrapped around their heads, then also wrapped in wigs. Black Mong women wear indigo-colored skirts with printed patterns on the hem, shorter than Flower Mong skirts, with slits in the middle of the chest, embroidered patterns on the arms and shirts. Green Mong women wear indigo tubular skirts, the hem of the skirt embroidered with cross-shaped patterns in the shape of squares, the shirt is open at the chest, slit straight to the left, buttoned with one button, and the sleeves are covered with colored fabric pieces. red and the cuffs have embroidered patterns. Green Mong girls let their hair fall shoulder-length. When they get married, they wrap their hair on top of their head and use a horseshoe comb to pin their hair forward, covering their head with a scarf.

Nowadays, Mong women's costumes have changed: Mong women in Sa Pa wear short and narrow pants, double-breasted outer jackets with stiff necks and patterns. Son La White Mong women wear long pants, a white blouse inside, and a traditional shirt outside. Flower Mong women wear shirts with open armpits.

Men wear shirts with armholes and chest slits, usually with 4 pockets, and 4 buttons. Leg-cut skinny pants. Mong Sa Pa men wear double outer jackets, chest slits without sleeves, and embroidered neck patterns.

Mong people have jewelry: Earrings, necklaces, bracelets, copper rings, silver rings, gold rings. If there are 2 rings on the hand, that person is married or married. Women like to use umbrellas with beautiful colors, which can both protect them from rain and sun and act as jewelry for themselves, creating charm.

The Mong people have a diverse and rich spiritual life in terms of customs, religion, beliefs, writing, language, culture and arts.

Mong people's houses are built relatively uniformly. The house is built on the ground, consisting of 3 rooms and 2 wings. In the middle is the altar, on both sides are the kitchen and the bedroom. The sleeping chamber is not arranged on the same level as the altar. Rich houses are solidly built, with wooden pillars placed on boulders carved into the shape of lanterns or pumpkins, with tiled roofs and boarded attics. The houses of the poor are simply built, with curved columns, bamboo or plank walls, and thatched roofs. The house has 2 to 3 doors open, the main door facing the altar. Livestock barns are separate areas.

Mong people's marriage is through buying and selling and there is some belief in religion. During the engagement ceremony, Mong people believe that whether a couple is compatible or not depends on the "seeing chicken feet" offering ceremony. A girl is valued through material values such as meat, wine, silver, opium... At each wedding, the bride's family usually requires from 60 to 120 silver coins, from 60kg to 120kg of pork, from 60 to 120 kg of pork, 60kg to 120kg of alcohol and some opium. The more material value the girl's family requires from the boy's family, the more perfect the girl is in terms of talent and beauty. In marriage relationships, aunts, elders, aunts, uncles are allowed to marry each other. The special thing is that his son is allowed to marry her daughter, which is a good thing in the family (good water is not allowed to flow into people's fields and because I have left a precious thing here, I must get it back). The Mong people have a custom that the brother-in-law is allowed to marry the sister-in-law (if the brother dies), whereas the sister-in-law has the right to marry the brother-in-law to preserve the property and be responsible for raising the brother's grandchildren. If the husband's brother is already married, the sister-in-law can only be a concubine. In cases where the family does not have a brother-in-law, the sister-in-law is allowed to marry a cousin. The custom of wife-stealing is very common: A group of young men of 3 to 5 people organize a meeting to kidnap a girl and bring her home (whether the girl is willing or not). At the time the girl was robbed, all relatives, family, and brothers were not allowed to participate in the rescue. After two days of stealing his wife, the groom's family sent someone to pay an honorary fine for stealing his wife and inform the girl's family about the incident. After that, the two families discussed and determined an auspicious day to hold the wedding ceremony for the couple.

About the worship beliefs of the Mong people: Since ancient times, the Mong people have always attached great importance to worshiping grandparents, parents and ancestors. In religion and ancestor worship, the Mong people always believe that "all things are spiritual" (meaning everything has a soul), humans always have two parts, the body and the soul, two parts are closely related to each other. When you die, the body dies, while the soul still exists in its own world, so organizing a funeral for the deceased is very important and is organized meticulously and complicatedly.

In the past, Mong people's funerals were usually held for 5 to 7 days, but today it has been reduced to 2 to 3 days. When a family member dies, they invite someone (a shaman) to perform the ritual of making offerings and singing to open the way, and then carry out the shroud (the outer garment is

made of linen to be reunited with the ancestors). The way each place behaves is different: There are places where the dead are placed on a "stretcher" hanging in front of the altar or on a bench placed across the door. There are places where the dead are placed in coffins but the lid is not covered so that the dead person's face can be easily seen. While singing the opening song to the story of the chicken guiding the dead back to their ancestors, people bring a dead chicken with its feathers intact and place it in a bowl of cornmeal below the dead person. At funerals, Mong people use flutes and drums to perform the ceremony of sending the dead back to their ancestors peacefully. When someone dies, there must always be a worshiper to guide the dead person back to their own world. After the song, there will also be the blowing of the flute. The song of the funeral farewell to the dead is also very complicated, lengthy but has a profound meaning. For the Mong people, when an old person dies, they often hold many funerals, kill many cattle and poultry, and are forced to slaughter large buffaloes, cows, and pigs each time the funeral is held. This is also a reason why the Mong people abandoned their customs and practices to follow religion. Because many poor families do not have buffaloes or cows to slaughter their elderly parents when they die. When a person dies, three or more funerals are often held, especially for the elderly. Only men perform funeral rituals for the dead, and sons are allowed to hold funerals for their parents, so the Mong people highly value brothers and clans. Especially when it comes to men and women, because only when there is a son, there is someone to worship, when a daughter gets married, she no longer belongs to the family line and has no relationship with her ancestors. When a girl gets married, she belongs to the husband's family, so she often doesn't take her seriously.

After the burial, if it is a man, people stick 9 branches and leaves, and women stick 7 branches to distract the dead person's soul from returning to harm family members. The worshiping ceremony brings the dead person's soul back to the ancestors after burial or lasts one or several years.

According to the Mong people's concept, the body can die but the soul will forever exist in its own world. Therefore, the Mong people believe that their ancestors (the deceased) always supervise, care for and protect their descendants from being harmed by evil spirits, and always bless their descendants with good luck in business...

Only men in the family are allowed to approach the altar to burn incense to worship their ancestors, showing their descendants' respect. Mong people remember the merits of their ancestors by posting paper in each family or setting up an altar as a place to worship their ancestors. Ancestor worship is highly valued by the Mong people. The place of worship or altar is the place where ancestors reside during holidays, New Year, weddings, naming ceremonies, and ceremonies to enter a new house, which directly affects the prosperity and decline of the whole family. According to custom, on the altar, Mong people paste a piece of paper, then stick on 3 bunches of chicken feathers. On holidays and New Year, families change the paper and clean and repair the altar to welcome ancestors back to celebrate with their children and grandchildren. The housing architecture of the Mong people is usually a land house and a ground floor house. Houses usually have 3 doors, one main door and 2 side doors on both sides of the house. In the house, the place to worship ancestors, house ghosts, and door ghosts are considered the most sacred and important places. Not

everyone in the family is allowed to burn incense and worship there, only the male owner is allowed. The head of the family holds a worship ceremony, invites ancestors to enjoy the ceremony and bless their descendants with good health and prosperity.

Through research on the culture and beliefs of the Mong people, it has been shown that the family organization of the Mong people is a small patrilineal family (consisting of two generations of parents and children living together). The head of the family is the man, who is responsible for taking care of family work: Going to the fields, praying to ancestors, welcoming shamans, and participating in the assigned work on behalf of the family, which any woman do not have the right to act for or on my behalf. In Mong families, people value sons more than daughters, so a family with many sons is a source of pride in the village. If there is discord between husband and wife in the family, the daughter-in-law can only seek refuge with a neighbor and is not allowed to return to her parents' house. If a daughter-in-law wants to visit her parents, she must ask permission from her husband's family and have her husband take her home. When a couple divorces, the woman is not allowed to return to live with her parents but goes to live with the official's house until she remarries. If a widow does not want to marry her husband's brother but instead marries someone else, all her assets must be left to her husband's family. In the family, the daughter considers herself a guest, freely moving and eating without having to abstain like the daughter-in-law in the family. Dividing assets, sons are divided equally, parents keep a portion of the assets equal to their sons, and daughters who get married are given a dowry by their biological parents. In general, Hmong family life is relatively harmonious, husband and wife stick together like a shadow, when going to the market as well as working in the fields and visiting paternal and maternal relatives, the husband goes first and the wife goes behind. In family relationships, grandparents and uncles play an extremely important role.

In addition, the Mong people also have a treasure trove of folk tales that occupy an important position such as: Worshipping ghosts, love, weddings, bridesmaids, orphans... And musical instruments such as: Flute, leaf trumpet, lip organ and decorative patterns on women's costumes are beautiful works of folk art, the bright natural beauty of the highlands.

Thus, the spiritual life of the Mong people has been mixed with Catholic morality and Mong people's morality, as a new cultural element incorporated into their spiritual life.

### **3.2 Some solutions to promote the good values of Mong ethnic culture and beliefs in Vietnam**

The Mong ethnic group is one of five ethnic minorities with a population of over 1 million people. Like other ethnic minorities, the Mong people in our country have many good traditional cultural values, including unique types of folk beliefs imbued with national identity. Up to now, some types of folk beliefs of the Mong people have had a positive impact on building and developing the personality of new people. Therefore, along with research to confirm the values of folk beliefs and achievements in preserving and promoting traditional cultural values, it is necessary to focus on awareness and solving some practical problems is emerging.

Reality shows that, in addition to the recovery of folk beliefs and rituals, superstitious rituals of spiritism, fortune-telling, and card-seeking... have recovered quickly, even in many places tends to increase. Meanwhile, forms of belief such as agricultural beliefs, god-worshipping beliefs, community-related beliefs... are somewhat declining. In particular, in the Mong community, changes in beliefs and religions have occurred, "strange religions" have appeared and quickly dominated life. If the folk beliefs of the Mong people highly value their ancestors, some Mong people now worship God. Some Mong people have abandoned the customs of funerals, weddings and especially the flute associated with the festival and replaced it with prayer. Funeral and wedding procedures are carried out according to religious rituals and many people also abandon the altar and do not worship their ancestors or parents...

Faced with the situation of eroding ethnic culture and changing folk beliefs that are happening strongly in the Mong people today, in order to promote the positive value of folk beliefs in building new people, it is necessary to focus on implement well some of the following solutions:

**First of all, it is necessary to diversify forms of propaganda to make the Mong people deeply aware of the cultural values and good ethics of folk beliefs for building a new cultural life and new people in the Hmong community today.**

It is necessary to combine traditional and modern propaganda forms and methods; proactively research and classify traditional cultural values, publish traditional cultural publications of ethnic groups; strengthen the promotion of typical folk beliefs of ethnic groups on mass media.

**Second, gradually introduce traditional cultural values and folk beliefs into educational and cultural activities in schools.** It is through educational activities that increase students' understanding of culture and society, fostering love for the homeland and pride in ethnic culture. Also through educational activities, all forces will be mobilized to participate in protecting and promoting cultural values. Relevant sectors need to coordinate in developing and issuing direction and guidance documents for this activity; Compile documents to introduce traditional culture completely; Training teachers and administrators.

**Third, increase investment in organizing traditional religious festivals that have positive value for the lives of the Mong people.** It is necessary to direct, support and encourage localities where many Mong people live to restore good traditional festivals to serve socio-economic development, and valuable cultural and religious activities in the forming and developing personality for the young generation, strengthening strong community relationships. At the same time, gradually fight to eliminate all manifestations of deviation in preserving and promoting traditional beliefs as well as taking advantage of beliefs and religions to harm the great national unity and ethnic culture.

**Fourth, proactively integrate traditional cultural values of the Mong people and folk belief values into activities to build a new cultural life in the Mong community.** In order for the cultural and moral values of folk beliefs to continue to penetrate into the life of the Mong community and promote their positive values, it is necessary to create a cultural environment that honors these traditional treatment is especially necessary. Therefore, it is necessary to proactively integrate traditional cultural values in general

and folk beliefs in particular in cultural activities and activities in the Mong community with different levels and forms; regularly link the content and forms of traditional cultural activities and folk beliefs with activities to build a new cultural life of the Mong people.

*Fifth, promote the role of the ethnic minority community in general and the Mong people in particular in propagating and promoting traditional cultural values, including folk beliefs.* Reality shows that no one can preserve cultural values better and more effectively than the owners of those cultural forms. Folk beliefs cannot stand outside the cultural activities of the community, or stand outside its cultural space. In order to maintain the vitality of folk beliefs that have been preserved by the community, first of all, those cultural values must be preserved as they are, honored, and immediately recognized by the people in the life of the community. Therefore, it is necessary to behave, preserve and promote the value of folk beliefs with national pride, with understanding, passion, and appreciation for beauty.

#### 4. Conclusion

Folk beliefs of ethnic minorities are a very important part of traditional culture; reflects the rich spiritual life of ethnic minority communities. Promoting the value of folk beliefs needs to be done in the spirit of "clarification", both promoting good values and eliminating outdated customs. To do that, it is necessary to carry out many forms and methods, in which special attention is paid to improving the quality and effectiveness of propaganda activities, educating traditional cultural values, and integrating construction new cultural life with preserving and promoting good traditional cultural values, preventing and repelling bad customs,... contributing to building a rich, progressive and creative cultural and spiritual life. A healthy environment to foster the soul and develop human personality, especially the young generation in the new era.

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