

The variation of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, Vietnam today

Le Van Loi

Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 135 Nguyen Phong Sac Street, Cau Giay
District, Hanoi, Vietnam

Corresponding author: Levanloinpa@yahoo.com

Abstract

Vietnam is a country of many religions. Traditional beliefs are an essential component of Vietnamese spiritual culture since they are rich and diverse in appearance and strongly connect to people's social lives. Numerous ancient habits, practises, rituals, and beliefs of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, particularly in the Central Highlands, have undergone modifications in recent years. There are numerous expressions of variance in traditional religious life in each ethnic minority community's social existence. Traditional religious practises among ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands are changing to adapt to and be more relevant to modern living. This essay briefly explains ethnic minorities' traditional religious lives in the Central Highlands and the changes in their traditional religious lives due to the contemporary process of socio-economic development, globalisation, and international integration.

Keywords: Variation of beliefs, ethnic minorities, Central Highlands, Vietnam

Introduction

Traditional beliefs are one of the elements of Vietnamese spiritual culture with a very tremendous and various appearance (Loi, 2021) . Numerous ancient habits, practises, rituals, and beliefs of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, particularly in the Central Highlands, have undergone modifications in recent years. In each ethnic minority community, there are different manifestations of variation in traditional religious life in the 'community's social life. The traditional religious life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands is changing to adapt and be more appropriate to real life. Certain traditional beliefs held by ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands have a tendency to recover, develop, and reinforce the meaning of human life for individuals and village communities (Daskon, 2010). Many new and progressive cultural values have been acculturated into people's religious life, making the cultural and religious value system richer and more humane. Particularly, the variation in the religious life of ethnic minorities here is clearly shown in the variation in the quality of belief and religious ritual practice, the reduction or receipt and interpretation of religious rituals, variation in the traditional religious practice team, the acquisition and permit and variation of folk religious activities of other ethnic groups and the receipt and variation of religious activities into religion activities, etc. With the help of previous works, this article will briefly describe the traditional religious life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and the variation in their traditional beliefs as a result of the current process of socioeconomic development, globalisation, and international integration.

Research Results

Overview of the religious life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands

The Central Highlands region includes 05 provinces: Kom Tum, Gia Lai, Dak Lak, Dak Nong and Lam Dong and has a natural area of about 54,477 km² (accounting for 16.8% of the 'country's area) with a population of more than 5.7 million people (Nguyen & Huynh, 2021). The Central Highlands region is home to 49 ethnic communities, of which 12 are local, and 37 have migrated from elsewhere. Ethnic minorities living in the Central Highlands include 375,825 people, accounting for

7.48%, with 08 ethnic minority communities accounting for 0.01% of the population. Ethnic minorities with large population are Gia Rai, Bana, Ede, Xo Dang, Gie Trieng, etc. Since ancient times, ethnic minority populations in the Central Highlands have developed their own particular religious and social customs and ways of life inside the gorgeous mountains, forests, rivers, and streams. With a simplistic and rudimentary idea of divinity, most ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands practise polytheism. The traditional beliefs of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands are polytheistic and are associated with production-related and life cycle rituals. Specifically:

Polytheism (Yang): This is a regular occurrence in the religious activities of the Central Highlands ethnic minority. The people worship various Gods, and each ethnic community has its manner of referring to them. The Bana people call the God of heaven "Yang" as "Ong Bok" (Bok) and call "ba da" (Ya). In addition, the Bana people also worship Gods such as God of Thunder (Bok Glaih), God of Mountain (Yang Kong), God of Water (Yang Dak), God of Tiger (Da Dak Kla), The Good (Dan No), The Evil (Da Cau).

Additionally, the Gia Rai (Jarai) people worship a variety of gods, including the God of the House (Yang Seng), the God of the Village (Yang Alabon), and the God of Water (Yang Penla). These are gods near the people and have a deep interaction with their lives. Additionally, the Gia Rai people worship various other deities, including the God of Earth, the God of Thunderbolt, and others.

The Ede people believe in "animism", so the God of heaven (Yang), Gods and souls are identical. Therefore, the Ede people think humans have Mngat and animals have "Yang". "Yang" can help people but can also harm people. The Gods (Yang), the souls, protect and govern human life. The more precious the object, the more substantial "Yang" is. When harming things, people must console "Yang". People want to be protected and supported by the Gods, with good crops, they must be grateful and respectful to the Gods (Yang) and the soul. The concept is that everything has a God (Yang) and a soul, so the Ede people worship many gods, in which the Sun God occupies a particularly important position in the religious life of the Ede people. (Dao, 1959).

According to the Mnong, the world is composed of three layers: the heavens, the earth, and the people. On each layer, there are residing and governing Gods. The heavens are the abode of the supreme Gods who take care of crops, such as: the sun God, the God of Thunderbolt, the Wind God, etc. The ground layer is ruled by numerous Gods, including the Forest God (Bo Krong), the God of the Stream, the God of the Mountains (Yok Nor), and the God of Trees. The underworld layer is ruled by Gods who handle the dead's possessions and by two Gods who evaluate terrestrial people to classify their souls after death.

Additionally, the Mnong people worship the God of the House (Yang Sang), who is responsible for looking after and protecting the house, the God of the Village (Yang Ala Bon), and the God of Water (Yang Ia), who are responsible for protecting villages and people's lives and are worshipped at the wharf and at the foot of the mountain, respectively. The God of the King (Yang Po tao) is the God who always blesses the people with favourable weather for good. The Brau people worship the Sun God (Yang Mat ngay), the Forest God (Yang Bri), the God of Water (Yang Duc), etc. The Xo dang people worship the God of thunder, the God of thunderbolt, the God of water, the God of rice, etc. The God of rice (Sori) has the most important role in the religious life of the Xo Dang people. The Co ho people worship the Sun God, the Moon God, the God of mountain (Yang Co P'Nom), the God of water (Yang Da), the God of Forest (Yang Bre), the God of Earth, the God of Rain (Yang Mhiu) and the God of Rice (Yang Koi), etc.

Production-related religious rituals: Since ancient times, ethnic minority tribes in the Central Highlands have been associated with mountains and forests and productivity in highland farms. As a result, most of the Central Highlands ethnic minorities, such as the Ede, Bana, Mnong, Xe Dang, Gie Trieng, Brau, and Ro hum, all worship Gods who preserve their harvests. Each ethnic group has rituals and celebrations linked with each stage of the upland rice plant's life cycle, from planting to maturity, yield to the warehouse, and warehouse to fields. The agricultural belief system of the people is carried out during the whole farming season (from March to December every year) and aims to pray to the Gods and give thanks to the Gods for bountiful harvests. In particular, the new rice ritual of the people here is the most

important one. This ritual is associated with festival activities for all people in the village to have a party and have fun after a tiring farming season.

The Ede people have numerous rituals associated with agricultural production and cultivation activities, including finding land, clearing fields, burning fields, raking weeds, seeding, planting roots, praying for fullness, praying for rain, worshipping the God of wind, praying for rice bloom, worshipping before harvest, new rice festival, a festival for good harvest, worshipping the water wharf, worshipping the rice spirit, worshipping the granary, and worshipping the rice cooker and rice container (Thuy, 2021). Each year, the Ede people perform a rite of worshipping the water wharf to express their village's appreciation for the water Gods. The water wharf worshipping event is often held in March or April of each year, after the crops have been entirely harvested, and lasts three days. The Ede people contribute to the water wharf to express gratitude to the God of water for blessing them with good fortune in the previous year, praying for favourable weather and crops, and restoring and cleaning the water wharf. The ritual of worshipping the water wharf is one of the Ede people's long-standing beliefs. It serves to educate the community about conserving pure water supplies and unite the village's solidarity. " In addition, the Ede people also have a ceremony to worship the God of Wind which is one of the agricultural rituals held annually at the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season, usually the end of November and the beginning of December every year, within 03 days. The Ede people carry out this ceremony to pray for a bountiful harvest and avoid strong winds and storms. The Ede people wish to remove the poisonous wind, welcome the good wind, and remove evil ghosts. According to custom, during the 03 days of the festival, people in the village are not allowed to contact any strangers, not allowed to go anywhere, and only stay at home to prepare for this ceremony. On the day of worship, people give out a few trees to represent the upland fields, for the God of Wind. The ceremony of worshipping the God of Wind consists of 01 small jar of wine and 01 pig.

People also make a Neu pole and hang it on the Neu pole with a rope to hunt elephants and a stick to control elephants. The Ede people believe that the wind is as strong as elephants, so they must have tools to hunt elephants to treat the God of

Wind, wishing for a year without strong winds and tornadoes. In addition, the Ede people believe that everything has a soul, so when starting a productive crop, people will hold the Weed raking ceremony in April or May every year and take place within 01 day. The offerings include 01 pig, bought together by villagers. The worshiping ceremony takes place at noon and a wizard wears a red brocaded robe and rakes the grass, symbolizing the beginning of the production season, and everyone in the village participates in this raking ceremony.

After worship, people will come down to weed the fields at the place of worship and then return to the village leader's house to have a party and fun. The Ede people believe that, in order for a bountiful rice crop, they must perform the ceremony in the early crop to pray for favorable weather before planting rice. During the ceremony, people often abstain from going far because of a fear of encountering bad things. A unique feature is that the Ede people do not play gongs during the initial ceremony due to a fear of strong rain and lightning. Additionally, the Ede people perform a new rice offering ceremony to commemorate the arrival of a full warehouse of rice to their home. The offerings may vary according to the economic circumstances of each family. The new rice offering ceremony's scope and duration also depend on each family in the village. When making new rice offerings, every family invites relatives in the village to attend their ceremony and party. This creates the spirit of community solidarity in the village, to pray that the following year's crop will be good, and 'birds, animals, etc won't attack it.

The Mnong people also hold a new rice festival. It can be said that this is the most significant ritual and festival of the year of the Mnong people. Depending on the amount of rice harvested, they will celebrate the new rice festival on a large or small scale. According to the majority of the Mnong people, when they harvest 100 or more rice papooses, they will organise a big celebration, usually with a buffalo, pig or a cow (if any family can't afford it, they will offer 02 chickens with 04 sufficient legs) ([Supriadi et al., 2021](#)). The Mnong people will build a traditional long house in the fields during the rice harvest to store rice. A very tall Neu pole will be erected outside the long house, made from a giant bambusa procera. There will be a Kring bird on the top of the Neu pole (according to legend, this bird brought rice seeds to the Mnong people).

During this worship time, the Mnung people will visit their fields to express gratitude to the ground and water supply for providing them with a bumper crop. After delivering rice to their home, they will slaughter an offering animal, mix blood with tube wine, and then pour it over the rice papooses, smearing the blood on the tube wine jar's mouth and on the house's door. Following the ceremony, everyone joins in on the celebration. For the Ma people, their new rice festival is also held after each family's harvest season (around December of lunar calendar). When people celebrate the new rice, they also prepare offerings to display on the pre-made altar in front of the yard. There is always an ear of rice made from a young bamboo tree at the altar and offerings such as wine, pig's head, boiled chicken, etc. The worshiper will read a request to the God of rice and other Gods to attend to witness the sincerity of villagers. When making vows, the worshiper always intends to return the villagers' sacrifices to the God of rice who has protected them during the previous year; prays for continued protection in the following year; and pledges to pay a larger ceremony if the harvest is good. During the ceremony, the sound of gongs is always played to increase the sacredness. Everyone eats, drinks, and dances all night when the offerings are finished. New rice ceremonies alternates in each family; when a family completes their ceremony, another family will organise it, and so on until all the houses in the village, at that time, the festival to celebrate new rice in that year is completed.

The Ma people also have a new standard form of rice offering to the whole community, called Ai R'hai, or buffalo stabbing ceremony. The communal worship event in this community occurs approximately once every 3-5 years, depending on the community's economic circumstances, and the offerings include buffalo, pig, chicken, and tube wine. This is a celebration that attracts the entire community. To celebrate the Ai R'hai village festival, people must prepare many offerings. One of the indispensable artifacts in this festival is a Neu pole. This is a unique symbol of the new rice festival. The Neu pole is built to send "news and invitations" to the Gods to attend the festival with the community. Each decorative item on the Neu pole show even numbers with the concept of completeness and fullness.

The Neu pole is buried in front of the community house's yard, symbolising the interaction between people and Gods and the community's sympathy for the

continued existence and development of ethnic groups. The Bana have an opening ceremony for a new production season, a pot offering ceremony, a rice planting ceremony, a washing ceremony (washing bad things so that the rice soul does not imitate), a summoning ceremony (calling the lost rice soul), new rice ceremony, rice plucking ceremony, warehouse closing ceremony. The Gia Rai have a rice planting ceremony, rice blooming ceremony, new rice ceremony, and rice warehousing ceremony. The Mnong people have a field clearing ceremony, axe thanksgiving ceremony, field burning ceremony, rice warehouse opening ceremony, rice worship before leaving the warehouse, field banning ceremony, rice planting ceremony, new rice ceremony, rice plucking ceremony, and rice bathing, weather praying ceremony. Ethnic communities of the Xo Dang, the Co ho, etc. all have rituals to sacrifice to the Gods related to each stage of each rice production cycle.

Religious rituals related to life cycle: Ethnic populations in the Central Highlands believe that humans go through three significant stages from birth to death: birth, adulthood, and death. As a result, they have rituals for each step of the life cycle that represent their beliefs and understanding of the cycle. The Ede ethnic group has rituals during the birth, such as a ceremony when a mother is pregnant, a ceremony before giving birth, and a ceremony for the midwife. After a baby is born, a naming ceremony is held about a day to a month. Offerings for this ceremony include a chicken and a jar of wine. Especially, it is a taboo to break the chicken intestines during the preparation, if not, bad things will occur descendants. Another chicken is requested in case of breaking. Additionally, there are ceremonies for the soul, which include wearing bracelets for a full month, a full year (one crop season), three years (three crop seasons), years (seven crop seasons), and fifteen years (seven crop seasons) (15 crop seasons). Adulthood (17 crop seasons), praying for peace, weddings, praying for the health of the young couple, praying for annual family health, praying for homeowner health at 50, 60, 70, and 80 years of age, funerals, grave abandonment ([Province, 2021](#)).

The Mnong people have ceremonies for pregnancy, foetus protection, praying for mothers after childbirth, opening eyes for baby, umbilical cord cutting, thanksgiving for raising and caring for grandparents, naming and soul for baby, hair cutting and ear piercing, ear blowing, tooth filing, adulthood, and a buffalo party to

repay the Gods. In particular, the M'nong's tooth filing to determine the age of maturity is also held with many rituals. In terms of marriage, the Mnong people have the principle of not marrying people of the same clan and there is no taboo in marrying people of different races. Criteria for choosing a life partner are also based on the responsibility and diligence for girls and hardworking, good hunting for boys. After the two parties get to know each other and want to 'marry, the groom's family must take the initiative to perform rituals such as proposing marriage and wedding.

The Mnong people also have the custom of "wire connection". Once the woman or husband dies, they will perform this ritual in order to preserve family property and nurture children more effectively. Additionally, the Mnong have a sense of a good and a bad death. Those who die in a dignified manner will be laid to rest in the community cemetery and offered chickens, pigs, and buffaloes. Those who die in tragic circumstances will be buried at the scene of death; individuals are not permitted to bring the deceased body home for fear of bringing bad luck to the family and community. People with lousy ends will not have visitors, just family members who come to organise a very simple funeral. After the burial is complete, relatives must find a strong stream to bathe their belongings. Doing so, they believe, will wash away the bad luck. In the funeral of people with good death, their coffin is made from china trees, silk-cotton trees, etc. Before taking the tree for making a coffin, a chicken must be offered, and vows shall be made, using the dead person's name to make a vow to ask for the tree to be cut down. Those who attend the funeral are given pork or buffalo meat to take home as condolences to the bereaved family. After 07 days from the burial date, they will make offerings only once at the grave and then abandon the grave. The Mnong people believe that the dead will go to another world, where there are villages and live like ordinary people.

The Ma people have rituals related to the life cycle Naming ceremony, adulthood ceremony, marriage ceremony, and funeral ceremony. In particular, when a baby is about seven days old, his family will have a naming ceremony. The Ma people use grandparents' names three generations apart to name their baby. The reuse of the ancestors' name is to educate that their children must know their origin, and partly to hope that grandparents will help them be healthy and talented. Offerings for

the naming ceremony are usually pigs or chickens, and tube wine. In the past, the Ma people frequently invited the entire community to attend the naming ceremony and observe their child's birth and growing (Hickey, 1982). The Ma people believe that children aged 13-14 are considered adults. This age is just a guess, calculated from the time the child was born until the next 13-14 rice harvest seasons and also based on their body development for boys and the appearance of the first period for girls. To indicate a child's adulthood, the Ma people have a ritual that forces the child to pass. It is a teeth filing ritual. This is an individual ceremony. The ritual is attended by community elders, a shaman, and family members. ' After organising an offering to Yang (God) with offerings including boiled chicken and tube wine made by the shaman, the person receiving the ceremony lies on a mat for experienced people in the community to file. They use a small saw blade or a special stone to file the 4 front teeth in the upper jaw to the gums. All community members have to do it if they don't want to be laughed at by the community and can't get married. After completing, the person receiving the ceremony is recognised as an adult and has the right to find a partner to marry and establish a new family. The Ma people have the principle of not marrying people of the same clan. The Ma people attach great importance to the working ability of community members. Health, hunting ability, farming ability, hard work, handicraft, etc. are necessary factors for a person to work in an agricultural environment. The Ma people live entirely on agriculture, so labour-related elements are emphasised in marriage. The Ma people believe that there are two worlds, the living and the dead. The world of the dead is an intangible realm inhabited by ghosts and is regarded as a sacred space for the living. The world of the dead is synonymous with the world of ancestors. Their forefathers and mothers will live in a hallowed place after death. Death is the soul of the living being's return to the ancestral world. As a result, when a family member dies, the survivors are always sad for the deceased, as they will never see each other again. As a result, people attempt to keep the deceased in their home as long as possible. Families with a healthy economy can keep the dead for longer than seven days, usually between three and five days. According to Ma's theory, the longer the deceased are kept in the house, the more the living's boundless regret for the dead. " During the time of keeping the dead in the house, they perform rituals, prepare pigs and chickens to invite

the shaman to bring the soul of the dead back to the ancestors, to invite relatives and neighbors to witness the passing of the dead.

In the life cycle ritual system of some ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, grave abandonment is the most important ritual. Grave abandonment is the last ritual where the living see the dead off to their everlasting residence (ghost village), completely removing the connection between the dead and the living. Ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands believe that only after the grave abandonment ceremony can the dead's souls be reincarnated into another life to start a new life. Then, the living can be assured of fulfilling their obligations to the dead. Therefore, grave abandonment is the biggest and most enjoyable ritual, meticulously prepared from creating tomb houses and sculpting statues to preparing offerings to offer sacrifices to the dead (Vorng, 2011).

Line of talismans, magic: Most of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands still believe in talismans and magic. They think that talismans command others and spread disease or death to others at the will of the talisman owner. Moreover, they also believe in the phenomenon of Krasue, a demon with a human shape, gutting people and eating corpses. Currently, the above-mentioned religious activities have many changes compared to the traditional ones, but to a certain extent, those beliefs still significantly impact the lives of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands.

Variation of traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands today

Variation of beliefs and practices in social life

The spirit beliefs are the most clearly retained in the ancient belief systems of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands; they are the most prominent among animist and magical beliefs. The types mentioned above of beliefs have become ingrained in the traditional cultural identities of the Central Highlands ethnic minority. The quality of ethnic minorities' beliefs and practices has shifted in the Central Highlands. In conventional society, ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands follow the belief of "Animism", with a dense system of Gods governing people's production activities and spiritual activities in the community. Gods reside everywhere and human life depends entirely on the Gods' will. Besides the supporting Gods, some gods can harm people. Therefore, people believe that if people want to be

helped and blessed by the gods in terms of health, plants, animals, etc., people must be respectful and practice rituals of worship in various forms of sacrifice.

Simultaneously, there are numerous sophisticated types of taboo and innumerable rituals and festivals dedicated to worshipping and anticipating the Gods, in the hope that the Gods will assist people and the community. Nowadays, most ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands no longer believe in "Animism", so the quality of belief and trust in the traditional Gods of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands is gradually extinct. Belief in Gods related to activities in human life has become less sacred, so sacrifice rituals also lose their meaning with less religious practice activities in the community's social life. Currently, only 39.19% of people believe that Gods help people in life such as the God of the mountain, God of the forest, God of the river, etc., 11.49% of people believe that there are punishing Gods, and 59.46% of people do not believe in Gods to bless or punish, 18.24% of people have faith in sacred objects, and 80.41% of people do not believe that sacred objects can bless or punish people (LoPresti et al., 2016).

Additionally, the living environment of ethnic minorities has changed, with agricultural cultivation and production becoming less reliant on the natural environment, altering numerous beliefs held by ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands about the God of Forest, God of Water, and God of Tiger, and so on. The Gods are increasingly losing their exalted status in the spiritual lives and beliefs of the people here; some of them are now only found in folk tales, epic works, and stories told by elders in the community. Gods such as the God of Trees, the God of Tiger (Ae Jung) in the Ede people's sacred forests, and Ma nap (the ghost of slain newborns) in the Hre people's sacred groves are currently found in village elders' traditions. Historically, the Neu pole was seen as a point of connection between heaven and earth, a sign of the Gods, in the traditional idea of ethnic minority in the Central Highlands. Today it has decorative meaning in sacrifices. In addition to the traditional festivals, the Neu pole is erected by the people when there is a common activity in the village, such as organising the People's Solidarity Day, public celebration or National Day. Village elders and village head allocate the steps of cutting, decorating, and constructing the pole, and they occur naturally without any ceremonial sacrifices or taboos, as is customary while raising the Neu pole (Iizuka, 2012).

Today, ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands are also less influenced by the concept of the existence of Krasue, a talisman or magic in life. Therefore, when someone in the family or village is sick or ill, people will seek scientific treatment instead of methods of healing caused by divine forces or doma, talisman, or magic on human health. However, there is still a fear of Krasue, talismans or spells that has not yet ended in the religious life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands today.

Due to the extinct beliefs, the traditional religious practices of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands have also changed. Currently, religious rituals among the people have reduced significantly, even though many rituals are only performed according to custom with a less spiritual element. During festivals and traditional Tet of ethnic communities, only 2.09% of people pray to Gods of the forest, river, mountain, etc., 4.73% of people pray to Gods when they are sick, 11.49% of people pray to Gods when they build a new house, and 77.03% of people do not perform praying rituals on festive occasions. Additionally, 52.7% of people pray on holidays, Tet, 4.73% pray when they are ill, and 34.46% pray for no reason (Van Dao & Van, 2020). Besides, when practising rituals related to the life cycle, rites of some rituals have been omitted, such as naming, bad luck removal, health, adulthood, wedding, peace, longevity, funeral, grave abandonment, etc.

For example, in the wedding ceremony of the Gie Trieng ethnic minority community, one of the indispensable wedding gifts that the bride's family asks the groom's family to bring to the bride's family is 100 bundles of betrothal firewood. However, today, this betrothal offering is about 15-20 bundles of firewood for symbolisation. When a family has a mother giving birth, the rituals of worship and taboo are rarely performed. When women of ethnic minorities give birth in the Central Highlands, they seek care at local health facilities rather than going to the forest to give birth alone as in the past; rituals such as throwing a pestle to scare away evil gods when a child is born or requesting the soul of a recently deceased person to enter the soul of an infant are no longer performed, and so on (Loi, 2021).

Variation of religious ritual practice towards simplicity or formal spiritual ritual practice

Many ethnic communities in the Central Highlands have a historical belief that Gods play a significant role and govern all aspects of human life. However, religion's entry into the lives of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands has dramatically affected the people's traditional culture and beliefs. In areas where ethnic minorities worship Buddhism, residents retain their native religious culture and ritual customs. However, traditional religious values and ritual practices have significantly changed in ethnic minority populations that adhere to Catholicism or Protestantism. The transformation of traditional beliefs from polytheism to a single God, of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands took place in a short time. Under the influence of tenets, canon law and Christian rituals have declined and gradually erased the notions of a divine system with powers covering heaven, earth and human.

Currently, most people in ethnic minority areas that adhere to Catholicism or Protestantism no longer believe in the assistance or punishment of traditional Gods (Loi, 2021). Additionally, numerous conventional rituals associated with the life cycle of crops in production and agricultural cultivation have been lost or obliterated, including the following: awakening the soul of rice, eating all reserve rice (Ka ba tonne), planting (Ondro lo Choi), and eating rice leaves (Ka la bâu Ka la koa). In some villages, villagers do not follow any religion and still grow upland rice. However, many agricultural rituals and worship of gods related to agricultural production such as the God of thunder, the God of rice, and the God of water, are no longer present in the farmers' consciousness, and many worshiping rites have not been performed regularly. Some other rituals such as trough worshiping ceremony of the Xo Dang people, water drop celebration of the Bana people) Many states have been omitted, and the spiritual meaning has disappeared. People in some villages only hold New rice harvest celebrations such as the New rice-eating of the Xo Dang, the Bana, the Gie Trieng, etc. The New rice celebration has also become extinct, and people rarely perform these rituals and festivals.

Many religious rites have been phased out in villages where the Xo dang ethnic minority community practises Catholicism, and other traditional ceremonies have

been discontinued because of changes in agriculture methods and population density. The Xo Dang people hold the water trough ceremony solely to execute rituals such as inspecting and fixing water pipes (changing Bambusa procera with plastic pipes) and assembling at the typical house to celebrate, dance, and sing. In some villages, Catholics have relocated to a lower area, eliminating the need for water troughs. However, people here still hold a ceremony to build a water trough on one day of the year, with no sacrifice ceremony. Instead, people repair ordinary dug wells and organise a party as a traditional cultural festival of the community. In the Xo Dang, Gia Rai, and Gie Trieng villages, which follow Catholicism and Protestantism, the buffalo festival to celebrate the new communal house is no longer performed. In some localities, new communal houses of villages are built with the support of the Government and become a typical meeting and event place, or several communal houses are not used when the construction is completed because they have a meeting hall, non-religion people in some villages rarely organise buffalo festivals to celebrate the new communal house.

In addition, many rituals in the life cycle beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands are no longer performed. In villages with people following Catholicism and Protestantism, folk religious rituals have been eliminated, and people only perform wedding and funeral rites entirely according to religious rites. In non-religious villages, life cycle rituals have been considerably reduced, and some worshipping and taboo rites have been eliminated. Currently, at some weddings of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, there is no longer the music of gongs. People organise a celebration party at home or a meeting hall or communal house and have a modern music band; sacrifice rituals to the Gods are still performed with a formal nature only.

Variation of the team practising traditional beliefs in sacrifice festivals and rituals of ethnic minorities

In the life of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands and the significant role of village elders in villages, shamans are always highly valued and respected in their spiritual life. The shaman is considered a bridge between the divine world and the human world, an indispensable factor in worshipping rituals because

the shaman is the messenger carrying the sacred messages of the Gods to people and conveying prayers of people to the Gods.

In the traditional religious life of many ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, when someone in the family or village is sick or holding religious ceremonies, they will holding religious ceremonies. They invite a shaman to examine and perform an offering ceremony to the Gods. The shaman must be knowledgeable about geography and astronomy, memorise many rituals, have an inspiring voice, be ethical, and be trained through many important events in the village. In addition, the shaman must also be mysterious, be able to predict and contemplate accurately over time, and be recognised by everyone in the community. According to customs and habits, the shaman is the person performing sacrifice rituals for the whole village, from worshipping water wharf, new house, adulthood, wedding, funeral, sickness and diseases, etc. When performing such sacrifice rituals, the shaman must wear the traditional costume of the community, hold the offering in his hand, read prayers and execute steps in the sacrifice ritual. In the ritual of worshipping water wharf of the Ede people, the shaman wears traditional Ede clothes, has a red scarf on his head and walks in front of a group with a bowl of wine mixed with pig's blood, followed by a village elder holding shields and knives, and everyone in the village in a long and solemn line to the water wharf. After the water wharf worshipping rite is completed, the shaman will visit each house on the same day to give offerings. Each family makes an offering of a jar of wine and a fowl or pig. After making offerings for families, the shaman will travel to the water wharf and dig a tiny hole near the wharf, above a river bank or stream bank, to pray to the Gods for protection and good luck for the owners. On the day of the ritual, routes to the hamlet are frequently blocked by trees and hung with ropes of various types: yarn, thread, and chicken feathers to deter visitors from entering and upsetting the ceremony's holiness. The shaman will sit in front of the first jar of tube wine, facing the morning direction, at the adulthood rite for boys of the Ede ethnic community, to make sacrifices to the Gods and proclaim: This guy is good. He understands how to effectively burn fields and sow rice, bananas, and sugar cane. He possesses maturity. Now, Gods, please assist him in obtaining a fresh source of energy, as well as strong and durable muscles and health. At the conclusion of the

maturity ritual, the shaman presents the boy with a shield and a sword, symbolising the young man's new obligation to guard his family and town against enemies and wicked creatures, etc. Over time, the development, awareness, and life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands have changed and are increasingly enhanced, so the image of the shaman in several rituals in religious life has been extinct. Currently, the number of shamans in some ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands who openly operate and are trusted by people in the community is meagre. However, some major festivals, such as the Water wharf ceremony, Solidarity festival, New rice ceremony, etc., are the oldest customs and habits held annually by ethnic minority communities here to pray for favourable weather, good crops, happy and prosperous life after harvesting, and the role of the shaman in such rituals is indispensable. These are also forms of common cultural activities with many positive meanings in the spiritual life of ethnic minority communities. Therefore, shamans in villages of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands have not entirely disappeared. Shamans still have a certain position and role in the traditional community, often operating in certain regions, and those who perform ritual sacrifices rarely openly call themselves shamans.

Reception and variation of folk religious activities of other ethnic groups and the receipt and variation of religious activities into religious activities

In the lives of ethnic minorities, there have been many changes in daily living habits, production methods and forms are no longer dependent on nature for agricultural cultivation and production, etc. Daily living changes and productive agriculture have steadily eroded the foundations of folk beliefs, removing the Gods from the lives of ethnic minority populations. In a traditional society, the Ede people worships the God of Earth, so they abstain from digging wells to get water because digging wells is offensive to the God of Earth and anyone will be punished if violating it (Thu, 1998). Today, the living area of the Ede people has changed and the natural water source is no longer clean, people need water to irrigate crops, so digging wells is no longer considered an insult to the God of Earth and a violation for punishment.

Because it is thought that the dead will have no interaction with the living when the grave abandonment is completed, ethnic minority communities in the

Central Highlands do not worship their ancestors. However, a part of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands lives with some other communities who migrated from different places and worship their ancestors and celebrate the death anniversary of their deceased relatives, so now a part of ethnic minorities in some localities worship their ancestors. In many places, *nhà mồ* (Funeral house) is a place to honour the dead of ethnic minority communities, built of bricks, corrugated iron roofs instead of wooden materials, with an incense bowl instead of rice house. In some localities, the traditional custom of grave abandonment of ethnic minorities is no longer performed and is replaced by the Festival for Tending Graves of the Kinh people. According to previous traditional rituals, statues for funeral houses and worshipping ceremonies no longer occur.

The changes in the religious life of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands have resulted from many reasons, including external causes and internal causes of the cultural and religious life of ethnic minority communities. The liberalisation of personal life is the cause for the renovation of the religious life of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. Additionally, changes in population structure, which result in significant changes in living environments, relationships, and traditional institutions, contribute to changes in religious life among ethnic minority groups. This method gives possibilities for ethnic minority populations in the Central Highlands to strengthen their social links, exchange and acquire new knowledge for life, while also increasing their options for religions and beliefs. Currently, with the vigorous development of socioeconomic life, in the context of expanding exchanges and integration, many cultural values and traditional views of ethnic minorities cannot keep up with the development of modern society. Outdated and conservative elements in religion activities and traditions become a burden on people's lives. Therefore, choosing a new, more straightforward and more economical religious belief than the traditional one or reforming and renovating traditional religion and belief activities are considered a solution to help ethnic minorities get rid of the spiritual deadlock in the present time.

Conclusion

The traditional beliefs of the Vietnamese people in general and the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands reflect the people's aspirations for a stable society and a prosperous life. Traditional beliefs also contribute to adjusting human perception and behavior in relationships: personal - family, community, village, country; people - the natural environment and people with themselves. Through those relationships, traditional beliefs help people live righteously and well. Historic ideas orient people toward preserving the nation's traditional cultural and ethical values, toward a truthful, good, and beautiful way of life. Additionally, traditional beliefs contribute to the formation of national cultural values. However, some conventional beliefs also make people dependent on religious beliefs and forget about their creative abilities and confidence. Pessimistic thoughts and dependence on divine forces have dominated the perception and actions of a large part of the people here. In globalization, globalisation, and integration, the traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands in Vietnam are changing strongly. Among such changes, progressive changes, increasing human values, and strengthening ethnic, cultural identity are significant. Besides, some changes tend to depress true cultural values in traditional beliefs. Thus, it is necessary to create conditions that encourage people to embrace the role of subjects of religious activities and to educate them on how to preserve and promote positive cultural values and to limit backward and unsound customs in traditional religious activities, thereby enriching social spiritual life and increasing resources for socioeconomic development in the Central Highlands in particular and Vietnam in general.

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