

# THE WORLD VIEW AND HUMAN VIEW LIFE IN FUNERAL RITES OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE

**Vu Hong Van**

University of Transport and Communications, Hanoi, Vietnam ,ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3867-1865>

Email: [vanvh\\_ph@utc.edu.vn](mailto:vanvh_ph@utc.edu.vn)

## ABSTRACT

The funeral rites are formed to show respect for dead family members. Therefore, in human life, in addition to human values, it also expresses the world view and human view life of the Vietnamese people. On the basis of ancient documents and actual surveys, the article systematically analyzes Vietnamese funeral rites, clarifying the need to perform these rituals in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Through this analysis, the research shows the values these activities bring to the spiritual life of people, contributing to enriching the cultural values of the Vietnamese people. This study uses two main methods: First, researching ancient documents, the studies of researchers discussing funeral rituals; second, carry out field surveys in several provinces and cities in Vietnam; directly participating in funerals was organized, conducting interviews with dead families and professional funeral workers. The article analyzes five worship rituals for the dead, the origin of those rituals, the philosophical values that these rituals bring to human life; the study also pointed out the changes in both the positive and the negative of these rituals in the impact of globalization and presented some problems for the researchers to continue to discuss and study.

## Keywords:

World view, Human view, Rituals of funeral, Spiritual life, Vietnamese people

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

## INTRODUCTION

A funeral is a ritual connected to the final disposition of a corpse, such as burial or cremation, attended by friends, and sent off people (Anh, 1998). Funeral customs encompass the complexity of beliefs and practices used by a culture to honor and respect the dead, prayers, and rituals done in honor of the deceased (Anh, 2005). Different customs between cultures and religious groups will form different funeral rites. Common secular dynamics for funerals include mourning the deceased, celebrating their lives, and providing support and sympathy for the deceased (Tylor, 2000). In addition, funerals may have religious aspects intended to help the deceased's soul reach the afterlife, resurrect, or be reborn.

The funeral usually involves some ritual through which the corpse receives a final arrangement of the threshold of living people (Hoy, 2013). Depending on culture and religion, these may involve the destruction of the body (for example, by cremation, water burial, or sky burial) or preservation (for example, by mummification or burial distilled). Various beliefs about cleanliness

and the relationship between body and soul are reflected in funeral practices (Anh, 2005).

For Vietnamese people, the funeral is one of the ancient and long-standing customs, perhaps formed from the early days of the Vietnamese people (Giau, 1973). Since ancient times, due to the influence of many Chinese ceremonies, Vietnamese funerals also include many processes, but many places have been modified to fit with Vietnamese traditions (Giau, 1983). Funerals are all rites performed by the living for the dead from death to burial, in order to show respect and gratitude to the deceased (Hinh, 2007). Therefore, funeral rites are done very carefully and very carefully.

The living in Asian society in general and in Vietnam, in particular, attaches great importance to affection, appreciates kinship, attaches great importance to the bloodline of families and relatives, so the funeral rituals are carried out very carefully repertoires. In Asian philosophy and thought, the performance of funeral rituals for the dead is very important, the duty of the living to

the deceased who are grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives your clan (Habenstein, 1963).

Death for everyone is inevitable and the funeral is a serious problem for a certain family. Right from the moment of one's death, the family atmosphere has become quiet with a sad look; children from near and far are informed to rush back to "meet them one last time", though crowded but they were quiet with a gloomy, sad expression.

Each ethnic group in Vietnam will have different funeral rituals suitable to their spiritual activities and traditions (Hoa, 2006). But basically still based on the general ritual performance rules of the Vietnamese people, whether it is Kinh or ethnic minorities, there is little difference. And, in funerals today there are other and new points compared to the period from the 20th century onwards. Many rituals are simplified to suit the social situation, especially in urban areas with "crowded land, crowded people" with modern life rhythm.

From a cultural perspective, the funeral with its rituals is a socio-cultural phenomenon reflecting ethnic cultural characteristics. In terms of science, the study of funerals is an approach to learn the traditional cultural values of ethnic groups, contributing to the preservation and promotion of the national culture in the current period. Therefore, this study is carried out in order to fully and systematically introduce Vietnamese funeral rites, focusing on the following main issues:

Systematize Vietnamese conceptions, rules, processes and rituals about funeral;

Survey changes in Vietnamese funeral rituals under the impact of economic factors, social, cultural exchange;

Clarifying the spiritual culture of Vietnamese people expressed through funeral rituals, including worldview, expressed under the behavioral culture between the living, between the living and the divine world as well as influences of some religions in Vietnamese funeral rites.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Finding out about Vietnamese national cultural identity is a never-ending topic for anyone who is a Vietnamese person. Because it is a quality of the Vietnamese as an expression of the love for national origin. In which, the funeral is the most obvious embodiment, this is one of the most popular customs of Vietnamese people. When learning about funeral customs in Vietnamese culture, people will get valuable things from it (Giau 1973 & 1983; Binh, 2005; Van 2019). This is not only the knowledge of traditional customs of the nation, but it also forms for people meaningful moral qualities for life (Hoa, 2006).

The custom of funeral has appeared since ancient times and is popular with many layers of Vietnamese culture (Anh, 2005). It is associated with the cultural, spiritual, spiritual and religious life of each individual, family, or clan; in each region and region, each ethnic group has different funeral rites (Huong, 2009). This is not only a ritual, a responsibility, but a moral of people who is living for a loved one when returning to their ancestors and grandparents. Not only does it appear in a certain class, but it exists in all classes, be it the upper class, the nobility, or even the common people (Giang, 2000; Hinh, 2007).

Research on the history and customs of Vietnam shows that, regardless of the class, class, or ethnic group, funerals still take place with solemnity (Giau 1973 & 1983), but there are many differences between ethnic groups (Van, et al., 2020). And what makes this difference is due to the diversity of customs and beliefs of each locality and region. If in the capital Hanoi and some provinces and cities in the Red River Delta, the funeral rituals often have a lot of taboos; in Hue (the central part of Vietnam) customs required finesse and magic, when coming to the river delta in the south (south of Vietnam), it required simplicity and simplicity (Them, 2016). This is also the reason for creating a colorful cultural identity among the ethnic groups in Vietnam. Moreover, the funeral rites even in any ethnic group need solemnity (Van, 2019), which is the attitude and affection of the rest towards the

deceased. Tran Ngoc Them (1999 & 2016) has pointed out: The attitude and feelings of the living towards the dead will be shown solemnity in funerals and the rituals will be used to send the dead to eternity.

The actual survey shows that there are a lot of funeral rituals performed, partly due to the influence of customs passed down from generation to generation; partly due to the impact of socio-economic factors; partly due to the cultural exchanges of ethnic countries in the current globalization context (Trung, 2020). The full memoir *Dai Viet* (1697) (a book about Vietnamese history) also records funeral rites during the feudal dynasties of Vietnam, especially the death records of the rituals the royal funeral. Through these rituals, a part shows the respect of the living to the dead, even if it is the King (Thuan, 2004).

Vietnam is a country with many different religions (Government Committee for Religious Affairs, 2016), so the organization of funerals is also influenced by this (Them, 1999 & 2016). So how does religion govern funeral customs? To clarify this, we can analyze the influences of two major religions in Vietnam, namely Buddhism and Christianity. Indeed, we can easily see this through the perception of “death” or other than the definition of the word “dead” according to each religion. When a funeral is held, there are many different rites (Van, 2019), and these are all cultural colors associated with a certain religion (Huong, 2009). The actual survey shows that, a ceremony of worship, a flower, a tear, a little heartache, etc. of those living preparing for the funeral of their loved one, even more or less it also shows human love between the departing (the dead) and the living. In it, taboos in the funeral is one of the important indispensable forms. Because these are things that need to be kept in mind to avoid having to deal with unlucky things with those who are still alive (Giau, 1973; Hinh, 2007). And in today’s life, despite knowing full of challenges in living life that people do not perform and even gradually forget. Nowadays, due to better economic conditions, people have

more conditions to express a greater willingness to those who have died. However, it must be recognized that the regulations and policies on funerals are still not closely synchronized, leading to a spontaneous phenomenon - and can be used from competition - in funerals and tomb building. Some places even “compose” some “standards” on funerals, graves, and burials, competing for the relationships between the livings, not because of the good tradition (Trung et al., 2020). The Vietnamese burial custom, up to now, is not only a social affair, but also a big story about the land and urban environment.

In fact, competition in building large and beautiful tomb like “city for the dead” in some localities has caused mixed social opinion, requiring specific and necessary regulations real and suitable with practical conditions, customs, practices and culture. In big cities, burial places, funding and procedures for the burial of the dead have become a big problem not only for individuals, families but also of society. When a person dies, choosing the form of burial (burial or cremation, where to bury or store the ashes), etc. is a big deal. In rural areas, many families whose dead people have to deal with the issue of people living far away from the countryside are allowed to bring the remains or ashes back to their hometown for burial? Can the poor from other places have enough money to buy land in the cemetery for burial?

The Party and State have had many directives, resolutions, guidelines and regulations such as: Directive No. 27/CT-TW dated January 12, 1998 of the Politburo, Directive No. 14/1998/CT-TTg dated March 28, 1998 of the Prime Minister on the implementation of a civilized lifestyle in weddings, funerals, festivals or the Prime Minister’s Decision No. 308/QD-TTg dated November 25, 2005 on the regulations on implementing a civilized lifestyle in weddings, funerals, festivals. However, the implementation of these guidelines and regulations has not been as effective as waiting. Vietnamese burial practices are a complex and sensitive issue. Deputy Prime Minister Vu Duc Dam (2019) emphasized: “This is a social issue, related to tradition, not only by

legal regulations or economic policies, but also need to fully study the socio-cultural aspects and coordinate only a few solutions can have a positive change. On the one hand, there must be legislation on what not to do and have economic support policies when choosing to do the encouraged form. In particular, it is necessary to promote the active role of religious and social organizations in order to create consensus for the people to well implement the policy. Vietnam has over 50 ethnic groups. Living habits as well as funeral customs are completely different, so it is impossible to mechanically require a common policy for all”.

On the basis of the selective inheritance of the previous researchers, this study aims to systematize funeral ceremonies in Vietnamese funeral organizations. Since then, making judgments about the positive values as well as the limitations of these rituals in life so that people can adjust accordingly to modern life.

## METHODOLOGY

My subject is: “The rituals of funeral in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people”, that is, wanting to study fully and comprehensively about Vietnamese funeral rituals requires research on the space is very wide, ie the entire country of Vietnam. To do this research, I focus mainly on qualitative research methodology using different data collection techniques. Along with this method, I apply the quantitative method by investigating by the questionnaire in order to explain the research problems posed in the topic, specifically:

Regarding ancient bibliographies, the author has studied the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* book (Complete Annals of Dai Viet), the book of a brief history of Vietnam; documents of famous authors studying culture (Phan Ke Binh, Tran Van Giau, Nguyen Tai Thu, Nguyen Lang, Toan Anh, Phan Ngoc, Nguyen Dang Duy, Nguyen Duy Hinh, etc); the epitaphs are kept in pagodas, temples, communal house, including Thay pagoda, Tay Phuong pagoda, Tran Quoc pagoda, Tay Ho realm (Hanoi capital), Hang Kenh pagoda, Le Chan

temple (Hai Phong City), Keo pagoda (Thai Binh province), Day realm (Nam Dinh province), Dau pagoda, Dinh Bang communal house (Bac Ninh province), Con temple (Nghe An province), Thien Mu pagoda, Hon Chen palace (Thua Thien Hue province), Po Nagar tower (Khanh Hoa province), Vinh Nghiem pagoda, Ngoc Hoang pagoda, Thong Tay Hoi communal house (Ho Chi Minh City) and Chua Xu temple (An Giang province).

Regarding the location in Vietnam, the author surveyed 10 cities, including Hanoi capital, Hai Phong City, Thai Binh province, Nam Dinh province, Bac Ninh province, Nghe An province, Thua Thien Hue province, Khanh Hoa province, Ho Chi Minh City and Tra Vinh province.

Observation - participation is a way of collecting data, requiring researchers to live, work and research in the community. Researchers become a part of daily life in the community by living together, working together, living together in order to have a deeper experience of the researcher’s concern. For me, I realize that Observation - participation is a way of collecting information that is essential to me in researching and understanding funerals in the community. In two years, from 2018-2019, I have surveyed the 10 provinces and cities mentioned above by directly attending the funerals, carefully recording the rituals, and the items used in funeral. Inheriting the knowledge gained in the process of in-depth research on folk beliefs in general and soul worship beliefs in particular; combined with the study of ancient documents and researches of scholars, along with the experiences during their time living in the community and continue to collect data from June 2018 to December / 2019. It can be said that from 2018 up to now, I have had a period of continuous experience during this period, that will facilitate me to gain perspectives, feel and explain the problem more objectively. Specifically, I spent time at the funeral in the community, this has helped me to truly experience a very vivid way as both a funeral visitor and a researcher is investigating the problem he is interested in.

In-depth interview technique: This is a technique that is applied in conjunction with attendance observation while collecting research data. In-depth interviews are a way of getting qualitative information from members of the community through deliberate dialogues with community members, which allows me not only to observe and record events, information in the community, but especially to help interviewers participate in the life of the reporter by listening, sharing and recording sincere information. This work has helped me have time to experiment in the community, family and listen to personal sharing. During the interview, in order to collect more diverse information, I apply interviews in many different forms such as individual interviews, group interviews. During the information gathering interview in 10 provinces and cities nationwide, I proceeded to record 350 interviews, each interview from 7 to 10 minutes. The interviewees were divided into groups: Monks (Buddhism), priests (Christians), Taoists (Taoism), local people and authorities. In addition, I also note interviews from subjects related to research issues such as professional worshipers who have a lot of experience in funerals.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

After looking at the ancient documents that discuss the funeral rituals that still exist to this day in Vietnam; synthesize the research results of the previous researchers; combined with practical surveys and in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders as mentioned above, the author can detail the funeral rituals often used in history and still being used in the current period, it is shown in detail as follows:

#### Common Things to Do When Family Member is Dying (Preparing to Die)

When a family member is dying:

As analyzed above, depending on the different religions, the preparation for the dead is a little different, but the actual survey shows that there are some common points as follows:

Moving the dying person through the main room (upstairs to downstairs, from the room to the main house, especially in the middle of the house),

usually turns your head east. Depending on the layout to suit the age of the landlord, the age of the dead;

The dead person's head will be turned indoors, eyes facing the door;

Family members will ask if the dying person has any thoughts and wishes to see anyone again;

The head of the family will assign relatives and descendants to stay beside the dying person. There must always be someone close to the person who is dying (24h/24h);

Family members will do prayer ceremonies (depending on different religions there will be different prayer ceremonies). In today's modern society, many families have used tapes, CDs, etc. pre-recorded to play for the dying person listen instead of family members to do prayers;

Remember the exact death time of relatives (the experience in many Vietnamese villages through surveys is that people often take some cotton to put on the nose of the dead, when seeing that the cotton does not move anymore, it is time to die);

Absolutely not let the tears of the living fall on the dead body. Folk belief that the deceased will not be able to leave peacefully;

Absolutely not let a black cat jump over a relative's body. According to folk beliefs, those who are dying and are jumping over people by a black cat will be possessed by a demon;

Prepare necessary items for bathing and personal use items of the dead when burial as: photos, 2 bowls of incense, money, gold, clothes etc. According to folk beliefs, what utensils are used by the survivors, the dead will use that them, so the items to carry are often very carefully prepared. In particular, clothes must be completely new.

#### Funeral Rituals are Often Used in Funerals

Through studying ancient documents, in ancient times there were many complex funeral rituals (Lang, 1974). However, as the times changed, many rituals were no longer used; there are rituals that are still in use but reduce the fussy. By comparing and comparing the rituals recorded in the ancient documents with the actual survey results, the following are funeral rites that are

often applied to the elderly, frail family members, die at home according to Vietnamese traditional funeral customs. For those who are die at the hospital, along the road, or accident ... are not eligible to perform the rituals, there will be another research project. The following are the most commonly used funeral rituals:

“Mộc Dục” ceremony (bathing ceremony for the dead): When bathing for the dead, it is usually enough to keep a small knife, a piece of cloth about 1m<sup>2</sup> (towel), a comb, a spoon, a little soil. In the “ông đầu rau” (in the kitchen) (for villagers often have their own kitchen; for city residents, they usually get some land near their house), a pot of five flavored water (including 5 flavors from 5 different plants) and a different hot water pot. When bathing for the dead, covering the curtain, the mourning owner kneels and cries, the maid also kneels and says “now please bathe and wash to get rid of the dust”, finished prostrating 3 bowls, then stood up. If the father dies, the son will take a bath, if the mother dies, the daughter will take a bath. Get a square cloth to cover the five spices, wipe your face, wipe yourself clean then brush your hair, tie your hair with a cloth, wipe your hands and feet with another towel; again, take knives to cut nails, toenails, and to dress properly (new clothes are sewn immediately after a loved one dies). Fingernails and pedicures wrapped, nails placed on the upper half of the body, nails placed on the lower half of the body to bury the dead; leftover knives, combs, spoons and bath water were buried; carry the dead body and put it on the bed.

After the “Mộc Dục” ceremony, during the time when the dead body has not been put on the coffin: Cover the dead person’s body with blankets or mats, let go of the curtains, place a child chair above the head, on which a bowl of rice, an egg, set a pair of chopsticks on the rice bowl and incense. There are localities where it is customary to place a knife on top of the dead person’s stomach (perhaps to eliminate evil spirits or demons to enter the colon). According to Phan Ke Binh (2005), this ceremony is very important,

so all work must be very carefully prepared and thoughtful.

“Phạn Phàm” ceremony (Sanskrit ceremony): This ceremony is according to the old custom, putting rice and money in your mouth to avoid evil coming and robbing them, to see off the soul to go far and beyond (Liem, 2016). Today, many places have left it, some places replace it with sewing a bag, in a bag containing a little rice money and a few small things that when living, that person often uses.

According to “Thọ Mai Gia Lễ” (2019), this ceremony is conducted as follows:

Take a little sticky rice to clean, three copper coins to lighten (rich people use gold or pearl); Funeral master went to cry and kneel, the celebrant also knelt, “cáo từ” (said) that “nay xin phạn hàn, phục duy hãm nạp” (now please offer rice, gold, money to the dead);

The celebrant in turn “xướng” (calls out each family member’s name): “Sơ phạn hàn, tái phạn hàn, tam phạn hàn” (the first, the second, the third sacrifice to the dead). Funeral master must be done three times worship, each time scooping some rice and a coin put in the right mouth, then left, finally in the middle. Finished, squeeze his mouth, cover his face as before.

Ceremony of “Nhập Quan” (bringing the dead body into the coffin): The children go to the place where the corpse is placed, the son on the left, the daughter on the right. The celebrant “xướng” (calls): “Tự lập” (stand close to), “cử ai” (cry both), “quỳ” (kneel). The celebrant also knelt and said, “Today is good time, please enter the customs”, “cẩn cáo” (respectfully announced); finished “chant”: “Phủ phục” (bow), “hưng” (stand up), “bình thân” (upright).

After that, the children moved to the sides, the maid turned and lifted the weight to bring the body in smoothly, put it in the center of the coffin, if there is any gap, take the old shirt of the deceased fully complement the complement, then fold the bottom to the top first, the left fold first, the right fold back, on the top fold last, paint the brace closed.

Note: The clothes of the living person should not be put on the coffin.

The objects used to “khâm liệm” (prepare for the dead): Rich people use “nhiều” (a fine and very expensive fabric), silk; poor people use a white cloth to sew as a big shroud (1 vertical piece, 5 horizontal pieces) or small shroud (1 piece along 3 horizontal pieces).

In the past, the use of a small shroud or big shroud because of the small cloth. Nowadays, use loose cloth, as long as the legs, arms, head, and heels are covered.

“In Vietnam’s custom, many people believe in witchcraft, in the coffin, there is often a piece of plank with star Bac Dau. Before entering the mandarins, often choose the time, avoid age, and then use the charm and the other is stuck inside, outside the coffin. Some people think that if death must be a bad time, they leave the deck of the shrimp nest or the calendar or the leaf boat to overwhelm the devil” (Binh, 2005, p.31). After everything is done, paint the coffin carefully, put it in the middle of the middle space, or the house, while the more dignified people, putting it in the next room.

What should we do in case of death, the person cowering and not putting on the coffin? According to folk experience: Heat a fire around the corpse and straighten it straight, or massage it with alcohol or alcohol. If it still hardens, then you can use two chopsticks to place both sides of the coffin and let the body slowly fall down. When they fall into the coffin, they have to cut off the leg straps, their arms, their shoulders, and their buttocks so that the dead can lie comfortably.

Ceremony of “Thiêt Linh” (after placing the dead body in the coffin): That is the ceremony to establish the tablets spirit, putting the funeral altar. When the dead person has not been buried (within 3 days of death), the way of treating the dead as with the living, taking that behavior that worships for the death, so every time bowing only two prostrations, in the tablets spirit and “khăn vắn” (mourning towel used to wrap around the heads of family members) using the words “Cổ phụ”

(grandfather), “Cổ mẫu” (grandmother) instead of “Hiền khảo” (father), “Hiền tỷ” (mother).

“Thành Phục” ceremony (ie descendants wear funeral clothes to worship and return the ceremony when visitors come): Before the “Thành Phục” ceremony, if there is a visitor, the mourning owner has not come to welcome him, but the “hộ tang” (the maid in the funeral) on behalf of the owner to receive guests and sympathize with the guests. After the “Thành Phục” ceremony, it is officially “phát tang” (1 roll of white cloth, 1m long, 0.5m wide, folded and handed to family members around the head) to family members. After that, friends and villages came to worship the dead.

In addition to the above-mentioned main ceremonies, there are many other rituals in the Vietnamese funeral ceremony such as “Di Quan” ceremony (moving the coffin of the dead to be buried), “Hạ Quan” ceremony (burial of the dead), 49-day and 100-day worship rituals for the dead, etc. However, due to the objective and subjective conditions, the author has not been able to implement it, so I will continue to learn in the following studies.

## DISCUSSION

### The Funeral Ritual Ceremony Shows the Human Life of the Vietnamese People

The question was arised: When dying, where the soul will go is also a big problem for most ethnic groups (Lang, 1974; Giau, 1983; Taylor, 2000; Van, 2019). Vietnamese people from past to present have always wondered about what exists after death, is that the soul? And this shows that they still want the “aid” of the gods, their ancestors, helping themselves to enjoy a safer and happier earthly life, overcoming the things than humans cannot pass (Van, 2005, p. 85).

The Vietnamese believe that there is an afterlife, a world for the dead (Lang, 1974; Hinh, 2007). This world is located in the West, because according to Vietnamese folk conception, the West is the direction of death, of the underworld. When people die, they will return to this realm, awaiting trial, their crimes in the world will be judged when they enter the underworld, if they do good

thing, they will go to Heaven (Hinh, 2007), up. Nirvana (Lang, 1974), if you do evil things while alive, you will go to hell, hungry ghosts (Van et al., 2010).

For the Vietnamese people, from ancient times up to now, when still alive, people simultaneously depended on many different factors of nature leading to polytheism (Them, 1999, p. 242). The afterlife (underworld), not only dead people but also gods and demons. Vietnamese people clearly distinguish between ghosts and demons, specifically:

Ghosts are further divided into two categories, namely “Ma Choi” (souls that have no one to acknowledge, worship) and lineage ghosts (but spirits with worshipers). “Ma Choi” are the souls of people who die from war, epidemics, road deaths, market deaths, and no worshipers; this type of ghost is often wandering, stray with no place to live, often scaring the living. Ghosts in the lineages are relatives who have died but have not yet reincarnated. Ghosts of this kind are gentle, and sometimes help family members and lineages;

The demons are often eviler than ghosts, including two types: One is created by humans by enchanting spells to do evil deeds (Thanh, 2019, p. 115). The second includes those who die unexpectedly, die young, die from resentment, anger, and not reincarnate into another life, but the soul wanders to tease and revenge (Thanh, 2019, 116). “Demons and gods here have a clear appearance and participate in human activities” (Binh, 2005, p. 167). Each type of the ghost, the devil has a different shape when appearing, so people name them as tangible objects such as the demon Misa, the Basa hungry devil, the demon long hair, the fetus demon, etc.

The starting point of the Vietnamese people was agriculture, wet rice cultivation, the former residence was only a wilderness, harsh nature plus widespread spread of Buddhism and Taoism, so the Vietnamese people soon formed to give me

the concepts of soul, ghost, and devil with deep Buddhism and Taoism philosophies.

Belief of a soul as real is very popular among the Vietnamese community (71.14% of the respondents answered that it is believed there is a soul exist). Soul and ghost is a widely popular concept among the people, especially among ordinary people (working people). Man is made up of two elements, the body and the soul (Lang, 1974; Hinh, 2007; Van, 2019). Body and soul always go hand in hand, inseparable.

Vietnamese people explain the phenomenon of “fainting” or “swoon” is because the soul temporarily leaves the body to find a new place to live. If the soul finds a new place he will die, if he cannot find it, the soul will return to the old body, he will awaken. That is why when someone faints, people often donate to the local soul things such as chickens, ducks, and pig heads, etc. in order for the soul to return to the body, making that person awake.

Vietnamese people think that when people are “hấp hối” (about to die), the soul flies away so people cannot remember anything (Binh, 2005). Immediately after the person breathes his last breath, the soul leaves the body and travels for 7 days, then returns to his home. Only after the 100 days of incineration can the soul go to reincarnate, continue a different life. If buried, then after “cabbage” (remains transferred to a new tomb) (about 27 months), the soul can reincarnate.

The soul having left the body, becomes an independent entity, also has life, and also needs to find food to survive. Therefore, the family has to do blessings to “dedicate” food (to offer food) and burn money, gold for the soul (are gold coins made from paper with the same shape and color as gold coins and people live using). The people believe that the wealth that was devoted to the pagoda and given to the monk will depend on incense smoke and sutras that come to their dead relatives. Therefore, whether these people are happy or not depends not only on the merit they had during their lifetime, but also on whether their descendants or relatives have done the merit more or less.

As the agricultural resident, Vietnamese funeral customs are also imbued with the spirit of the yin and yang five elements of the South. The mourning flag and tied only for the dead are white (Lang, 1974). At the same time in the philosophy of yin and yang, negative corresponds to even number, so everything that makes the dead belong to even number. They think that the odd number is the number of the ghost, the number of the fire, so conflicts are easy (Duy, 2002). That's why in funerals and at weddings, Vietnamese people abstain from odd days (Giang, 2000). The offerings made to the dead are also arranged in an even number. The west is said to be the direction of the dead, so the objects are all arranged facing west. When the dead are left in the house, their heads are still facing the East, because they believe that their loved ones are still somewhere and have not really left (Duy, 2002). Only when carried for burial or cremation can the head be placed in the West direction? This confirms once again that the person has actually started the journey to the afterlife, has no chance to return to the East, the direction of the living. The procession of anti-clockwise three-round procession around the main hall during the "cải mã" ceremony or around the crematorium is also a movement from east to west, from positive to negative.

Influenced by Buddhist religion (Lang, 1974), the Vietnamese believe that the "Four Great" includes earth, water, wind and fire that make up everything in this world, including humans. Among the four elements, the water element is a very important factor to the life of the Vietnamese people and leaves a strong mark on Vietnamese culture, especially in funerals, expressed through the watering ceremony, wash with coconut water, with light wine...etc.

### **The Vietnamese Funeral Ritual Shows the Behavioral Culture of the Wet Rice Farmers**

As analyzed above, funerals and other forms of worship are manifestations of the mercy and filial piety of the living towards the deceased (Huy, 1995; Hoa, 2006). In the behavior between the living and the dead, there are two pulling

psychology: regret for relatives and sending off loved ones to the other side of the world (Them, 2016, p. 260). This is also the period when the living learns how to adapt to a new situation, one that no longer has a specific presence of a loved one in their daily lives. That is why they feel pity and regret which is reflected in the crying of the deceased.

Behavioral culture between the living and the dead is expressed through the thoughtful preparation for the dead to return to the afterlife by means of preparing utensils, bathing the corpse, performing rituals, offering offerings items, etc. During the burial process, the road from home to the burial place will be spread by family members with money and money along the way, with the belief that the loved one's soul can track and return home.

As a Buddhist, the Vietnamese still know that at death, people cannot bring anything, only sin and blessings (Lang, 1974). However, the common people still believe that the afterlife where the dead will come is a world like the world of the living. "Yang stars, yin" (how he lives, when he dies that it), this concept leads the Vietnamese to prepare for the dead the items they use every day such as clothes, shoes, familiar objects of the dead for the dead to carry to the afterlife and use. At the same time, the living person cleanses and scents the body so that the dead soul is clean and go to the ancestors, meeting the Buddha also shows the living's thoughtful preparation for the dead, expresses the living's concern for the deceased's life after death. At the same time, offering offerings to the deceased is also the Vietnamese culture of behavior towards the dead. They also believe that the soul, although no longer residing in the body, still needs food and drink, that is why the living must offer food for the dead, so that the dead can be fully satisfied in the next world that.

The living's concern for the dead is also reflected in the performance of super prayers (Lang, 1974; Thu, 1997). It is believed that, through superficial pleasures, the souls of their loved ones can reduce their sin and gain Nirvana. Therefore, they focus on implementing the supernatural for the dead.

This prayer for the dead also helps people to accumulate merit, dedicating merit to their dead grandparents who attend the blessing. This interest is also shown through enthusiastic and dedicated people in the community attending the funeral as well as the aftermath. No matter what conflict happened between them and neighbors, even hated each other so much that they didn't even look at each other, when that person died means all mistakes, anger, disputes are removed. Those who come to visit, those who attend rituals, sincerely think of the deceased with the best that he or she has done during life.

The funeral ritual also shows the relationship between people and gods (Kim, 1919; Thanh, 2019). The gods is one of the powerful forces that people fear. The agricultural lifestyle formed a diverse system of gods, divided into two types of good and evil. For Vietnamese people, demons have a clear appearance and participate in human activities (Anh, 2005). It is because the gods can decide the health or the sickness, the prosperity of the region that people fear the gods and must make offerings to the gods so that they can be healthy and full. In general, however, the relationship between man and spirit is a please-give relationship and the Vietnamese people worship the divine forces for their own livelihood (Ngoc, 2002).

For the gods in nature that have a direct influence on their livelihoods, they hold solemn rituals to pray for the season, pray for water (New Year's New Year) and pray for sunshine (moon worship). For the gods, they make offerings to ask for the protection of their health and safety. To the devil, they make offerings to ask for peace, not to be disturbed or harmed by demons. At the same time, the Vietnamese people believe that demons are responsible for watching the souls, bringing the soul home to attend the ceremony as well as the return of the soul. So they do not forget to donate gift to the devil, they also give it to the wandering, wandering, helpless soul.

The belief of the eternal soul, of death is only a temporary cessation of the body, then the soul begins a new eternal life in the afterlife, a peaceful

world of the gods, non-birth and death led to the birth of ancestor soul worship, of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship and the rituals around it are the way through which a person comes into contact with the object of worship, that is, his or her deceased grandparents.

The Vietnamese people worship their ancestors very attentively, because they think that "trees have a new root that blooms green branches, the water has a new source that is wide and deep in the river" (Thu, 1997). Therefore, people, without parents and grandparents, could not have them today. Parents and grandparents are not only people who have the grace of birth, but also have the grace to raise us into people and teach us how to do business. And grandparents and parents left behind not only material possessions but also a rich spiritual life. That is why children must be filial to their parents.

Traditionally, the Vietnamese people in addition to setting up an altar at the family, they also gave the remains and the cards their ancestors to the pagoda (Ngoc, 2002). By bringing rice and fruit cakes to the temple, offering to the Buddha and the Buddhist monk, the Vietnamese people believe that the items and food they offer will depend on the incense smoke and their prayers to bring their prayers to their ancestors, parent; for the world between the living and the dead "seems to always have a close relationship" (Ngoc, 2002, p. 231).

This worship is the meeting bridge between the visible world and the divine universe. And the dead, even though the body is gone, the soul remains. "Đương sao, âm vậy" (How to live, die like that) is a popular concept among of people. Whatever the living needs, the dead also need that, also have a life as in the underworld, which means that the dead need to eat, drink, and consume like the living. Therefore, during the super prayers, people often buy for the dead the necessary household items, to rely on the sound of chanting, those things will come to the dead so that they can spend in the next world (Hinh, 2007).

Because of this belief, plus the custom of burying on the pagoda, in order to keep it in the temple, the Vietnamese people worship their ancestors at the temple. Therefore, the temple and the monks “bring a deep love” (Giau, 1983). Offering rice, offering gifts to monks will help their loved ones live happily in the afterlife. Therefore, the Vietnamese people often bring rice, rice and fruit to the temple for 2 days, 1st and 15th of every month. Before bringing rice and left cakes to the pagoda, people light incense on the Buddha altar in the house, commend the dead relatives to witness (Lang, 1974).

Funeral is also an opportunity for people to behave with the divine world. Because at death, the soul leaves the body and joins the world of souls. Because of the new soul, there are still many uncertainties, so it is necessary to donate to other souls in the funeral to pray those old souls to help the souls of their grandparents in the early stages.

## CONCLUSION

Vietnamese people's funeral is a great event marking a transformation of people from the physical world to the spiritual world (Them, 1999). It is a phenomenon not only related to the life of each individual but also organically interacts with the entire social system, becoming a social event of the community. It is both a constituent element of the ethnic culture and a reflection of ethnic cultural characteristics (Ngoc, 2002). Through the study of Vietnamese's funeral rituals from a cultural perspective, I give some comments and assessments as follows:

Vietnamese funeral rituals are very complicated, but there are still similarities between ethnic groups and regions of Vietnam. The form of burying the dead is very popular, and with the change of society today, there is cremation.

Vietnamese funeral rituals are influenced and strongly influenced by Buddhism and Taoism; in addition, to other religious believers influenced by their religions. The community is shown highly, when a family has a dead person, the neighbors will help a lot.

In funeral rites, the householder often has great respect for the gods, with the spirit of respecting the spirit so that family members can leave peacefully. The Vietnamese people's funeral ritual has shown the spirit of “drinking water, remember its source” (gratitude to ancestors) deeply.

Through the funeral ceremony, it can be seen that Vietnamese culture is clearly shown. The meaning of the rituals shows the way of life and beliefs of an entire community that have been accepted and passed down through the generations. It also shows us that the strength of the traditional culture of the Vietnamese people is very strong, creating unique cultural features of the Vietnamese people. Today, the society is developing more and more, the social relationships are also gradually changing, in which the cumbersome elements of funeral rituals have been removed, however, the core values it brings. still unchanged. These values are still increasingly contributing to enriching new values about the world view and human view life of the Vietnamese people.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is funded by University of Transport and Communications, Hanoi, Vietnam

## REFERENCES

- [1] Anh, D. D. (1998). *Vietnamese cultural and historical*. Dong Thap: Dong Thap Universal.
- [2] Anh, T. (2005). *The custom of worshipping in families and public places in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Youth.
- [3] Binh, P. K. (2005). *Vietnamese custom*. Hanoi: Culture Information.
- [4] Chu, P. H. (1992). *The least year charter schedule*. Hanoi: Social Science.
- [5] Duy, N. D. (2002). *Spiritual culture*. Hanoi: Culture Information.
- [6] General Statistics Office. (2019). *Results of the population and housing census in 2019*. Hanoi: Statistics.
- [7] Giang, H. (2000). *Ancestor worship, a bold feature of the Vietnamese spiritual life*. Hanoi: Culture and Information.

- [8] Giau, T. V. (1973). *The development of thought in Vietnam from the nineteenth century to the August Revolution*. Hanoi: Social Science.
- [9] Giau, T. V. (1983). *Traditional spiritual values of the Vietnamese nation*. Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City.
- [10] Government Committee for Religious Affairs. (2016). *The beliefs, religions and decrees detail a number of articles and measures to enforce the law on beliefs and religions*. Hanoi: Religions.
- [11] Government Committee for Religious Affairs. (2019). *Vietnam's religious situation*. Hanoi: Religions.
- [12] Habenstein, Robert. (1963). *Funeral customs the world over*. Milwaukee, WI: Bulfin
- [13] Hinh, N. D. (2007). *Vietnamese spirituality*. Hanoi: Encyclopedia Dictionary.
- [14] Hoa, L. N. (2006). *Nature of beliefs and religions*. Hanoi: Religions.
- [15] Hoy, William G. (2013). *Do funerals matter? Purposes and practices of death rituals in global perspective*. Routledge
- [16] Huntington, Richard and Peter Metcalf. (1979). *Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary ritual*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- [17] Huong, N. X. (2009). *Beliefs of coastal residents in Quang Nam - Da Nang*. Hanoi: Encyclopedia & Cultural Institute.
- [18] Huy, C. X. (1995). *The oriental ideology with suggestion of reference viewpoints*. Hanoi: Literature.
- [19] Huyen, N. V. (1995). *Contributing to the study of Vietnamese culture*. Hanoi: Social Sciences.
- [20] Huu, T. D. (1996). *Come modern from tradition*. Hanoi: Culture.
- [21] Institute of History. (2007). *Vietnamese history*. Hanoi: Social Sciences
- [22] Kim, T. T. (1919). *A brief history of Vietnam*. Quan Hai Tung Thu.
- [23] Lang, N. (1974). *Vietnam Buddhism history*. Saigon: La Boi.
- [24] Lien, N. S. (1697). *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (translation: 2004). Hanoi: Social Science.
- [25] Liem, T. (2016). *Funeral rituals*. Hanoi: Ethnic Culture
- [26] Ngoc, P. (2002). *Vietnamese cultural identity*. Hanoi: Literature.
- [27] Roszko, Edyta. (2012). From spiritual homes to national shrines: Religious traditions and nation-building in Vietnam. *East Asia* 29, 25–41. Doi: 10.1007/s12140-011-9156-x
- [28] San, N. M. (1998). *Access to Vietnamese folk beliefs*. Hanoi: Ethnic Culture.
- [29] Tan, V. (1991). *Vietnamese dictionary*. Hanoi: Social Sciences.
- [30] Thalpe Ge Indika Piyadarshani Somaratne. (2019). *Meditate on life through death and the Buddhist view of death*. Sri Lanka: Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka.
- [31] Thanh, D. (Compilation). (2019). *Thọ Mai Gia Lễ*. Thanh Hoa: Hong Duc.
- [32] Them, T. N. (1999). *Vietnamese cultural foundation*. Hanoi: Education
- [33] Them, T. N. (2016). *The Vietnamese value system from tradition to present and the path to the future*. Hanoi: Culture.
- [34] Thinh, N. D. (2004). *Worship of Mother Goddess and Shamanism among ethnic groups in Vietnam and Asia*. Hanoi: Social Sciences
- [35] Thu, N. T. (1997). *The Influence of ideologies and religions on Vietnamese people today*. Hanoi: National politics.
- [36] Tylor, E. B. (2000). *Original culture*. Hanoi: Art and Culture.
- [37] Van, V. H. (2019). From the belief of the immortality of the soul, the blessing or the harassing of the soul towards people to the worship of the souls of Vietnamese people. *Asian Social Science* 16 (3), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v16n3p1>
- [38] Van, D. N. (2005). *Theory of religion and the situation of religion in Vietnam*. Hanoi: National Politics
- [39] Van, V. H., Long, N. T., Thanh, T. T., Dong, T. K., & Luong, P. V., (2020). *Folk Beliefs of Vietnamese People*. India - United

Kingdom: Book Publisher International.

DOI: 10.9734/bpi/mono/978-93-89816-92-1