



The ancestor worship beliefs of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi Commune, Hanoi City

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Abstract

Ancestor worship is a quintessential form of folk belief deeply intertwined with traditional moral values and cultural practices. It is based on the conviction that ancestors can protect and guide their descendants in the present life. For the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi commune, Hanoi City, this belief plays a central role in their spiritual and community life. Through ancestor worship rituals, the bonds among family and clan members are strengthened, simultaneously transmitting ethical, humanistic values and a spirit of intergenerational cohesion. This system of rituals not only expresses reverence for ancestors but also reflects profound conceptions of the cosmos, humanity, and human ethics, interwoven with influences from Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. This article focuses on an overview of the socio-cultural life of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi, subsequently analyzing some distinctive characteristics and humanistic meanings within their ancestor and clan worship beliefs, thereby contributing to clarifying the value of traditional culture in the modern context.

Keywords: Dao quần chẹt people, ancestor worship

Introduction

The Dao people in Vietnam are a diverse ethnic minority community, showcasing their distinct cultural identity through various local groups like the Red Dao, Coin Dao, and Dao Quần Chẹt. Among these, the Dao Quần Chẹt group living in Ba Vi commune, Hanoi City, stands out for its unique system of cultural practices and beliefs, especially ancestor worship and the Cấp Sắc ritual—a ceremony marking a man's maturity and entry into the spiritual community. These practices not only reflect the depth of their spiritual life but also serve as a mechanism for transmitting moral standards, maintaining community relations, and preserving traditional cultural knowledge. Studying these specific cultural elements helps clarify the cultural structure of the Dao ethnic group amidst social changes. It also provides a crucial scientific basis for conserving and promoting intangible cultural heritage in the modern, integrated world.

First, an overview of the life of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi commune, Hanoi City

Ba Vi is a mountainous commune located about 17 km from the center of Ba Vi district and nearly 60 km from downtown Hanoi. It's bordered by Van Hoa commune to the east; Tan Linh and Ba Trai communes to the north; Minh Quang commune to the west; and Khanh Thuong commune to the south. Currently, Ba Vi commune comprises three villages: Yen Son, Hop Son, and Hop Nhat. These villages are not contiguous but are interspersed with villages of the Muong and Kinh people from Minh Quang and Ba Trai communes [1]. The commune's population of 2,378 people consists of three ethnic groups: Kinh, Muong, and Dao. Of these, the Dao people make up the majority, accounting for 98% of the population. These are primarily Dao Quần Chẹt people, who reside in the three villages of Hop Nhat, Yen Son, and Hop Son [2]. The name Dao Quần Chẹt (tight-trousers Dao) comes from the women's traditional attire, which features narrow trousers tight to the knee, distinguishing them from other Dao branches like the White Trousers Dao, Coin Dao, Thanh Y Dao, and Red Dao. There are varying opinions regarding the origin of the Dao people

in Ba Vi. According to researcher Pham Quang Hoan, the Dao in Ba Vi today originated from China, migrating from Guangdong to Quang Yen before dispersing to various locations, including Ba Vi. However, some elderly Dao villagers in Ba Vi believe they are groups who migrated from Vinh Phuc, Hoa Binh, and Phu Tho to Ba Vi mountain in search of a livelihood due to the area's abundant natural resources [3]. Upon migrating to Ba Vi, the Dao people primarily practiced slash-and-burn cultivation. In 1968, the government encouraged the Dao community to move down from the mountains. Notably, following the initiative to establish the Ba Vi National Park conservation area, by 1990, with the support of various levels of government, all Dao Quần Chẹt people who had been living scattered across the mountains were relocated to settle around the foothills of Ba Vi.

Regarding Production and Livelihoods: The Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi, Hanoi, primarily sustain themselves through wet-rice cultivation and traditional herbal medicine. These activities not only provide a livelihood but also reflect their adaptation to sustainable development requirements. They've transitioned from destructive slash-and-burn farming to settled agriculture and forest protection. The Dao people's herbal medicine in Ba Vi is renowned for its inherited knowledge of medicinal plants, used for healing and health protection. Yen Son village has even been recognized as an "herbal medicine village," affirming the cultural and economic value of this trade. As a result, the Dao people of Ba Vi have gradually moved away from nomadic, shifting cultivation to a more stable and developing economy. Ms. Duong Thi Hien from Yen Son village recounted, "Before, the Dao people only knew how to clear land for swidden farming and lived scattered on mountain peaks. In 1968, with government encouragement and settlement support, our people 'descended the mountain' and settled collectively at the foot of Tan Mountain. Thanks to the Party and the State's attention, the appearance of our villages is more prosperous, people's lives are increasingly comfortable, and Tết celebrations are more fulfilling..." [4].

Traditional Social Organization: According to local historical documents, the Dao Quần Chẹt people are believed to have been settled in the Ba Vi, Hanoi area for over two centuries. Dao society is organized based on neighborly relationships and a clan system. Common surnames include Ban, Dang, Trieu, Ly, Lang, Duong, and Phung, with the Trieu clan having five distinct branches, reflecting the diversity and complexity of their family structure. According to author Chu Thu Ha: "They don't live interspersed with other ethnic groups but are purely Dao Quần Chẹt, with clans such as Duong, Ly, Ban, Dang, Phung, Lang, and Trieu. Among these, the Trieu clan is the most numerous and was the first to migrate to Ba Vi. Clans and lineages often have their own genealogies and a system of middle names to differentiate individuals from different generations" [5]. This preference for residing in separate villages, free from other ethnic groups, allows the Dao people here to freely practice their customs and traditions, thereby preserving and promoting their unique and distinct cultural identity.

Community Organization: The traditional homes of the Dao Quần Chẹt are known as half-stilt, half-ground houses (peo). This architectural style is perfectly suited to the steep, hilly terrain of the Ba Vi mountain slopes, demonstrating the Dao people's ingenious adaptation to their natural environment.

The most common type of house features three bays and two lean-tos. For multi-generational households, a larger house with five bays and two lean-tos is built to accommodate the greater number of family members. The ancestor altar is always placed in the central position of the house, signifying deep reverence for their ancestors, and is consistently located near the space reserved for the head of the household, reflecting the central role of the family head in the social structure. Traditional homes are more than just dwellings; they carry profound cultural significance, closely linked to the spiritual life and identity of the Dao Quần Chẹt community in Ba Vi. "The Dao are very particular about not building houses in a straight line with connected ridgepoles. If a house is not yet finished or completed but the new house ceremony hasn't been performed and thunder is heard, they must dismantle it and wait for an auspicious day to rebuild" [6].

Important Rituals and Spiritual Cultural Life: The Dao people possess a rich system of rituals that deeply reflect their spiritual life and cultural identity. Some typical festivals include Tết Nhảy (Dancing Festival), the Cấp Sắc ceremony (a coming-of-age ritual), the New House Ceremony, and the Crop Prayer Ceremony. Additionally, dances like the bell dance (with its characteristic jingling sounds) and the turtle dance (symbolizing longevity and good fortune) are often performed during festivals or special events, enriching their cultural life. The Dao people have a variety of musical instruments, including drums, gongs, cymbals, musical bells, and horns. These instruments are not just for entertainment but are also closely tied to their beliefs, helping to connect people with ancestors and deities. The Dao sing, compose, or improvise songs during gatherings of young men and women, at weddings, new house celebrations, festivals, and market days. These songs often carry familiar content, expressing the community's

thoughts and aspirations, and serve as a way to transmit culture across generations.

It can be said that the rich and diverse geographical and climatic environment has fostered the varied customs, practices, and lifestyles of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi. These geographical, economic, and social conditions provide the foundation for the local community to effectively preserve and promote their unique cultural identity.

Second, some characteristics of ancestor worship among the Dao Quần Chẹt People in Ba Vi Commune, Hanoi City.

In traditional societies, belief and religion play a crucial role as core elements of spiritual culture, profoundly influencing many aspects of community life. These elements not only shape material production but also strongly impact folk art and literature. For the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi, their beliefs and religion share many similarities with other Dao sub-groups and ethnic minorities, evident in practices like ancestor worship, crop prayer rituals, and the incorporation of Taoist elements. However, these characteristics also reflect an adaptation to the specific geographical environment and social conditions of the Ba Vi region, contributing to the distinct cultural identity of the community.

The Ancestor and Clan Altar, and Worship Space

The ancestor altar of a clan is called a bàn ham (tia đạn) and is placed in the home of the clan's head, which serves as the ancestral temple (tổ piếu). This space is dedicated to ancestor worship rituals and the Cấp Sắc ceremony for clan members. The Dao Quần Chẹt people typically use wood harvested from the forest, such as ironwood or nghiến wood, to craft the altars. The rectangular altar is designed with three tiers, each serving a distinct function and meaning. The uppermost tier is used to display offerings and ritual items like the incense burner, a small tea set, and a bottle of plain water. The incense burner, a crucial element in their rituals, is cast from lead—a material believed to be "heavy" and "cool," symbolizing the blessings of ancestors and deities. The ash within the incense burner is a mixture of glutinous rice ash and ash from cinnamon bark and leaves, placed in the center of the house for ancestors to witness before its use. The middle and lower tiers are used to arrange essential items for worship, including divination blocks and votive paper. For the family of a shaman, these two tiers also hold seals and ritual books. To place the incense burner on the altar, the homeowner must choose an auspicious day and collect rice and various fragrant plants (like agarwood and cinnamon) from three to four different clans in the village. Then, with everyone as a witness, the homeowner burns everything to ash and pours it into the incense burner along with a bit of gold or silver; only then is the incense burner considered complete. During this process, women are traditionally prohibited from entering, as their presence is believed to defile the sacred incense burner; they may only observe from outside and attend to kitchen duties.

To establish an ancestor altar, the Dao people in Ba Vi must perform numerous rituals, with the Tết Nhảy (Dancing Festival) being the most significant. This is the final ritual in setting up the ancestor altar. However, a Dao family doesn't hold Tết Nhảy every year. The homeowner only organizes

Tết Nhảy in the year they have promised to their ancestors. The interval between Tết Nhảy celebrations among the Dao in Ba Vi typically ranges from 15 to 20 years... Previously, "Tết Nhảy is typically performed for three consecutive years. The first year, it lasts for one day and one night; the second year, two days and two nights; and the third year, three days and three nights. If, during these three years, the family experiences a death or a birth, they must restart the Tết Nhảy ceremony from the beginning" [7]. Currently, the Dao people in Ba Vi perform Tết Nhảy only once for a single day, but all the rituals and their sequences are still fully observed according to custom. According to Mr. Ly Van Phu, Yen Son village: "Tết Nhảy is an especially important ritual in the ancestor worship practices of the Dao people. It's an occasion to express gratitude to the deities and ancestors who helped the boats of the twelve Dao clans overcome hardships at sea years ago to reach new lands. It is also a time to pray for blessings from the spirits and ancestors for healthy descendants and prosperous livelihoods..." [8]. The Tết Nhảy ceremony of the Dao Quần Chẹt people consists of three main parts: opening the ritual (khai lễ), the main ritual (chính lễ), and the farewell ritual (lễ tiễn đưa). The organization and execution of the rituals are overseen by shamans, with the assistance of ritual attendants. All direct participants in the ceremony must be adult males who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual—a rite marking spiritual and social maturity in Dao culture. "During the opening ritual (khai lễ), the shaman sets up the altar, arranges offerings, and invites deities and ancestors to attend the ceremony. The main ritual (chính lễ) is considered the most important and the longest part. This section begins with the altar opening ceremony (khai đàn) and concludes with the spirit summoning ceremony (chiêu binh). Throughout both the opening and main rituals, the shaman and their assistants dance and sing, accompanied by the lively sounds of trumpets, bells, drums, gongs, and cymbals. The songs and dances recount the sea voyage, re-enact the labor and battles against invaders and wild animals that their ancestors undertook to protect the villagers. These mystical songs and dances transport observers, making them feel as if they are living in another world—a world where past and present converge..." [9]

The worship space of the Dao Quần Chẹt people is arranged in the main hall of the house, typically the reception area, which signifies solemnity and sacredness. This hall features two parallel doors: the right door is located in the center of the house's facade, while the left door directly faces the ancestor altar of the clan or lineage. According to traditional Dao beliefs, the right door is called the 'yang door' (cửa dương), symbolizing life and the cycle of sunrise and sunset; it's the main entrance used for daily activities. Conversely, the left door is considered the 'yin door' (cửa âm), representing the spiritual world—where ancestors and deities enter and exit. This door is only opened during important rituals such as funerals, agricultural cycle ceremonies, house-building rituals, weddings, or exorcisms, with the purpose of welcoming ancestors and deities back to witness and bestow blessings.

Objects of Worship

Ancestor worship: In the ancestor worship beliefs of the Dao Quần Chẹt people, the primary objects of worship are deceased relatives within four generations, including parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-

grandparents. According to traditional beliefs, only those who have had the full funeral rites performed by their descendants, especially the "lễ đốt tang" (or "làm ma" - burning the coffin/funeral ceremony), are officially admitted into the ancestral world and become sacred objects of worship. Conversely, the souls of those who have passed away but have not had the proper funeral rites performed—whether due to objective circumstances or specific reasons—cannot return to the ancestral realm and therefore are not included in the family genealogy or the clan altar. Thus, the system of ancestors worshipped in each family primarily consists of recent generations who not only share a direct blood relationship but have also had their position in the spiritual realm established through rituals. During ancestor worship ceremonies, especially on important occasions, the shaman or head of the household will call out the names, clearly stating the age and year of death of each ancestor to invite them to witness and bless their descendants with peace and prosperity.

Bản Vương: According to the legend of the Dao Quần Chẹt people, Bản Vương was originally known as Long Khuyển Hồ—a mythical figure embodying sacred and heroic qualities. Thanks to his glorious victory in defeating Cao Vương, an invader of Bình Vương's kingdom, Long Khuyển Hồ was handsomely rewarded by King Bình Vương, who also offered his daughter's hand in marriage. From this union, Bản Vương and the princess had 12 children (6 sons and 6 daughters). Each child was later granted a surname and established a distinct clan, forming the 12 major Dao clans: Bàn, Lam, Mãn, Uyên, Đặng, Triệu, Lương, Tông, Phụng, Đồi, Lưu, and Lý. These clans form the basis of the current social structure of the Dao ethnic group. After King Bình Vương passed away, Bản Vương ascended the throne but maintained a simple lifestyle, remaining close to his people. He is widely credited with teaching the Dao people essential farming and living techniques, such as rice cultivation, weaving, hunting, and animal husbandry. Due to these significant contributions, Bản Vương is revered by the Dao as their ancestral progenitor—the one who not only gave birth to their people but also guided their way of life and social organization. After his death, Bản Vương is respectfully worshipped on ancestor altars and during special religious ceremonies.

In the belief system of the Dao Quần Chẹt people, Bản Vương is revered not only as the progenitor of the Dao ethnic group but also as the protective spirit of the clan, possessing a sacred quality akin to a "ma tổ"—a spiritual entity representing the origin and bloodline connection. Consequently, Bản Vương is respectfully worshipped at the ancestral temple (nhà thờ tổ) of each clan, which serves as the hub for sacred ritual activities that foster community cohesion. The Bản Vương worship ceremony is meticulously organized, with representatives from the twelve Dao clans in the region participating. Rituals involving incense, flowers, and offerings—primarily grains—are conducted in a solemn atmosphere, expressing profound respect for the sacred ancestor. Beyond the main ritual, the Bản Vương ceremony also includes symbolic ritual activities such as the turtle dance, trance possession with fire jumping, and pestle wrestling (vật chày). These elements not only reflect their belief in the supernatural world but also represent the continuation of traditional cultural values through folk performance combined with

ritual. "From the beginning to the end of the Bàn Vương worship ceremony, strict taboos must be observed. Not only the shamans but everyone attending the ritual must be vegetarian. When leaving, no one is allowed to gossip or criticize. "Couples are forbidden from being intimate, and even outsiders are not allowed close. Such abstentions ensure future spiritual efficacy"" [10]. Related to the custom of worshipping Bàn Vương, the Dao people in Ba Vi have a custom of worshipping black dogs and not eating dog meat. Explaining this custom, Mr. Triệu Phú Đức stated: "According to ancient legend, Bàn Vương (the ancestor of the Dao people) disguised himself as an intelligent, agile black dog. He used his snout to plug a hole in a leaking boat, helping the ancient Dao people safely cross the East Sea to migrate to Vietnam" [11]. It is evident that the custom of worshipping Bàn Vương, along with other folk belief and cultural activities, serves as a powerful symbol of the Dao people's unified origin and cultural identity. These are mystical activities and also a beautiful aspect of Dao traditional culture. Author Nguyễn Chanh affirms: "Currently, the Bàn Vương worship ceremony is no longer widely practiced among the Dao ethnic group. However, the Bàn Vương ceremony is a deeply humanistic ritual because it continuously directs people to remember their origins and reassures them spiritually, knowing that the sacred and powerful Bàn Vương, their ancestor, provides protection. At the same time, this ritual also serves as a strong bond connecting the community within clan and village relationships, fostering strength to protect and build their lives" [12].

Tam Thanh: The Three Pure Ones (Tam Thanh) belief of the Dao people, particularly the Dao Quần Chẹt, developed under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and most notably, Taoism, with the deepest impact coming from Taoism in the Ba Vi region. The Tam Thanh worship system includes three deities from the Taoist pantheon: Ngọc Thanh (Jade Pure), Thượng Thanh (Upper Pure), and Thái Thanh (Grand Pure). In the ancestral temple of a clan, the caretaker often adorns it with paintings of these three deities. However, displaying these paintings as symbolic representations of "saintly masters" on the clan altar is only permitted for individuals who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual—meaning they have officially joined and are recognized within the Dao people's Taoist community. Throughout worship rituals, a specific set of paintings must be fixedly hung on the wall. These paintings fully depict divine figures, from celestial beings to earthly gods, not only expressing spiritual belief but also holding high educational value, transmitting moral and humanistic values. Preparing this set of paintings requires a strict process, from selecting an experienced painter, purchasing the paintings in three correct stages, to holding a "khai quang" (eye-dotting) ceremony where a shaman is invited to offer sacrifices such as a pig's head and a chicken to ensure their spiritual and ritual efficacy.

The Dao people's conception of life after death is deeply intertwined with the belief that the human soul does not cease to exist after leaving the body but continues to live on in another realm. Consequently, Taoism not only intervenes in the spiritual world but also directly influences the lives of the living through rituals, magic, and talismans. A prime example of this influence is the "Cấp Sắc ritual," a crucial custom that marks the transition into manhood. Only

individuals who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ceremony are recognized by the community and allowed to participate in important village decisions. This signifies that they possess the necessary moral integrity to distinguish right from wrong and to receive blessings from ancestors—symbolized by Bàn Vương. The Cấp Sắc ritual not only affirms social recognition but is also a traditional cultural phenomenon passed down through generations. Depending on socio-economic contexts and the impact of urbanization, this ritual has undergone certain changes while still maintaining the core values of the ethnic group. The Cấp Sắc ceremony is typically held annually in November, December, or January, reflecting aspirations for a prosperous, happy life and the richness of spiritual life within the Dao community.

According to Bàn Tuấn Năng: "The strong connection within the Cấp Sắc ceremony has been localized by the Dao people, along with ancestor worship, and as long as ancestor worship persists, so too will the Cấp Sắc ceremony. Therefore, to better suit contemporary life, the Dao people have reduced ritual costs and ceremony duration, eliminating cumbersome and superstitious procedures to move towards a fast, concise, economical, and effective Cấp Sắc organizational process, while still ensuring the sacredness and strong cohesion within the Dao community" [13].

The ancestor worship rituals: In the ancestor worship rituals of the Dao Quần Chẹt people, the central role is typically held by men, especially those who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ceremony—a ritual marking maturity and official recognition within the spiritual community. Taking on ancestor worship rituals not only demonstrates a man's responsibility in maintaining spiritual connections with ancestors but also serves as a concrete expression of his acknowledged status and moral character. Should a family not have any male members who have undergone Cấp Sắc, the rituals will be performed by a shaman. The shaman—who has been trained and has experienced traditional rituals—is invited to the home to officiate the ceremony on behalf of the family. After the ritual is complete, the shaman is often invited to stay for an intimate meal as a gesture of gratitude. Concurrently, the women of the family prepare a modest offering, including items such as *bánh dày* (sticky rice cake), glutinous rice wine, or chicken. These offerings are usually wrapped in cellophane or banana leaves and given to the shaman to take home. This act is highly symbolic, expressing gratitude and maintaining the sacred relationship between humans and the spiritual realm within Dao culture.

Regarding the ancestor worship: In the ancestor worship beliefs of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi, the structure for organizing and maintaining the ancestral temple does not depend on the birth order of children within a family. Unlike many ethnic groups with clear regulations on the prioritized role of the eldest child, the Dao Quần Chẹt believe that anyone within the clan, if they meet the conditions regarding economic stability, ritual understanding, and responsibility, can separate from the main ancestral temple to establish a branch ancestral temple (also known as a "sub-ancestral temple"). When this occurs, other members of the same lineage must respect this separation and shift their worship practices to the new temple. Each clan within the

Dao Quần Chẹt community has a distinct ancestral origin, linked to a specific progenitor from whom subsequent branches emerged. The head of the clan, typically the eldest son of the eldest branch, is responsible for overseeing the main ancestral temple. The clan head is not only the highest-ranking individual by bloodline but must also meet strict criteria: they must have undergone the *Cấp Sắc* ritual, possess extensive knowledge of ritual systems and customs, and be capable of organizing and coordinating important clan affairs. Whenever the clan faces a significant event—from ancestor worship ceremonies, house building, weddings, to exorcism rituals—the clan head will inform and convene family representatives for discussion. After reaching a consensus, they will be responsible for organizing, directing, and supervising the implementation process. Besides their coordinating role, the clan head also directly performs ancestor worship rituals during annual festivals and other traditional religious ceremonies for each clan.

However, if the clan head lacks the capacity or has not been fully instructed in the worship rituals, the performance of important ceremonies will be transferred to reputable shamans within the community. According to the Dao Quần Chẹt belief, only highly skilled shamans—those who master ritual principles and can connect with the spirit world in accordance with ethnic traditions—are qualified to communicate with ancestors and protective deities. “Thus, in the family, the Dao people report every event and request blessings from their grandparents, ancestors, and clan. This highlights the strong connection between the living and the dead; when incense is lit, it's as if the past and present merge, with no distinction of distance” [14].

Third, the humanistic significance of ancestor worship among the Dao Quần Chẹt People in Ba Vi Commune, Hanoi City.

Expressing the Dao Quần Chẹt People's Conceptions of the Spiritual World

In the worldview of the Dao Quần Chẹt people, humans are a harmonious combination of a visible body and an invisible soul—the latter being considered the core element that sustains life. They believe that each individual possesses a sacred entity called a “hồn” (soul), representing life, consciousness, and the spiritual essence of a person. According to this view, the “hồn” is not synonymous with the concept of “ma” (spirit/ghost). While “hồn” is an intrinsic element, protective in nature and intimately connected to the individual while alive, “ma” is a different form of existence, often attributed to supernatural entities that can negatively influence humans. The Dao clearly distinguish between two types of “ma”: benevolent spirits (*ma lành*) and malevolent spirits (*ma dữ*). Benevolent spirits are believed to be the souls of ancestors and deceased relatives who offer protection and guidance to their descendants. In contrast, malevolent spirits are often wandering souls, those without a place of rest, or those who died unnatural deaths, carrying resentment and thus prone to causing misfortune, illness, or bad luck for the living. This belief profoundly influences the Dao people's rituals, exorcisms, soul-calling ceremonies, and other spiritual practices, reflecting the close relationship between humans, ancestors, and the supernatural world in their religious life. “Benevolent spirits include ancestors, *Bản Vương* spirits, the Jade Emperor, Earth Deities, Agricultural Deities...

Benevolent spirits usually grant blessings and protect humans, but they also punish if people show disrespect. Malevolent spirits include twin spirits, stream spirits, mountain spirits, forest spirits, and the souls of those who died abnormally... Malevolent spirits are bad spirits that always harm people” [15]. The Dao people believe that humans consist of two parts: the body (*phân xác*) and the soul (*phân hồn*). The body is the tangible entity that humans can see, while the soul governs the body and is invisible. They believe that a person has 12 souls scattered throughout the body: in the head, eyes, nose, ears, mouth, neck, chest, abdomen, hands, feet, back, and anus. Among these, one primary soul determines a person's life. The soul in the head, residing in the hair whorl, is the main soul that controls all others. The soul is an invisible and constantly moving element. During sleep, the soul can leave the body and travel everywhere, and what the soul encounters is reflected through dreams. Therefore, they believe in dreams and omens” [16]. In the Dao concept of the cosmos and the afterlife, when a person dies, their body and soul separate. The soul, upon leaving the body, is not immediately liberated but is sent down to the underworld, envisioned as a hell—a space that confines souls, preventing them from returning to their ancestors or achieving supernatural transformation. To free the soul from the underworld and guide it to the heavenly realm—where ancestral souls reside—descendants in the living world must perform the “đốt tang” (funeral burning) ritual. This ritual acts as an intermediary, helping the soul cross the boundary between life and death to achieve peace and eternal existence. According to the Dao Quần Chẹt worldview, the heavenly realm is not an undefined space but is organized in an orderly fashion, reflecting the social model of the earthly world. Ancestral souls reside by clan, and these clans form residential communities, much like villages in the real world. This structure demonstrates the continuity between the social order of the living world and the spiritual world, while also reflecting the strong connection between generations within the same bloodline, even after crossing over. The *đốt tang* ritual, therefore, is not merely a farewell but also a re-establishment of the deceased's position within their clan's ancestral system in the heavenly realm.

Reflecting the Dao Quần Chẹt People's conceptions of human maturity

The *Cấp Sắc* ritual for the Dao people in general, and the Dao Quần Chẹt community in Ba Vi in particular, is not merely a religious and spiritual ceremony. It is a comprehensive cultural symbol that deeply reflects the people's philosophy of life, traditional ethics, and unique folk art. This ritual plays a crucial role in establishing spiritual citizenship, marking a significant transition in each individual's life—from adolescence to adulthood, with full responsibilities towards family, clan, and community. From an anthropological perspective, the Dao Quần Chẹt have a clear understanding of maturity, linking it to both physical changes and psycho-social transformations. For females, maturity is demonstrated through their growing interest in domestic skills like embroidery and sewing, paying attention to their appearance, and behaving more discreetly and modestly in interactions, especially with the opposite gender. Meanwhile, males entering adulthood show clear changes in behavior and interests: they gradually move away from childhood games like top-spinning and *đấu*

playing, instead participating in community activities such as attending market fairs, gathering at summer festivals (ồ thội hè), learning to play the flute, and singing courtship songs (hát giao duyên)—forms that demonstrate their communication skills and ability to attract partners according to ethnic tradition. Thus, these external manifestations of maturity are not just natural biological signs; they are also preparations for social roles and spiritual rituals—culminating in the Cấp Sắc ceremony. This ritual signifies the affirmation and recognition by ancestors and the community that an individual possesses the qualities necessary to enter adult life—ethically, culturally, and spiritually.

Beyond the aforementioned psycho-physiological signs, the Dao people in general, and the Dao Quần Chẹt specifically, have a ritual that marks the maturity of young men: the Cấp Sắc ceremony. This is a quintessential cultural feature in the spiritual life of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi. They believe that only those who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual possess a virtuous heart and moral character, understand right from wrong in life, strive towards good deeds, refrain from evil, and are truly recognized as descendants of Bàn Vương. The Cấp Sắc ceremony elevates a male from childhood to adult manhood. An elderly man who has not undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual is still considered immature. Conversely, even a young man who has completed the Cấp Sắc ritual is permitted to participate in village affairs. The Dao people believe that if one does not undergo the Cấp Sắc ritual, they will forever remain an immature child even after death, lacking status within the clan. The Dao Quần Chẹt worship ancestors for four generations. When inviting the deceased to a ceremony, they first invite those who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual. For those who died without having completed Cấp Sắc, their families will invite them to partake in the ceremony last, and by the time of their grandchildren, they may no longer be worshipped. The Dao Quần Chẹt believe that an individual who has not undergone Cấp Sắc lacks status and therefore cannot lead or bring blessings to the family, as they are still considered an immature child incapable of undertaking important tasks.

The Cấp Sắc ritual marks a significant turning point in a Dao man's life, elevating him to the status of a mature adult with full authority to participate in community affairs. This ceremony helps individuals develop a proper understanding of themselves and how to live a life of character, morality, and responsibility towards their family and society.

Reflecting the Dao Quần Chẹt People's Conceptions of Moral Education

The ancestor and clan worship rituals of the Dao Quần Chẹt in Ba Vi profoundly instill virtues of humanity (nhân), propriety (lễ), and filial piety (hiếu) in younger generations within modern society. These practices also foster a resilient vitality, enabling the Dao Quần Chẹt to adapt to new circumstances without being assimilated by other ethnic groups or losing their unique cultural identity. The establishment of the ancestor altar continues throughout their lives, creating a spiritual space that holds a core and important position in the spiritual life of each family, ensuring continuity and knowledge of their origins and the nurturing contributions of their ancestors. Through these worship rituals, people receive an education about their roots and traditions, which is essential for any ethnic group.

In ancestor and clan worship, the images of ancestors, the ethnic origin, and the processes of migration and development are vividly brought to life through the narratives and skillful performances of the shamans. This unfolds in a "sacred time" and "sacred space," recreated frequently in the Dao people's spiritual life. For the Dao, performing these rituals takes place in a sacred atmosphere with intense concentration, demanding self-awareness from each participant, thus achieving a very high educational impact. Whenever families organize ceremonies, such as Tết Nhảy or Cấp Sắc, a large number of relatives, friends, and neighbors are drawn to observe and learn, express gratitude to ancestors, and transmit traditional cultural values. The educational aspect of these ceremonies, particularly regarding traditional culture, is prominently expressed in the songs, pronouncements, commandments, and ancestral teachings that emphasize "doing good and avoiding evil." During the ritual, the moral instruction part (lễ giáo huấn) is one of the most important steps for the initiate and participants. For instance, in the Cấp Sắc ceremony, the initiate must be formally dressed, sitting before the altar, holding a bamboo pole across their shoulders, with a horizontal bar inserted to hold candles and lamps for the ritual. The initiate receives moral commandments from the Taoist masters, including prohibitions such as: Not to kill living beings; Not to curse gods, heaven, earth, or the moon; Not to be impious or disrespectful to deities; Not to crave lust or wealth; Not to commit adultery; Not to favor the rich and disdain the poor; Not to despise siblings or friends. And vows such as: Vow to be sacred; Keep the body pure; Not to be suspicious; May the seven stars protect; May the three origins assist. They believe that only those who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual possess a virtuous heart and moral character, understand right from wrong in life, strive towards good deeds, refrain from evil, and are truly recognized as descendants of Bàn Vương. The Cấp Sắc ceremony recognizes a male's transition from childhood to adult manhood. An elderly man who has not undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual is still considered immature. Conversely, even a young man who has completed the Cấp Sắc ritual is permitted to participate in village affairs. The Dao people believe that if one does not undergo the Cấp Sắc ritual, they will forever remain an immature child even after death, lacking status within the clan. The Dao Quần Chẹt worship ancestors for four generations. When inviting the deceased to a ceremony, they first invite those who have undergone the Cấp Sắc ritual. For those who died without having completed Cấp Sắc, their families will invite them to partake in the ceremony last, and by the time of their grandchildren, they may no longer be worshipped. The Dao Quần Chẹt believe that an individual who has not undergone Cấp Sắc lacks status and therefore cannot lead or bring blessings to the family, as they are still considered an immature child incapable of undertaking important tasks. Thus, for the Dao people, the education of human morality is always highly valued. They teach respect for the shamans who perform the Cấp Sắc ceremony, gratitude towards parents, loyalty to friends, prioritizing righteousness over wealth, altruism, and courage. They also emphasize knowing right from wrong, avoiding evil, sacrificing for fellow human beings, not committing evil acts, not harming living creatures, and not being greedy for wealth or fame. Living truthfully, respecting laws, and living sincerely with integrity are also crucial values...

In summary, ancestor and clan worship plays an exceptionally important role in the spiritual life of the Dao Quần Chẹt people in Ba Vi. This isn't merely a traditional form of belief, but also a foundation for community cohesion, contributing to the maintenance and reproduction of the unique cultural values and customs of the Dao people. At the same time, this belief system is also a component that contributes to the diversity within Vietnam's cultural landscape, helping to form the national cultural identity with its unity in diversity. Continuing to preserve and promote this belief not only means preserving intangible cultural heritage, but also helps to strengthen cultural identity in the context of modernization and integration.

Notes

- [1],[7],[15],[16] Chu Thi Thu Ha (2020), *Material Culture of the Dao People in Ba Vi – Hanoi*, Ethnic Culture Publishing House. pg. 57, 109, 103, 104
- [2] <http://bavi.bavi.hanoi.gov.vn/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/gioi-thieu-ve-xa-ba-vi-555-557.html>
- [3] <https://toquoc.vn/tai-hien-tet-nhay-cua-nguoi-dao-tai-lang-99202738.htm>
- [4],[8],[9],[11] <https://hanoimoi.com.vn/ban-in/Van-hoa/956204/tet-nhay-cua-nguoi-dao>
- [5] *Tết Nhảy of the Dao People in Ba Vi – A Cultural Gem of Hanoi.pdf*
- [6] <http://dulichlangvanhoa.com/gioi-thieu-ban-sac-van-hoa-dong-bao-dan-toc-dao.html>
- [7] *Chữ Thị Thu Hà (2020), Văn hóa vật chất của người Dao ở Ba Vi – Hà Nội*, Nxb. Văn hóa Dân tộc, tr109
- [10] <https://vovworld.vn/vi-VN/sac-mau-cac-dan-toc-vietnam/tuc-tho-cung-ban-vuong-cua-nguoi-dao-o-huyen-ba-che-quang-ninh>
- [12] <http://laichau.gov.vn>
- [13] <http://bavi.bavi.hanoi.gov.vn/tin-chi-tiet/-/chi-tiet/oc-ao-le-cap-sac-cua-nguoi-dao-ba-vi-1132-551.html>
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