

SPECIFICS OF QUAN THANH DE QUAN BELIEF IN HONG NGU CITY, DONG THAP PROVINCE

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Abstract

Around the end of the 18th century, Hong Ngu became a place for trade and commercial activities and also a place for culture exchange among the Vietnamese, Chinese and Kh'mer people, the typical result of which was specifics of Quan Thanh De Quan belief. Synthesizing and analysing documents in combination with fieldwork, participatory observations, and in-depth interviews based on functional, acculturation theory groups with historical, interpretive specific culture associated with a particular context, this article presents the appearance and characteristics of Quan Thanh De Quan belief in Hong Ngu into two outstanding aspects: multicultural fusion and tolerance. At the same time, the article presents the work of conservation and promotion of Quan Thanh De Quan belief values by the state management agencies and the residents in Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province.

Keywords: *Belief, fusion, Hong Ngu, Quan Thanh De Quan, tolerance.*

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ĐẶC TRUNG CỦA TÍN NGƯỠNG QUAN THÁNH ĐẾ QUÂN Ở THÀNH PHỐ HỒNG NGỰ, TỈNH ĐỒNG THÁP

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Tóm tắt

Hồng Ngự đã sớm trở thành nơi giao thương buôn bán và diễn ra sự giao thoa văn hóa Việt, Hoa, Khmer vào khoảng cuối thế kỷ XVIII với kết quả tiêu biểu là các đặc trưng giá trị của tín ngưỡng Quan Thánh Đế Quân. Vận dụng phương pháp phân tích, tổng hợp tài liệu thành văn kết hợp với điền dã, quan sát tham dự, phỏng vấn sâu dựa vào nhóm lý thuyết chức năng và tiếp biến văn hóa với quan điểm đặc thù luận lịch sử và diễn giải văn hóa gắn với ngữ cảnh cụ thể. Bài viết này thể hiện diện mạo, đặc trưng của tín ngưỡng Quan Thánh Đế Quân ở Hồng Ngự qua hai giá trị nổi bật là tính dung hợp đa văn hóa và tính khoan dung. Đồng thời, tìm hiểu về công tác bảo tồn phát huy giá trị tín ngưỡng Quan Thánh Đế Quân của cơ quan quản lý nhà nước và cộng đồng cư dân ở Hồng Ngự, tỉnh Đồng Tháp.

Từ khóa: *Dung hợp, Hồng Ngự, khoan dung, Quan Thánh Đế Quân, tín ngưỡng.*

1. Introduction

During the process of land reclamation in Hong Ngu, in which so many hindrances and difficulties had incurred, the indigenous people constantly wished that they would be protected, that all things would be proliferate, so several kinds of beliefs have existed in accordance with the foundation of the community's cultural traditions and human values as a result. All these elements create a cultural life, full of colors thanks to the harmony and exchange between the main ethnic culture - Vietnamese and the imported cultures of the Chinese and Khmer ethnic groups. Therefore, some types of beliefs, including that of Quan Thanh De Quan (Guan Yu), will be "folkified" or "Vietnamized" to adapt themselves to the local people's spiritual life. Despite its long history of formation with local people's lifestyle characterized with openness, harmony, and strong integration between ethnic groups, Hong Ngu has remained in a small township, so studies about the origin of formation and identification of the religious values of Guan Yu in people's spiritual life have still been blurred and insufficient so far. In order to take advantage of the local diversity in folklore culture, studies about Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu should receive more special attention because Guan Yu belief or "Quan Cong worship" (as called by the folk people) is the religious practice of a very rich and valuable multicultural fusion process, but not fully identified, unattended by local authorities, leading to ineffective management, preservation and promotion. In this article, we present the issues including the appearance, characteristics, impacts and meaning of Guan Yu belief, with the specific case at Guan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu being the key study focus. To take a more comprehensive, thorough view of the research problem, we applied *the functionalism* by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) and his group of acculturation theory of historical discourse and cultural interpretation and reinterpretation associated with specific contexts, combined with fieldwork, observation and attendance, oral interviews with local people, in-depth interviews with management boards.

2. Beliefs and Guan Yu belief culture

In Chinese language, belief (信仰) means "the

affection, faith, and reliance on a certain subject, either a human being or a god" (Shaozhou, 2012, p. 17, 26). According to another interpretation, "belief is man's faith in something sacred, sublime, supernatural or in other words simply man's faith and expectation in the "sacred", as opposed to the "worldly" existence" (Ngo, 2001, p. 16). In his work of *Magic, Science and Religion*, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) argued that "religion was born when human life had many obstacles and uncertainties, then people used the magical ritual system" (Duong & Duc, 1954, p. 17-92). Regarding religious culture, Nguyen Dang Duy said that "culture expresses sacred values in daily life and expresses sacred beliefs in religious life" (Nguyen, 1997, p. 29). According to author Nguyen Ngoc Tho, "religious culture is a value system of human behavior towards the living environment (natural and social) in order to achieve good wishes for their lives" (Nguyen, 2017a, p. 21). Within the scope of the article, we inherit the above interpretations and define that religion is a system of spiritual belief created by men to convey aspirations to a deified subject to pray for protection from uncertainties, calamity, mental fear in their living world.

Guan Yu belief is a type of folk one crystallized from the cultural crossover process of Vietnamese and Chinese people in the land of Hong Ngu. For each ethnic group, the image of Guan Yu has been imprinted in their subconsciousness and has played an important role in contributing to the formation of national cultural identity. So far, Guan Yu belief is still flourishing in the spiritual life of the people of Hong Ngu, is a part of the social ideology to honor the historical hero who contributed to the country, with the community as a representative of the good values of historical, cultural, social ethics and are worshipped as "god-saint" so that people can have their faith on and could be protected and blessed by him. No matter what the social context will be, the position of Guan Yu in the minds of the people always occupy a certain reverence for his power over them. The practice of Guan Yu belief has helped to bring people together, even beyond the limits of local prejudice or partiality to direct people towards one unique faith. In Guan Yu belief, many national

traditional values such as moral values, and human values such as the mind of “uông nước nhớ nguồn” (as you drink water, remember the source, “an qua nhớ kẻ trong cay” (gratitude is the sign of noble souls), “take chivalry and prestige” to honor those who have meritorious service to the people and the country.

Currently, the studies about belief in general, about Guan Yu in particular have been approached at different aspects by several authors such as Nguyen (2017) with the article “Transformation and empowerment in Guan Yu belief in Southern Vietnam” (Nguyen, 2017b); Duong (2008) “Belief in worshipping Guan Yu in Southern Vietnam (from the perspective of cultural exchange)” (Duong, 2008); Nguyen (2016) “A brief review of the origin of Guan Yu worship” (Nguyen, 2016); Nguyen (2011) with commentary on Tam Quoc (Three Kingdoms) (Nguyen, 2011); Do & Phan (2016) “Belief in worshipping Guan Yu & Guan Yu Temple in Hong Ngu region” (Do & Phan, 2016); Nguyen & Nguyen (2013) “Trung and Nghia (Righteousness and Gratitude) in Vietnamese culture, studying the image of Quan Thanh De Quan” (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2013); Nguyen (2013) with the song “Quan Cong worship - a unique spiritual culture of Chinese people in Can Tho” (Nguyen, 2013); Nguyen et al. (2017) “Belief in worshipping Quan Thanh De Quan in Tu An Hieu Nghia religion” (Nguyen et al., 2017); Nguyen (2014) “Worship of Quan Cong in endogenous religions in Southern Vietnam” (Nguyen, 2014); Nguyen (2019) “The image of Quan Cong through parallel sentences in Chinese pagodas and temples in An Giang” (Nguyen, 2019); Le (2020) “Belief in Quan Cong” (Le, 2020). Some more general studies also mentioned Guan Yu as one of the deities worshipped by the Chinese community in Southern Vietnam as Phan An expressed about the religious characteristics of Quan Thanh De Quan in his article on Chinese people in Southern Vietnam (Phan, 2005), meanwhile, Tran Hong Lien also describes the attributes of this worship custom and characterizes the system of divine shrines of the Chinese people in Southern Vietnam (Tran, 2005, p. 23). These research results have helped us determine the research context in Hong Ngu

city, located in the overall cultural region of the Southern/Southwestern of Vietnam with specific given geographical and historical circumstances. The research results will help us look for new interpretations associated with reality rather than interpretations following the fixed meaning of symbols or cultural realities stereotypes according to the functionalist research school by Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942).

However, previous studies have not really touched the specific context of such a border region as Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province. Although Do Kim Truong and Phan Thi Kieu Hanh mentioned the worship of Guan Yu and Guan Yu Temple in Hong Ngu, they mainly described the history of the establishment of Guan Yu (Guan Yu Temple) in Hong Ngu city (Do & Phan, 2016). All studies were done basing on conducting direct surveys and internal interaction relationship between the statue of Guan Yu and the faith community, but not really on the perspective of multi-ethnic cultural exchange in the targeted research area. At the same time, in the research works, the theory of cultural interpretation with a specific view of historical discourse and cultural reinterpretation associated with context along with structural theory to emphasize the interaction relationship between the pair of “sacred-mortal” categories in religious life was not properly used. Furthermore, the views of constructivism - deconstruction were not used to identify the “indigenous attributes” of the Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province. For this article, the focus was attributed to fieldwork surveys in the community and to semi-structured and in-depth interview methods. Thereby, enough fundamental background was generated and then applied for proposing solutions to improving the effectiveness of preserving and promoting the values of Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province. Additionally, the research results of this article do not overlap with those of previous publications although all of the previous published results have made important contributions in terms of scientific theories and practical context to the effective completion of this paper.

3. Specifics of subjects and foundation of Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu

In terms of the religious subjects, in the folk beliefs of Chinese and Vietnamese people, there are many worshipped subjects such as: Mr. Bon, Quang Trach Ton Vuong, Bao Sanh Dai de, Phuc Duc Chinh Than, Thien Hau, Kim Hoa Nuong, Cuu Thien Huyen Nuong, etc. This rich divine system is the crystallization of cultural crossover during people's migration and settlement on the lands of Southern Vietnam and Hong Ngu city. Typically, the statue of Guan Yu, often called Quan Cong, is popularly worshipped in the communities of Chinese and Vietnamese residents. During our fieldwork in Hong Ngu city, when being asked about the Guan Yu belief or the custom of worshipping Guan Yu, the participants all showed clear understandings and they used the word "Him" to refer to this type of belief. *"In this area of Hong Ngu, everyone knows it well when it comes to Guan Yu, and he is really sacred. The people here visit him almost every day and on occasions of worshipping ceremony for him at the old market, affirmed Mr. P.T.S* (participatory interview: a male research participant, who visited Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu).

Guan Yu, whose real name was Quan Vu (Quan Yu) or Quan Van Truong (Yunchang), was a native of Shanxi, was one of the famous figures of the Tam Quoc (Three Kingdoms) period in China and was symbolized through the works Tam Quoc Chi and Tam Quoc Dien Nghia (Romance of the Three Kingdoms). It was a normal and appropriate process for Guan Yu to be promoted from Knight to King and then Great Emperor because this symbolic meaning is completely consistent with the concepts of "di lao dinh quoc" (those who died for the nation should be worshiped), "di tu can su" (those who died because of serving the country should be worshiped) by Confucianism (according to Le Ky). By Duong Dieu Tong's time, when the Kings ordained 46 generals from the Xuan Thu to the Tang Dynasty, Guan Yu was ranked 50th. From then on, Guan Yu officially entered the divine world of the orthodox bureaucratic class. By the time of Mingcheng, Zhu Yuanzhang had made a move to consolidate and spread the Guan Yu belief throughout China. Following that, Ming Shenzong (1563-1620) made

him "Hiep Thien ho quoc trung nghia Dai de" (the man who protected the country with the help from Jade Emperor) in 1578, and in 1613 continued to enthrone "Tam gioi phuc ma Dai de than uy vien tran Thien ton Guan Yu" (the Chinese great general who had resounding prestige), Quan Cong was officially called Quan Yu, Hiep Thien Dai De or Guan Yu (Nguyen, 2018, p.88). Over a long period of time, due partly to being influenced by social context and different dynasties in China, the title Quan Thanh De Quan was also called by many different names such as: Quan Vu, Quan Cong, Quan Lao Gia, Quan De, Son Tay Phu Tu, Quan Phu Tu, Vu De, Phat Gia Lam, Ong Do Mang, Than Tai (Le, 2015). Stemming from the different worshipping methods and practical needs of the Chinese people in each social situation, the image of Guan Yu as a character mentioned in Chinese history books were gradually been folked, fictionalized, mythologized, deified into a glorious deity, popularly worshipped in Chinese households and outside the community (Nguyen, 2019).

The belief of Guan Yu in Hong Ngu City as well as in Southern Vietnam takes the image of Quan Cong as the base for the symbolic value for worshipping activities. The image of Quan Cong worshipped in Hong Ngu City plays an important role in the minds of the people here, not only in Chinese households but also in Vietnamese families in addition to other gods. In the folk belief system, Vietnamese people in Hong Ngu have adopted the image of Quan Cong with most of the sacred functions of a sacrificial deity to give blessings to the people by two basic ways: the first being "folkification" or "Vietnamization", which were traditionally spread to the land from North Central Vietnam and the second being deepened by the Vietnamese through the cultural baggage brought here by Chinese immigrants. Through the process of cultural exchange between ethnic groups in Hong Ngu, the image of Quan Cong in the minds of Hong Ngu people has changed in terms of signification and expression in accordance with the characteristics of the social context - urban areas for trade and commerce activities. The image of Guan Yu is expressed by many Hong Ngu people with the belief that he is a "blessed god", "god of wealth" or "than van xuong" (the god that gives people right behavior, education, and career success) rather than a

god of the destiny of the man in the family or the god of exorcism to cast out demons as what Mr. P.T.S. believed *“My family and I often come here and offer incense to worship Guan Yu and prostrate in front of him on every occasion of worshipping ceremony organized by the temple. We come here mainly to pray to him for his protection and for his help with the household’s smoothly-run business, so that we could be soon prosperous and also pray for giving support to my children who could later study successfully and attain a congenial career”* (participatory interview: a male research participant, who visited Guan Yu at Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu).

In terms of the characteristics of the belief origin, the image of Guan Yu in families and community in Hong Ngu city all bear distinct values in terms of architecture, art and his worshipping ceremony is also a typical traditional culture of the Chinese community in Hong Ngu city. It can be seen that the urgent needs of the exiles when arriving and settling down in a new land is a strong desire to repay the gods who supported them on the way to migration as well as when they settled peacefully and prosperously (Tran, 2005, p.23). The Chinese community in Southern Vietnam practice polytheistic worship, however, there are three popular worshipped gods: Guan Yu, Thien Hau Mother and Phuc Duc Chinh Than. It is no coincidence that these gods are worshipped, cherished and hold the most dignified position in the life of Chinese people in Southern Vietnam, but it is the god himself and the general economic, political and social context in contemporary China and Southern Vietnam, especially the worship of Guan Yu and Thien Hau Mother that plays the vital role (Phan, 2005, p.142).

The Guan Yu Temple in Hong Ngu City is referred to by various names such as Quan De Mieu, Quan Thanh Mieu, Mieu Quan Cong, Mieu Ong Quan Cong etc. although on the diaphragm located just above the main gate of the temple the three words Guan Yu Temple (廟帝關) are written and most of the people who participated in our interviews used the two words “Chua Ong” to interpret the Guan Yu Temple as explained by Mrs. N.T.L that *“the people around this area all call it Chua Ong and have great confidence in his sacredness because he blesses*

everyone with good health, prosperous business and successful education of descendants” (participatory interview: a female research participant, who visited Guan Yu at Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu). Guan Yu Temple covers an area of 248 square meters and is located on Ly Thuong Kiet Street, Hamlet 2, An Thanh ward, Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province. In terms of geographical feature, Guan Yu Temple is located in the heart of Hong Ngu market where the trading city is busy and bustling with trade and commerce activities and is located along the banks of the So Thuong River, which is gentle, airy all year round (fieldwork document in 2022). With the conditions of “*thiên thời, địa lợi*” (heavenly weather, earthy advantage), convenient for both inland and waterway trade activities, the Guan Yu Temple is always crowded and bustling during the days of the worshipping ceremony. From our fieldwork documents, there are 20-30 visits per day and according to Mr. L.H.T., *“It is estimated that more than 300 people participate in worship during the days of the astral ceremony on the 24th day of the 6th lunar calendar”* (participatory interview: a male research participant, who visited Guan Yu at Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu).

Before being finally relocated to Hong Ngu market area in 2022, Guan Yu Temple, under the influences by socio-economic context and natural conditions, had undergone many removals, restorations and repairs. As explained by Do Kim Truong - Phan Thi Kieu Hanh, “Guan Yu Temple has gone through three stages of formation and development, associated with each area, being in different names such as Quan De Mieu Tra Du, Quan De Mieu Thuong Lac and Quan De Mieu Hong Ngu (Do & Phan, 2016). On our actual survey on the formation history of Guan Yu Temple in Hong Ngu City in 2022, it was recorded that people from middle age to old age all said that “the temple of Mr. Quan Cong here is called Chua Ong, originally built in the Tra Du area, and was called Tra Du Temple as a consequence. However, because Tra Du was actually in a low terrain, it was often flooded. Therefore, the people together moved the temple to the area of Thuong Lac on the banks of the So Thuong River and renamed it as Guan Yu Temple of Thuong Lac (currently Thien Quang temple dedicated to Buddha). Later, the administrative

boundaries were adjusted and the government built Hong Ngu market on the banks of the So Thuong River at the intersection with the Tien River. As a result, the trade and commerce activities became busy, people's life was prosperous thanks to the convenience in commodity sales to and from Cambodia and in transporting goods to the lower basin of Tien River such as Cao Lanh, Sa Dec, Vinh Long and Can Tho. The life of people in the Hong Ngu market became rich, so they joined hand and moved Guan Yu Temple to the side of Hong Ngu market and renamed it as Quan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu as what it is now" (Fieldwork document 2022).

"Construction history of Guan Yu Temple, 1860-1991" kept inside the temple stated that "in the Autumn of Canh Than, the 18th year of King Tu Duc, the feudal government deployed So Thuong (tariff collection station) in Hiep An village, General Kien An, Kien Dang district, Dinh Tuong canton control the tax collection from the local people. Hiep An village used to be a market place, so trade activities were bustling, the people's life was prosperous, the population was abundant, so they were rich and respectful, Chinese people, Vietnamese people and the people of Guan Yu disciples contributed energy and money to build Chua Ong of wooden frame, red tile roofing, lime brick walls in Hiep An market" (Fieldwork Document 2022).

The results of our 2022 actual survey show that, in Hong Ngu city, there are currently 02 (two) main establishments worshipping Quan Cong, namely: Guan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu and Quan Yu of Tra Du Temple (area of about 150 square meters; full set of incense - lambs - tea - fruit; sitting or standing statues; diaphragm, and paralleled sentences, all in good conditions). As Mr. L.H.T. said: "In the past, the temple was built and managed by a group of Chinese men and a small number of Vietnamese after their donation and charity, but the later generations of Chinese men who went far away for jobs but they had no successors at all, so now the members of Ban Te themselves are mainly Vietnamese" (participatory interview: a male, member of the worshipping board for Guan Yu). In addition, there are 07 (seven) places to worship Quan Cong, mostly small temples built of concrete by Vietnamese people and were located on the roadside or in front of the household's yard used to worship Quan Cong, Thien Hau Mother, Ong Dia, Phuc Duc Chinh Than (under 14 square meters; full set of incense - lamb - tea - fruit; using glass to paint the portrait of Guan Yu or articles inscribed Chinese characters Guan Yu; the condition of the facilities is still well preserved). People living around regularly come to worship, offer incense to pray for the God's support to their families so that they could be healthy and that their businesses would go smoothly (Fieldwork Document 2022).



Photo 1. Quan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu, An Thanh ward, Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province

Source: The author's, 2022.



Photo 2. The main hall in Quan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu, An Thanh ward, Hong Ngu city, Dong Thap province

Source: the author's, 2022.

Through the characteristics of the subject as well as the location and scale of Guan Yu belief establishments in Hong Ngu, it is shown that the worship of Guan Yu is associated with the commercial profession in the urban area. In the public consciousness, the image of Quan Thanh De or Quan Cong bears many powerful characteristics as those of the “god of wealth” or the characteristics commonly shown by ethnic groups as a “god of blessings” in the spiritual life of local people as Mrs. N.T.L said: *“The people around this market are very confident in his sacredness, which has blessed everyone to trade prosperously and have a prosperous life”* (participatory interview: a female research participant, who visited Guan Yu at Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu). In the households’ thoughts, the image of Guan Yu has the common characteristics of being a “god of blessings” as Ms. H.T.N.C said: *“I often come here to offer incense and pray that he will give blessings and peace to myself and my family members”* (participatory interview: a female research participant, who visited Guan Yu at Guan Yu Temple - Hong Ngu).

4. Typical values of Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu

Through our current time to study about Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu, it is possible to summarize some typical values of this type of belief as follows:

First, it is the cross-cultural fusion, a consequence of cross-cultural process, will lead to the phenomenon of integration, osmosis or symbiosis of some close attributes between the close cultures to form a new attribute block with higher orientation values. In cultures, the phenomenon of cultural pluralism integration manifests itself at the micro level rather than cultural pluralism. The phenomenon of cultural alignment refers to holistic integration. The integration process always exists in parallel with two elements, one side is the “subject” (indigenous culture) and the other is the “object” (imported culture) that are screened, combined and absorbed into each indigenous cultural element. Every culture of the countries in the world has goes through this process as an objective law.

The transformation from a Chinese “god of support” to the god of life for Vietnamese men or Vietnamese “god of blessings” was done as over Vietnamese’ acceptance of Guan Yu imange, they began the process of “Vietnamization”, “refraction” of the Chinese god of in new forms of structures to better acceptance. When the origins of Chinese culture was transformed to Vietnamese culture, it seems that Quan Yu power also turned into new powers that are “blessed” or “genius” for Vietnamese. In parallel with that process is a complete transition from the position of a pure “god” of the Chinese to the position of “god of wealth” of the Vietnamese because in Hong Ngu residents’ mind , Guan Yu is the god

of the Chinese themselves. He gave blessings to the Chinese so that they could do business successfully; therefore, Vietnamese people followed their beliefs although they do not know the origin and functions of Guan Yu (Nguyen, 2017a, p. 297). This is the result of the process of integrating transformation in the belief of Guan Yu, which has proved the multicultural integration of the ethnic groups living in the land of Hong Ngu.

The belief of Guan Yu in Hong Ngu exists on the basis of sharing, reconciling many currents of thoughts, including folk ones to be able to achieve the most basic goal of “existing but not minggling”. From another perspective, after more than three hundred years of history of cross-cultural collision, compromise and integration, some values and attributes of this worship tradition have gradually deposited into a part of the historical heritage sediment, so that the community can still identify the cultural identity of each ethnic group through ancestors’ awareness and religious activities. Invariably, the process of cultural deposition takes place in parallel with the process of cross-cultural integration and integration. It is one of the motivations to promote the preservation and promotion of cultural values to prevent the risk of culture erosion under the processes of cultural intersection and integration among ethnic groups in Hong Ngu. Therefore, the culturally integrated character of the Imperial Saint belief associated with the historical-cultural context of the objective communities is considered, with the pluralistic origin of the beliefs, integrated values and cultural attributes largely maintaining the nuances of the origin of Guan Yu to a certain extent. As a result, cultural phenomena after integration are easily identified compared to purely traditional cultural phenomena. Over more than three hundred years of existence and development in the land of Hong Ngu, the belief of Guan Yu has undergone a continuous and powerful process of cultural integration in both awareness, organization and behavior with the living environment.

Second, it’s tolerance - openness, both inheriting Vietnamese national cultural traditions from ancient times and being fostered from the

natural context and historical characteristics, the cultural and spiritual values of Hong Ngu people are imbued with intergration and tolerance although the level of tolerance among communes and wards in Hong Ngu is somewhat different. Because the tribes have revered and worshipped these gods in a tolerant and open way, regardless of which god it is, believers have no discrimination to any gods regardless of whether it is old or small, luxurious or cowardly, male or female, new or old, strange or familiar, etc., everyone is equal. People worship gods with the same faith and desire to receive the blessings and satisfy their spiritual needs. Inadvertently, it has created a rich belief picture, diverse in genres, colorful in values as shared by the Temple’s Committee of Worship and the faith community in Guan Yu worship facilities when the author conducted in-depth interviews with Temple’s Committee of Worship and with the people coming to the temple for worship. As for Guan Yu belief, Mr. L.H.T said: “On the occasion of the *worshipping day*, many people come around. Although they are all far away every time the ceremony is celebrated, which is bustling and joyful, they take care of the ceremony together” (participatory interview: a male research participant, who is also a member of Temple’s Committee of Worship). When we asked some people who came to the temple for worship, they all gave the same answer about the implication of the belief as Mr. D.H.S (who lives in Tan Hong district) said: “Every year at the *worshipping day for Guan Yu*, my family and I come here to worship him and pray for peace for the family and hope that Guan Yu will give us good health and that the family business will be favorable and prospersous” (PVS, male, research participant who comes to Hong Ngu Guan Yu Temple). Ms. T.H.Q (lives in Tam Nong district) also said: “I come to the *worshipping day* and wish him to bless the family to be healthy, to bless the business to be favorable and prosperous” (participatory interview: female, research participant who comes to Hong Ngu Guan Yu Temple).

In addition, Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu also carries many nation’s traditional cultural features in terms of humanistic moral values and profound human values. Therefore, the belief of Guan Yu has

contributed to educating people goodness of life, directing people to reach the values of truthfulness - goodness - beauty, reminding the young generation to turn to the origin, from which tradition is multiplied into love for the homeland. Accordingly, the values urge the young generation to constantly study and practice talents to make contributions to building a more and more prosperous country. The cultural values of Guan Yu belief contributes to building a characteristic beauty in the folklore treasure of the land of Hong Ngu imbued with national cultural identity. Not only Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu, but all other beliefs and religions direct people towards the greatness, truth, goodness and beauty to promote positive values contributing to building their cultural life in the community and in Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu, Dong Thap province itself.

5. Conclusions

Guan Yu belief and worship has become popular in the folk belief system in the land of Hong Ngu. The places for practice Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu are Mieu Ong or Chua Ong which are usually of small size, built on the roadside, riverside, next to or inside pagodas. However, some places to worship Guan Yu are of a fairly large scale such as Guan Yu Temple of Hong Ngu and Guan Yu Temple of Tra Du. In terms of the nature and function, Guan Yu Temple is revered by the people here as a close god in their spiritual life, powerful as a “god of blessings” who gives blessings, prosperity and fortune to the people. The land of Hong Ngu was reclaimed, resided by different peoples who did business quite early, contributing to making this place a bustling and prosperous trading and commercial town in the Southwest of Vietnam. Guan Yu belief in Hong Ngu - Dong Thap along with those in other provinces and cities such as An Giang and Vinh Long is the result of showing the preservation of traditional culture of ethnic people basing on a harmonious and tolerant lifestyle to form new elements in spiritual activities in accordance with the characteristics of the land of Hong Ngu. The typical characteristic of Guan Yu belief has become a cultural feature of the Vietnamese and Chinese communities who worship, pray for best wishes./.

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