

THE BELIEF OF WORSHIPPING CO SAU IN CON DAO DISTRICT, BA RIA - VUNG TAU PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

The Vietnamese people's belief in worshipping people with meritorious services to the national community has long been established, popularized, and has become a social moral value. The belief of worshipping Co Sau (Vo Thi Sau) is a typical example of worshipping people with meritorious services in modern society, playing a very important role in the cultural life of the people of Con Dao, Ba Ria - Vung Tau province, currently.

Key Words: Worshipping beliefs, Co Sau, Con Dao, Ba Ria - Vung Tau.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The belief in worshipping Co Sau in Con Dao district, Ba Ria - Vung Tau province

According to the Dictionary of Religion (2002) by Mai Thanh Hai, the belief is belief and admiration in a supernatural and mystical force; which can take the symbolic form of “Heaven”, “Buddha”, “Lord”, “Saint”, “God” or some illusory, mysterious, invisible force affecting the people's spiritual lives, believed to be real and worshiped by people. Beliefs are gradually formed and developed in descending order: Totemism, magic, fetishism, polytheism and complete religions¹.

In “Vietnamese Traditional Beliefs” (2014), Doan Trieu Long believed: “The belief is a person's belief and admiration for sacred and mysterious things, beyond the real world. Beliefs are formed from imagination, then trust in a divine force with superhuman strength that can dominate all human activities.² “Belief is synonymous with spirituality (divine belief). This also means that spirituality is not religion, spirituality is just the ability to lead to religion”³.

In Vietnam, the belief of worshipping people with meritorious services to the village community, the nation has existed for a long time and has been handed down in folklore, developed and persisted to this day.

Among many heroes with meritorious services to the country, Vo Thi Sau is considered as one of the noble images of revolutionary heroism, sacrificing for the independence and freedom of the Fatherland. The sacrifice of “Co Sau” in Con Dao prison shows the indomitable spirit of the Vietnamese people. The death of the heroine is not only the epic song of Vietnamese young

Mai Thanh Hai (2006), *Dictionary in religious beliefs of the world and Vietnam*, Culture and Information Publishing House.¹

Mai Ngoc Chuc, Do Thi Hao (1984), *Vietnamese Goddesses*, Women Publishing House.²

Dinh Ngoc Bao, Do Thanh Binh and Nghiem Dinh Vi (1998), *World history from antiquity to 1918*, Hanoi National University Publishing House.³

generation in the period against foreign invaders, but also the obsession of the enemy right at Con Dao prison. Co Sau “lives heroically, dies gloriously”, and she is sacred and worshiped by the people of Con Dao. The phenomenon of worshipping Vo Thi Sau in Con Dao is actually a Vietnamese people's belief in worshipping people with meritorious services.

Heroine Vo Thi Sau was born in 1933 in a poor family in Dat Do, her father worked as a charioteer and her mother sold noodles at Dat Do market. In early 1946, the French colonialists returned to occupy areas in Ba Ria for the second time, including Dat Do. Vo Thi Sau at that time also just turned 11 years old. With an honest, gentle and simple nature, loving her homeland and country, seeing scenes of brutal murder and robbery by French soldiers, Vo Thi Sau deeply hated the invaders.

Before the pain and loss of her homeland, Vo Thi Sau participated in the resistance war against the French colonialists. In 1947, at the age of 14, Vo Thi Sau was both on duty to buy goods and to communicate with the enemy to grasp the enemy's situation and as a secret agent of the volunteer police in Dat Do district. Although she was young, she was very clever, agile and always completed the tasks assigned by the organization.

In 1949, Vo Thi Sau became a volunteer police officer in Dat Do district, participated in many battles to protect the homeland, the most prominent of which was the battle to destroy the famous evil ruler in Dat Do in 1949 and used grenades to disrupt a rally conducted by France in the district. The French government in Dat Do district was afraid and angry, and aggressively pursued the activities of the volunteer police team, including Vo Thi Sau.

In December 1949, during a business trip to Dat Do, Vo Thi Sau was captured, detained at Dat Do prison and Ba Ria prison. The enemy used many cruel torture methods but still could not get any testimony from Vo Thi Sau. Then they took her to Chi Hoa prison. Here Vo Thi Sau continued to communicate and fight to force the enemy to improve life in prison. In the face of Vo Thi Sau's fierce fighting spirit, although there was not enough evidence, due to fear of her influence on the revolutionary movement in the South, the French colonial government sentenced Vo Thi Sau to death and exiled Vo Thi Sau to Con Dao. As a resilient, brave and loyal soldier, Vo Thi Sau was honored to be admitted to the Vietnam Labor Party by the Party Committee of Con Dao Prison.

Vo Thi Sau died on the morning of January 23, 1952. When the French invaders took to the scaffold, with a relaxed face, steady steps, high head, singing the international song, Vo Thi Sau demonstrated the optimistic and indomitable spirit of a communist soldier.

Vo Thi Sau's sacrifice has left infinite mourning for comrades, teammates and compatriots. Vo Thi Sau's sacrifice is also a strong accusation against the barbarity and despicable intrigue of the French colonial regime.

After Vo Thi Sau's death, there are many anecdotes about the phenomenon of Co Sau “appearing” in the grave of the heroine in Hang Duong cemetery. People in Con Dao, on the 15th and the 1st of every month, often come to burn incense at Co Sau's grave to pray for peace in life. Many evildoers in Con Dao prison also had to fear, burnt incense and prayed that Co Sau would not harm them.

Vietnamese people in general and people of Con Dao in particular, most of them have the belief that, after people die, the soul still exists. A young dead person like Vo Thi Sau turned into a very sacred “Ba Co”. Ba Co can enter into someone, either to bless, to help, or to rebuke and punish. Con Dao people believe, admire, worship Vo Thi Sau who sacrificed for the people and country at a young age. They consider Co Sau as a blessing and powerful god. When you ask for her, you get it, when you wish, you also get it.

In Con Dao, the anniversary of heroine Vo Thi Sau's death day is one of the biggest events of the year, attracting not only locals but also tourists from all over the country to attend.

According to records in many documents, the date Vo Thi Sau was executed was January 23, 1952 solar calendar, ie December 27, 1951 lunar calendar. Therefore, in the past, Co Sau's death anniversary was held periodically on January 23. However, the people of Con Dao have decided to take December 27, 1951 of the lunar calendar as the death anniversary of the heroine Vo Thi Sau since 2010.

Vo Thi Sau - the heroine in the resistance war against the French, on the one hand was “turn into God” after her death, on the other hand, was “deified” by the people of Con Dao district. The worship of Co Sau has become a national hero worship belief, which has special significance in the spiritual life of the people of Con Dao district in particular and people of the country in general. The belief of worshipping Co Sau not only shows the morality of “drinking water, remembering the source”, gratitude to the heroes who have contributed to the country, but also shows the responsibility of the descendants to the ancestors in the construction and defense of current socialist Vietnamese Fatherland.

1.2. The role of Co Sau worshipping belief in the spiritual life of people in Con Dao district, Ba Ria - Vung Tau province currently

The belief of worshipping Co Sau contributes to balance the spiritual life of the people

From a place of imprisonment, torture of patriots and revolutionaries, up to now, Con Dao has become a district-level administrative unit of Ba Ria - Vung Tau province. Under the impact of globalization and the market economy, people's spiritual life, besides positive aspects, also shows signs of insecurity and anxiety. The belief of worshipping Co Sau makes an important contribution to balance the spiritual life of the people of Con Dao currently.

The belief of worshipping Co Sau is a spiritual support for people of Con Dao, a place of faith, hope, showing respect, deep gratitude to Co Sau for her heroic sacrifice for the national liberation struggle.

Normally, when people believe in the existence, help and support of supernatural beings, all prayers will come true. In the depths of people's consciousness, belief in the effectiveness of gods and saints has awakened and urged them to engage in good moral actions, helping them to be at ease and confident in the reality and good future.

The economic life largely depends on activities such as fishing at sea, exploiting forests, doing commercial services, spiritual tourism services, etc., so it is difficult to avoid luck factors in

the life of the people of Con Dao. Con Dao people believe that Co Sau is sacred, helping and protecting them to make life better. Whenever they come to burn incense at Co Sau's grave, they seem to have a state of peace of mind and relaxation. Through the forms of worship, the Co Sau belief becomes a general cultural phenomenon, satisfying the spiritual needs of the people here.

The belief of worshipping Co Sau contributes to strengthening community solidarity

Community is enhanced when the people of Con Dao share a common belief in the sacredness of Co Sau. The number of people visiting Co Sau's grave is increasing day by day. Co Sau's death anniversary is considered as a solemn holiday of the resident community in Con Dao. On the death anniversary, people voluntarily perform the death anniversary ritual. Co Sau's death anniversary is an occasion for residents of Con Dao to exchange, meet, connect, unite, and cordially help each other. The spiritual harmony has made the connection among people in real life increasingly stronger.

Co Sau's death anniversary in Con Dao is an opportunity for the people of Con Dao and the whole country to respectfully offer the heroine the incense to express infinite grief and gratitude. The example of heroic sacrifice of the female martyr is always shining so that future generations are proud of her and follow.

Co Sau's death anniversary in Con Dao is not only held at her grave and temple, but also at each family. Visitors from all over the world to Con Dao mostly follow the call of the mind about the sacred and gratitude. The incenses and their smoke at Co Sau's grave seem to never stop from early morning until late night. From an indomitable heroine who sacrificed for the people and the country, Vo Thi Sau has become consciously the god of destiny of the resident community of Con Dao district.

After each time joining hands to celebrate Co Sau's death anniversary, local people are more attached to one another in production, business and daily life. Thus, the belief of worship Co Sau is a typical case, representing the solidarity tradition of the Vietnamese people, contributing to the unity of the resident community of Con Dao, and moreover, the cohesion of the people across the country.

The belief of worshipping Co Sau contributes to the development of the local tourism economy

Con Dao is a historical relic, and also a sacred land associated with the belief of worshipping Co Sau, a place where more and more domestic and foreign tourists come to visit and experience spirituality. Co Sau's grave and relics related to Con Dao prison are the highlight of spiritual tourism. "According to a survey result, tourists come to Con Dao for many different reasons, of which two main and most important reason is the sacred Co Sau (with 76% of visitors), the spiritual factor (with 72% of visitors). Besides, there are 46% of visitors to Con Dao with the reason to "know" and 20% of visitors to Con Dao are interested in the issue of gratitude for the deceased at Hang Duong cemetery."⁴

Nguyen Le Phuong Anh (2021), The choice of spiritual cultural tourism forms of tourists in Con Dao, Culture and Arts Journal No. 482, December 2021.

“During the 113 years of existence of Con Dao prison (1862-1975), known as “hell on earth”, henchmen of colonialists and imperialists imprisoned tens of thousands of prisoners. Among them, more than 20,000 people died from torture with brutal methods. It can be said that the bodies of prisoners were buried almost everywhere in Hang Duong cemetery, etc. Of the 1,913 graves in the cemetery, only 793 graves have specific addresses, the rest are nameless graves. This is also the resting place of many patriots Nguyen An Ninh, the grave of Mr. Le Hong Phong, Heroine Vo Thi Sau...”⁵

The great holidays or the death anniversary of the deceased patriots in Con Dao all bring a very special spiritual element, becoming more and more popular, becoming a way of life in the spiritual life of the people. Currently, Con Dao welcomes most tourists from many regions across the country. Visitors to Con Dao come from all ages, classes, genders and professions in society. “According to a report of Con Dao district, the number of tourists coming to explore and relax in Con Dao is increasing, with an average rate of 18.41% per year in the period 2011-2015. Specifically, in 2010, the whole district welcomed 40,323 visitors (3,793 international arrivals), in 2013 it was 89,333 arrivals (19,234 international arrivals). In 2014, Con Dao district welcomed more than 90,000 visitors to visit and relax (Ba Ria - Vung Tau Newspaper, 2014). In the period 2017 - 2019, the growth rate of the number of tourists to Con Dao increased by an average of over 20% per year. The average growth rate of tourism revenue is 15.5%/year. In 2020, despite complicated developments of the Covid 19 epidemic, tourism service revenue reached VND 1,294.19 billion, up 6.59%; There were 345,000 tourists coming to Con Dao, up 6.72%.”⁶

Spiritual tourism in Con Dao are traded and exploited by many companies, including well-known companies such as Saigon Tourist, Fidi tourist, Vietnamese Tourism, Cho Lon Tourist, ...In addition, there are also companies specializing in organizing Landtours for travel companies that cannot directly conduct tours in Con Dao such as Con Dao Beach Tourism Company, Phu Vien Travel Company, Con Dao Life Travel Company,...Thus, tourism activities in general and spiritual cultural tourism in Con Dao are increasingly developing, which also partly helps the economic life of local people to develop thanks to visitor services.

The belief of worshipping Co Sau in Con Dao contributes to preserving traditional cultural values

The belief of worshipping Co Sau carries values towards the origin of the nation. Stemming from moral principle of “drinking water, remembering the source”, repaying gratitude, beliefs about the worship of national heroes have been formed. In the minds of every Vietnamese in general and Con Dao people in particular, Vo Thi Sau is a national hero who has great merits, fights and sacrifices for the independence and freedom of the Fatherland.

Heroine Vo Thi Sau is a loyal child, a loyal comrade who is trusted and respected by the people. Vo Thi Sau's life and career are recorded in the history of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the history of Southern Women, the history of the Party Committee of Ba Ria - Vung Tau province, the history of Dat Do district and the history of Con Dao prison. Vo Thi Sau's name and career

Hang Duong Cemetery (2018), <https://baria-vungtau.gov.vn/sphere/baria/vungtau/page/xem-tin.cpx?item=5b28abb952568924f5613120>, (see November 28, 2022).

Nguyen Le Phuong Anh (2021), *The choice of spiritual cultural tourism forms of tourists in Con Dao*, Culture and Arts Journal No. 482, December 2021.

have also been honored as one of the typical characters of the People's Public Security Encyclopedia. She was respectfully mentioned by President Ho Chi Minh as the typical heroes and martyrs of the nation.

Vo Thi Sau's indomitable example has been honored by the people and the State as a symbol of revolutionary heroism and traditional cultural values. Vo Thi Sau's name has been given to many roads, schools, parks, the name of the Union, the Team, the name of the scholarship fund, etc. across all regions of the country. To remember the merits of Heroic Martyr Vo Thi Sau, the District Party Committee and People's Committee of Long Dat district (now Long Dien and Dat Do districts) built a park and a monument to Vo Thi Sau on an area of 4,100m² in Dat Do town in 1982. In the park, there is a 7m high bronze monument, depicting the image of Co Sau walking proudly to the execution ground. In 2001, Dat Do district built a temple of Vo Thi Sau right behind the monument, displaying documents about Vo Thi Sau's life from the beginning of her participation in the revolution until her arrest and death. About 100m from the park and the monument is the Vo Thi Sau memorial house - where images related to the faithful Dat Do daughter are kept.

For many years, the park, monument, and memorial house of Vo Thi Sau has become a place to educate revolutionary traditions for people of all walks of life, and at the same time serve domestic and foreign tourists to visit and burn incense to remember the heroine. This place is also chosen by many Youth Union establishments as the source of traditional education for youth union members and students. On every major national holiday, many Unions and Teams organize for union members and teenagers to burn incense at the park, monument, and memorial house of Vo Thi Sau and report to Co Sau on the activities of the Union and the Team. This is also an opportunity for the younger generation to remember the revolutionary tradition, multiply the pride in the revolutionary tradition of previous generation, and also an opportunity to see more clearly their responsibilities and obligations to the construction and defense of the socialist Fatherland.

More than 60 years have passed since Dat Do's daughter died. Up to now, Co Sau's brave spirit has always been a shining example for Vietnamese youth to follow.

Currently, the Party and State have special guidelines and policies for socio-economic, cultural and educational development in Con Dao. The work of ensuring material and spiritual life, including satisfying spiritual needs, has always been paid attention by the authorities of Con Dao district. The belief of worshiping Co Sau has a strong spread, becoming a good custom and lifestyle, contributing to the development of the material and spiritual life of the people of Con Dao.

2.CONCLUSION

The belief of worshiping Co Sau in Con Dao is an emphasis in the belief in worshiping people with meritorious services to the country, worshiping national heroes of the people of Con Dao district, Ba Ria - Vung Tau province.

From the hero's heroic sacrifice at a young age, Vo Thi Sau has entered the folk consciousness, manifested as a spiritual patron god for the community in Con Dao, currently. The belief of worshiping Co Sau has become a beauty in cultural life, contributing to balancing spiritual

life, building community solidarity, developing tourism economy, preserving and promoting traditional cultural values of people of Con Dao district, Ba Ria - Vung Tau province today.

In order to implement the Party's guidelines and the State's policies on developing Con Dao to become an island district that is rich in economy, developed in culture, stable in security and defense, it is necessary to pay attention to the role and exploit the value of Co Sau worship, and consider it as a spiritual resource in the process of developing tourism economy, educating traditional cultural values for current young generation.

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