

TRA VINH PROVINCE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE
TRA VINH UNIVERSITY

PHAM VAN PHUONG

**THE NATIONAL HERO TRAN VAN
THANH BELIEF IN AN GIANG
PROVINCE**

DOCTORAL THESES IN CULTUROLOGY

Major code: 9229040

THESIS SUMMARY

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Science advisor:

Prof. Dr. Nguyen Chi Ben

1st thesis advisor:

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3rd thesis advisor:

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HEADING

1. Reason for choosing the topic

The Southwest is not only a land characterized by history and natural geography but also a land with many beliefs and religions. Although each belief and religion has different origins and characteristics, they together contribute to creating the unique cultural appearance of the Mekong Delta cultural region. Here, gentle and liberal people with a strong desire for survival are ready to accept the cultural values of many beliefs and religions. Thereby, they find protection and refuge, taking it as their spiritual strength to establish a hamlet, build a village, and earn a living. Based on beliefs and religions that are passed down through generations, the people of the Southwest also create new religions and beliefs that cater to their spiritual needs while harmonizing with the natural environment and historical context of their land. These indigenous beliefs and religions can be mentioned, such as the custom of worshipping Ba Chua Xu, the custom of worshipping the Nam Hai general, Buu Son Ky Huong religion, Tu An Hieu Nghia religion, Hoa Hao religion, Cao Dai religion... and various smaller religious groups scattered across provinces and cities. From a social perspective, these indigenous beliefs and religions have played a role in binding village communities together, fostering a positive-oriented belief, and helping the community in general and believers in particular in overcoming the Southwest region's tumultuous historical phases.

Because of the reclamation and establishment of hamlets in the South, the tradition of "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls" has a more profound influence on the people in this region. Especially gratitude and honor to the ancestors who brought wisdom, talent, courage and sacrifice to protect the country and build villages. For the people, they have become heroes. Their courageous struggle, resilience against invaders, and willingness to sacrifice for a great cause are a shining example that future generations should follow and revere. Until today, the feats and sacrifices of the heroes Truong Dinh, Nguyen Trung Truc, Tu Kiet, Thien Ho Duong, and Tran Van Thanh are immortal idolatries in the belief of the Southwest community. Tabernacles have a standard and popular festival process in the

provinces that vividly demonstrated the power of people's belief in the worshiped character.

In order for the images of the national heroes to always shine over time, the Vietnamese community in the Southwest region has established worship facilities to show respect and remembrance of them. During the period of resistance against the French colonialists, the people of the Southwest region not only struggled to defend their homeland, resisting cultural assimilation, but also constantly created new values suitable to the social context. In terms of spiritual culture, new forms of religious belief through the role of "ong Dao" have connected the spirit of patriotism with the desire for peace, independence and happiness. Throughout history, previous generations of ancestors have demonstrated unwavering determination and a readiness to make sacrifices in order to safeguard their country's national independence. Therefore, the national hero belief has embraced by the people and has become an indispensable need in the spiritual life of the people in the Southwest.

In An Giang province, the historical figure Tran Van Thanh had the merit of fighting the French invaders to protect his homeland, so he was respected, loved and worshiped by the people. In addition, Tran Van Thanh is also the leader of the Buu Son Ky Huong religion, an indigenous religion has attracted many followers. The followers of this Buu Son Ky Huong religion joined leader Tran Van Thanh to fight against the French invaders.

During the resistance war against the French, Tran Van Thanh sacrificed his life and became a heroic example in the people. They consider Tran Van Thanh a person who "born as a general, dies as a god, " so he is respected, worshipped and dare not call his name, only respectfully speaking as "Duc Co Quan." When Tran Van Thanh passed away, the people of An Giang province established a temple in his honor and regarded him as a deity. Today, Tran Van Thanh temple has nationally recognized as a historical and cultural relic. The people of An Giang worship Tran Van Thanh as a "god" or a talented leader of the Buu Son Ky Huong religion. Today, this belief has spread widely in the spiritual life of people not only in An Giang.

Tran Van Thanh belief has become a beauty in the spiritual life of the people of An Giang. This beauty is clearly manifested in Tran Van Thanh festival held annually in An Giang. It reflects the

principle of 'gratitude is the sign of noble souls,' the spirit of community unity, and nationalism, contributing to the education of patriotic ideals, anti-enemy traditions, and the cultural values of the nation for future generations. Therefore, researching a historical figure like Tran Van Thanh with folk beliefs reveals the unique cultural activities of the people of An Giang. This study from a culturology perspective becomes even more intriguing and holds both theoretical and practical significance.

From the above bases, we chose topic "The national hero Tran Van Thanh belief in An Giang province" as a doctoral thesis, majoring in culturology.

2. Research aims and research tasks

2.1 Research aims

Thesis clarifies the origin, characteristics, role, cultural value, and contribution of Tran Van Thanh belief in relation to other beliefs in An Giang province.

2.2 Research tasks

To complete the above aims, we will focus on the following research tasks:

- Clarify some key concepts, highlight the viewpoints of various theoretical approaches, and provide an overview of the land and people of An Giang.
- Investigate the current operation of Tran Van Thanh belief in the lives of the local community in An Giang: present the process of sanctification of Mr. Tran Van Thanh through legends and tabernacles; describe the ritual characteristics and organization of local residents' festivals.
- Analyze, evaluate the current status, and compare Tran Van Thanh belief with the beliefs in Nguyen Huu Canh, Thoai Ngoc Hau, and Nguyen Trung Truc in An Giang.
- Explain the role of Tran Van Thanh belief in the spiritual life of the people of An Giang.

3. Research subjects and scope of study

3.1 Research subjects

Research on Tran Van Thanh belief in terms of ritual characteristics, worship spaces, and how this belief operates in the spiritual and cultural life of the people in An Giang province.

3.2 Research scope

Research Space: In the study of Tran Van Thanh belief, we identified three geographical research spaces related to the reference materials used in the content of thesis: Southern Vietnam, Southwestern Vietnam, and An Giang Province. In practice, there have been previous studies with titles and headings referring to the culture of Southern Vietnam, but their main content primarily focused on Southwestern Vietnam (also known as the Mekong Delta).

Survey area: We focused our research in An Giang province in two main worship facilities, such as: 1/ Tran Van Thanh temple in Thanh My Tay commune, Chau Phu district, An Giang province; 2/ Son Trung shrine in Vinh An commune, Chau Thanh district, An Giang province. In addition, we also expanded the study of Tran Van Thanh belief in An Giang province in other places of worship, such as: Ong The shrine in Can Dang commune, Chau Thanh district; Vinh Thanh Trung communal house, Chau Phu district; Vinh Te ward, Chau Doc city.

Research Period: Thesis focused on Tran Van Thanh belief in An Giang Province from 2014 to the present. In 2014, the An Giang Provincial Historical Science Association and Chau Phu District organized a scientific conference "Historical figure Tran Van Thanh". This marked a significant milestone, demonstrating the interest of various levels of government in An Giang Province in religious beliefs and the historical figure Tran Van Thanh, which has been studied in depth from both historical and cultural perspectives. Thereby, it affirms the role of Tran Van Thanh in the history of resistance against foreign invaders and his great contributions were honored and respected by the people of Lang Linh - Bay Thua in particular and An Giang province in general. The seminar, along with public opinion, influenced the decision to construct Tran Van Thanh's monument (permitted by the Department of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of An Giang on October 27, 2015) at the center shrine of Tran Van Thanh in Con Nho, Chau Phu District. The monument was completed on December 19, 2015, fulfilling the aspirations of the people of An Giang. Over the past period, two National Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the 12th and 13th, have been held. We have seen a change in the management and preservation of cultural heritage sites. The cultural development strategy issued by the

Government shows its concern and the implementation of policies to conserve and promote the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups. This has had a significant impact on the cultural management processes at the local level, including An Giang province.

Scope of materials: We have compiled and inherited the previous research results related to the topic and utilized the results of on-site research at Tran Van Thanh tabernacle in An Giang province. The content analysis, evaluation, as well as the cultural significance of Tran Van Thanh belief, are also extended in the context of the local cultural and social development vision (up to 2030).

4. Research question and hypothesis

4.1 Research question

To clarify the research aims outlined above, we pose three main research questions:

Research Question 1: When did Tran Van Thanh belief originate? Where did it originate, and how did it evolve?

Research Question 2: How do the activities of people who worship Tran Van Thanh take place at tabernacles and festivals?

Research Question 3: What distinguishes the historical figure Tran Van Thanh belief from the other historical figure beliefs like Nguyen Huu Canh, Thoai Ngoc Hau, and Nguyen Trung Truc in An Giang?

4.2 Hypothesis

To answer the above three research questions, we propose the following hypotheses:

- The first hypothesis: When participating in the resistance against the French, Tran Van Thanh gained the trust and support of the people. After Tran Van Thanh's passing, the people in An Giang province established a temple and organized annual festivals in his honor. They sanctified a historical figure into a religious one. Tran Van Thanh belief has become a folk belief, carrying multiple layers of significance for the local population. Over the course of 150 years, Tran Van Thanh belief has been established and sustained with the growing acceptance of the local people.

- The second hypothesis: During the festival season, cultural elements along with the festival activities are of great interest to the people. People voluntarily renew cultural elements related to the belief system, including the worship facilities, the displayed and offered

ceremonial items. The spiritual culture within the belief system of Tran Van Thanh is manifested through legends, rituals, the people's belief, and the relationship between Tran Van Thanh and the Buu Son Ky Huong Religion. In terms of culture, Tran Van Thanh belief preserves belief in traditional creativity, as well as the psychology and consciousness of the local people. The image of Tran Van Thanh in the people's consciousness, along with the expressive rituals of the Buu Son Ky Huong Religion, dictates the behavior and role of Tran Van Thanh belief in the lives of the people in An Giang.

- The third hypothesis: Tran Van Thanh belief is admired by the people of An Giang. This belief continues to spread in the land of An Giang, alongside the beliefs in other historical figures: Nguyen Huu Canh, Thoai Ngoc Hau, and Nguyen Trung Truc. The distinctive feature of Tran Van Thanh belief is its association with the Buu Son Ky Huong Religion (Tran Van Thanh succeeded and inherited the Buu Son Ky Huong Religion in place of Doan Minh Huyen). Currently, Tran Van Thanh belief has established a certain strength within the hearts of the people of An Giang

5. Research approach and methods

5.1 Interdisciplinary approach

Culturology is a field that explores culture. Culture encompasses both material and spiritual values, and it offers multiple approaches for research. Interdisciplinary approach is a method to approach the subject of study. Therefore, to research Tran Van Thanh belief, we employ an interdisciplinary approach, including history, folklore, religious studies, sociology, and cultural anthropology. The interdisciplinary approach, combined with the utilization of research methods specific to each field, helps us elucidate issues related to the history, culture, and beliefs surrounding Tran Van Thanh – a figure revered by the people of An Giang but with limited documented information available. Specifically, we apply History to understand the development of Tran Van Thanh belief within a particular historical and societal context. We use Religious Studies to comprehend the relationship between Tran Van Thanh belief and the Buu Son Ky Huong religion. Sociology aids in constructing relevant research objectives and subjects. From there, we established the content associated with thesis and the in-depth interview form.

Additionally, we explore the local culture and the perspectives of both local residents and tourists during Tran Van Thanh memorial festival.

5.2 Methods

5.2.1 Synthetic analysis method

Based on the available documents from previous researchers published in libraries, the internet, etc., which may include books, scientific papers, journals, specialized works, etc., we collected and synthesized them for reading. We then sifted through these documents to identify those related to the topic and used them as a scientific foundation for our research. Through this process, we analyzed the data to determine whether these works had previously addressed the topic and, if so, to what extent, in order to identify any gaps that needed to be addressed in the dissertation.

5.2.2 Sociological Research Method

In-depth Interviews: This method was used by the PhD student to conduct interviews with the temple and shrine administrators regarding topics related to Mr. Tran Van Thanh. Interviews were also conducted with local residents who participated in the tabernacle festivals. The interview subjects were diverse in terms of gender, age, and occupation but were purposefully and randomly selected. This method provided valuable information for the dissertation to identify the process of the formation of Tran Van Thanh belief tradition and the spiritual life of the people in An Giang.

Participant Observation: The researcher visited the areas where Tran Van Thanh's shrines and temples were located and participated in the temple and shrine festival programs, as well as worship rituals dedicated to Tran Van Thanh for a period of three days to understand the significance of this religious belief. On national holidays such as April 30th, I attended Tran Van Thanh belief sites for two days to study the ritual practices of the people of An Giang, particularly those in the Mekong Delta region. During these visits, I utilized various methods to collect data, including filming, photography, note-taking, observation, and distributing questionnaires. Through these methods, we documented the temples and shrines, the sacred spaces associated with Tran Van Thanh belief, and the typical religious practices

carried out by the organizing committees, local residents, and pilgrims visiting the worship sites.

Comparison and Contrast: This method was employed to compare and contrast the differences and similarities between Tran Van Thanh belief tradition and the worship traditions of historical figures such as Nguyen Trung Truc, Thoai Ngoc Hau, and Nguyen Huu Canh within the same geographical area, which is An Giang province. Based on the collected data, it aimed to identify commonalities and distinctions in Tran Van Thanh belief tradition to fulfill the research objectives set out in this thesis. It was through the comparative method that the integrative and inheritable nature of these worship traditions in the spiritual life of the people of An Giang was discovered, resulting in them becoming shared cultural assets for the province.

6. New point of thesis

Tran Van Thanh belief tradition has endured for 150 years in the consciousness of the people of An Giang. While it has become a folk belief, no comprehensive and systematic research work has been conducted on it. Therefore, this thesis can be considered the first in-depth and systematic study of Tran Van Thanh belief tradition. It includes the establishment of a network of Tran Van Thanh belief facilities in An Giang, elucidation of the relationship between the worship tradition, Tran Van Thanh festival, and the spiritual needs of the community, and clarification of certain issues that previous research had left unexplored or had not addressed. These issues include the formation of Tran Van Thanh belief tradition, the construction of worship facilities, festival organization, ritual practices, and organizational structures to meet the religious needs of the people. This thesis connects and transforms these elements, imbuing Tran Van Thanh belief tradition with profound significance. Tran Van Thanh belief contributes to the preservation of traditional cultural values, reinforces belief in positive aspects of life, shapes appropriate behaviors and lifestyles, and maintains strong community bonds.

7. Scientific and practical significance of thesis

7.1. Scientific Significance: This thesis provides scientific documentation for the study of worship traditions honoring figures who contributed to the nation in the Mekong Delta and South Vietnam (specifically, the Mekong Delta region). Thesis contributes to explaining the role and significance of the worship tradition of Tran Van Thanh (a figure from the period of resistance against French colonial invasion) in the cultural and spiritual life of the community. It establishes a scientific foundation for understanding the nature and role of religious beliefs in the spiritual lives of the people. Thesis also clarifies the organic relationship between Tran Van Thanh belief and the individuals who made significant contributions to the nation within the cultural traditions of the people of An Giang.

7.2. Practical Significance: Thesis topic will provide additional resources for readers to gain a better understanding of the worship traditions of Tran Van Thanh in An Giang. Particularly, the research results from this thesis will serve as a reliable source of information contributing to the research, teaching, and practical application of cultural and religious studies. This will help preserve and promote the cultural values of the local community. Thesis contributes to the reference materials used by researchers, cultural managers, and local residents, enabling them to have a clearer and more active appreciation of the cultural significance of Tran Van Thanh's worship traditions.

8. Thesis structure

Thesis consists of two parts: Content Section and Appendix. The Content Section, in addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, References, thesis has 3 chapters:

Chapter 1: An overview of documents, an overview of the land and people of An Giang, and Theoretical Foundation.

Chapter 2: Components of Tran Van Thanh belief.

Chapter 3: Discussion on Tran Van Thanh belief in An Giang province.

The Appendix includes: Photos, Tran Van Thanh tabernacles, Interview Questions, and Interview Transcript Templates.

CONTENT SECTION

Chapter 1: AN OVERVIEW OF DOCUMENTS, AN OVERVIEW OF THE LAND AND PEOPLE OF AN GIANG , AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.

1.1. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH SITUATION

1.1.1. Group of research works on history, culture and people in the Southern region

Numerous works on the history, culture, and people of South Vietnam have been produced by many authors both within and outside of the country. However, we have chosen several works by the following authors: Phan Quang, Son Nam, Nguyen Phuong Thao, Hong Hanh, Tran Ngoc Them, Tran Thuan, Vo Van Sen.

1.1.2. Group of research works on beliefs, religion, and festivals in the Southern region

There is a diverse and rich body of research on beliefs, religion, and festivals in the Southern Region conducted by numerous scholars from both within and outside the country. We have selected a number of works authored by the following individuals: Phan An, Ngo Van Le, Nguyen Minh Khai, Pham Minh Thao, Pham Lan Oanh, and Mai Thi Minh Thuy. These works have elucidated various concepts related to religion, beliefs, and superstition. They provide valuable insights for researchers examining the commemoration process of a historical figure in a province within the Western Southern region.

1.1.3. Group of research Works on An Giang province and the historical figure Tran Van Thanh

Among the research works focusing on An Giang Province and the historical figure Tran Van Thanh, the following authors have contributed: o Hoang Khai, Nguyen Van Hau, Phan Van Kien, Vo Thanh Phuong, Vo Phuc Chau, and Son Nam, and the compilation of "Historical and Cultural Relics of An Giang" (2012) by An Giang Provincial Museum. There was also a scientific workshop specifically dedicated to the historical figure Tran Van Thanh. For the first time, this figure was explored from various angles, including historical, cultural, and social perspectives.

1.1.4. General assessment

More specifically, our focus is on the viewpoints and arguments presented by the following authors: Nguyen Chi Ben, Tran Ngoc Them, Ngo Duc Thinh, the conference materials concerning the

historical figure Tran Van Thanh in An Giang, internal circulated documents at Tran Van Thanh shrine, and documents related to the people, culture, beliefs, and festivals in the An Giang region.

1.2. OVERVIEW OF AN GIANG'S LAND AND PEOPLE

1.2.1. An Giang - a region that converges distinctive traits of the Mekong delta

An Giang province, historically considered a remote border area, boasts a northern border stretching nearly 104 kilometers. This region has been shaped by multiple layers of culture and the harmonious cultural characteristics of its inhabitants, which are reflected in their daily lives. An Giang possesses all the natural conditions typical of the Mekong Delta: lush green rice fields, meandering rivers, intricate canals, rugged mountains, and vast mangrove forests, creating a picturesque landscape that is both charming and magnificent.

1.2.2. An Giang people - a shared living empathetic community

An Giang is a region where four ethnic groups converge: the Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer, and Chẵm, with the Vietnamese playing a role of cultural subject. The daily life of the people in An Giang is closely intertwined with cultural beliefs and religion. In everyday activities, elements of belief, religion, and the interaction between people and the divine are ever-present. "An Giang is renowned as a spiritually rich land, where virtually every locality has a place of worship for some religion, and even within a single family, it is not uncommon to have 5 - 7, or sometimes more than 20 altars (for followers of Tu An Hieu Nghia religion)," as noted by Mai Thi Minh Thuy in 2017 (page 48). At present, building upon its historical and cultural heritage, An Giang province is making efforts to unearth and revive both its natural and humanistic values, propelling the province to new heights in the context of Vietnam's global integration.

1.3. THEORETICAL BASIS

1.3.1. Some research concepts

Belief: *We use some of the following Belief concepts: (1) "Belief (tin ngưỡng), in the original sense, comes from the word "belief" which is faith, which pertains to admiration, aspiration towards something. Thus, Belief is faith in an individual, a doctrine, a supernatural force" (Nguyen Minh Khai, 2013, page 12).*

Based on the concept of belief presented above, we define our understanding of belief as follows: (2) "The belief is the human faith in the supernatural, the sacred, achieved through various ritual activities through worship, in order to fulfill the needs of individuals in their present lives."

National hero

In a narrow sense, *a national hero is a courageous individual who does not fear sacrifice and makes outstanding contributions in the struggle of the nation against foreign invaders. In a broad sense, a national hero is someone who makes remarkable contributions to the nation, whether in times of war or peace, to make the country prosperous and thriving.* Based on the understanding above, we define the concept of a national hero as follows: *A national hero is someone who appears at a historical turning point and contributes to changing the destiny of the nation, while also being a timeless symbol and source of pride for that nation.*

1.3.2. Lý thuyết nghiên cứu đề tài luận án

Structural Functionalism

The birth of the Structural Functionalism is an important step forward in Sociology research. Through research and examination, sociologists have derived a foundational premise: the social nature is the integration of various aspects of human life into a specific, corresponding system that ensures the existence and development of society. Each social institution, such as the state, religion, family, etc., possesses distinct functions yet maintains close interconnections to establish equilibrium within societal activities.

Cultural Sphere Theory (文化圈學說)

The Cultural Sphere theory is put forth as a selection of cultural forms within the environment that gives rise to it. Each cultural sphere possesses a culturally compatible environment that allows for its existence and transformation to align with a particular cultural, historical stage of each region and locality created by cultural actors. Therefore, the Cultural Sphere theory is regarded as a cultural domain or territory in which people reside, settle, engage in daily life, and engage in cultural exchanges to create cultural values for the community. These cultural values persist throughout the process of settlement and have become common characteristics of the culture manifested through material and spiritual aspects.

1.3.3. Approach

In the study of traditional festivals among the Vietnamese people, the author Nguyen Chi Ben introduces a very novel approach to the structure of festivals. What's new in the author's perspective is the recognition that the structure of a festival is not comprised of just two elements, as many researchers have previously claimed, namely "ritual" and "jollity." Here, author Nguyễn Chí Bền presents a festival structure consisting of three constituent elements: the revered character, existing elements, and concealed but existing elements within the sacred time frame. This perspective by Nguyễn Chí Bền has allowed researchers to make comparisons between festivals with two elements and those with three elements.

Sub-conclusion

Tran Van Thanh is a historical figure who valiantly resisted the invasion of French colonialism. In history, Tran Van Thanh led a fierce anti-French resistance campaign. This image of Tran Van Thanh continues to hold a significant place in the spiritual life of the people. It spreads and develops according to the laws of cultural dynamics. Therefore, in recent years, research on Tran Van Thanh has garnered the interest of many researchers.

Chapter 2: COMPONENTS OF TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF

2.1. National hero Tran Van Thanh: life and career

Tran Van Thanh, a native of Binh Thanh Dong, An Luong, Chau Phu district, An Giang province, along with the armed forces, the people, and followers of the Buu Son Ky Huong religion, built rafts to block the enemy's warships at Con Nho (Phu Binh, Tan Phu). On March 20, 1873, the main stronghold Hung Trung came under attack. Tran Van Thanh remained composed and took direct command of the rebel forces against the invaders. The battle raged fiercely from morning till night. It was during this battle that Tran Van Thanh courageously sacrificed his life in the face of the enemy's guns. The grieving populace affectionately referred to him as "Duc Co Quan" and erected a shrine in his honor at Lang Linh.

2.2. LEGENDS RELATED TO TRAN VAN THANH

2.2.1. Legend of the Sau Bo boat

The Sau Bo boat's origins are shrouded in mystery; it's unclear when it was built, and there's no record of the craftsman responsible. However, it belonged to Mr. Sai Xa Lam (in Tam Giang). One day, he

took the boat with six Khmer people down to Láng Linh to meet Tran Van Thanh. The purpose of this meeting was to challenge Tran Van Thanh and determine who was superior, as Mr. Sai Xa Lam had heard of Tran Van Thanh's talents. Mr. Sai Xa Lam gifted the boat to Tran Van Thanh. The Sau Bo boat was crafted from a thick and sturdy layer of wood. Consequently, the enemy's guns and ammunition at that time couldn't penetrate its hull. The boat became a means of combat that allowed Quan Co Tran Van Thanh to fight the invaders and bring peace to the people of An Giang.

2.2.2. Legend of the construction of the Son Trung shrine

In 1939, the government initiated a project to dig a river from Vam Sang Tay Duong to Soc Xoai. After the river was completed, Mr. Le Quoc Lap brought the people to Tran My (Cho Moi district today) for land reclamation and village establishment. He brought along cattle for agricultural purposes. However, when the cattle reached a high mound at Bridge No. 5 in Vinh Hanh village, some of them ran away, and the remaining cattle couldn't move any further and lay down on the spot. Subsequently, Mr. Le Quoc Lap set up an altar and prayed to Tran Van Thanh for peace and prosperity in their lives and businesses. On that piece of land, Mr. Le Quoc Lap built a simple yet warm Tran Van Thanh shrine, filled with deep religious belief. Tran Van Thanh became increasingly known among the people for his sacred presence through oral traditions passed down in the community. People began to visit and offer rituals to Tran Van Thanh in growing numbers. Through these actions, Mr. Le Quoc Lap realized the significance of his work for the local population. As a result, he decided to leave the land behind to build a magnificent shrine dedicated to Tran Van Thanh. This became known as the Son Trung shrine.

2.2.3. Legend of the construction of Tran Van Thanh temple

According to the records kept by Tran Van Thanh temple, the legend of the temple's construction includes several mystical details as follows: In the sky, a pair of very large birds, whose origin was unknown, suddenly appeared and cried out loudly. A group of people, filled with joy, followed the direction of the birds' flight, hoping to find Tran Van Thanh's residence during the resistance. After a long and arduous search, the group finally discovered the location of Tran Van Thanh during the wartime. Over 19 years had passed, and in the autumn of 2016, with the

permission of the authorities, the temple underwent extensive restoration and transformation. The small shrine that once stood had now evolved into an spacious temple dedicated to Tran Van Thanh belief.

2.2.4. Legend of the death of Mr. Tran Van Thanh

Tran Van Thanh's uprising in the Bảy Thưa region of An Giang province highlighted the spirit of resistance and national salvation during this period. According to authors Nguyen Quang Thang and Nguyen Ba The: "After Bản Hưng Trung Doanh was heavily damaged and suffered a severe defeat, Tran Van Thanh withdrew to the combat zone and was reported missing on the 21st day of the 2nd lunar month in 1873." However, according to Nguyễn Văn Hầu, in the book "Duc Co Quan," it is written: "Only Duc Co Quan from then on disappeared, and no one heard from him anymore." Followers of Buu Son Ky Huong believe that: "Duc Co Quan possessed the power of invisibility, so when the French occupied Hung Trung fortress, he transformed and passed through the French army's sight and returned to the spirit world."

2.3. TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF FACILITIES

2.3.1. Tran Van Thanh temple

Tran Van Thanh temple is located at ấp Long Chau I, Thanh My Tay commune, Chau Phu district, An Giang province. This temple is closely associated with various historical events from the resistance against the French, such as the Ho Ba location, Bo Dau canal, Hung Trung fortress, etc. The significant role of this temple in history and culture is a source of pride for the people of An Giang.

2.3.2. Tran Van Thanh shrines

Son Trung Shrine

Son Trung Shrine is located in Vĩnh Quới hamlet, Vĩnh An commune, Chau Thanh District. The architectural design of the shrine is unique. The altars in the temple have three tiers, with the first tier typically left empty or used for offering items. The second tier holds vases of flowers and small cups of water, while the third tier contains incense burners, small bronze figurines, and serves as the place of worship. The architecture of these altars is simple.

Ong The Shrine No. 1

The local people discovered the first talisman and established a worship place called Dinh Quan Thê No. 1. They believe that this

land is the realm of Ong The, where Tran Van Thanh previously planted the first talisman as a boundary marker. The architectural design of Ong The Shrine No. 1 follows traditional folk architecture.

Ong The Shrine No. 2

The locals discovered a circular-shaped stick, 1.2 meters long, with a lotus-shaped tip and the inscription "Buu Son Ky Huong" carved on its trunk. The locals placed a hat on the tree and respectfully referred to it as "Ong The." They constructed Mr. Thê's shrine and have since continued to maintain and renovate it, creating a dignified worship space as it stands today.

Ong The Shrine No. 3

The third talisman, named Xifang Baidi (West White Emperor), was planted at Bong Lai Pagoda near Vinh Te canal in Châu Đốc, An Giang Province. The pagoda was built in 1861 by monk Đạo Lập (one of the 12 chief disciples of Phật Thầy Tây An). In 1988, a new temple was constructed at the Ba Bai pagoda, which is now beautifully designed. Ong The is worshiped at this new facility and is known as Ong The shrine.

2.4. TRAN VAN THANH FESTIVAL

2.4.1. Preparations for Tran Van Thanh festival

With the arrival of each festival season, people from the Mekong Delta region and neighboring areas gather at the shrine of Tran Van Thanh and several other shrines dedicated to him to participate in the festival. Everyone is eager to contribute their efforts and financial resources to the festival's organization. Some volunteers engage in tasks like decorating with flags and banners, cleaning and renovating the shrine, and preparing offerings for Tran Van Thanh, including flowers, tea, alcohol, cakes, fruits, etc. Additionally, people assist in welcoming and hosting guests, providing food and drinks.

2.4.2. Festival at Tran Van Thanh temple

Every festival season, the people of An Giang and the surrounding region gather at Tran Van Thanh temple to participate in the festival. The festival spans three days, taking place on the 20th, 21st, and 22nd day of the lunar calendar. The activities on the first day are referred to as the "Tien Thuong" (preliminary ceremony) phase. The focal point of the festival occurs on the second day, known as the "Chinh Le" (Main Ceremony). The third day marks the conclusion of Tran Van Thanh Festival and is called the "Hau Thuong" (post-ceremony) phase.

2.4.3. Tran Van Thanh festival at Son Trung shrine

The first day of the festival takes place on the 20th day of the 2nd lunar month. Activities related to the preparation of Tran Van Thanh festival are carried out in accordance with ceremonial procedures. The main ceremony of Tran Van Thanh festival at Son Trung shrine is held on February 21st on the lunar calendar with many activities related to the resistance against the French. These ceremonial activities are conducted by the organizing committee in a specific order.

2.4.4. Festivals at the Ong The shrines

At the Ong The shrines, the primary focus of the festival is the worship of Ong The (as he is the main deity at these shrines). Therefore, we have combined the festivals of the three Ong The shrines into this section and selected representative details to describe Tran Van Thanh festival at these Ong The shrines. The ceremony to worship Tran Van Thanh at the Ong The shrines is simpler compared to the festival at the Buu Huong temple in Thanh My Tay commune, Chau Phu district, and at the Son Trung shrine in Vinh An commune, Chau Thanh district. However, it is equally solemn and dignified.

Sub-conclusion

Tran Van Thanh called upon the people to rise against the French invaders. His talents have been woven into legends by the people of An Giang. Each legendary tale highlights a unique skill of Tran Van Thanh. This reflects the admiration and love that the people have for him. Consequently, the people have established shrines to worship and pay homage to Tran Van Thanh. These shrines are constructed with dignity and carry spiritual and cultural significance.

Chương 3: DISCUSSION ON TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF IN AN GIANG PROVINCE

3.1. COMPARISON OF TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF WITH THE WORSHIP OF HISTORICAL FIGURES IN AN GIANG PROVINCE

3.1.1. Similarities in Tran Van Thanh belief with the worship of other heroes in An Giang province

In social life, since ancient times, the relationship between humans and gods has been a special one. Humans create gods and have always shown respect, reverence, and a desire to rely on gods for protection and peace in life. This represents a deep sense of respect and reverence for individuals who have made significant contributions, individuals with

extraordinary qualities beyond ordinary people. The practice of worshipping the four heroic figures, Nguyen Huu Canh, Thoai Ngoc Hau, Tran Van Thanh, and Nguyen Trung Truc by the people of An Giang province, originates from the moral tradition of "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls."

3.1.2. The distinguishing features in Tran Van Thanh belief compared to the worship of other local heroes in An Giang province.

3.1.2.1 Compared to the Nguyen Huu Canh belief

Nguyen Huu Canh was born in the year of Canh Dan (1650) in Quang Binh. Not yet 22 years old, Nguyen Huu Canh rushed into battle, supported the lord, comforted the people, and kept the land peaceful. With Nguyen Huu Canh's great contributions to opening up the southern land, generations of descendants have built communal houses, temples, built tombs, and erected memorial stele to pay tribute to Nguyen Huu Canh's merits.

3.1.2.2. Compared to the Thoai Ngoc Hau belief

Thoai Ngoc Hau, whose real name was Nguyen Van Thoai (1761 - 1829), came from a poor peasant family in Đà Nẵng. When he arrived in the An Giang region, Thoai Ngoc Hau transformed the natural environment, providing livelihoods for the local population. He dug canals such as Vinh Te and Thoại Hà, built roads and bridges to facilitate transportation and trade. Thoai Ngoc Hau's land development efforts made the region prosperous and attracted people from various backgrounds to settle there. Due to his significant contributions, Thoai Ngoc Hau became a revered figure in the hearts of the people.

3.1.2.3. Compared to the Nguyen Trung Truc belief

Nguyen Trung Truc was born in 1838 during the reign of Minh Mang. He hailed from Vĩnh Hội village, Trung An district, Phu Cat region, Bình Định province (now Vĩnh Hội village, Cát Hải commune, Phu Cat district, Bình Định province). His resistance efforts are known for two remarkable actions: the burning of the Nhứt Tảo ship (also known as the Hóa hồng Nhứt Tảo) and the attack of the Kiên Giang stronghold (also known as the Kiem Bat Kien Giang). After sacrificing his life, Nguyen Trung Truc was revered and worshipped by the people.

3.2. THE INTEGRATION OF BUU SON KY HUONG PATH INTO TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF

3.2.1. integration of Religion and Life

A religion emerges based on the combination of three elements: natural conditions, historical and social circumstances, and the need for

human psychological relief and balance. The An Giang region in the Southwest is a place that has absorbed various religious beliefs, especially serving as the birthplace of distinctive indigenous religions in the South, such as Buu Son Ky Huong, Hoa Hao, Tu An Hieu Nghia, linked to the roles of "religious men," including Doan Minh Huyen, the founder of the Buu Son Ky Huong Path in the Ky Mao year (1849) in the That Son mountain region. Among his disciples, Tran Van Thanh was chosen by the Buddha monk to inherit the "Seal" and continue the main path of Buu Son Ky Huong.

3.2.2. The integration of beliefs in "Learning Buddhism" and "Cultivating Humanity"

The Buddhist monk Tay An chose the form of practicing Buddhism and traditional rituals by establishing temples as places of worship for the people to come and convey their beliefs. To achieve the aforementioned content, the Buddhist monk Tay An developed very simple teachings for the Buu Son Ky Huong Path, making it easy for people to understand and absorb in order to build and cultivate themselves. This is a method of learning Buddhism and cultivating oneself, connecting one's spiritual journey with social responsibilities.

3.2.3. The fusion of concepts about the Four Graces

The Four Graces consist of: grace to ancestors, grace to the homeland, grace to the Tam Bao, and grace to the Phap Bao. Each grace is preserved and passed down by Buddhist and Buu Son Ky Huong believers from one generation to the next, with the aim of promoting Buddhist teachings and making the Dharma increasingly luminous.

3.3. THE ROLE OF TRAN VAN THANH BELIEF FOR THE PEOPLE OF AN GIANG PROVINCE

3.3.1. Religious beliefs and human behavior regulation

Ritual worship serves as an expression of gratitude towards national heroes, individuals who have contributed to the homeland, and showcases pride in the nation. This tradition is deeply embedded in Vietnamese culture. Within the consciousness of the people of An Giang, folk beliefs in venerating deities, saints, national heroes, and historical figures hold a significant place in their spiritual lives.

3.3.2. Educating the patriotic spirit

The love for one's homeland, nation, and pride in one's ethnicity are awakened within each of us when we have the opportunity to learn about the glorious history of our people through historical relics, including

the historical relic of Tran Van Thanh temple. By participating in Tran Van Thanh festival, people have the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the tenacious and unwavering history of resistance against the French colonialists by generations of people from the An Giang region, exemplified by Duc Co Quan Tran Van Thanh.

3.3.3. Strengthening community unity

Community members have relationships with each other through their work, culture, festivals, and other activities. Any activity, whether subjective or objective, affects the community in their daily lives. Due to this unique nature, every community is formed and exists based on these connections. Tran Van Thanh belief plays a significant role in preserving the sense of unity within the community.

3.3.4. Preserving local traditional culture

Looking back to our roots has long been a moral tradition in Vietnam. "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls" is not just a saying but a way of life and behavior for the Vietnamese people in their daily lives, all of which are reflected in the beliefs and practices. This is a natural source from which humans have originated and continue to be an integral part. It preserves the cultural heritage, passing it on to future generations.

Sub-conclusion

Tran Van Thanh belief holds a special place in the hearts of the people in An Giang province. This belief has both similarities and differences with the worship of other heroes such as Nguyen Huu Canh, Thoai Ngoc Hau, and Nguyen Trung Truc. The unique features of the Trần Văn Thành worship contribute to the cultural diversity of An Giang province.

CONCLUSION

An Giang is a region closely tied to the historical figure Tran Van Thanh. It is a locality that possesses the natural conditions typical of the southwestern region of Vietnam, including its distinctive mountainous terrain and intricate network of canals and rivers. In this region, people maintain a multidimensional relationship with their environment, ecosystems, and culture, embodying the Vietnamese saying "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls". The people of An Giang have sanctified the heroic figure who played a crucial role in initiating the anti-French resistance. That figure is Mr. Tran Van Thanh, and he is venerated through various religious practices in many places throughout An Giang province. Today, our research focuses on the religious beliefs centered

around Tran Van Thanh in An Giang province. During our research, we have posed and addressed the following questions:

1. Identifying Mr. Tran Van Thanh as the pioneer of the anti-French resistance in An Giang province. His uprising received widespread support from the local population and quickly evolved into a movement against the French colonial forces. This image of Tran Van Thanh continued to spread and develop in accordance with the law of movement of national culture (merit - religious beliefs - remembrance). The people of An Giang transformed the merit of Tran Van Thanh into a spiritual cultural value that catered to human needs. We affirm that this assertion has been synthesized from various documents related to the culture of Southern Vietnam, the Mekong Delta, and Tran Van Thanh. These documents have significantly contributed to elucidating the life and achievements of Mr. Tran Van Thanh.

2. Identifying Tran Van Thanh belief as a spiritual and cultural value of the people of An Giang. It is hidden within the elements of Tran Van Thanh belief tradition (legends, temples, festivals). To clarify these elements of the belief system, we conducted on-site surveys three times during Tran Van Thanh festivals in An Giang. Additionally, we visited during various other festivals throughout the year. Through these field visits, we observed, touched, and heard firsthand about the contributions and beliefs of the local people. To enhance the research findings, we employed an interdisciplinary cultural approach, combining the Structural Functionalism and the Cultural Sphere theory to identify the distinct cultural characteristics within Tran Van Thanh's legends, temples, and festivals. Based on these theories, we established an analytical framework to elucidate the material and spiritual cultural values expressed during the festivals and their reciprocal effects within the community.

The cultural values, both material and spiritual, during Tran Van Thanh festival exist within the sacred time and space through the ritual and festivities. The offerings presented to Tran Van Thanh during these ceremonies are highly regarded by the local people as sacred items. They serve as expressions of gratitude and remembrance for Tran Van Thanh. Simultaneously, the communal activities during the festival reflect the people's reverence for Tran Van Thanh. The intertwining of ritual and festivities during Tran Van Thanh festival has created a vivid tapestry of beliefs, which is a cultural product of the An Giang community.

Tran Van Thanh belief, as seen through the societal lens over the past 150 years, has affirmed the cultural and spiritual value of this belief

system. It has manifested in the construction of grand religious sites (such as Tran Van Thanh temple, Son Trung shrine, Ong The shrine, etc.) which serve as centers where various cultural elements converge, giving rise to new cultural values for An Giang. These religious sites host the grand Tran Van Thanh festival. The ceremonial rituals within the festival have been preserved and passed down through generations as "living treasures." Tran Van Thanh belief has become a traditional culture deeply ingrained in the lives of the people of An Giang.

The festival is also a time when local residents and those from neighboring regions bring offerings to honor Tran Van Thanh and reminisce about the glorious history of the uprising. Through his victories and legends, Tran Van Thanh has become a shining example of patriotism and compassion for the people, enduring in the hearts of the people to this day.

3. Determining the role of Tran Van Thanh belief tradition for the people of An Giang is of great significance. This belief has instilled a positive outlook on life in the people. Worshipping Tran Van Thanh is deeply ingrained in the psyche of the locals, akin to ancestor worship. This practice reflects their belief in Tran Van Thanh. Tran Van Thanh belief regulates the behavior and perceptions of the people, promoting better conduct and a more virtuous way of life, following the teachings of learning from Buddhism and personal cultivation, which Tran Van Thanh inherited from the Buddhist monk Tay An.

Tran Van Thanh belief is also expressed through ritual ceremonies during festivals, fostering a sense of community spirit among the people of An Giang. This sense of unity creates collective strength that promotes a civilized way of life. It encompasses the way people interact with each other and with the divine during these festivals, exemplifying the culture of the community. As a result, the bonds among the people of An Giang within their community are strengthened, elevated by a sense of spirit and self-awareness, to uphold and perpetuate the belief from one generation to the next.

Tran Van Thanh belief has created a cultural value system that satisfies the spiritual needs of the people, enhancing their enjoyment and participation in festivals, and contributing positively to social development. These cultural values have enriched the spiritual and cultural life of the people. Furthermore, the provincial policies for the development of this belief system in An Giang have ensured its growth in the right direction, aligning with the spirit of enjoying the values of spiritual culture. This has also played

a constructive role in the lives of the people by enhancing the positive effects of festivals on their daily lives.

Tran Van Thanh successfully carried on the tradition of patriotism and land development established by his forebears in his homeland of An Giang. His continuity in this tradition brought An Giang a resilient spirit in resisting the French colonial forces and transformed many barren lands into fertile agricultural areas, exemplified by regions like Bảy Thưa and Láng Linh. The places where Tran Van Thanh left his mark have provided the local population with prosperous and contented lives, particularly in the area known as Ba Ong The.

Tran Van Thanh belief has been preserved and promoted by the people of An Giang, becoming a beautiful aspect of their culture. Today, Tran Van Thanh belief serves as a shining beacon of patriotism, educating the younger generation about the love for their country and the nation-building spirit. Therefore, Tran Van Thanh belief holds significant value in the spiritual life of the people, helping to maintain the traditional culture, the moral values of humanity, and the preservation of local culture in the context of globalization.

4. The portrayal of Tran Van Thanh belief that we have researched and depicted signifies the historical and cultural significance for the people of An Giang. With this portrayal, we have sketched the content within the limitations of research materials available about Mr. Tran Van Thanh. Therefore, during the execution of this topic, we encountered many difficulties regarding research materials. We had to conduct field surveys to gather real-life materials about the places of worship and the belief of the people in Tran Van Thanh. Tran Van Thanh festivals occurring simultaneously in various locations posed challenges for our surveys. However, we made initial efforts to study Tran Van Thanh belief systematically, based on research methods and Structural Functionalism and Cultural Sphere Theory, to highlight this belief. We hope that this thesis contributes to the promotion of Tran Van Thanh belief in the lives of the people of An Giang. This thesis also serves as our profound tribute to Mr. Tran Van Thanh. Through our research, we have realized that "there are still many gaps that we have not had the opportunity to explore and delve into." We hope that this initial completion of our work serves as a stepping stone for further in-depth research into Tran Van Thanh belief, contributing to the development of the cultural identity of An Giang province.

**LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY THE RESEARCHER
RELATED TO THESIS TOPIC**

1. *The Heroic Festival of Tran Van Thanh in Chau Phu District, An Giang, and the Cultural Values of the Festival*
2. *Heroic Folk Beliefs in the Southwestern Region of Vietnam through Legends*
3. *Duc Quan Co Tran Van Thanh in the Consciousness of the People of An Giang.*