

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF THE DAO PEOPLE IN THANH HOA PROVINCE

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**Abstract:** *Dao people in Vietnam were known as a migrating community from China. Due to historical and social changes within the nation under the Qing dynasty, a part of the population had fled abroad including the Yao (in Chinese language); they crossed the mountains and established their villages in the highlands of Vietnam. There are 2 groups of the Dao in Thanh Hoa respectively Dao Quan Chet (meaning Dao with tight trousers) and Dao Do - Red Dao (meaning Dao with red color clothes). The aim of the article is to add more details of the history and typical ethnic cultural features of the Dao in Thanh Hoa province to enrich the knowledge of the Dao in Vietnam. In fact, the Dao people has a very rich and diverse cultural life. Although the Dao population is quite small in comparison to the other ethnic minority groups in Thanh Hoa, they have still reserved their unique cultural values which contribute to the richness and diversity of ethnic cultural characters in Thanh Hoa.*

**Keywords:** *The Dao people, ethnic minorities, history and culture, Thanh Hoa province.*

### 1. Introduction

There have been many studies on the Dao ethnic group in Vietnam in many aspects such as historical origins, economy, culture, and ethnic society; in which research on the history and culture of Dao people in Vietnam has been concerned by many researchers. There are some typical researches on Dao people typically: Dao People in Vietnam written by Be Viet Dang, et al. (1974); Dao ethnic minority by Nguyen Khac Tung (2014). Additionally, initial studies on the history and culture of the Dao people in Thanh Hoa must refer to typical works as follow: Notes on the Tay Dèng de Lang Chánh (Thanh-Hóa-Annam) (Robert. R, 1941); Customs and habits of Dao people in Thanh Hoa (Dao Thi Vinh, 2001); Le Thanh Hoa (Robequain. Charles, 1929); Trieu Dao Family with study promotion in Phung Son village, Phung Chau commune, Ngoc Lac district. Furthermore, there are many valuable documents about the Dao in the Chinese language that provides concrete background for studying Dao subgroups in Vietnam. In general, these are valuable sources for doing research on the history and culture of the Dao people in Vietnam in general and in the mountainous area of Thanh Hoa province in particular.

The research results indicate that Dao ethnic group was a migrating community from China. Their long migration process into Vietnam perhaps began from the 13th century until the 1940s. However, this is a hypothesis about their migration due to the

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lack of solid documents to confirm an accurate time when they migrated to Vietnam. In some Dao people's memory and few remained family annals, the authors assume that the Dao migrated to Vietnam in different periods by different subgroups and by many pathways as well. The fact shows that Dao people currently residing in the northwest region migrated to Vietnam around the 13th century by routes. This was the earliest group of Dao people putting their first steps and settling in the northwest area of Vietnam. Be Viet Dang et al. (1974) informs that the Dao living in the northeast region and some northern midland provinces migrated into Vietnam from the 13th century to the early 20th century and traveled mainly by waterways.

According to the report of VPHC (2019), the Dao population was around 891,151 people (accounting for 0.092% of the total population of Vietnam). The Dao community in Vietnam is the 2nd largest Dao group in the world after the one in China) [9]. In general, Dao people in Vietnam have many different subgroups living in different places within Vietnam. Indeed, they have unity features in terms of ethnic's names, language, and culture. This indicates that the Dao in Vietnam has a very deep sense of their historical origins and destiny.

## **2. Research methods**

In this article, the ethnographic field method and three cultural research theories namely historical particularism, cultural ecology, cultural relativism as well as secondary data collection are used to clarify the historical origins, migration process, and formation of the Dao ethnic minority in Thanh Hoa.

Firstly, the theory of historical particularism considers each society as a unique product of its historical context. The culture of each ethnic group is formed in a historical process associated with a certain social environment and in specific geographical conditions. Besides, cultural ecology theory explains mutual influences between the natural environment and culture which helps to analyze the relationship between the Dao culture and the natural environment where they live in. In case of the Dao in Thanh Hoa, they have their own special historical figure, being one of 7 ethnic groups in the minor ethnic community in Thanh Hoa province.

The theory of Cultural relativism acknowledges the equality of cultural values created by different inhabitants. Indeed, cultural relativism refers to not judging a culture to our standards of what is right or wrong, strange or normal. Instead, we should try to understand the cultural practices of other groups in their context. This is a profound framework for researchers when studying the socio-cultures of the Dao people in this study. The cultural creations of the Dao people in Thanh Hoa have partly shown their flexible behavior and respect for the natural environment toward sustainable development.

Moreover, the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork is also used to gather the data. Practically, fieldwork is the process of immersing oneself in as many aspects of the daily cultural lives of people as possible to study their behaviors and interactions. In the fieldwork process, the authors eventually collect ideas about kinship, language, religion, politics, and economic systems which allow us to create a picture of Dao society. The

cultural values of the Dao have made an important contribution to enriching the cultural colors of Thanh Hoa in particular and the Vietnamese ethnic community in general.

### **3. Key Findings**

#### ***3.1. The history of formation and development process of the Dao in Thanh Hoa***

It can be said that Dao ethnic group is widely inhabited in the northern part of Thanh Hoa province including Ngoc Lac, Cam Thuy, and Muong Lat districts. It is divided into subgroups depending on their customs, habits, clothes, and costume. Thanh Hoa is home to about 6.340 Dao people. The names of two small groups of the Dao are Dao Quan Chet (meaning Dao with tight trousers) and Dao Do - (meaning Dao with red color clothes). Specifically, Dao people mainly reside in some districts respectively: Cam Thuy (3.540), Ngoc Lac (1.715), Muong Lat (781), and Thach Thanh (37) [10]. In terms of the settlement, the Dao Quan Chet group lives in lower mountain valleys with ten villages (nine villages are all Dao people and one village is mixed with other ethnic groups like Thai, Muong, and Kinh people). There are 7 Dao villages located in Cam Thuy district, in Phu Son, Son Lap, Binh Yen, Binh Son, Ngoc Son, Thach An, and Oi village. There are 3 villages of the Dao in Ngoc Lac district: Ha Son, Tan Thanh, and Phung Son. On the other hand, another group is the Red Dao residing in the mountainous area of Muong Lat district near Vietnam – Laos border with three villages: Suoi Tut, Con Dao (Quang Chieu commune), and Pu Quan (Pu Nhi commune).

Until now, local people still call the Dao Quan Chet- Man (Mán) or Man Son Dau (Mán Sơn Đầu), and Red Dao is called Giao (Giáo). These two groups of the Dao migrated to Thanh Hoa at different times and in different places, they know very little about each other even though they have the same root. In terms of language, for example, if Dao Quan Chet and Red Dao join in a conversation, they may understand seventy percent of the content due to different pronunciations.

Moreover, the report showed that at the beginning of 1925, there were three small groups of the Dao (Man) living on up-hills of the northern part of Thanh Hoa, along the slope of the schist from 300- 600m high. Their neighbor was Hmong people living in the upper land in the mountain ranges of Phu Nghi (Pu Nhi) near the border of Hua Phan province (Laos PDR) between Ma river and Luong River with an average height of 1.200 m [7].

Group1: There were about 10 Dao houses built in Quan Hoa district, in the northern part of Hoi Xuan commune, on the land of Lung Coc (Co Lung commune) and high peaks separating Hoi Xuan and Phu Nghiem villages (Phu Le commune).

Group 2: There were about 30 Dao houses were built in Ngoc Lac district. They settled in the southwest of Phong Y, Dien Chau, Phu Tiem communes, and Hac Mountain (Hao Mountain).

Group 3: There were about 20 houses of the Dao people living on the tops of a mountain in Cong Khe and Doi Nam, Cao Tri village (Ngoc Khe commune) and Phung Giao (Van Am commune), Ngoc Lac district.

In addition, a document titled Notes on the Tay Deng people in Lang Chanh written by French General Manager- R. Robert has shown that more than 50 years ago, there were only a hundred Man (Mán) people in this area living scatteredly in Phu Yen and Cao Tri communes, Ngoc Lac district. When they were asked about their origins, they said that they belonged to the Annam group called the head painting group (Son Đầu). Certainly, they were a part of the hill tribal group- Man Ta Pan [8]. According to a man named- Chêu Văn Liáng (probably Trieu Van Luong in Vietnamese) - a literate person living in Bu Nan Mountain (Phu Yen commune), the group of Man Son Dau also lived in Thach Lam (Thach Thanh district), Doi Moc (Tan Hoa district), Lai Lang (Quan Hoa district).

Moreover, Robequain (2012) indicated that Dao Quan Chet living in Thanh Hoa province nowadays mainly migrated in the early 20th century from some northern provinces of Vietnam such as Tuyen Quang, Hoa Binh, and Vinh Phuc. Specifically, the Man certainly came to Thanh Hoa before the year 1905. At that time, few Man families left their old villages in Vinh Dong and Kim Boi (Luong Son district, Hoa Binh province), where they had lived for about 30 years, and then after four days of walking, they arrived at the land of Trieu Nguyet (the yoke- of the ruling classes of Dien Ha village, Dien Lu commune) and stayed there for 15 years. Then, they evacuated to other places in Quan Hoa, Ngoc Lac district. While studying the migration path of Dao people into Thanh Hoa, C. Robequain figured out that there was a close relative kinship relationship between Man people in Thanh Hoa and Man groups in the north of Tonkin. This clue shows the connection between the Man in Thanh Hoa and Man in Tam Dao (Tuyen Quang). The Man in Thanh Hoa also knew another name- Du Cun [8]. Like Man people in Du Cun - Tam Dao, Man in Thanh Hoa is probably a subgroup of great tribal- Man Dai Ban living in the land spreading from Hunan to Laos. However, the issue of the relationship between Dao in Thanh Hoa and Dao in Tam Dao or other Dao groups in Vietnam has been controversial to scientists that further research is needed.

There has been a controversy for a long time about when is needed ancestors of Dao Quan Chet in Ngoc Lac and Cam Thuy districts migrated into Vietnam. Some initial research has shown that those people came into the country approximately four centuries ago. If the current migration of the Man in Thanh Hoa is well-known, on the contrary, their origins are extremely vague. No one in their community can remember exactly their roots, they only remember that they have been in Vietnam for 12 generations (each generation is within 20-25 years).

Related to the migration process, Ban Phuc Chinh who lives in Tan Thanh village (Thach Lap commune, Ngoc Lac district) said that the Ban Family record is still intact and written that: “Ban Family came to Quang Ninh on 11st of February 1742, and then migrated through Tuyen Quang, Hoa Binh and arrived to Thanh Hoa on 26th December 1903” [2]. In another research, Nguyen Dinh Manh (2013) provided that according to the record of the Trieu Family in Phung Son village (Phung Giao commune, Ngoc Lac district), their origin is from China, and they have settled in Vietnam for a long time. Mr. Trieu Ngoc Duong, head of the Trieu Family in Phung Son, remembered that due to a lack of land to cultivate, Trieu Family had to migrate from China to Quang Ninh province, and then gradually go across some land of the country: Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang,

Hoa Binh and resided in Ngoc Lac, Thanh Hoa. In 1954, there were 3 Dao households with 13 people of the Trieu Family who had moved from the highland of Thanh Lap, Phung Son to reclaim soil and cultivate the mountain areas. In 1969, 4 Dao people moved in; they created a community of Dao people living in harmony with other families. At that time, he recalled most of the land belonged to the Muong group (Mường), thus they did not have the land field to cultivate; therefore, he and his family had planned to return to Tuyen Quang province. The reason is that due to the small number of Dao migrants and late arrival in comparison to other ethnic groups in Vietnam, the Dao have less advantage over other ethnic groups like Muong, Thai... However, in 1974, when the government implemented the plan to build Phung Son Spillway, the Dao people were granted land field and their lives have been gradually changed and improved.

The second group of the Dao in Thanh Hoa is Dao Do- Red Dao currently living in the Muong Lat district. In the beginning, they migrated into Thanh Hoa later than the Dao Quan Chet group. According to historical documents, the Red Dao people migrated from Guangdong and Guangxi of China into Vietnam around the 18th century. They were living in some northern parts of Vietnam: Cao Bang, Lang Son, Thai Nguyen, Ha Giang, and Tuyen Quang province. In the period 1945 - 1950, a part of the Red Dao people migrated to Laos, and then around the year 1954, they moved to Muong Lat, Thanh Hoa [2]. However, some written document assumes that the Red Dao people perhaps came to Muong Lat before 1954, or even before 1945 [5]. Mr. Trieu Xanh Chiu (Triệu Xanh Chìu) was the leader of 10 families including 66 Red Dao people who moved from Laos to Muong Lat and stayed in Pu Quan village, Pu Nhi commune. At first, life was tough for them, thus 3 of 10 families had returned to Laos. Mr. Chiu encouraged his residents to work hard and stayed in Pu Nhi Forest to establish Pu Quan village. After that, Red Dao people who had moved to Laos before came back and established two more villages of Red Dao named Con Dao and Suoi Tuot hamlets in Quang Chieu commune. These three villages are close relatives and have a relationship with the Red Dao group in Laos. Recently, Muong Lat district was home to 781 Dao people [5]. Due to their settlement in mountainous areas of Thanh Hoa province, their socio-economic life, in general, is not equal to those living in lower lands in Ngoc Lac and Cam Thuy districts.

In general, both groups of Dao people now cling to the land and forests to preserve life, along with preserving their traditional culture and living in harmony with other ethnic groups.

### ***3.2. The cultural characteristics of the Dao in Thanh Hoa***

#### ***3.2.1. The traditional economic activities and material life***

It can be stated that the Dao is well adapted to cultivation on sloping land ecosystems. Upland and wet rice cultivation have risen for a long time and remained up to now. They also plant some crops and breed cattle and poultry. Agriculture equipment is initially rudimentary and improved gradually. They also have applied more techniques in agricultural production; therefore, they have a diversified crop system. In addition, the Dao people still maintain and develop their handicrafts such as forging, weaving, making paper, making indigo plant-glue, and making jewelry & knitting to ensure needs of self-

sufficiency. Since the Dao settled in Thanh Hoa, they have gradually adapted to wet farming cultivation and applied sciences and technology in farming practices to replace their traditional old ways.

Towards material life, the Dao people also have many distinguishing characteristics compared to other ethnic groups. There are also many differences between the two groups the Dao Quan Chet and Red Dao in terms of living habits, eating manners, clothing... Taking house architecture as a typical example, traditionally, the Dao people build houses following 3 styles: stilt house, half-stilt, and half-land house. Dao Quan Chet is used to live in half-stilt houses or half-land houses while Red Dao is used to living in ground houses or land houses. In the past, the Dao house has a widened roof to create more space inside with few doors. Nowadays, their living habits have changed gradually due to the influence of the modern architecture of Viet people (Kinh). Recently, there are only 3 traditional houses with half stilts and half-land houses remaining in Phung Son village (Ngoc Lac). Most houses have been converted to modern houses like the Kinh houses. However, it should be highlighted that it is merely changing in form of the house outside, the inner content or behavioral culture inside the houses of the Dao people is still well preserved by themselves until now.

### 3.2.2. *The spiritual life*

The fact shows that spiritual life is associated with a variety of sacred spiritual elements which transparently shows the values of historical traditions, traits of community, ethnic psychology, and brave spirits of the community. Those are rituals associated with the life span of a person. One of the most special rituals of the Dao people is the maturity ritual- (tục cấp sắc/ lễ cấp sắc). That is a mandatory custom for all Dao men to become real descendants of Ban Vương (Forefather of the Dao people). Accordingly, only when passing the maturity ritual, a Dao man is considered to be mature by others in the community, if not he will be seen as a child. Particularly, all Dao men aged 15- 20 must pass the ritual. Red Dao people call this spiritual practice - *Qua tang* (meaning enlighten ritual or lightening) and Dao Quan Chet group calls it- *Quả tãng* (tãng means the light – a formality in the ritual). The ritual must be held in the order of a man's position in the family. The father must have this ritual before his son and an older brother must do it before his younger brother.

In reality, a man who doesn't pass the maturity ritual is believed not to be able to control his spirit. In that way, he is only able to return to Đào Hoa cave and does not reach Dương Châu - the Dao's ancestral land which consequently hurts the destiny of his offspring. In other words, the maturity ritual is considered a birth of a Dao man, in which he receives a name from the Gods which will be used in another world after death. People passing *tục cấp sắc* are believed they are not to be harmed by devils after their death. Even if a Dao man does not pass the ritual while he is alive, as a result, when he dies, his family members must do it for him instead. For the above reasons, no matter how rich or poor he is, a Dao man must pass the maturity ritual. Therefore, *tục cấp sắc* is a common social activity of Dao men which is related to religious concepts, moral spirits, and daily life activities.

Regarding the maturity ritual of the Dao in Thanh Hoa, through many field trips to the Dao community, the authors figure out some typical common beliefs of this ethnic minority group. Firstly, only a man passing *lễ cấp sắc* can become a sorcerer which is of much importance to the Dao. A sorcerer means that he must know how to worship, to do magic things and he is recognized by the Gods and is given gosh soldiers (*âm binh*) - the souls of soldiers who died on the battlefields). Secondly, a man passing *le cap sac* will be reunited with his ancestors after he dies. Indeed, *lễ cấp sắc* is considered "the birth of a man" or the ceremony that a man receives a new name from the Gods/ Spirits. Those who passed *le cap sac* are recognized as descendants of Ban Vuong or Ban Ho and protected by him. Thirdly, a person who passes the ritual will have the right to worship ancestors while he is alive and become ancestors after his death. He is eligible to worship by his descendants, and more importantly, his name will be written in family records. Finally, Dao people have a deep belief that, if they pass *le cap sac*, they will be successful to do their business and have a very happy life. In practice, when people spend their whole hearts in Ban Vuong worship, family members are healthy, and these clans will be prosperous. Moreover, to the Red Dao group, if a man does not go through maturity, he will get into trouble in married life because Dao women feel that he is not mature enough to rely on for their whole life. Today, no one is encouraged to do *lễ cấp sắc*, on the other hand, some Dao families in Muong Lat and Ngoc Lac districts who have good economic conditions and strong belief in religious beliefs still practice the rituals in real life.

Briefly, most of the traditional rituals are constantly well preserved and play a crucial role in the spiritual life of the Dao.

### 3.2.3. *The Dao family relations*

It should be noted that the Dao family is like a miniature ethnic group. Importantly, family plays a crucial role to the Dao people because it raises up an individual in both material and spiritual life.

First and foremost, the Dao family has the function of uniting family members. In particular, the patriarch- head of the Dao family- holds an important position in dealing with domestic and foreign affairs to maintain the sustainable existence of the family. Also, regarding the custom of Dao people, marriage between people in the same family is considered a violation of custom.

Furthermore, the Dao people have a very high sense of community which is shown in both real life and spiritual life. Community spirit is expressed through feeling harmony and taking care of each other; through the rituals of joining the family. In addition, the Dao people also highly appreciate the relationships with their neighbors through sharing joys and sorrows, and helping each other when facing difficulties in life. The high sense of community of the Dao is not only shown in their family relationship but also in the ethnic solidarity with other ethnic like Muong, Thai, Kinh, Hmong, and others through marriage and economic relationships.

In brief, there are some typical characteristics of the Dao people such as a high sense of community, open-mindedness, and living in harmony with other ethnic groups which have formed a very strong and dynamic Dao community that creates a profound foundation for preserving and promoting the Dao ethnic traditional values.

#### 4. Conclusion

It is necessary to reconfirm that the Dao ethnic group in Vietnam originated from China, migrated directly to the northwest of Vietnam around the 13th century. The Dao people have migrated to mountainous areas of Thanh Hoa province and settled down there for nearly a century. Dao people are one of seven ethnic groups living together in Thanh Hoa. They form one of fifty-four ethnic groups officially recognized by Vietnam. Although the Dao are associated with the process of shifting cultivation, they still preserve many unique traditional cultural values. Specifically, after the Socio-economic Renovation in Vietnam in 1986, the cultural and socio-economic situations of the Dao improved significantly. After that, they quickly update and apply scientific information and technology in farming practices to change their outdated method. Nowadays, most Dao school-aged children are allowed to go to school; marriage exchange between Dao people and other fifty-three ethnic groups has become more popular. In short, Dao people always have a high sense of preserving their traditional cultural values which contribute to the diversity of ethnic group culture in Thanh Hoa province.

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