

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE WORSHIP OF KITCHEN GOD OF VIETNAMESE IN VIETNAM AND CHINESE IN CHINA

***Abstract:** The Vietnamese and Chinese folk religions regard the Kitchen God (Stove God, Zao Zun) as a deity who manages the cooking work and is one of the important deities protecting the family. These deities are the Patron god of the village, T'u-ti (God of the Land), Ancestors. The origin of the Kitchen God has begun since the Antiquity of China. When the worship of the Kitchen God was introduced in Vietnam, it was changed to correspond with Vietnamese custom. However, it was observed the elements of worship, offerings and social functions of Chinese. Through the comparative study of the Kitchen God cult of Vietnamese in the Red River Delta and Chinese in China, the author indicated the social functions, the similar and different elements of the Kitchen God cult in Vietnam and in China.*

***Keywords:** Kitchen God cult, Zao Zun cult, Vietnamese, Chinese, Vietnam, China.*

1. The origin of the Zao Zun cult of Vietnamese in Vietnam and Chinese in China

According to Sino - Vietnamese reading, Vietnamese called the Kitchen God as Táo Quân (Zao Zun), this deity also named Thần Bếp in Vietnamese. Then, this god was worshipped along with Thổ Địa (the God of the Land) so called Thổ Công (Tudigong- Lord of the Soil and the Ground). In Chinese, the Kitchen God has many names such as Zao Zun, Zao Shen, Zhang Lang, etc...

Zao Zun was a deity with a long history and great merits in Chinese traditional religion. In Chinese history, from Qin dynasty to Ming, Qing dynasties, the worship of Zao Zun was considered an important ritual of

* Lecturer, University of Northwest, Son La Province, Vietnam.

the feudal Court. The Chinese ancient bibliographies wrote much about the ritual of worship Zao Zun. For example, the Chinese historian Sima Qian in his work *The Records of the Grand Historian* (Chronicle of the Emperor Wu of Han) wrote: The Son of Heaven was the Celebrant the ritual of worshipping Zao Zun. The Book of Han (Han Shu - History of the Former Han) wrote: the great mandarins of the Court were in charge five rituals (sacrifices) as the Door god, the Family household god, the Well god, the Kitchen God, and the God of thunder, etc...¹ Travelling and meals is very important for human life, so the worship of these deities in order to have peace and luck.

There were many versions about the origin of Zao Zun. Under Qin and Han dynasties, the Zao Zun deity was considered the incarnation or a descendant of kings of the Chinese Antiquity such as Huangdi (The Yellow Emperor), Yan Emperor Shennong (The Emperor of the Five Grains), etc... “Huangdi had created stove, after his death, he was awarded as the Zao Zun deity”². “Yan Emperor Shennong created fire, after his death, he was awarded as the Zao Zun deity”³. “Le a son of Zhuanxu was worshipped as the Zao Zun deity”⁴.

The Chinese ancient bibliographies wrote that Zao Zun Chúc Dung... was an old kind woman. The work *Tai Ping Yu Lan - Pacific defence* shows, volume 59 wrote that Zao Zun Chúc Dung was an old woman. A scholar of Han dynasty Trinh Thanh Khang explained that “The King established seven rituals for people,... Zao Zun deity was responsible of cuisine, Zao Zun was an old woman named Chúc Dung”⁵.

Afterwards, the Zao Zun deity was gradually secularized and became a Personal god with reputation, background and a beautiful face as a woman. He had a normal family life with wife and children. The Book of the Later Han, *Culinary Heroes’ Story* 22 wrote that “the Zao Zun deity named Thiêm, dressed in yellow”⁶.

According to the Chinese ancient bibliographies, the Zao Zun deity originally was incarnated of the gods half human, half animal, was the primary people who knew to use fire and invented stove. They were a transformed form of the God of Light and the God of Fire in the primitive beliefs. The emergence of the Kitchen God cult truly reflected the integration of nature worship into the daily life of people in ancient times. Then, the Zao Zun deity gradually became a kindly old woman who was

in charge the kitchen (folk conception of Chinese that cooking and taking care of the family was a natural role of women). Finally, the sacrifice became a custom that was widely introduced and the Zao Zun deity became a male god with nice appearance as a female and he had a family life with wife and children.

Along with writing in the ancient bibliographies, in some areas of China, there were legends about the origin of the Kitchen God with the rich content.

In Fuzhou area (formerly Foochow), there were stories which circulated about a person named Zhang. He was a poor man, but he was very lazy, he had a passion for gambling, so he was bankrupt, had to sell his wife. His wife was merciful; she often hid food for him. Then, Zhang was ashamed; he jumped into the stove to suicide. After his death, the Jade Emperor bestowed him as the Kitchen God⁷.

In Shandong area, a tale was circulated that formerly, an old couple named Zhang, who lived with their son named Zhang Lang, and daughter in law named Đinh Hương. Zhang Lang did not like to farm work, he became a trader. His wife stayed at home to work as a farmer and took care her parents in law. Her life was so hard. Five years later, Zhang Lang came back home with a woman and his wife was expelled from home. An old woman brought her home and she became her daughter in law. She had a happy life. A day, Zhang Lang's house was fired; all his fortune was burned and his wife died in the fire. Zhang Lang was blind; he became a beggar. Then, he arrived Đinh Hương's house. She did not only give him rice, but she also donated gold, silver for her old husband. Zhang Lang realized the generous woman was his old wife, he was ashamed, he jumped into the stove to suicide. As a result of the relatives relation, the Jade Emperor bestowed him as the Kitchen God⁸.

Residents on both sides of the Changjiang River also circulated a folk tale of the Zao Zun deity as follows: Once upon a time, a young man of the rich family named Li got married to a woman named Wang (a daughter of a farmer's family). They were married for a long time, but they did not have children, then he got married to the other wife. The first wife was expelled from home as incitement of the second wife. Wang was extremely painful and went to an isolated place for reclaiming. She recruited and helped many poor people to settle there. People were hard

workers; they built the wilderness into a rich manor. Every one honoured her as a leader. It is about Li, her old husband, after several years, he and his wife spent all his parent's fortune, then the wife went away from him. He became a beggar. Then, he arrived Wang's house and he was kindly welcomed. He realized the householder was his old wife, he was ashamed, he jumped into the stove to suicide. Shortly, Wang died because she was merciful to her old husband. The Jade Emperor stated that Li realized his errors and the Jade Emperor bestowed him as the Kitchen God; Wang was an intelligent and virtuous, so the Jade Emperor bestowed her as the Kitchen Goddess⁹.

The Hunan area also circulated a folk tale about the origin of the Zao Zun cult as follows: The youngest daughter of the Jade Emperor was a virtuous gentle girl. She was sympathetic and merciful to the poor. She fell in love with a poor man who work as a burning coal worker. The Jade Emperor was extremely disappointed. She was exiled to the Earth and she was punished along with the poor man. The Queen Mother of the West (Xi Wang Mu) was merciful to her daughter, so she solicited the Jade Emperor bestowed the poor man as the Kitchen God and the youngest daughter as the Kitchen Goddess. Because of understanding the poverty and the misery of humankind on the Earth, the Kitchen Goddess used to visit her parents in the Heaven, by the way of coming back she brought delicious, special food and granted to people. The Jade Emperor detected and he was so angry; he promulgated the Edict that the Kitchen Goddess and the Kitchen God just return the Heaven once a year on the 23 of the 12th month (Lunar calendar). The Kitchen Goddess took advantage of staying there to accumulate the food, then they came back the Earth on New Year's Eve (Lunar calendar). Thus, on the Eve night, every person sits beside the stove and burn incense, votive paper, firecrackers to welcome the return of the Kitchen Goddess and the Kitchen God¹⁰.

On the one hand, the Chinese folk tales praise merit the Zao Zun deity, on the other hand, they satirized the deity. Through the content of the tales, we can see the feelings and attitudes of people towards the Zao Zun deity. Because of governing cooking and meals, the Zao Zun deity is extremely respectful. In addition, the deity is in charge of supervising the family activities (the family members do good or bad things), so people

are fear of the deity; the fear has generated the animosity then people have created satirical tales.

In Vietnam, there is a thrilling folk tale about the origin of the Zao Zun cult as follows: Once upon a time, there was a poor couple. The other year, after the crop failures the husbands had to work away from home, many years passed but the husband did not return. The wife was in mourning her husband then she got married to a man who helped her. One day, the old husband returned. The wife embraced the old husband and she just cried. Then she brought rice and wine for the old husband. To avoid scandal, she told the old husband that he temporarily evaded in a rick. The new husband came back home; he came into the kitchen to take the ashes to fertilize the farm but there was not any ash, so he burned the rick and he accidentally killed the old husband. The wife was merciful her former husband; she jumped in the fire to die. The new husband did not know why, but he also jumped into the fire because his compassion the wife. The Jade Emperor thought that three persons felt great affection for each other; He bestowed them as the Kitchen Kings so that they could live together forever and the fire always warms their love.

2. The social function of the Zao Zun deity

During the Xianqin (Tiên Tần) period, the Zao Zun deity just governed cooking and meals of each family. *The Book of Han- Han Shu* wrote that the Zao Zun deity was the origins of the nutrition. Therefore, it can be said that people considered Zao Zun as the deity of cuisine management during the Qin and Han dynasties¹¹.

The Book of the Later Han, Culinary heroes' story wrote that: “Âm Tử Phương, during the Emperor Xuan of Han (Han Dynasty), was filial piety, virtue. In an early morning, he made a fire in the kitchen; he saw the incarnation of Zao Zun deity. Âm Tử Phương reverently worshipped him. He slaughtered the unique golden goat of his family to sacrifice Zao Zun. Since the Zao Zun deity has blessed Âm Tử Phương's family. In the old age, he had more than 700 acres of farm land, many cattles, poultries, slaves. His descendants were also wealthy and the mandarins of the court. Thus, many families killed golden goats to sacrifice Zao Zun on the 23 of the 12th month (according to the lunar calendar)¹². Therefore, since Han dynasty, the Zao Zun deity has managed finance and career of people.

During the Jin dynasty, the Zao Zun deity was in charge of human longevity in recording good or bad activities of people to submit to the Heaven. The Book *Hoài Nam vạn tốt thuật* wrote that the Zao Zun deity returned to the Heaven in the last day of the month to announce the human merits, crimes¹³. The author Ge Hong, belonged the Eastern Jin dynasty, in the work *Bão Phác tử nội biên - Vi chí* wrote that “On the last night of every month, the Zao Zun deity returns to the Heaven to submit to the Jade Emperor the merits and crimes of humankind on the Earth. If someone commits a serious crime he/she will be reduced 300 years of longevity; if someone commits a minor crime he/she will be reduced 3 days of longevity”¹⁴. The power of the Zao Zun was not only the management of cuisine, but this deity also managed the birth, death, happiness, scourge of each family, recorded human merits, crimes.

Since the Tang dynasty to the Qing dynasty, Taoism has flourished; the Zao Zun became a multi-functional deity that supervised everything on the Earth. During the Xuantang Era of Qing dynasty, the Work *Táo Vương phủ quân chân kinh* wrote: Zao Wang supervised the Kitchen that observed every activity of family members, clearly defined good or bad actions. On the 30 of every month, the Zao Zun deity returns to the Heaven to submit to the Jade Emperor what he has seen¹⁵.

The Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese is a “Trinity” (Tam vị nhất thể) system. In this system, the Tudigong (Thổ Công) oversaw the kitchen, the Tudishen (Thổ Địa) looked after the house, the Thổ Kỳ was a woman, so she oversaw the markets. The three Zao Zun deities were crowned king of the kitchen that were being tasked to look after the house, to prevent demons, to return to the Heaven to submit to the Jade Emperor what he has seen, on the 23rd of the 12th month, then the Jade Emperor determined the happiness or scourge of each family in the new year. According to Vietnamese, after death of the three Zao Zun, they became deities and they were worshipped because of their merits on protecting people. The deities objectively recorded the good or bad activities of people on the Earth. Basing on their report, the Jade Emperor determined the happiness or scourge of each family, so the ritual of the Zao Zun deities was solemn as well as sacred. Simultaneously, this faith led people to humanitarian and moral activities in order to protect their family happiness and fortune. It expresses the Vietnamese point of view on aestheticsenses and values.

3. The icon of the Zao Zun deity

For a long time ago, the ancient Chinese books wrote about the icon of the Zao Zun deity. *The Book of the Later Han - Culinary heroes* wrote that “the Zao Zun deity wears a yellow robe, appears in the kitchen in the midnight”¹⁶. The data is different from the deity’s appearance in the woodblock paintings.

These paintings always are yellow, green, black, red with many sizes. The icon of the Zao Zun deity is divided into two types. Firstly, the icon of deity with “large face”, it means that the face is larger than other body parts. Secondly, the icon of deity with treasures. It means that the deity is painted with gold, silver bullion, and strings of money. In addition, the Zao Zun deity rarely is alone, along with the deity is his wife (Táo Vương Bà Bà) or Guanyin (Mercy Goddess), Kubera, Door gods, Tudishen or T’u-ti (God of the Land), etc... These triptych paintings drew the majestic image of the Zao Zun in the centre, the Táo Vương Bà Bà and chamberlains were next to him. The Zao Zun deity was painted as a feudal mandarin with dark face, long beard, couture clothes and the Táo Vương Bà Bà was a beautiful, kind woman. Moreover, there were chickens, dogs in the front of the paintings. In the ancient paintings, they were added a meteorological table of 24 sections according to the Lunar calendar to help farmers to calculate agricultural seasons and the weather.

In addition, there was the other kind of worshipful painting of the Chinese which was divided into three parts such as the Guanyin Tong Zi was painted on the top; the Zao Zun deity and his wife were in the middle, and the Kubera and the fairies at the bottom.

In the Nam Son Buddhist temple, Côn Minh city, China, there was a china statue of Kubera liked the statue of Maitreya and the worship liked the Zao Zun deity ritual. Moreover, there were statues of the Zao Zun deity and his wife as an old, kindly, benevolent man and woman in each Chinese family. This symbol was appropriate for the tendency of personifying the Zao Zun deity of the Chinese.

However, the Zao Zun deity was worshipped as the symbol of two men and a woman in Vietnam. The Vietnamese used three paper hats (or a paper hat) and three tablets (or a tablet) which symbolized the three deities. In the annual ritual, people burned the old hats, then they replaced the new one. The offerings were added paper clothes, shoes and money.

The paper money included 5 colours that represented the Five elements such as Wood, Fire, Earth, Kim and Shui. In addition, the three tablets were written such as Thổ Công manages the kitchen, Thổ Địa manages the home's affairs and Thổ Kỳ manages the market's affairs and vegetable garden. Sometimes, the three deities were offered one tablet with the sentences in the Sino - Việt language such as “Định phúc Táo quân” or “Bản gia Đông trù Tư mệnh Táo phủ Thần quân” or “Bản gia Thổ địa Long mạch Tôn thần” or “Bản gia Ngũ phương Ngũ thổ Phúc đức Chính thần”. This data indicates that Vietnamese considered the Zao Zun deities is one (Nhất gia chi chủ). Each family has to worship their Zao Zun deity.

4. The worship place of the Zao Zun deity

The Chinese who lived in the countryside worshipped the Zao Zun deity at a corner of the kitchen. The altar was simple with the incense bowl and tablet. Some families worshipped the Zao Zun deity with the wooden or glass tablet in the church altar or the tablet on a piece of wood, the other families hang the Zao Zun deity's altar on the wall of the kitchen.

According to Vietnamese custom, the Zao Zun deity is not worshipped at a corner of the kitchen. The Vietnamese build an altar called the Thổ Công's altar. People use the top of the cabinet to place the altar or hang the wooden altar on the wall or use a bamboo frame to make the church altar (like a tiny house). The Zao Zun deity's altar was placed on the west of the house. There is an incense bowl and the other worship objects. Currently, Vietnamese houses have changed from wooden house to concrete house, so many families have shifted the location of the Thổ Công deity's altar. They usually worship the Zao Zun deity at the ancestral altar in the centre of the house; the incense bowl of the Thổ Công deity is placed on the left (West).

Furthermore, there is a difference in decorating the worship place of the Zao Zun deity between the Vietnamese in Vietnam and the Chinese in China. The couplet (Chinese poetry) in the worship place of the Zao Zun deity has reflected the faith of each race. The Chinese have chosen the couplet with the meaning that “Going to the Heaven, reporting the good affair/ Coming back to the Earth, protecting the family in peace” (Lên Trời nói lại những điều tốt lành/ Dưới hạ giới bảo hộ gia đình được bình

yên). The context of this couplet has showed the intrigue of the Chinese families, on the contrary, the Vietnamese has a custom of decorating the spring couplet on the sides of the worship place of the Zao Zun deity and the meaning of the couplet that “The virtue of the deity could control the fire/ The impartiality of the deity goes through the Heaven” (Sự đức độ của thần có thể điều khiển được lửa/ Sự vô tư của thần thấu lên tận Trời cao) which showed the attitude of Vietnamese towards the reverence and the impartiality of the Zao Zun deity.

5. The ritual of the Zao Zun deity

The worship of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese and the Chinese has a common point which is “benefit”. It means that the deity bestows them what they have invoked. The differences in worshipping this deity of two races were caused by the deification and the secularisation of the Zao Zun deity.

The Chinese believe that the Jade Emperor has commanded the Zao Zun deity that dwells in the kitchen to observe human activities, then this deity comes back the Heaven to report on the occasion of the end of the year, finally the Jade Emperor determines happiness, scourge, longevity of humankind. To avoid the scourge, the Chinese actualized the spiritual life according to the view “The secular life is the same the deity life”, they consider the Zao Zun deity as a feudal mandarin who took bribes so they have also bribed the Zao Zun deity in order to do not report their bad activities and the Jade Emperor has bestowed happiness for their family. Therefore, every day before cooking, the Chinese always burn incense on the Zao Zun deity’s altar, they sometimes offer fruit, flower, candy, and paper gold, silver bullion to the deity. In the ancient time, people offered fruit, flower and salty food. Until the Qing dynasty, they just offered fruit, flower and vegetarian food. At present, they offer one or three cakes, an apple, a pear or a banana to the deity. Thus, the offerings have changed from plurality to simplicity. Through these offerings, we realize that the cult of the Zao Zun deity originated from Taoism. Since the Qing dynasty, Buddhism has been combined with folk religion. The Zao Zun deity has become the Bodhisattva and the offerings have been vegetarian food such as sweet food (sugar, candy), salty food (salt). People limited killing in order to have happy karma and they hoped that the deity narrated sweet and salty speech like the offerings. In addition, the

Chinese families in the rural areas offered peanut, rice, tofu, votive paper, etc... They desired that the deity blessed with prosperity and good harvests. The most important day related to the feast day on 23th of the 12th month (Lunar calendar) and people offered many offerings. After the ritual, people burned paper gold, silver bullion or the deity's tablet then they dedicated a new tablet or a new statue at the end day of the year (or the 5th day of the Lunar new year - Tết festival). Currently, the Chinese costume of worshipping the Zao Zun deity shows their awareness of religion has changed from the deification and the secularization and the combination with Taoism, Buddhism and folk religion while the folk religion is dominant.

For the Vietnamese, the worship of Zao Zun deity plays an important role in the deity system of protecting the family. Whenever a family member goes to work away from home or returns home, the full moon and new moon each month, the feast days, the Tết festival or important occasions such as birth, wedding, funeral, etc... the Vietnamese burn incense to worship the Zao Zun deity and they offer sticky rice, meat, wine or fruit for the deity with the hope that the family members will be protected. Offerings are different depending on the economy of each household. On the full moon and new moon each month, offerings usually are vegetarian food such as fruits, candies, votive paper, betel and arecanut; on Tết occasion, offerings are added salty food as sticky rice, wine, chicken. For the Vietnamese, the Zao Zun deity is not a feudal mandarin who likes taking bribes, so the Vietnamese do not say that they bribe the deity, but they say that they burn incense or joss-stick to worship the Zao Zun deity.

On the feast day of 23th of the 12th month, the Vietnamese always organize the ritual to worship the Zao Zun deity for his journey to return the Heaven. It is considered one of the most important rituals. On this day, beside the normal offerings such as fruits, candies, betel and arecanut, sticky rice, meat, etc... each family has to prepare three paper clothes, tablet and votive paper. In the past decades, the cult of the Zao Zun deity has changed in the urban areas, beside the traditional offerings, the Vietnamese offer three carp (or three paper carp) as a vehicle of the Zao Zun to the Heaven. According to the ancient costume, at the beginning of the spring occasion (Tết festival), the felling ceremony of

the new year tree (lễ hạ cây nêu) is the day by inviting the Zao Zun deity come back home for worshipping. Currently, most of the households invite the Zao Zun deity after the new year Eve ceremony. Because of conception that incense is burned on the ancestral altar during the three days of Tet and the perfume of incense attracts ghosts and devils so people desire the Zao Zun deity come back their home on the first day of the new year. However, the ritual to worship the Zao Zun deity for his journey to return the Heaven and the ritual to invite the deity come back human house are different depending on the custom of each region.

The Zao Zun deity was the most important in the protected family deity system of the Chinese and the Vietnamese. This cult originated from the Han dynasty and it has been widely propagated in China and Vietnam since two thousand years. As mentioned above, this worship has been changed. However, the Vietnamese still consider that the Zao Zun deity is one of the most important deities in protecting family and almost families have the Zao Zun deity altar in their house and the status of this deity just ranked behind the ancestors. “Although the Zao Zun deity status is ranked behind the ancestors, but this deity is the most powerful”¹⁷. On the Death Anniversary of the ancestor, the family member has to invite foremost the Patron god of the village (Thổ Công) or the Zao Zun deity, then asks the deity permits their ancestors return home to enjoy the offerings. It can be said that the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Chinese has experienced a process of flourishing, then it was backward. In contrast, the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese has still maintained a high status in the protected family deity system.

6. The causes led to the similarities and differences in the cult of the Zao Zun deity between the Chinese in China and the Vietnamese in Vietnam

The cult of the Zao Zun deity the Chinese and the Vietnamese has homogeneities in the form of worship, but there are differences in the nature of worship. The similarities caused by the rational adjustment and the influences of the Chinese folklore culture. The differences led by the deeper layer of culture with the symbol of religion of two races.

The Zao Zun deity initially was the Fire God (Hỏa thần), Solar God (Thái Dương thần), then these deities gradually became the Zao Zun deity, finally this deity was personified as a feudal mandarin. The

transformation has started since the Western Han dynasty. It marked a higher level of personification and the social function of this deity, the deity took care the kitchen that became the deity supervised the scourge and happiness, human life expectancy, even as a Bodhisattva - a god was popularly circulated in folk-religion of the Chinese.

The cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese has been affected by the Chinese since the Song dynasty. The similarity of this cult that the tablet of the god was written in the ancient Chinese characters. However, the Vietnamese selectively absorbed this cult and modified it, the legend of a male God in the Chinese religion became Three gods with two males and a female in the Vietnamese religion. It is considered as a cultural identify of the Vietnamese: “harmony does not mean dissolution” (Hòa đồng chứ không hòa tan).

Currently, the kitchen culture of the Vietnamese has been changing in cooking with fire stove of straw, wood, coal and finally gas, etc... However, the kitchen function, the cultural and spiritual life related to the kitchen still exists in current life. The cult of the Zao Zun deity is not only in China, Vietnam, but it also is in the other countries in the Southeast Asia. It can be said that there were legends about the icon of this god in the polytheistic religions of the Vietnamese before the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Chinese affected to the Bách Việt region.

In my opinion, the worship of fire stove with “His first three vegetables” (ba ông đầu rau) for cooking with straw was a deeper layer of the God of the Land cult according to the type “Trinity” of the Vietnamese, it existed before the propagation of the cult of the Zao Zun deity. The traditional religion has been circulated until the present time. Basing on the archaeological evidences, Trần Quốc Vượng stated that: “For approximately 10.000 years, owners of the Hòa Bình culture used the fire stove with “His first three vegetables”. The fire stoves with “His first three vegetables” made of pottery were found in the vestiges of the Iron Age of Vietnam such as Đường Mai (Hà Nội), Nội Cầm (Bắc Ninh)”¹⁸.

In the opinion of the ethnologists, the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese has originated since the pre-history. However, the archaeological data which Trần Quốc Vượng based on that was the worship of rock switched to the cult of the Zao Zun deity. The worship of

rock was originated from the Southeast Asia for a long time ago. The cult is related to fire because the fire can be created from rock. The phenomenon of three stones formed the “Trinity” that was the symbol of bonfires and related to the ancient worship of rock. The fire stoves contained the cultural connotation and the historical accumulation. It had the simple functions such as lighting, heating, cooking. Then, it became a religion that contained social and cultural content as well as it was a place where humankind communicated with the god. Simultaneously, the fire stoves were the symbol of family with many functions. It can be said that the fire stoves were an origin of spiritual life of each race.

Currently, the Vietnamese worship the Patron god of the village (Thổ Công) as an inheritance of the cult of fire, the Kitchen God. This worship was gratefulness of human being to the kitchen fire. The worship of the fire stoves switched to the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese was a progress of socialization and receptiveness of the Chinese culture but it was modified to appropriate for their culture. As mentioned above, the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese has been originated from the worship of the fire stoves with “His first three vegetables” since the ancient time. As a result of the differences of society, history, geography, etc... the Chinese and the Vietnamese chose the different modes of worship the Zao Zun. The cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese preserved many elements and cultural connotation of worshipping fire and fire stove, on the contrary, the cult of the Zao Zun deity of the Chinese had a great divergency; it lost the ancient cultural connotation and it contained the symbol of the secular society, even, the Buddhist elements as the personification the Zao Zun deity like a Bodhisattva.

In addition, the reason why the Zao Zun deity became the Patron god of the village (Thổ Công) in the Vietnamese culture? In my opinion, firstly, the importance and function of the Zao Zun deity was gradually extended and appreciated in each Vietnamese family. The Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese initially managed fire and cooking affairs related to the livelihood of each family. When receiving the Chinese culture, the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese was added the function of managing and reporting the good or bad activities of human being on the Earth to the Jade Emperor determines happiness or scourge for each family.

Secondly, the Zao Zun deity of the Vietnamese was influenced by the cult of T'u-ti (God of the Land) of the Chinese because of the penetration of political forms of the monarchical society into each family during the Tang and Song dynasties. In order to suit these forms, the cult of T'u-ti gradually changed (the role of this god was more clear). Furthermore, the society of the Tang dynasty had changes in the economy relation. During the Song dynasty, the mandarins advocated the expansion of the cult of T'u-ti. Thus, the function, duty, authority and magic of the God of the Land increased. As a result of change in awareness and mode of worship the God of the Land of the Chinese, the Vietnamese combined the concept of a family that was formed in the context of the agricultural culture with the worship the God of the Land of the Chinese in order to suit the Vietnamese folk religion. The concept "The land has its god, the river has the god of water" (đất có thổ công, sông có Hà Bá) was deeply impressed in the minds of the Vietnamese. In addition, the function, duty, authority of the three Kitchen gods was similar the function of protecting the family of the God of the Land, so the three Kitchen gods were consolidated into the God of the Land. Trần Ngọc Thêm stated that "The Patron god of the village (Thổ Công) was the God of the Land as well as was the Kitchen gods because the land, house and kitchen of the inhabitants who settle in a place to grow crops was similar and their status was very important"¹⁹.

The cult of the Kitchen god was influenced by the cult of the Land God and the worship of the Land God of the families manifested the adoration of land. In the context of the traditional agricultural culture of the Vietnamese, the Kitchen god cult (Zao Zun) contained the adoration of land that was not a chance. As a result of this adoration, the Patron god of the village was worshipped in the family and concurrently hold the post of the God of the Land as well as was the Kitchen god that became one of the most important deities of the Vietnamese. Thus, the worship of the Patron god of the village was usually performed along with the ancestral ritual. The Patron god of the village and the ancestor managed birth, agedness, sickness and death; prosperity or decline of each family.

7. Conclusion

The forming of the Kitchen godcult of the Vietnamese was an adjustment process between the Vietnamese indigenous culture and the

Chinese culture. In this process, the Vietnamese culture, in particular, the Vietnamese folk culture was not passively absorbed the Chinese folk culture. It was an adjustment process with selection and reconstruction of the Vietnamese indigenous culture. The Kitchen god cult was a typical folk religion of the Vietnamese and the main rule of forming the Vietnamese culture. In fact, the folk culture in general and the folk religion in particular is a crucial issue in comparison research the relationship between Vietnam and China./.

Notes:

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- 4 Vương Lợi Khí (1981), *Phong tục thông nghĩa hiệu chú* (tiếng Trung), Trung Hoa thư cục, Bắc Kinh: 310 (*Customary Explanation* [the Chinese language], Publisher: Letter Departments of China, Beijing: 310).
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