

A FURTHER DISCUSSION ON THE CAUSES LED A PART OF HMONG PEOPLE CONVERTED TO PROTESTANTISM

Abstract: *In recent years, the rapid expansion of Protestantism in Hmong community and some other ethnic minorities in the North-West Vietnam has caused many changes. The Hmong and the other ethnic minorities have lived in many Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, so the religious conversion has not been an issue of Vietnam but it has also been a common matter in many countries. In Vietnam, the speedy development of Protestantism in Hmong community and some other ethnic minorities has led to positive and negative impacts on many aspects of politics, culture, and society. Despite in the context of summary 10 years of implementation of Directive No.01/2005/CT-TTg of the Vietnam Prime Minister on some tasks toward Protestantism, many local authorities have confused. This article explained the causes that led to the conversion of a part of Hmong people to Protestantism. It is an initial outline, so we need to have a deep research in order to have comprehensive evaluations.*

Keywords: *Hmong people, Protestantism, ethnic minority, conversion.*

1. Overview of the Hmong Protestant community¹

The Hmong ethnic group is one of the ethnic minorities that inhabits along the border areas of Vietnam - China, Vietnam - Laos, China - Laos. The evangelisation of Protestantism in the Vietnam Hmong community was not separated from the Hmong community in the regional countries. In 1998, the Vietnamese local authorities detected an unauthorized entry of 27 Chinese from Yunnan province into Lai Chau, Lao Cai and Ha Giang provinces to evangelize in Hmong, Dzao and the other ethnic communities². It needs to confirm

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that the abandonment of traditional religions in order to convert into Protestantism in particular and Christianity, in general, is a common phenomenon of Hmong people in the regional countries.

**Table 1. Number of Hmong Christians
(Catholics and Protestants) in the regional countries**

Order	Country name	Hmong Population	Believers	Percentage (%)
1	China	7.398.035 (2000)	70.000 (1922)	0,94
2	Laos	315.465 (1998)	14.000 (1975)	4,4
3	Thailand	126.300 (1998)	5.000 (1990)	3,9
4	Myanmar	8.000-10.000 (2001)	500 (2003)	6,2

Source: Nguyễn Văn Thắng (2009), *Keeping the old reason or following the new reason - The nature of the various reactions of the Vietnam Hmong to the influence of Protestantism*, Hanoi: Social Sciences Pub.: 106. (Giữ lý cũ hay theo lý mới - Bản chất các phản ứng khác nhau của người Hmông ở Việt Nam đối với ảnh hưởng của Tin Lành).

Unfortunately, I did not have a chance to collect data of Hmong Protestants in the regional countries at present, so I could not compare with the previous periods. Furthermore, the figures in the above table were collected at different times, so they are just considered as references. However, these figures also show that there was a part of Hmong converted to Christianity in almost places where the Hmong people live firstly. I could not evaluate the case of China because the data of the Protestants in China in general, the Hmong Protestants in particular was probably not accurate in reality. The Chinese government's statistic of the amount of believer is trendily lesser in comparison with the reality. Therefore, data of Hmong Protestants in China (for nearly a century ago) did not correctly reflect the reality. The figures of Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar showed a greater rate, but they were not as high as in Vietnam. Secondly, even though the proportion of Hmong Protestants in Vietnam was higher, the majority of Hmong people has maintained their traditional religion.

Hmong people has been one of the ethnic groups that have had a long history and cultural identity before a part of them converted to the Christianity. This community was originated from the South China, however, their migration to the Southeast Asia caused by the vicissitudes of the Chinese imperial dynasties. This race had its own social organization and cultural identity with a religious life was fixed. The Hmong people had cultural characteristics that were not mixed with other ethnic groups such as costumes, language, lifestyle, family activities, community, religious rites. It helped the Hmong people were not assimilated by the other communities. Thus, they kept their cultural identity, throughout the historical vicissitudes for centuries.

During the colonial period, a small part Hmong has converted to Catholicism. However, since more than two recent decades, since Protestantism has been spread rapidly in ethnic minorities area, especially, in the Hmong community. Most of the Hmong people mechanically practiced ritual according to the Commandments, they did not understand the teachings of this religion. They were also less interested in the differences between the Protestant denominations. Therefore, they did not have any difficulty in leaving this denomination or in joining onto the other denomination. The reason of change was simply as the people of clan favoured this denomination or the other denomination, or even economic reasons.

The latest data from the State authorities showed that the amount of Hmong Protestants has reached over 200 thousand people, approximately 1/5 of the Hmong population in Vietnam. Because of most of the Hmong Protestants in the Northwest provinces of Vietnam, where the majority of Hmong people has resided. According to a statistic of the research team, in the 12 plus 2 provinces managed by the Northwest Steering Committee of Vietnam, the number of Hmong Protestants was approximately 170-180 thousand, representing 20% of the Hmong population there³. Initially, Protestantism was propagated to remote places, where people had difficulty in the economy, infrastructure, and transport networks, etc... Then, it was spread to the near urban areas where the standard of living was better. In fact, a large amount of Hmong has recently

converted to Christianity in a short time; it has never seen throughout thousand year history of the Hmong people. Their traditional religions have faced many challenges. This is an anomaly.

Studying the characteristics of the Hmong Protestants, some main points are shown as follows:

Firstly, this community is not small; the number has reached over two hundred thousand people. Therefore, their role and social impact on the Hmong people in particular, on the political and cultural situation of the Northwest region society and the whole country, in general, is not small. Since 1987, it is also found that the Hmong Protestants who have converted do not easily give up this new religion to return to their traditional religions.

The current situation of Hmong Protestants is the same situation of Vietnamese Catholicism the first half of the 19th century. The Vietnam social context in the 19th century also created social conditions for the spread of Catholicism (so the prohibitive policy on religions of the Nguyen Dynasty proved powerless unless there are agents in the community that lead them to apostasy or irreligious act). Currently, the Vietnamese society in general, the Hmong community in particular, it is not easy to push the Protestant community from its body. In addition, a rapid increase in the number of Protestants, from the first believers to tens of thousands for over two decades, has clearly shown that the Hmong community has been in an anomalous situation. Thus, the question is not how to limit the expansion or to inhibit the influence of communities because of the ineffective measures to prevent the development of this community. The key is how to keep this community's belief in the policies of the State, to live a good life, a good religion, to abide by the policies and laws.

Secondly, the Hmong Protestants's residential area is scattered and they are in a diversity of denominations, however, this community is united as well as extremely diverse. They have two common points: i) the way of life and cultivation of the Hmong people is not mingled with other peoples; ii) residential area with difficult terrain, harsh natural conditions, poor infrastructure, the most remote areas of the country, but their faith in Jesus Christ towards kindness, at least at the theoretical domain.

However, the Hmong Protestants community is heterogeneous. In the domain of residential area, the Hmong Protestants are present in all the Northern provinces, but they are concentrated in Lao Cai and Dien Bien provinces. The members of this community are diverse in the domain of joining with Protestantism, for example, some people converted for two decades, the other people have known this religion for a few months. There are those who understand the teachings of this religion; they attended short-term or long-term courses of training in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh cities; they are deeply influenced by the Commandments of God. However, the majority of them has limited knowledge despite they converted for decades. The neophytes also have limited awareness of the dogma. They are believers of different Protestant denominations such as the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (South) belongs to Christian Missionary Alliance, abbreviated as C.M.A, the Christian Fellowship Church of Vietnam, the Baptist Evangelical Church of Vietnam, the Seventh-day Adventist Church Vietnam, the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), etc.. Therefore, this community has been influenced by different theological perspectives and doctrines, sometimes it has been mixed with the “new religions”.

Thirdly, it is a cohesive community. According to the results of the initial research, Protestantism has a great influence the lifestyle and habits such as the equality of men and women, the non-existence of patriarchy like the traditional family of Hmong. The women are not afraid to express themselves in public. They represent the ability of the organization and maintenance activities of the community. Generally, the Hmong people have been organized according to kinship and traditional rites. Today, they have adhered to some religious organizations, the Protestant churches. While the evangelizing is not fully supported by the government, the cohesion of this community is strong in order to keep their religion. In addition, the Protestants, especially women, find out an important spiritual platform from their religion. Previously, the Hmong women often used poisonous leaves to commit suicide. Currently, they have found in this religion the means of life-saving and relieve stress. Therefore, the propagation of Protestantism has changed the “balance” of power

in the family with the increase of women's role and status. Furthermore, it has also changed the "balance" of power in the religious dignitaries as the decline of the traditional religion's dignitaries (shaman or Chi Nênh) and the rise of the new class like the pastors and preachers.

Fourthly, the Hmong Protestant community is dynamic. They are hard working people in business, learning and absorbing information from external sources or co-religionists. These Hmong easily migrate by farming conditions like the other Hmong people. Today, they are affected by religious factors following the call of pastors and preachers. These factors have led Hmong Protestants to become active people with ties to international organizations.

It is a double-edged sword for the authorities. If the government policies conform and meet their expectations, this community will be the pioneer in supporting the State and encouraging other people. In contrast, they easily have extreme acts to put pressure on the authorities to make concessions, or they even oppose the government. It is really a great challenge for the government.

Fifthly, we should not perceive the Hmong Protestant community as an uncertainty, and in fact, it is making big changes. The Hmong Protestants frequently leave this sect, join the other denomination as simple reasons such as kinship, material, and spiritual care, etc... There is a contradiction in this community as between believers who adhere to the strict rules of this religion with those who are still addicted to alcohol, bicker, steal, or the Hmong Protestants belong to many different sects which cause the cohesive issue, etc.. Since 1997, the un-pious trend has appeared in Tuyen Quang and Ha Giang provinces. There were three tendencies of abandoning the Vàng Trú religion with the number of thousands of people from 1998 to 2001: Some people gave up this religion and returned to ancestral worship; the others abandoned hesitantly; some people gave up this religion but they did not return to ancestral worship, they were at the "crossroads"⁴. Whether they returned or did not return to traditional religion, a mass of the Hmong people converted to the Vàng Trú religion in a short time, then some of them gave up it which showed

that the Hmong currently are plunged into a crisis on religious beliefs. A large part of the Hmong no longer believes in the traditional religion, but they do not believe in the Vàng Trứ religion either, so they are looking for a new religion. This is a good chance for the expansion of the new religion.

In summary, the Hmong people have a long history, the identity of a social organization, culture and traditional religion. If there are any intrinsic and external factors that cause the abandonment of the traditional religion, Protestantism in particular and foreign religions, in general, cannot easily penetrate into the Hmong community.

2. The causes led a part of the Hmong people converted to Protestantism

In recent decades, there have been changes in life, culture, and religion of the Hmong which caused by the impact of the ethnic policy as well as the socio-economic development of the Vietnam State. First, it needs to discuss on the economic structure transformation. People have begun to develop a garden economy besides the traditional upland cultivation, such as medicinal herbs, special fruit trees in some places. The commodity market has appeared. The cultural exchange has been expanded and improved which was caused by the infrastructure development. There have been urban areas in the Hmong region. The traditional cultural element has mixed with the modern cultural element. The cultural teams were sent to serve the Hmong markets and villages with the folk repertoire such as dance with flute, leaves flute, folk songs, etc..

There are many reasons to explain why Christianity could propagate in the Hmong minority areas. Firstly, the fact that there are some similarities in the worldview between the Hmong morality and the Christian dogma. On the aspect of religion, it needs to emphasize the Hmong worldview. According to their conception, the universe comprises two worlds like the Earth where people live and the Heaven where Heaven (Ông Trời) and Hmong gods inhabit. The Hmong ancestors inhabit somewhere in a corner in the Heaven. The Earth and the Heavens were created by Mr. and Mrs. Chầy. This Hmong worldview is similar to the Christian worldview on the Earthly world

of humankind and the Super-earthly world (Kingdom of God). The conception of life and death was originated from the Hmong legend as follows: the human being was born from the earth. People initially lived a happy and immortal life, they did not know about sufferings and death. That made the Heaven angry, he thought that humankind had an equivalent position with him. Since the Heaven has coerced people into a disease, and death, etc..

F. M. Savina - a catholic missionary - stated that it was not difficult to attract the Hmong people convert to the Christianity. It is easy to join the Christianity's morality into the Miao's morality, just leave a few mistakes, permanently delete some prejudice related to the nature of the God (...) In summary, if joining our morality into the Miao's morality, it just needs to revise and to add their faith in order to have a religion as the basis of two moralities⁵.

Secondly, the Western missionaries had evangelized efficient methods based on their research on customs, on the social organization of the Hmong. These missionaries evangelized the patriarchs, and then they propagated their faith to the rest of the clan. The missionaries interfered between the colonial government and the Christians in priority land grant and tax reduction. They also translated the Bible into the Hmong language. F. M. Savina accompanied some Hmong to visit Hanoi and the Red river delta in order to let them know the outside world, this country is not only the mountains and rocks as their hometown, etc.. The first missionaries who evangelized in China and in Vietnam had the sophistication of converting the Hmong people.

There is a question that: Why did the Hmong convert to Protestantism instead of the other religions? The answer obviously can be found in the specific characteristics of Protestantism. As a reformed religion, it has a simplicity of rituals, a loose organization of the church. For instance, a part of the Hmong Catholics converted to Protestantism. The first believers converted after listening to the radio, they were not directly propagated by missionaries. Obviously, there are some advantages of Protestantism. In fact, most of Hmong Protestants have limited understanding of the teachings of this religion.

Thirdly, it is the economic reason. In the context of high and rugged mountains, economic difficulties, poor infrastructure, while the Protestantism helps to reduce a cost of rituals and mores. The study of Nguyen Van Thang showed that if a Protestant gets married to a non-believer, the amount of requiring as wedding gifts are only 250 thousand VND, they just need a wedding celebration of a religious leader. However, if a Protestant man gets married to a non-Protestant woman, the wedding gifts are about 4 million VND and the wedding celebration is not simple. The propagation of Protestantism also leads to a division in the clan or in a family of Hmong people among Protestants who abandon the worship of ghosts and non-Protestants who still keep the traditional customs. Protestants are isolated where a number of believers are small, they are forced to migrate to other places where their co-religionists inhabit. Conversely, if non-Protestants are a minority, they will be isolated from Protestants⁶.

It needs to state that the cost of maintaining the rituals, traditional customs of the Hmong is expensive, a burden for poor families. According to estimates of the researchers, the total payment for both mother and father's obsequies is about 10.64 million VND including a cow or a longhorn buffalo, 20 kg of pig, 20 liters of wine, 20 kg of rice (responsibility of a son who got married) and is about 5,768 million VND including 80kg of pig, a dress, 2m of white cloth (responsibility of a daughter who got married). Besides, there is the time, effort, cooking⁷.

It is not difficult to understand that the first Hmong Christians under the colonial period were not only converted by the religious demand but also originated from the pragmatic mentality: Believe in God was not only the happiness in the Heaven, but also was the issues of daily life such as land grant, new prop, giving up the worship of ghost⁸. A desire to escape poverty, to have a prosperous life has led a large part of Hmong converted to Protestantism. Thus, throughout the post-colonial period from 1945 to the middle of the 1980s, the number of Hmong Christians significantly reduced and there were 56 households in Sa Pa and some dozen households in Tram Tau.

In the interviews the Hmong Protestants, most of them mentioned the economic reasons. Even, the initial impression that most of the Hmong Protestants thought that the economic reasons caused their abandonment of the ghost worship and many traditional religions, conversion into the new religion introduced from Europe. The interview a Protestant family in the Nà Tầu commune, Dien Bien district, Dien Bien province as follow:

Question: Why did you and your whole family give up the ghost worship and convert to Protestantism?

Answer: Because the ghost worship was costly. The raising cows and pigs were intended for the ghost worship. We were very hungry and miserable. We could not help worshipping ghosts and ancestors, but then we were in debt.

Question: What are changes in your life since you have converted to Protestantism?

Answer: We often drunk wine. However, we have given up drinking alcohol, we have been hard working in our business since we have converted to Protestantism. We abandoned the ghosts worship because we should worship the God. When someone was sick, they were taken to the hospital and we asked for God's blessing⁹.

The economic causes have been seen clearly. However, in the other dimensions, these are not the most fundamental reasons that led the Hmong community converted to Protestantism. The Hmong people have lived in poverty for a century, but they have massively converted to Christianity since the late 1980s.

Fourthly, it is the intellectual reason. There is an undeniable fact that the Hmong people in particular and the ethnic minorities, in general, has a low level of education. The percentage of postgraduate degree of the Kinh people is 1/6.043, of bachelor is 1/90, of a college degree is 1/54, while the corresponding rate of the ethnic minorities is 1/72.554, 1/441, 1/111. The postgraduate, university, and college degree in some specific ethnic groups such as the Tay: 0.3%, the Muong: 0.7%, the Hmong: 0.06%. Along with a low level of education, the ethnic minorities are also in the poorest regions of the

country. Son La province has 18,534 poor Hmong households, accounting for 75.99% of the Hmong and 21% of poor households in the province (2006)¹⁰.

Currently, the Hmong people belongs to the low level of education. The rate of illiterate is high.

Table 2: The proportion of the ethnic groups over 5 years old not go to school in Lao Cai

Numerical order	Ethnic group	Percentage (%)	Female Percentage (%)
1	Việt (Kinh)	10,0	11,8
2	Tày	20,0	25,1
3	Nùng	41,1	47,1
4	Giáy	45,5	58,5
5	Thái	60,7	78,9
6	Kháng	63,5	78,9
7	La ha	64,4	79,1
8	Dao	70,0	81,3
9	Phù Lá	73,8	87,2
10	Bố y	79,5	85,8
11	La chí	89,9	93,8
12	Lào	90,9	99,35
13	Hmông	92,16	98,08
14	Hà Nhì	96,42	99,23

Source: Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *Hmong Culture*, Hanoi: Ethnic Culture Pub.: 205.

This table shows that the Hmong people are one of the ethnic groups who have the highest proportion of people do not go to school. However, these figures of Lao Cai province is not the general situation of the Hmong in the country. The Lao Cai province is one of the provinces that has a large number of Hmong and it is not a developed province in the Northern mountainous provinces. Thus, this table shows the situation of the Hmong in Lao Cai province in particular and in the North West region in general. This situation has been improved in the past two decades, but it has not been significant.

Fifthly, it is originated from the psychology peculiar to the Hmong people. There is a relationship between the “professed king” (xung

vua) phenomenon and Vàng Trú. “Vàng Trú” is the image of a king and also the image of the Savior of the traditional religion. And preparation for the Vàng Trú welcoming ceremony is similar to the kind welcoming ceremony of the ancient “professed king” event: giving up producing and slaughtering cattle, practicing to fly into the sky at night in the forest¹¹. Vuong Duy Quang agreed with this view and stated that Vàng Trú movement was started in the same way as the “professed king” in the Hmong society. Initially, they also announced that Vàng Trú was coming; Vàng Trú was appearing. And the initiators of this movement, as well as extreme members, professed themselves as disciples of Vàng Trú (...) and like the “professed king” movement, the appearance of Vàng Trú was constantly announced with the oracles (...). Finally, they met the desire of people by promising along with the compulsion or threat. According to Vuong Duy Quang, the Hmong people believe in the “professed king” phenomenon as well as Vàng Trú because there was a historical story that: once upon a time, old the other, the Hmong King fought with the Chinese, he was killed by the Chinese. Before his death, the king of Hmong said that: “I will revive in a thousand years, I will bring the Hmong to happiness, they will have a country”¹².

Sixthly, a part of Hmong has lost their belief in real life, in the spiritual life as well as in the traditional culture for thousands of years. Perhaps, this is the fundamental cause. Along with the reasons mentioned above, it is the reason why a large number of Hmong has converted to Christianity since the late 1980s. In other words, the weakness of the traditional religion and traditional cultural values as a weak resistance or “immune system” of this community to the exotic culture and religion is the most fundamental cause which led to the success of Protestantism. It is considered as the most basic cause, is the result of a variety of causes for decades that led to the development of Protestantism in the Hmong people as well as many other ethnic minorities.

Thus, the weakness of the traditional religion has created a space for Protestantism. Therefore, it needs to analyze this cause. The Hmong people believed in polytheism and shamanism. They believe that their life is blessed by the gods. For example, Mr. Chơ Nghĩa

teaches them the musical instruments, as well as behavior, Mr. Lias Lur determines the propriety of marriage, Ms. Niav Ngaaul Cho teaches them how to embroider, Mr. Zyz Zi helps them to win disease.

Besides the kinship organization, it needs to mention the role of Mystery-men or Shaman (Chi Nênh, in the Hmong language Txir Nînhz or Txir Nênhz), they are regarded as a profession in Hmong society. Chi Nênh is a member of the spiritual life of the Hmong who helps to find out a cause of illness, disease, and treatment. Currently, although the material life and the new culture has developed, education and health care condition have gradually improved, Chi Nênh still plays an important role in the spiritual life of the Hmong, participates in social relationship and has a status in the traditional organization of the Hmong society¹³.

Most of the villages have a shaman, even a village has many Chi Nênh. There were many Chi Nênh in the past, but the number of Chi Nênh has been decreased now. Though they still have a critical role in Hmong society. For instance, if there is an unusual problem that occurs in everyday life, such as sickness, funeral, and even the “professed king”, people will ask for the help of Chi Nênh. According to their conception, people are sick because their souls go somewhere or are seized by a demon. Demon always seizes the soul of the pregnant women to make difficulty in giving birth. Therefore, Chi Nênh is a person who can dialogue between the earthly world and the world of the dead; Chi Nênh will use magic to lure souls come back the body of the client, to eradicate the demon.

Chi Nênh may be a member of the clan or not. There are two types of Chi Nênh. The first kind of Chi Nênh has ghosts (neeb) who is chosen by ghosts. This Chi Nênh is notified of this through a serious illness or a dream. Then, Chi Nênh is tested himself/ herself by the sticks divination. Next, Chi Nênh will have a ceremony to welcome the ghost. Thanks to the magic, Chi Nênh can enter the world of ghosts, has the power to govern the ghost, can diagnose and treat diseases. And the second kind of Chi Nênh has to learn to gain success. The prestige of Chi Nênh depends on her/his ability. Chi

Nênh is a person who connects with the clans of the Hmong. Chi Nênh is not hereditary, nor have a specific costume. Chi Nênh has prestige, dignity, and specific abilities. Chi Nênh can hand down career by vocational training for some someone to attend training.

To practice profession, Chi Nênh must have his/her own altar. To talk to the demon, Chi Nênh uses yin and yang coins (kạ lểnh) in which a side symbolizes the spirit of the person who needs treatment, the other side symbolizes the ghost. Shamanism makes a tremendous impact on the spiritual and political life of the Hmong (...) The shaman is not only the person who worships and treats diseases for the Hmong, but the shaman is also the person who understands the Hmong tradition and custom. The shaman is reputable in the Hmong community. The shaman participates in conjuring the spirits ceremony for young children or moving house....¹⁴

The number of the shaman (Chi Nênh) has declined in the Hmong community that showed the weakness of the traditional religion of the Hmong. Furthermore, the shaman's reputation has diminished in the community for a few decades ago. For example, Bắc Hà Đông (Lùng Phình) had 38 villages with 788 Chi Nênh in 1930¹⁵. Currently, the number of Chi Nênh has a significant diminution and the role of Chi Nênh in the spiritual life has also dropped. It indicates the weakness of the traditional religion in the contemporary society in comparison with the previous decades. The causes of this weakness have been mentioned in some works¹⁶. The author Vuong Duy Quang showed a downward trend of the Chi Nênh's role in healing with specific figures in recent years through the question: What were treatments when you and your family members were sick or diseased? 54.55% of interviewees said they invited Chi Nênh¹⁷. However, both of Tran Huu Son and Vuong Duy Quang mentioned the neglect of cultural values and traditional religion as one of the factors, along with the economic, social, cognitive factors, etc...

The decline of traditional religions as a basic factor leading to the spread of Protestantism into the ethnic minorities was stressed by Nguyen Xuan Hung. He stated that the economic, social, cognitive causes were the important factors, but they were not the most basic

one. Based on the fieldwork for the Protestantism's propagation in the ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands, Nguyen Xuan Hung said that all factors such as the development of a market economy, of media communication, cultural exchanges, migration led to the weakness of traditional religions of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, the decline of reputation of the village elders and chiefs decline. This class was no longer the spiritual symbol of a part of an ethnic minority community. The weak resistance of these ethnic minorities to the effects of exotic religions and culture that was a good chance for Protestantism. It is not difficult in the economy, the conspiracy of the enemy, using the money to bribe or charismatic mission that easily attracted the ethnic minorities to a mass conversion (as the research on Protestantism before 1975 showed). The mutation occurred when the traditional religions of the ethnic minorities lost immunity from the outside attack that had caused the impact (for a long time) of economic difficulties, change of structural community, culture, lifestyle¹⁸. This is a persuasive comment and it has a scientific value.

The field research results reinforce the above statements. Mr. Ma Khải Sò, was born in 1930 in Quan Ba district, Ha Giang province, was a prestigious Hmong, had good knowledge of culture and religion of his race, said that a part of Hmong, especially the young people who have not been interested in the traditional culture, many of them have not known how to play Khèn (a kind of flute). He asked directly some Hmong Protestants the reason why they gave up worshipping their ancestors (ghosts of parents and grandparents), the answer: Nobody taught us these things. We knew imprecisely. Thanks for your instruction, we knew Hmong custom. So, we did not follow Protestantism. The opinion of Mr. D K (from Cao Bang province) was the same.

Question: In your opinion, why did a part of Hmong convert to Protestantism or the illegal organization Duong Van Minh?

Answer: Losing confidence in the leadership of the Party and the State and negative effects of society pushed Hmong people in a crisis of confidence. Under the pressure of social injustice, a part of Hmong

desired to change their destiny. Protestantism met this demand because it is a reformed religion. They thought that it is a way to save themselves.

The State's policy towards the Hmong people is inappropriate that makes the decline of faith. According to Mr. DK., we also understand a little about the Hmong so it is not enough to propose policies and solutions for the Hmong. Because of our government, unions, political system maybe a big hammer. A big hammer can not kill a cow, while it just needs a small hammer in the policy for the Hmong¹⁹.

According to our preliminary research on this issue, the Hmong in Vietnam in general and in the Northwest, in particular, is not an exceptional case. Some extremist policies of the authorities against remnants of social monarchy, superstition originated from the class struggle perspective after 1954 which undermined traditional religious values of Hmong people in particular, many ethnic minorities in Vietnam in general. Scripts, costumes, cultural life and belief of the ethnic minorities have been eroded by many factors. Under the perspective of "opposing feudalism", especially in the period before the Renovation (1986), many traditional cultural values of ethnic minorities were considered superstition as the remnants of poverty and backwardness, of the old society, of the monarchy, of colonialism so they were eliminated. As a result, we have undermined the traditional values of this ethnic group. Limitations of the previous policies towards the ethnic minorities, particularly before the Renovation, undermined cultural values and traditional religions which were an indirect way to create conditions favorable for the expansion of Protestantism. In addition, the development of information and communication technology also played an important role in declining the traditional religions of the Hmong and the other ethnic minorities. In the context of "weakened resistance", the Hmong had difficulties in preserving their cultural values and traditional religions against the penetration of Protestantism in particular, the exotic religions in general.

In recent years, the authorities have been aware of this problem so they have sought the way to re-promote the role of the Shaman, of the

village chief. However, it has been the slogan. It will not be solved if we do not take effective measures which are not just the momentary actions and the propaganda for political goals.

For a long time, from the 1960s to the early 1990s, the “Nào xông” and “Gầu tào” festivals were considered as superstitious and forbidden. The authorities feared that a large number of the inhabitants took part in these festivals, they may fight that led negative effects of social security. The traditional “Gầu tào” festival lasted all month with many festivals, but they were propagandized that they had to limit the holiday within some days in order to avoid waste. Therefore, many festivals were also limited. In some places, the government used the extreme measures such as Chi Nênh were arrested and sent to labor camps as crimes. The weakening of the Chi Nênh’s role of the authorities before the Renovation is one of the factors causing the development of Protestantism in Hmong areas.

Recently, these festivals have been opened, but they have been changed. For example, the traditional ceremony “Nào xông” mainly banned grazing cattle during the planting season, protected forest, counteract thieves. The traditional “Nào xông” ceremony has been accompanied on the convention cultural life. The “Gầu tào” festival replaced “cây nêu” by the national flag. A funeral has included traditional rites and has been added condolence ritual of the local authorities. Some traditional rites at the festivals were lost, they only remained in the memories of old people such as “Tu su” (chasing risk ceremony), “Nào xông”, “Lùng sán”. The number of young who does not know how to sing folk songs, to play folk games and traditional instruments has declined. People who can sing folk songs, play traditional instruments, understand the customs mostly have been middle-aged and elderly people.

3. Conclusion

Thus, the conversion into Protestantism of Hmong originated from many different causes. They are intrinsic causes of this community and external agents. However, the most fundamental reason is the weakness and crisis of religion that led a part of the Hmong who was not interested in the traditional religion. It created a gap in spirituality

which was a good chance to spread Protestantism and new religious movements.

As mentioned above, the basic causes led a part of the Hmong converted to Protestantism, which is initial judgments. It should have the other research in order to propose specific solutions for the Hmong Protestants and the Hmong who believe in traditional religion. Nevertheless, the above analysis is important, it is like a diagnosis. The disease will be cured if the diagnosis is right./.

Notes:

- 1 At the beginning, the Hmong was not aware of the Protestant denominations; they followed Catholicism in some periods; they sometimes called their religion as “Vàng Trú”. “Vàng Trú” is the name of Protestantism in the Hmong community.
- 2 Some Hmong people in Vietnam have been to China to learn the doctrine and to receive missionaries documents, and then they evangelized in Vietnam. See: Đỗ Quang Hưng, *Religion, Belief in the ethnic minorities along the border Vietnam - China*, Electronic Portal of Lao Cai Department of Sports - Culture, and Tourism, access the 18 March 2013. (Đỗ Quang Hưng, *Tôn giáo, tín ngưỡng trong các dân tộc thiểu số dọc biên giới Việt - Trung*, Cổng thông tin điện tử Sở Văn hóa - Thể thao và Du lịch tỉnh Lào Cai, truy cập ngày 18/3/2013).
- 3 The management of the Northwest Steering Committee consists of 12 provinces such as Điện Biên, Lai Châu, Lào Cai, Sơn La, Hòa Bình, Yên Bái, Tuyên Quang, Bắc Kạn, Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Thái Nguyên, Hà Giang, Thanh Hóa, and Nghệ An. The data of Hmong Protestants mentioned above did not include over 30.000 Hmong Protestants migrated in the Central Highlands.
- 4 Vương Duy Quang (2005), *Spiritual culture of the Hmong in Vietnam, tradition and present*, (Văn hóa tâm linh của người Hmông ở Việt Nam, truyền thống và hiện tại), Hà Nội: Culture- Information and Culture Institute: 203-205.
- 5 F. M. Savina (1924), *History of Miao* (Histoire des Miao), Hong Kong. Translated and stored by the Institute of Anthropology, VASS. (*Lịch sử người Mèo*. Bản dịch đánh máy tư liệu Viện Dân tộc học).
- 6 Nguyễn Văn Thắng (2009), Keeping the “old reason” or following the “new reason” - The nature of the various reactions of the Hmong in Vietnam to the influence of Protestantism, Hà Nội: Social Sciences Publisher: 149 -160. (*Giữ “lý cũ” hay theo “lý mới” - Bản chất của những cách phản ứng khác nhau của người Hmông ở Việt Nam với ảnh hưởng của Tin Lành*).
- 7 Nguyễn Văn Thắng (2009), *ibid*: 115 - 116.
- 8 Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *Hmong Culture (Văn hóa Hmông)*, Hà Nội: Culture and Ethnicity Publisher: 180 - 181.
- 9 Fieldwork Document, on January, 2015 in Điện Biên.
- 10 Thảo Xuân Sùng (2009), *Hmong people in Son La with solving religion and belief issues at present (Dân tộc Hmông Sơn La với việc giải quyết vấn đề tín ngưỡng tôn giáo hiện nay)*, Hà Nội: Culture - Information Publisher: 82, 86.
- 11 Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *ibid*: 184.
- 12 Vương Duy Quang (2005), *ibid*: 186.

- 13 Thảo Xuân Sùng (2009), *ibid*: 37.
- 14 Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *ibid*: 60.
- 15 Report of the authority of Bắc Hà in 1930, Archives of the Historical Research Department, Party Committee of Lào Cai province, code A175. Citing follow Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *ibid*: 56.
- 16 Trần Hữu Sơn (1996), *ibid*: 187.
- 17 Vương Duy Quang (2005), *ibid*: 150.
- 18 Nguyễn Xuân Hùng (2012), Some Matters of the Protestantism in Vietnam in the period of 2011-2020, the overview report of a ministerial level research project. Institute of Religious Studies, VASS. The work was judged on September 2012: 60. (*Một số vấn đề của Tin Lành giai đoạn 2011 - 2020*, Báo cáo tổng quan đề tài nghiên cứu cấp Bộ, Viện Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo, Viện Hàn lâm Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam).
- 19 Fieldwork Document, on June 2015.

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