

## SPIRITUAL CULTURE INSTITUTION THROUGH CULT OF THE MAZU OF CHINESE IN SOUTH WEST OF VIETNAM: TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

**Abstract:** *This article indicates the cultural institution in the Cult of the Lady Mazu (Lady of the Sea) in many dimensions such as modes of social organization, place of worship, worship, and local cultural activities. It also compares tradition with transformation in the tendency of urbanization in South West of Vietnam (Tây Nam Bộ).*

**Keywords:** *Cult; Chinese; Mazu; tradition; transformation; South West; Vietnam.*

### Introduction

Research on the spiritual culture institution through the cult of the Lady Mazu (Queen of Heaven; hereinafter referred to as Mazu) in South West of Vietnam aims at examining the organizational culture of this cult such as the mode of organizing, the places of worship, worship activities, local cultural activities. “Indicating the organizational culture consists of a form of beliefs, values, and habits which have been developed throughout the history of the organization. They are expressed in the way of operating and behaviour of its members”<sup>1</sup>. For examining and analysing this issue, we did not only rely on the written documents, but we also based on the fieldwork documents that were compiled for many years, especially in 2014 and 2015 in the Southwest provinces. In addition, we used the comparative research method according to diachronic and synchronic approaches.

### 1. Organization of Chinese society

#### 1.1. *Band (Bang)*

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When immigrating to other countries, the Chinese quickly established an organization in order to link countrymen into groups. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the first organization of Fujian people called the Sơn Trang Association has appeared in Vietnam, then Lý Châu, Đồng Hương Associations have been added. They were fraternal organizations with the religious purpose and were predecessors of the Bands<sup>2</sup>. Band was a form of social organization that was originated from the survival need of Chinese immigrants with the goal of supporting members of the band. It had the activities such as the material and spiritual aid, building Assembly Halls (Hội quán) as public places; construction, management and restoration of cultural premises and places of worship for the whole community; building social infrastructure as schools, hospitals, cemeteries for the deceased who did not have relatives; organizing culture, arts, and sports activities<sup>3</sup>. In 1787, the kind of the band organization was officially established under Nguyễn Ánh's permission<sup>4</sup>. At first, there were 4 bands<sup>5</sup> such as Fujian, Chaozhou, Hainan, Guangzhou (Phúc Kiến, Triều Châu, Hải Nam, Quảng Châu); then 3 new bands were added<sup>6</sup>.

In 1871, the French colonial government dissolved these 7 bands, re-established four bands, according to dialects such as Fujian, Chaozhou, Guangdong, Ha Chau or Hakka (Phúc Kiến, Triều Châu, Quảng Đông, Hạ Châu/Hẹ) in order to closely manage the Chinese. In 1885, these 4 bands were structured into 5 bands: Fujian, Teochew, Hainan, Guangdong, Hakka (Phúc Kiến, Triều Châu, Hải Nam, Quảng Đông, Hẹ). Each band had a head who was elected by members of the bands and was approved by the colonial administration. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Association of four bands (*Hiệp hội bốn Bang*) was established that was a union of Fujian, Chaozhou, Guangdong, Hakka (Phúc Kiến, Triều Châu, Quảng Đông, Hẹ). Each band elected a representative who participated in the Executive Committee called the Lý Sự Association (Lý Sự Hội). The workplace of the association members called the Four Bands Association (*Tứ Bang hội quán*). In 1927, the Association of four bands was expanded to Chinese Association of Vietnam. In 1946, France and the Republic of China signed a treaty on relations between French Indochina with China.

According to this Treaty, the Chinese band institutions in Vietnam were replaced by the Chinese team of local administration (*Nhóm hành chính Trung Hoa địa phương*). The title is headed by the Chairman. In 1960, the band organization - Lý Sự Association and its various manifestations were officially dissolved under the government of Ngô Đình Diệm.

### ***1.2. Assembly Halls (Hội quán)***

Assembly Halls were a union formed by traders, “a place for the associations according to language or origin”<sup>7</sup>. When immigrating to new lands, despite many difficulties, the Chinese immediately built a temple to thank the gods and Assembly Halls as temporary sanctuaries. It depends on the situation and specific condition of each dialectal group and region where they settled that shrines or Assembly Halls were established before<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, it also needs to divide the Chinese immigrants in Southern Vietnam into two parts: The first part those who “protested Qing, restored Ming” (phản Thanh, phục Minh) arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as political refugees; their descendants were Minh Hương people while the second part who immigrated to Vietnam for livelihood reasons from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1945. This division depends on the Vietnam process of the two parts which are completely different. Meanwhile the first group was organized into commune units such as Trần Biên Thanh Hà commune, Gia Định Minh Hương commune, Hà Tiên Minh Hương commune,... the second group was organized according to the origin of their hometown, for example, Fuzhou, Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, Fujian, and Hainan. This kind of organization first is called as Phủ (“District”) and then as Bang (“Band”)... Each band had an Assembly Hall which was situated next to the shrine for the gods and a school was located on the other side of the shrine. The yard of Assembly Hall also placed for cultural performances, practice and competition gymnastics - sports. Then, each band had its own hospital and cemetery. These cultural institutions showed that the Assembly Hall had an important role in the Chinese immigrant’s community. However, it could belong to a Chinese group or many different ones.

### **1.3. Office (Công sở)**

Office was organized according to their occupation and compatriot. It also had divine worship, charity, and public interest, culture-art activities, but its most significant functions had changed towards business services for it was organization by occupation. Since each merchant belongs to a band and was a member of an Assembly Hall, most of the offices merged into an Assembly Hall. As a result, Assembly Halls and shrines (or places of worship), the Assembly Hall's Board also was in charge of management and organization the community's religious activities.

## **2. Organization of worship's place**

### **2.1. The name of Mazu worship's place**

In order to serve the Mazu worshipping practice, the merchants called immigrants' contribution (who were countrymen and had the same dialect group) to build places of worship. At the beginning, the places of worship Mazu was called Cung (Palace) and miếu (Shrine). Her places of worship are called Palace because she was the Holy Mother (Thánh mẫu) awarded through the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Later, people called them as Chùa Bà (Temple).

In South West of Vietnam, there were various names of her places of worship such as Mazu Palace (*Thiên Hậu Cung*) in Hộ Phòng town, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu city; Mazu Shrine (*Thiên Hậu Miếu*) in Cà Mau city or Holy Queen of Heaven Shrine (*Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu Miếu*) in Ward No. 3, Ninh Bình street, Bạc Liêu city, or the Old Shrine of Mazu (*Thiên Hậu Cổ Miếu*) in Ward No. 1, Vĩnh Châu town, Sóc Trăng; the Old Shrine of Holy Queen of Heaven (*Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu Cổ Miếu*) in Huỳnh Kỳ hamlet, Vĩnh Hải commune, Vĩnh Châu district, Sóc Trăng; Temple of Mazu (*chùa Bà Thiên Hậu*) at No. 31, Lê Lợi street, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu.

Shrine/Palace for worshipping her was built by the same dialect group or various dialect groups as *Thất Phủ Shrine* in Song Phú commune, Tam Bình district, Vĩnh Long province was built by residents of 7 "Districts".

If the construction of the assembly hall in Vietnam and in the Southwest Vietnam is carried out by traders, it will be constructed by government officials and traders or by mandarins and politicians in China<sup>9</sup>.

In Vietnam and in South West of Vietnam in particular, a shrine for worshipping her and the Assembly Hall had the *regional nature* (tính khu vực) because it was built in order to attract countrymen and it also had the *commercial nature* (tính thương nghiệp) because of developed trade, crowded merchants, fixed place for operation, business forums, and discussions for prices. Thus, the Assembly Hall clearly showed the commercial nature, although it was built by whom<sup>10</sup>.

### **2.2. Building location**

The survey of the shrines for worshipping Mazu in Cà Mau, Bạc Liêu, Sóc Trăng, Vĩnh Long, An Giang, and Kiên Giang showed that they almost were built in the town, township, at the confluence. This is not only the Chinese temples' characteristics in South West of Vietnam, but it is universal in Vietnam. To immigrate into Vietnam, most of the immigrants arrived through the waterway, especially, there was an interlaced river network in Southern Vietnam, so the water transport was more favorable. They chose confluence of rivers/canals to build a temple for worshipping Mazu for residents often gathered from everywhere and it was a gathering place for trade. For example, Mazu Shrine in Quách Phàm commune, Đầm Dơi district, Cà Mau is located on the banks of the Cây Dương canal, near the Keo river; Mazu Shrine in Khánh Hưng commune, Trần Văn Thời district, Cà Mau is located at the confluence of Nhà Máy and Kinh Ngang rivers.

### **2.3. Shrine architecture**

Each shrine had its own typical architectural style when it was formed that depended on dialect group. This helps to differentiate Mazu Shrine of each Chinese group. Mazu Shrine of Fujian team had the roof shaped like a boat with a curved sword. Two front windows look like two eyes of a tiger. Fujian people believe that tiger is their totem. When they settled in new lands, their divine temples, whether

male or female divine, were very simple construction with leaf roofs and wooden wall or tin roof and soil wall. Then, when their business was steady, they rapidly contributed money to rebuilt the old temple, to expand it, or because of various reasons, for example, soil erosion by building too close bank river, they relocated shrine with a larger area. Most Mazu shrines in Cà Mau, Bạc Liêu, Sóc Trăng, and Vĩnh Long were in this situation.

The Mazu shrines' architecture is quite similar to other divine shrines. The difference in architecture is not due to divine worship but it depends on a conception of art and aesthetics of each Chinese group according to the dialect. Fujian group has the most typical architecture. While the Fujian group's temple with a curved roof as a boat shape, the Guangdong temple's roof like the top of a thick sword, curving like upturned U-shape. At the temple doors, two ancient treasure rocks (also called as rock drums) of Fujian group were the largest scale, while of Guangdong, of Chaozhou groups were small scale or nonexistent. In South West of Vietnam, through many times of restoration, this form of decoration was no longer as popular as before.

In addition, in front of the temple, it was always put two animals, one male, and one female, with the concept of "male left, female right". The goddess or the civil mandarins Temple was placed unicorns. The female unicorn always hugged her child. The god or the martial officer has placed two lions.

On the front roof of Mazu shrine often had the icon of the Sun (Ông Nhật) and the Moon (Bà Nguyệt) though it belonged to any Chinese group. According to the Chinese concept, they just placed two statues in order to harmonize two factors yin - yang, heaven and earth, and it also means the temple of people with nostalgia Ming dynasty; two Sino characters meaning "Sun" and "Moon" (Nhật - Nguyệt) combined into the letter "Ming" (明). Architectural space was generally triangle - shaped structure, with 3 blocks in parallel from front to back, separated by yards called Well of the Heaven (Giếng Trời).

In the front of Mazu shrine was built of brick material without plaster. This is the traditional architecture of temples in China. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shrines' building materials also were imported from China. Gradually, in the course of long-term residents, through many times of restoration, shrines had additional materials that were produced on site. For example, the roof of Mazu temples of Chinese Guangdong in Vĩnh Long, An Giang, Sóc Trăng, and Cà Mau provinces were decorated with ceramic objects produced by kilns in Chợ Lớn, Bửu Nguyên, Đồng Hòa...

The two front sides of shrine often decorated two animals as dragon and tiger. The white tiger was placed on the right; the green dragon was placed on the left of the shrine. Two images are symbols of Animism, but it is a symbol of good Feng Shui of temple location where has "a green dragon on the left, a white tiger on the right" ("tả thanh long, hữu bạch hổ").

The first part of shrine usually had an entrance with sandstone frame. There was another door connect to the middle part or the yard (Well of the Heaven). People did not often go through this door because it was reserved for the divine; procession of the Goddess went through it to the yard of the temple or to go marching around the area of the Chinese residence.

The Mazu temple at An Hiệp commune, Châu Thành district, Sóc Trăng province was located in the Khmer region, accounted for 60% of the population, so there was a sala-ten in front of the temple used for praying peace, the roof temple architecture in the form of a cake (bánh ít); the main hall was designed as the four pillars influenced by the Oriental philosophical thought: the four Symbols.

### **3. Human resources organization**

Religious activities at Mazu temples were under the direction of a Management Board. Board members must be prestige people in the dialect group, sponsored by businesses. Management Board of Assembly hall had pretty tight structure. Each Board had its head and from 10 to 21 members. The reason of having 21 members because of the division of 3 permanent people for 3 shifts in the morning, in the

afternoon, in the evening. Thus, there was a member of the Management Board worked at shrine/Assembly Hall 7 days a week to solve the tasks of the community. In 2015, the number of members in each shrine has not reached sufficient numbers, because it was not enough people participating in the Executive Board.

The Mazu temple at No. 62, Lê Lợi St, Cà Mau City has had 30 members of the Executive Board considered as a rare case. The Mazu temple of Chinese Chaozhou, at the Song Phú commune, Tam Bình district, Vĩnh Long province has had 05 people of the Executive Board, who have been Vietnamese Chinese. The drop the number of members of the Executive Board recently showed that previous personnel structure could not meet the demand at that time.

Large temples located in the crowded Chinese resident's area have also retained a large number of the Executive Board. The Mazu Temple, in Hộ Phòng town, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu province has had 18 members of the Executive Board. It should be added that there was a name changing of the operating organization of shrine/Assembly hall in different stages. After 1975, most of the shrines were called the Management Board of the shrine/Assembly Hall (Ban Quản trị). Ten recent years, the official name has been inscribed in the organizational structure and the charter as the Executive Board (Ban Trị sự).

The Executive Board has not only included representatives of the dialect group who repaired shrine/Assembly hall, organized meetings and annual ceremony for the divine (lễ Vía), but they also participated in conducting of economic, social, cultural activities of their group. In addition, it cannot help mentioning the role of benefactor. Members of the Executive Board were not only prestige people, they always had a powerful economic potential, a pioneer in contributing to the Assembly Hall. The head and deputy's head always contributed at the highest level.

In general, the Executive Board included: 01 head, deputy heads, and specialized parts such as finance, accounting, secretariat, security... The Executive Board was elected by the members and each

term can prolong 2, 3, 4, or 5 years. Depending on each Assembly Hall, there was no regulation. Before 1975, members of the Executive Board were people of same dialect group, but there is a mixture of members from different dialect groups at present, although the shrine belongs to a dialect group. For example, Sông Đốc Mazu shrine's Executive Board has Chinese Chaozhou and Vietnamese; Mazu shrine in Vũng Thơm, Sóc Trăng has an Executive Board of 12 people, including 07 Chinese Chaozhou, 02 Khmer and 03 Vietnamese.

However, there are also some worship establishments for Mazu were built by 7 Phủ (district), so the members of the Executive Board included 5 dialect groups such as Cantonese, Chaozhou, Fujian, Hainan, Hakka as Thất Phủ shrine in Vĩnh Long city.

Thus, the Executive Board of an Assembly Hall, each member of the Board may be having relationships with other organizations. Through assembly hall activities, members have the opportunity to meet and exchange experiences in trading and manufacturing, which links with external organizations are formed, such as cultural, fitness - sports associations that contribute to improving the quality activities. In addition, the Executive Board also has relationships with overseas organizations and individuals. Through this social network, shrines/Assembly Halls have been more favourable to the restoration of funding contributions. In contrast, the culture of the Chinese community has the opportunity to disseminate beyond the scope of the nation.

An Assembly Hall, depending on the mode of the Executive Board organization, establishes an assistant board called Ban Thào Ngán (Thào Kê) included volunteers who help to prepare for rituals and annual festival (lễ Vía), to campaign for annual funding (donations). For instance, Mazu Palace at Hộ Phòng town, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu province has an assistant board consists of 4 people who help to organize the annual festival. They will be replaced by other people the next year.

#### **4. Religious activities**

Religious activities of the Mazu cult were quite different depending on financial condition and human resources of each shrine. At each

Mazu shrine, the decoration of statue and festival content of Vía Bà had a little difference. Generally, the worship of Mazu was homogeneous.

#### **4.1. Statue decoration**

As Mazu goddess temples, the altar for Mazu always is situated in the center of the shrine (sanctum). The differences often depend on the preferences of each dialect group which has a different co-worship. The Chinese Guangdong usually worship Mazu with two other goddesses as Long Mẫu nương nương and Kim Huê nương nương; the Chinese Chaozhou worship Mazu with Guan Gong (Quan Thánh) and Mr. and Mrs. Bồn as the case of Mazu shrine at Vũng Thơm (Sóc Trăng). And Mazu Goddess Palace at An Hiệp commune, Châu Thành district, Sóc Trăng province co-worships Guan Gong and Goddess of Mercy/Guan Yin (Quan Âm). The Chinese Fujian has not had worship system the couple Mr. and Mrs. Bồn in the same sanctuary. A Vietnamization trend took place during the process of co-living with the Vietnamese community that led to co-worship *Phúc Đức Chính Thần* và *Holy Mother of the Realm* (Bà Chúa Xứ) in many shrines such as the case of Mazu Palace at Hộ Phòng town, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu province.

In the areas where three ethnic communities settled, religious exchanges with the Khmer was also expressed through the altar of Neak Tà in the main sanctuary, with plaques inscribed: *Lục Tà Công* in Mazu temple in Vũng Thơm (Sóc Trăng), or in Mazu temple at Huỳnh Kỳ hamlet, Vĩnh Hải commune, Vĩnh Châu town, Sóc Trăng province, Mazu was co-worshipped with *Mother goddess of Land* (Hậu Hiền and Địa Mẫu), while in the other temples in Vĩnh Châu, Mazu was co-worshipped with *Guan Gong* (Quan Công) and *Phúc Đức Chính Thần*. The emergence of Hậu Hiền and Địa Mẫu in the main sanctuary of Mazu also shows imprints of exchanges with Vietnamese traditional religions.

#### **4.2. Festival**

Vía Bà is the biggest festival in the Mazu temple. In the South Vietnam, as well as in many other countries, the temples worshipping

Mazu conduct major festival in the day 23 of the third month according to lunar calendar is Mazu's birthday. However, during the process of co-living with Vietnamese, a Vietnamization trend has taken place over the festival period. In Mazu Palace (Thủ Dầu Một, Bình Dương province), the festival takes place on the First Full Moon (lễ Nguyên Tiêu). In 2011, there was a change; believers took the day 26 of the first lunar month to organize the ceremony. This is one of the characteristics of Bình Dương province and all 8 Mazu temples in the province also have differences. Mazu shrine at Phố Market (Phong Phú, Cầu Kè district, Trà Vinh province) has also shifted Vía Bà ceremony on 23<sup>rd</sup> of the third lunar month to the full moon day of the third lunar month<sup>11</sup>.

The festival has been held on her birthday, but it usually takes place within 2 days, on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of the third lunar month in big temples. The preparation is quite thoughtful. In big temples, a bathing ceremony for Mazu (bathing the Mazu statue) is often conducted on the day 22<sup>nd</sup>. After the bathing ceremony, the Mazu statue gets new clothes. Although these ceremonies are organized in different hours, they are conducted during the day 22<sup>nd</sup> of the third lunar month.

The order of service Vía ceremony, in the morning of the day 23<sup>rd</sup> of the third lunar month at Mazu temples, is quite homogeneous. The ritual begins at 9 am. During the Vía Bà festival, believers firstly worship the God of Heaven at the altar Thiên Phủ Địa Mẫu addressed on the temple's yard. At Sông Đốc Mazu shrine, after worshipping the God of Heaven, they worship Quan Âm (Guan Yin), Mazu, Bà Hỏa (Fire Goddess), Tiền Hiền. The celebrant prays, rings the bell three times and plays drum twelve times. At Mazu temple, Cà Mau city, the ceremony takes to play with 12 times playing the drum. The bell is rung following the drum according to local custom.

The content of praying is peace for the country, security for people, and a good weather. The temples were built by the Chinese Chaozhou, during the ceremony, members of the Executive Board prayed in Chaozhou language; some temples prayed Buddhist scriptures. For example, Mazu temple in Song Phú commune, Tam Bình district, Vĩnh Long province was built by communities of 7 Districts (Phủ),

but at present all 5 members of the Executive Board are Vietnamese, so the language used in Vía ceremony is Vietnamese.

The offerings are diverse. There are five kinds of fruit, especially the presence of oranges and mandarins because they symbolize favourable auspices. In addition, offerings include pigs, cows, and goats (belong “Tam sinh” group) or chicken, duck, crab, shrimp, and fish (belong Ngũ sinh group). Before 1975, the offerings of Tam sinh usually were white killed pigs, but were not cooked. Pigs were cleaned, left the hair on their head. Later, many temples improved, more simply, by an offering of roasted pork. Furthermore, depending on the different dialect groups, offerings also were slightly different. For instance, in Sông Đốc Mazu shrine (Cà Mau), most members of the Executive Board were Chinese Chaozhou, so the offerings for ritual included dependence tea (chè ý) and many kinds of cakes such as bánh bò, bánh lá liểu, bánh trái đào, etc.. Each kind consisted of 12 sections.

Mazu temple in Thới Bình town, Trần Văn Thời district, Cà Mau, the offerings consisted of five kinds of fruits and five kinds of foods. In particular, offerings included two raw white pigs. After the ceremony, they were given to people who contributed money. Someone offered 300,000 VND, received 1.5 kg of meat; 500,000 VND, received 2 kg of meat. Moreover, the offerings included two kinds of cakes such as a big roasted cake (bánh bò) and 200 green rice cakes (cốm), each year one colour. On an ordinary day, believers offered the goddess dependence tea (chè ý) and cake (bánh ít) etc..

For Chinese Cantonese, they also offer bánh bò in every festival because this cake symbolizes multiplication and growth, (the cake was higher when it is cooked, and it was called *phá-cúi*).

In particular, in the area of Vũng Thơm (Sóc Trăng), where produces *bánh pía* and *mè láo* cakes, offerings always have these cakes. In addition, a Mazu shrine in Vũng Thơm, believers offered tofu, vermicelli, fried peanuts, fried tofu (tàu hủ ky, bún tàu, đậu phộng chiên, rong đá, đậu hủ chiên)<sup>12</sup>.

The festival also related to a custom of borrowing money of the god. Borrowing money of the goddess was organized in each temple.

Before 1975, there were some shrines which held the custom of borrowing money of the goddess as Mazu shrine in Mỹ Xuyên market, Sóc Trăng, but it did not exist any longer. The Chinese came to Mazu temple on the occasion Vía Bà festival, Tết, First Full Moon Festival to borrow money with the wish that the money will bring good fortune to their business. For example, Mazu temple in Vũng Thơm held on this custom on First Full Moon Festival on the principle of borrowing this year and returning it the next year. Mazu temple in An Hiệp commune, Châu Thành district, Sóc Trăng organized this custom on the New Year festival.

### **5. Cultural and artistic activities**

Mazu temple/Assembly Hall was also a place to preserve and promote the traditional Arts and Culture, to perform gymnastics and sports.

In order to serve the religious activities, especially for the annual Vía Bà festival, depending on the conditions of funding and staffing, the cultural-artistic activities of each temple were different from each other. There were some shrines where trained artisans, also were offices of the Chinese Mutual Association (*Hội Tương Tế người Hoa*), for instance, the office in Cà Mau represented for 14 associations, including the association of communal music. Mazu temple in Cà Mau city had a communal music association (*Đồng Tâm cổ nhạc xã*). Before 2007, this temple organized hát Tiều (the theatre of the Chinese Chaozhou), and training courses of this art. Since 2007, new musical theatre classes have begun. These classes have not operated constantly because students have attended universities, they must be gone away from home. At present, there is a new musical theatre at the temple at the Vía Bà festival, using 3 languages such as Vietnamese, Chinese, and Khmer.

Mazu shrine in An Hiệp commune, Châu Thành, Sóc Trăng was located in the region of the Khmer residence, the date Vía Bà, a musical band (Dù Kê Dân Công) was invited to perform on two nights of 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> the third lunar month. Before worshipping, the representatives of the band came to burn incense in the goddess alter.

Chinese have lived in this region and they could understand the Khmer language, so in the show, Dù Kê performed some new Vietnamese musical versions.

Dancing was the most popular cultural activities. Depending on the dialect groups that have had different forms of dancing. The Chinese Cantonese loved Southern lion dance; the Chinese Teochew loved Northern lion dance; the Chinese Fujian liked the dragon dance. Before 1975, the dance group was invited by the Hồ Chí Minh City. In recent years, as a result of financial difficulties, some shrines have just invited a dance group to perform once time for several years. The Mazu shrine at Vũng Thơm, Sóc Trăng established *Hội Bát Cầu* that used 8 musical instruments such as the trumpet, drum, flute, etc.. This Society was founded when building shrines. Currently, in the Vía Bà ceremony, a Southern lion dance group has been invited to perform.

A Mazu shrine in Cà Mau has had a rule that the goddess procession organizes, for every 60 years, within Ward No. 2, from 19 to 20 o'clock.

Mazu shrine at Sông Đốc had a Southern lion dance group named Hưng Nghĩa Đường that served Vía Bà, First Full Moon Festival, Seventh Full Moon, Tết Festival. Mazu shrine in the Tân Hưng Commune, Cái Nước District, Cà Mau invited the opera group “*Thống Nhất*” come to perform, then this group was dissolved. Thus, people invite the performance of Vietnamese opera group (*hát bội*) at present.

Gymnastics and sports activities at Mazu temple were often interrupted. The basketball association of Mazu shrine at the Mỹ Xuyên market was founded before 1975 with 20 participants, but it was stalled for a while and then re-established. In addition, there was an ancient music club of the Chaozhou Assembly Hall (*Triều Châu hội quán cổ nhạc xã*). The Lò-cầu association has composed of 20 members serving the Southern lion dance and Northern lion dance (*múa lân, sư*) for 30 years, but there is the Southern lion dance at present. In terms of content, the meaning of Southern lion dance (*múa lân*) was quite profound. The appearance of lân brought happiness, auspiciousness, and warded off evil spirits (*spirit cooking*). The

Southern lion dance teams in the Southwest were not as strong as they were in the Hồ Chí Minh City. However, the absence of the opera group Thống Nhất in Hồ Chí Minh City specialized in *hát Tiều* and *hát Quảng*, also affected the service activity on Vía Bà days in Southwestern, because most shrines there invited the art show from the Hồ Chí Minh City.

Religious beliefs were not only reason the Chinese came shrine on Vía Bà days, but they also enjoyed art shows, gymnastics - sports. The need of enjoying the theatrical arts activities had a special significance in the cultural- spiritual life of the Chinese.

#### **6. Social welfare activities**

As immigrants living abroad, so taking care of their community life was the first and most important job of the Chinese groups. Each community, each dialect group built their Assembly Halls as soon as they arrived new lands. On the one hand, they had a place to reside. On the other hand, they had a place of worship, it was a centre for spiritual practices of the community. Thus, the shrine was a centre where organized spiritual activities as well as practical help to the community. Moreover, it also functioned as an educational establishment that trained the next generation who preserve the language and characters of the community.

Therefore, the place of worship Mazu where organized charitable activities as well as coordinated a human being activities, from birth until death. Assembly Hall took care for members of their communities in many different forms of activity. When settlers arrived, Assembly Hall was temporary accommodation, took care of each other when they did not have a business; Assembly Hall also facilitated each member have the capital for a stable business.

Currently, in everyday activities, members of the Executive Board who have been responsible for monitoring, covering the affairs of the Shrine/Assembly Hall to timely visit their members, to encourage and support the member in trouble, weddings or bereavement. It can be seen through charitable activities of Mazu shrine. Assembly Halls has increasingly promoted this practical activity. These charitable activities have been shown clearly through the Ghost Festival (Lễ Vu Lan).

The charitable activities of Mazu shrine have not been only carried out in their localities, but they also have participated actively in the social program throughout the country that was launched by the government, local authorities, including major programs such as poverty reduction (Xóa đói giảm nghèo), building houses for the poor (Nhà Tình Thương, Nhà Tình nghĩa), supporting poor patients etc..

### **Conclusion**

On the viewpoint of cultural, history, and ethnography studies, this study examines the spiritual culture institution through the cult of the Lady Mazu in the Southwest in order to identify the organization and operation of the Mazu Shrine/Assembly Hall as a typical culture institution of a community according to dialect group. It shows that this is a unique institution, and an inter-institution in order to work for the good of the community.

Generally, there are some highlights as follows:

(1) Shrine/Assembly Hall is an important spiritual culture institution in the Chinese cultural life in Southwest Vietnam. This is a place where the Chinese dialect groups organize meetings or gather many different Chinese groups as the case Thất Phủ Shrine, participate in cultural social activities of each local region.

The spiritual culture institution of Mazu shrine shows that this is a form of cultural organization of community life. If a culture favours the silence towards cultural activities in depth in order to preserve the cultural identity of the community, a culture favours the movement towards cultural activities in width in order to develop the fields of the social-cultural life of the local region and exchanges with other places. Thus, through the spiritual cultural institution of the Mazu cult, the Chinese preserve their cultural identity as well as integrate into the social-cultural life of South West of Vietnam, of the whole world through social networks of their relatives in different countries.

(2) From the cultural activities favour the movement along with a special spiritual culture institution, the former Chinese created an uninterrupted closed institution. The presence of the shrine, the Chinese used donations for the community interest, such as opening the Chinese

courses at the school on the right of the shrine to maintain the language and characters of the community; an Assembly hall on the left supports material and mental life for their community. Currently, the social organization of each group in each temple has been changed. The social welfare activities from monetary donations have not only served the Chinese, they have also served to the whole Vietnamese society where the Chinese became a citizen and an ethnic group of Vietnam.

(3) The spiritual culture institutions through the cult of the Lady Mazu in South West of Vietnam, in general, it was formed later than the institution in the Hồ Chí Minh City. The majority shrines were established in the middle and late the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This explains the reason the Executive Board of Mazu shrine in South West of Vietnam has been less homogeneous of dialect than the case in the Hồ Chí Minh City at present. On the other hand, the Chinese in South West of Vietnam, especially the Chinese Fujian, has left abroad for many years, thereby leading to the change of the ethnic component in the Executive Board. As a result, there has been a change of layout worship statues. For example, the case of Mazu Palace, Hộ Phòng town, Giá Rai district, Bạc Liêu province was brought the statue of Bà Chúa Xứ (Holy Mother of the Realm) to co-worship with Mazu goddess after the year 2005 (which previously was the Ông Bồn shrine of the Chinese Fujian, named Phúc Đức ancient shrine).

(4) The cultural institution of the assembly hall should be put into the orbit of the movement “All people unite to build cultural life” in the local region. This work requires a closed coordination between 2 sides: the State and the Executive Board of the shrine. For cultural activities favour the silence, the State should create favourable conditions in the management of schools, the cemetery land, etc.. For cultural activities favour the movement, the State should have policies to foster and enhance knowledge, skills for members of the Executive Board of the shrine. With enthusiasm for communal care and coordination with the government, the spiritual culture institution of Mazu worship activities mentioned above will have conditions to further promote for the communal benefit through social welfare activities of Mazu shrine/Assembly Hall./.

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**Notes:**

- 1 [http://chungta.com/The\\_ao\\_la\\_van\\_hoa\\_to\\_chuc/](http://chungta.com/The_ao_la_van_hoa_to_chuc/)
- 2 Nguyễn Văn Huy (1993), *Người Hoa tại Việt Nam (The Chinese in Vietnam)*, Costa Mesa: ABC Pub.: 363.
- 3 Nguyễn Đệ (2008), *Tổ chức xã hội của người Hoa ở Nam Bộ*, Luận án Tiến sĩ, chuyên ngành Dân tộc học: 81. (*The Chinese Social Organization in the Southwest Vietnam*, PhD. thesis in Ethnography).
- 4 Tsai Maw Kuey (1968), *Les Chinois au Sud Viet Nam*, Translation of the Sciences and Historical Research Commission of the National Education Ministry in Saigon, cited in Anh Do Van's thesis, Paris: Sorbonne University. (*Người Hoa ở miền Nam Việt Nam*, bản dịch của Ủy ban Nghiên cứu Sử học và Khoa học của Bộ Quốc gia Giáo dục Sài Gòn / Đỗ Văn Anh, Luận văn Đại học Sorbonne, Paris: 36).
- 5 Including Fujian, Chaozhou, Hainan, Guangdong, and Hakka.
- 6 Including Fujian, Chaozhou, Hainan, Guangdong, Qiongzhou, Fuzhou, and Hakka.
- 7 Li TaNa và Nguyễn Cẩm Thúy (chủ biên, 1999), *Bia chữ Hán trong Hội quán người Hoa tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*, Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội: 9. (*Sino Characters Steles in Chinese Assembly Hall in Ho Chi Minh City*, Hanoi: Social Sciences Pub.).
- 8 Trần Hồng Liên (2005), *Văn hóa người Hoa ở Nam Bộ - Tín ngưỡng & Tôn giáo*, Nxb. Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội: 13-14. (*Culture of the Chinese in the Southern Vietnam - Belief and Religion*, Hanoi: Social Sciences Pub.).
- 9 Vương Triệu Tường, Lưu Văn Trí (1999), *Thương nhân Trung Hoa, họ là ai?* Cao Tự Thanh dịch, Nxb. Trẻ, Tp. Hồ Chí Minh: 96. (*Chinese Merchants, Who are They?*, Thanh Cao Tu trans., Ho Chi Minh City: Youth Pub.).
- 10 Vương Triệu Tường, Lưu Văn Trí (1999), *ibid*: 100-101.
- 11 Đặng Hoàng Lan (2014), “Lễ hội Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu của người Hoa ở Nam Bộ (Nghiên cứu trường hợp tại Thiên Hậu Cung - Thủ Dầu Một, Bình Dương và miếu Thiên Hậu quận 5, Tp. Hồ Chí Minh)”, trong Võ Văn Sen, Ngô Đức Thịnh, Nguyễn Văn Lên (chủ biên), *Tín ngưỡng thờ Mẫu ở Nam Bộ - Bản sắc và giá trị*, Nxb. Đại học Quốc gia Tp. Hồ Chí Minh: 440. [*Mazu Goddess Festival of the Chinese in the South (A Case Study at Mazu Palace - Thủ Dầu Một, Bình Dương and Mazu Shrine, District No. 5, Hồ Chí Minh City*, in the book: Võ Văn Sen, Ngô Đức Thịnh, Nguyễn Văn Lên (chief author), *The Cult of Mother Goddess in the South Vietnam - Identify and Value*, Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City National University Pub.]
- 12 Interview Mr. Trần Tấn Nghiệp, 64 ages, member of the Executive Board.

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8. [http://chungta.com/The\\_ao\\_la\\_van\\_hoa\\_to\\_chuc/](http://chungta.com/The_ao_la_van_hoa_to_chuc/)