

**THE CULT OF MAZU (THIÊN HẬU) IN MINH HUONG  
VILLAGE AND ACCULTURATION PROCESS  
(The Case of Huong Vinh commune, Huong Tra district,  
Thua Thien - Hue, Vietnam)**

***Abstract:** The Chinese immigrated to Vietnam in general and to Hue in particular for a long time and they coexisted with the local ethnic groups. The Chinese culture had contacted with the indigenous culture in the process of living, then it gradually changed. Almost of former mandarins of the Ming dynasty in Hue had Vietnamese nationality, got married Vietnamese, followed Vietnamese customs and traditions. They were managed in the Minh Huong village - a village had the organizational structure as a Vietnamese traditional village. The process of cultural contact and mixed marriage caused a dramatic change and characteristics of the Minh Huong village. The cult of Mazu, one of the Chinese folk-religion, also complied with this rule. So far, it has absorbed the Vietnamese culture in all aspects and formed many new cultural paradigms.*

***Keywords:** Acculturation, Chinese, Minh Huong people, Mazu, pattern, culture.*

**1. The concept of “acculturation”**

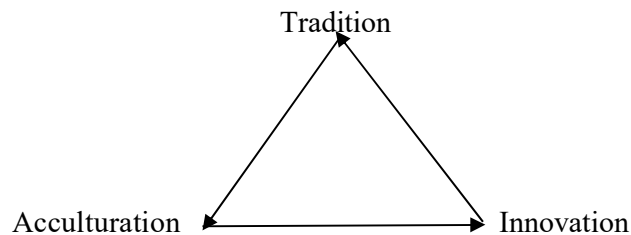
The concept of “acculturation” has not been strange to the researchers on literature and culture, especially, the development of contemporary anthropology that pushes its connotation higher. Over the many vicissitudes of history, Vietnam has been known as a land of “arrivals, departures” people and it can be considered as one of the typical examples of acculturation. According to *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, “Acculturation is the process of culture change set in motion by the meeting of two autonomous culture systems, resulting

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in an increase of similarity of each to the other”<sup>1</sup>. Acculturation subsumes a number of different processes including Diffusion, reactive Adaptation, various kinds of social and cultural reorganization subsequent to contact, and “Deculturation” or cultural disintegration. The range of adjustments that results includes the retention of substantial cultural autonomy (“stabilized pluralism”) or, more typically, the assimilation of a weaker by a stronger contacting group, and (though rarely) cultural fusion, where by two cultures may exchange enough elements to produce a distinctive successor culture<sup>2</sup>. Thus, according to this definition, acculturation is a cycle starting from the contact of two cultures leads to their transformation that produces a new culture with many similarities of the two previous cultures. However, another definition of French authors such as Francois Gresle, Michel Panoff, Michel Perrin, Pierre Tripier in the *Dictionnaire des sciences humaines Sociologie/Anthropologie* “Acculturation is a cultural fusion caused by direct and long contact between two cultures leading to the transformation of one or more cultural patterns at present of each community”<sup>3</sup>. It is different from the above-mentioned definition, this definition stated that a acculturation process produces new cultural patterns in those two cultures rather than integrating into one.

In Vietnam, according to Ngô Đức Thịnh: cultural communication is a process where human communities “meet” and on the basis of “receiving” cultural values of each other<sup>4</sup>. He affirmed that “cultural communication is motivation to innovate “tradition”<sup>5</sup>, he also proposed the model of expression of the tradition’s motion in the culture as follows<sup>6</sup>:



This model showed that after communication and transformation, tradition will be innovated and this innovation stably exists, then it

will produce new tradition. The new tradition continues to motivate so the concept of tradition is relative.

The fourth definition is that “acculturation is the approach of different groups of people, ethnic groups in terms of their historical origins, their languages, and their culture but they co-exist for a long time in the same geographic and ecological environment, in a cultural and historical area, especially in a unified country, long economic and cultural exchanges will lead to the integration of ethnic groups”<sup>7</sup>. This definition implies that long-term contact between two cultures will lead to integration, to creation a new culture with similarities of the two original cultures. Thus, this definition is similar to the first definition mentioned above.

It can be said that although there is a little difference among the above definitions, they have a common point is that acculturation is the process of contact between two cultures leading to transformation and to creation a new thing. I agree with this view and it will be used in the article. I also add that this “new thing” is only relative because if it lasts for a long time it will become a tradition and continue the cycle of acculturation to produce new ones.

In Vietnam, specifically in Minh Huong village, Hue, where the research was conducted, it showed that the Chinese immigrants to Vietnam, a long time living together with the indigenous ethnic groups led to Chinese and Vietnamese (Kinh) acculturation process that made the change of their cultural patterns. This article refers to the Chinese and Vietnamese acculturation through the cult of Thien Hau in Minh Huong village, Huong Vinh commune, Huong Tra district, Thua Thien- Hue province.

## **2. Minh Huong village in Hue**

As in many other places in Vietnam, the Minh Huong community in Hue was mainly formed by the loyalists of the Ming dynasty who refused to serve the new dynasty (Qing) so they fled to Vietnam as refugees. The Nguyen Lords allowed them to settle, to set up their own village called Minh Huong village. This kind of village had the same basic structure as the Vietnamese/Kinh one at that time. Most of

Minh Huong people married Vietnamese women, their children were Vietnamese. Therefore, some people defined that the Minh Huong people were Chinese-Vietnamese halfcastes. They observed the Vietnamese customs and habits. They could study, to be mandarins, have the rights as a Vietnamese. People who was not naturalized in Vietnam were called overseas Chinese, lived in organizations such as State (bang), Assembly halls (Hội quán).

The Minh Huong people along with the overseas Chinese in Hue initially traded for livelihood. By the end of the XVIII century, this port city began to decline, the Chinese traders moved to a place near the Hue capital (now Hue city) and Bao Vinh, Dinh, Đuọc markets for trading. The majority of Minh Huong people leaved their village, moved to the Chinatown, continued their business. They got married the overseas Chinese and their children became the Chinese. Few people stayed in the village and gradually changed to farming. They bought more land of neighboring Vietnamese villages for farmland, cemeteries<sup>8</sup>.

When switching to farming, Minh Huong people planted food crops of the Vietnamese. Until 1975, agriculture has become the main activity of the village. They have also used the same farming tools as well as the Vietnamese calendar. Since the Vietnamese in neighboring villages also have had the right to migrate to Minh Huong village. Curently, more and more people have married Minh Huong people. Therefore, the Vietnamese culture has more integrated in Minh Huong Village, in all aspects such as production, kinship structure, marriage, life cycle rituals, customs, habits and religion. Some people commented: "... the farming methods, production tools and even agricultural rituals are completely like the Vietnamese one"<sup>9</sup>.

The long-lasting co-existent process and mixed blood between the Chinese and the Vietnamese, along with the change of their livelihoods, has made the two cultures of Hoa-Viet strongly exchanged, resulting in a number of cultural patterns have been transformed. The customs and practices of Minh Huong people have absorbed many elements of Vietnamese culture. By about 1980, the Minh Huong people had reduced the six rituals in marriage into four while the Vietnamese has had three rituals. The tray for married

ceremony of the Minh Huong people is different from the Vietnamese in that they have added a bundle of toothpick (100 toothpicks), 100 cents and five round of thread with five colours which express the desire for wealth and lasting marriage<sup>10</sup>.

In customary funeral, the Minh Huong people dedicated the odd number of offerings and homeowners always returned little offering to the guests, they did not receive all<sup>11</sup>. Currently, the customs of wedding, of funeral have been much simplified, they are similar the customs of the Vietnamese.

The Minh Huong people have been influenced by the Vietnamese culture in naming their children. A Chinese kinship regulated that each generation has a different middle name, and Kinh people have maintained the same middle name for many generations, and a middle name may be a branch of a kinship. At present, the Minh Huong people have used the middle name for many generations as the Kinh. They has “imitated the Vietnamese folk customs” in naming<sup>12</sup>.

The influence of Vietnamese culture on the Minh Huong people is also manifest in folk arts such as folk tales, folk songs. They praise the scenery of their villages, they have absorbed folk songs like the hulling rice and the singing of male and female responses of Vietnamese. They fluently use the Vietnamese language, many of their folk songs contain some local words of Hue such as “dòm vô”, “châu mô”, “Ôn cha mô tổ mi”<sup>13</sup>. At present, the Minh Huong people have mixed blood with the Vietnamese/Kinh for many generations and most of them identify themselves as Kinh on their identity cards, (some people identify them as the Minh Huong’s origin). The rest of the villagers can not speak Chinese, the Vietnamese language has become their mother tongue.

Like the other customs and folk art forms, the Mazu worship of the Minh Huong people there have absorbed many elements of the Vietnamese culture and produced many new paradigms.

### **3. Overview of the Mazu Goddess cult in China**

Thiên Hậu was called as Thiên Phi, Thiên Thượng Thánh Mẫu, Thiên Hậu Thánh Mẫu, Thiên Vương Thánh Mẫu, etc.. Thiên Hậu was

a Chinese Sea goddess, revered by merchants, mariners, tourists and fishermen. The popular people called her by the name Ma Tổ. According to many Chinese records such as *the Great Qing's laws* (*Đại Thanh hội điển sự lệ*), *the story of Bodhisattvas* (*Bồ Tát ngoại truyện*), *Phúc Hiển chí* or the local geographical books ... the origin of her legend has the following basic content: Mazu was said to have been daughter of Lin Yuan, born in Meizhou Island, in Putian District, Fujian Province, China. She was born on 23/3/960, died on 09/9/987 (lunar calendar). The other legend said that she was born on 23/3/1110, died on 09/9/1119 (lunar calendar). When she was born, there was a bright red dazzling light. From the birth to full month, she did not cry, so people called her Lin Wai (Lâm Mặc), her parents also called her Lin Wai. She was more intelligent than her sisters and friends when she was young. Then, she went to teacher house to learn, she just read one time she could remember and understand the meaning of the book. When she grew up, she decided to do good deeds for the rest of her life (did not marry), and her parents also had to follow her wishes. As a medical expert, she often cured people, taught people how to prevent diseases, people loved her passionately. Once, her father and brothers had an accident at sea, she was at home with her eyes closed and used wizardry to rescue them. The mother thought she was sick and wake her up. She opened her mouth to answer that I could only save father and a brother was drifted (some documents say that the father was lost). A few days later, the father returned and told the story the same way. Since, she had prestige in the community. She died at the age of 28 without diseases. The day of her death, people in the Meizhou Island said that they had seen a five colours cloud was gradually flying in the sky on the Meifang mountain, they also had heard the music in the air. After the day of her death, people built temple and worshiped her in the Meizhou Island (vì nhớ ơn). Since, mariners said that they always saw she wore a red dress, flew on the sea to save people. Thus, mariners started worshiping the Ma Tổ statue in order to be lucky and peaceful. The Mazu cult was started.

The legends about her were continued. The Chinese attached some functions like boiling ghost, maternal infant protection, killing the robbers or she was an Agricultural Goddess, Rain Goddess, Healing Goddess.

In China, people worshiped her in the palaces, shrines. Her statues were often changed dress in some places. On the festival occasion, people usually organized the procession. According to Lý Lộ Lộ, there were two forms of worshipping Ma Tổ as follows: 1) fixed ceremony on her birthday and deathday (the 23 of 3 and the 9 of 9 according to Lunar calendar); 2) unfixd ceremony (instant rituals organized by people in distress at sea, by people who demanded for raining, having children...) <sup>14</sup>.

The fixed ceremonies were held at Ma Tổ shrines. In the past, this activity was solemnly celebrated by the Qing court officials, and the local people offered incense, prayed, donated money to donation boxes... The offerings included chicken, ducks, pigs, goats, fish. The Ma Tổ shrines in the Northern Port- Taiwan also had procession. People on both sides of the road opened their doors, offered offerings, burned firecrackers to welcome the goddess visits their house with the hope that the goddess will bring good things. During the procession, the palanquin often rotated, when returning to the shrine, there was a custom of “going under the palanquin”. There were also lion dances. At night, people playacted, played gongs, drums, circus, wrestling, climbing pillar. In some places, people invited Ma Tổ to visit their boat to worship and organized dragon boat race. Every person on the boat must be vegetarian and had a bath, while worshipping they must wear new clothes, the head of the boat wore long dress, pink scarf, burn incense, the children (boys) played gongs to welcome the goddess. Sometime, they sacrificed Mazu with dragon head (a part of the dragon boat). During the festival of the shrine, there was an activity “Ma Tổ incarnates in different body forms comeback her mother house in Meizhou Island”. In places far away from the Meizhou Island, people invited Ma Tổ statue to Fujian or Guangdong Assembly halls there, or to the most ancient Mazu shrine which was considered as the original shrine (Miếu tổ). Mazu statue was left there three days before returning to the shrine. In the past, the Taiwanese often chose the most ancient Mazu shrine to be the “original shrine”, however, in recent years, there have had many changes, the Taiwanese have directly arrived Meizhou Island to offer incense <sup>15</sup>.

However, another study<sup>16</sup> divided the Ma Tô ritual into two categories: ritual at home and ritual in palace or shrine. The ritual at home is a folk form of worship Ma Tô. In fact, this is the most primordial form of sacrifice included the following forms: ritual on boat, at sea, at home, in lineage hall or clan ancestral house.

*Ritual on boat* is a ritual was organized on boat when people met big waves and strong wind. From the Song Dynasty to present day, most of the boat owner has worshiped Ma Tô. Before going to sea and coming back home, the boat owner had to worship Ma Tô according to custom of praying for a safe journey. Although it was very simple, but it had become a popular custom and was an indispensable regulation of seafarers.

*Ritual at sea* is the most popular form of Ma Tô worship of the ancient coastal residents. Every year, on the day of birth or death of Ma Tô, the people in the coastal area were gathered at the coast, prepared five kinds of fruit, burned incense, prayed for peace at sea. When they finished, they dropped flowers and poured wine into the sea to show their respect. On this occasion, all the boats nearby or offshore were gathered worship and pray.

*Ritual at home* is a form of worshiping Ma Tô at private house. Only worshipful people placed alter at their houses. On the first day, the full moon day, the birth day as well as the death day of Ma Tô, people burned incense, worshiped. This practice was common in coastal region, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Chinatowns in Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, United State of America, United Kingdom and Canada. According to a survey, this form of worship represents one-third of Ma Tô worshipers.

*Ritual in lineage hall or clan ancestral house* is a ritual activity of Ma Tô's descendants in the ancestral house of Lâm clan or the Chinese overseas all over the world at the Friendship Hall. This form of ritual was a clan scale, widely spread in the Lam clan in Bò Điền as well as the Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia. People usually chose the date of birth or of death of Ma Tô to sacrifice.

The ritual of Ma Tô in the shrine often has had fresh flowers, incense and firecrackers. The rite consists of the following stages:



1. Priesthood: the owner of shrine was the priest and all the people from the small shrines were deacons.
2. Objects: lamps, incense bowls, drums
3. Objects (Nghị trượng): chess, bell, antique weapons
4. Offerings: vegetarian food that describes the nature
5. Ceremony: offering noodles arranged into the shape of longevity character, bowing.
6. Music: musicians use 28 kinds of instruments to perform: flute, drum, etc ...
7. Dance: traditional dances such as butterfly dance, cloud dance, phoenix dance, etc..

The shrine of Assembly Hall (Miếu hội ) often sacrifices Ma Tô on her birthday (23/3 lunar calendar) and her day of death (9/9 lunar calendar). People who worshiped Ma Tô at home participate in the First Full Moon Festival. People who came from the small shrine (Miếu phân linh) had to bring Ma Tô statue there to celebrate the ritual (make the statue more sacred, considered as an incarnation of the main statue Nguyễn Thái Hòa).

All the small shrines of Ma Tô periodically rotated worship at the original shrine (Miếu tổ) in Meizhou Island. The shrine of Assembly Hall had folk performances such as dragon dance, lion dance, umbrella dance...<sup>17</sup>.

#### **4. Cultural acculturation of the Mazu cult in Minh Huong village, Hue**

The Mazu cult in China has been mentioned above, however, when it was introduced into Hue, experienced a long time of communicating with Vietnamese culture, it has changed. In Minh Huong village, a palace was built by the Chinese traders in the early period when they came here to set up a commercial town, around 1685, but residents there called it “Bà Pagoda”. The palace is located in the north of the village, faced the Huong River towards the Southeast. It originally consisted of a main sanctum, a front sanctum, a sanctum on the right, a sanctum on the left. Initially, materials were completely imported

from China and built by the Chinese. Therefore, the relic was characterized by Chinese architecture.

However, during the resistance war against France (1949), the pagoda was burned, only the sanctum on the right left. After many restoration and reconstruction by Vietnamese materials and workers, the current pagoda has been no longer preserve the Chinese traditional architecture, exception some objects offered by Minh Huong people. It was influenced by Vietnamese architecture. Therefore, an architect commented that the roof (trùng thiềm điệp ốc) is a traditional architectural style of Hue and the main sanctum and the front sanctum has been decorated with some motifs of Hue traditional style as decoration style of the Khải Định Age<sup>18</sup>.

The Mazu Palace in Minh Huong village is very different from the Ma Tô Shrine in China in the aspect of function. The Palace also has a house for meetings, a temple for worshipping the City God, dignitaries, people with good deeds to the village, the Patron god of the village. This temple likes a communal house of the Vietnamese.

According to our survey results (February 2009 and October 2014), this temple still dedicated to Mazu- the main Goddess- and the Three Goddesses, 12 midwives, Văn Xương, Phúc Đức with the mandarins. In addition, there was the forefather house dedicated to people of the previous generations who have had merit to the village in the temple. The Guan Yin was worshiped at the top of the meeting House. The meeting House had a Hồ Chí Minh statue made of plaster but there was no altar and no worship. After an interview with the custodian of the temple, we knew that currently exception for the Mazu ceremony, the annual ceremonies at this temple including:

1. On the Lunar New Year, the temple organized worship during three days: the ritual for inviting the ancestors on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the Lunar New Year, the main ritual on the first day of the New Year; the ritual for farewell the ancestors on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> days. The offerings included sticky rice, fruit, wine, candy, cake.

2. Next, the early day ceremony of the New Year on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, they prayed peace, security for all people. The offerings

consisted of a roasted pork, sticky rice, fruit, wine, porridge and votif paper for the God of the land. This ceremony was firstly performed at the forefather house, then in the temple called worshipping Mazu and midwives. Worshipping is like worshipping in the Precious Church.

3. The women's festival, also known as the Women's Association, was held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January (Lunar year). The ceremony was entirely performed by women, including prayers for having children, prayers for giving childbirth safety. The offerings consisted of sticky rice and two roasted porks, one for Thien Hau, one for Three Goddesses and Twelve Midwives. When the ceremony finished, they dined on offerings. The research of Ché Thị Hồng Hoa showed that the ceremony was held on 16<sup>th</sup> January and 16<sup>th</sup> August (Lunar year) in the past. Those who would like to give birth to girls dedicated offerings such as the golden tray, jewelry, bracelets, necklace... Those who would like to give birth to boys must offer golden or silver necklace. These offerings were left in the temple until a child was given birth, they came back receive them for their child<sup>19</sup>. However, Huỳnh Đình Kết concluded that the ritual offered offerings to the Midwife on January 16<sup>th</sup> and the ritual thanked her on January 17<sup>th</sup><sup>20</sup> (Lunar year). According to this author, the ritual offered offerings to the Midwife that was organized by Minh Hương men, a person had to practice this ritual only one time in his life. The thanked ritual was organized by the women Association in order to thank the Midwife who gave them children. However, until 1980s, people voted to change the date of this ritual on January 17<sup>th</sup> (Lunar year).

4. The ritual for Văn Xương (Wenchang Wang), Phúc Đức was organized on February 2<sup>nd</sup> (Lunar year). In the past, it was also the festival of opened pen at the beginning of the year and people who had high achievements in the exam gathered at the shrine for commenting on literature and poetry. After 1975, there was no longer this custom. The ancient offerings were roasted pork meat but current offerings include one head of pork or two pieces of boiled meat because there is less participants. Today, this ceremony is an opportunity for parents to take their children there to pray for children studying well, passing the exam or person who passed the exam come to thank the God.

5. The Ghost Festival, worship on July 15<sup>th</sup> (Lunar year), vegetarian offerings such as sticky rice, banana.

6. Worship for Hundreds of clans held on July 16<sup>th</sup> (Lunar year), offerings include sticky rice, meat, betel, tea, fruits. This ceremony is dedicated to founders of the village, Minh Huong people were court officials and village dignitaries. Huỳnh Đình Kết indicated that this ceremony was also called the Autumn ritual of blessings, in the past, gifts including sticky rice, meat, grilled beef and 7 trays of rice<sup>21</sup>. In the past, the shrine organized a ritual on July 15<sup>th</sup>, then because of the influence of Buddhism, they think that July 15<sup>th</sup> is the full moon day, it is not convenient to slaughter so they move to the next day (July 16<sup>th</sup>)

7. Worship on the first day and the full moon day every month with fruits and flowers.

8. Death anniversary of Trần Tiên Thành on November 22<sup>nd</sup> (Lunar year), the ritual was held in the forefather house (Tiên hiên) and on his grave next to the shrine.

9. Visiting grave ritual (Lễ tảo mộ hay chạp mộ) on December 16<sup>th</sup> (Lunar year), was held in the forefather house, gifts including sticky rice, meat. The Chinese often visited tombs in the Qingming (Thanh minh) occasion but Minh Huong people there followed the custom of the Vietnamese (visiting tombs at the end of the year). On the occasion of Qingming, they visited graves on the An Cựu Mountain, offerings included sticky rice, meat, salt, rice, incense, flower, betel, porridge. This land was bought by Mr. Trần Tiên Thành, used as a cemetery for those who do not have children.

On the occasion of ceremonies and rituals, the shrine had a worship ceremony for the Buddha with vegetarian offerings. This shrine hasn't worshiped Buddha until recent years, a new Buddha statue was introduced into the temple for worshipping. Since the spring of 2004, a Vietnamese overseas originated Minh Huong from the United States has offered the statue of Guanyin Buddha made of plaster, 2m high. At the beginning, the statue was placed in the corridor of the main hall, on the occasion of Vía Bà festival (the 23<sup>rd</sup>

of March Lunar year), this statue was moved to the meeting House (nhà Hương hội) with the reason that if the Guanyin Buddha statue was there they could not organize rituals with salt offerings (meat). Therefore, a small lake was built next to the meeting House, put a Hòn non bộ and placed the Guanyin statue in the center. On the first day and the full moon day every month, the Buddha was offered fruits and flowers. It marked the strong penetration of Buddhism in Vietnam to the Mazu Palace.

According to research of Chế Thị Hồng Hoa, in the past, there was a ceremony for those who gave birth to sons and it was greatly organized on the First Full Moon Festival. Minh Hương people in the village and everywhere came to participate in the ceremony there. The offerings were mainly cakes such as bánh chưng, bánh dày, bánh bò tai... they were ranked 10 storeys, placed in the alter of Twelve Midwives. The same cakes were ranked higher and placed in the alter of Thiên Hậu and Văn Xương, Phúc Đức<sup>22</sup>. In addition, there was pork meat, sticky rice and fish soup, etc.. After worshipping, these cakes were given to children in the village and the whole villagers ate the other things. The author stated that this ritual markedly showed the traditional cultural elements of the Chinese<sup>23</sup>. However, this custom is no longer available.

In the past, this pagoda was also the other festival named Đông chí (winter solstice) in November. The offerings included tea (chè ý) made of sticky rice with sugar<sup>24</sup>. This custom is also no longer available.

Mazu was the main deity of the Bà pagoda, worshiped in two middle rooms of the main sanctum. At the largest sanctum, she was worshiped with two statues and two odalisques. Mazu was ordained four times by the Vietnamese monarchies with five đạo sắc or sắc phong (the text that transmits imperial orders to the nobles, officials, commandants of meritorious deeds or deities, and rank for the gods to be worshiped) in 1826, in 1831, in 1842 and in 1850. The legend of Mazu was told by one of Minh Hương's person as follows: "Thien Hau was on board, she had miraculous powers when she was 12 years old. The Chinese worshiped her on the board to be blessed. A ship in

distress at sea, people knelt down to pray, then they passed the distress. She was powerful”<sup>25</sup>.

Her birthday festival (Vía sinh - on 23<sup>rd</sup> March Lunar calendar) was often held solemnly and it was the largest ritual of the temple. And her death-day festival (Vía hóa - on 9<sup>th</sup> September Lunar calendar) was often held simply. A study stated that in the past, the birthday festival of Mazu was very large. The Organizing Committee usually rent a band for festive service, decorated with flags. The board of ritual consisted of a high priest (usually the village chief), two auxiliaries (all dressed in blue robes), a drummer, a bell-ringer (wearing a black coat). The ritual included three stages, offering wine, finally tea, burning the text of oration in the end of the ceremony. The ritual was exactly similar to worship of the Vietnamese communal temple. Offering consisted three kinds of animal such as pig, cow, goat. All rituals had “hát bộ” or “hát tuồng” (a form of Vietnamese theatre). It performed by a group of people who borrowed money of the village to have capital to do business. By 1982, the custom practice was abandoned<sup>26</sup>.

Previously, people performed the ceremony at 17.00 on March 22<sup>nd</sup> (Lunar calendar), offerings and rituals were similar to the main rite. Before the ceremony, high priest/ village chief stayed and followed a vegetarian regime at the temple within a day. Latterly, as a result of war and security, this custom was abandoned. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the ritual was held at 4 o'clock in the morning because of fresh air and solemn atmosphere. Previously, the party table of the temple during the holidays usually had the Chinese dishes such as: fish soup, sea cucumber, steamed fish, chicken stew. Gradually, the Chinese less came back the village, this food was not lasted<sup>27</sup>. In the past, the court usually appointed mandarins as “Thượng thư” (the head of a ministry) or Tuần vũ to worship at the 23/3 ceremony (such as Thượng thư Hồng Quang Địch or Tuần vũ Hoàng Yên), however, laterly Minh Hương villagers elected some elderly people in the village as the chief priest<sup>28</sup>.

After an interview with the temple custodian, we learned that in the past, the temple used to offer three kinds of animal such as a pig, a cow, a goat, sacrificed on the afternoon of March 22<sup>nd</sup>. In that night,

the villagers offered porridge with pork meat, the next day, on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, a cow was slaughtered. In addition, there was also sticky rice, fruit, betel, wine. However, since 1975 to present, a few Minh Hương inhabitant has lived in the village, the original people of Minh Hương and the Chinese have come back less to worship Mazu, so the organizers replaced the offering of three kinds of animal by a roasted pork about 15kg along with a tray of sticky rice. The other gods in the temple were worshiped by a piece of boiling meat and sticky rice. After sacrificing, the organizers feasted guests with these offerings. This feast has been still maintained. He also said that there was no procession<sup>29</sup>.

On the occasion of Mazu death-day festival, the organizers did not celebrate the ceremony of bath statue (mộc dục) but it was celebrated at the end of the year (on any day was arranged by the temple). People used a clean towel sprayed perfume to clean all the statues in the temple. However, Mazu was not changed her dress until someone dedicated dress and hat for her. They did not need to perform any ritual before changing her dress, just cleaned the statue.

Behind the largest statue of Mazu at the main sanctum, there has been a luminescent lamp of the Buddha. This lamp was added there since the year 2000. This luminescent lamp has made the Mazu statue similar to the Buddha Guan Yin statue. This formation also showed the influence of Buddhism on this practice. By present day, the temple still keeps the custom of asking for sacred card (xin quẻ and xin thẻ Bà). The Mazu cards consist of 103 leaves, in which, the first three cards are not numbered. People often apply for her card when they have important work such as wedding, building a new house... There was also a custom of borrowing money, of paying by offerings. The ceremony of loan or repayment was done on January 17<sup>th</sup> (coincided with the festival). Residents can pay the previous year and then borrow for the new year. The minimum repayment amount must be double the loan. Talking with us, researcher Huỳnh Đình Kết said, around 1990, during a visit to the temple, he realized that on the arm Mazu statue was weared a wallet. The temple custodian revealed a

pilgrim dedicated offering to her. Is it possible the appearance custom of borrowing money, of paying by offerings?

Before 1975, the temple had a custom of celebrating the Mazu death-day on the occasion of the Double Ninth Festival (September 9<sup>th</sup> Lunar year). However, as a result of flooding season, the river blew through the front gate of the temple, the Minh Huong residents came back decrease, villagers mainly participated in the ritual. Thus, it was organized in a simple way, although the ritual was quite similar to other ceremonies. It has been abolished since 1975.

On the Mazu death-day festival in 2014, the author was there at 7.30 AM. The scene of the temple was desolate, gloomy. After talking to Mr. L.N.C (a brother of the temple custodian) who sold water before the gate of the temple, I learned that the temple custodian had went to be injected, then to the market to buy flowers, fruit to worship. Waiting until 10.00 AM, he came back. He said that no one came to the temple on this occasion so he did not organize anything. His grandfather was a Minh Huong person, however, by this day, he and his brothers have recognized themselves as Kinh and their wives are Kinh<sup>30</sup>.

On the occasions of sacrifice, the temple custodian wrote a handwritten text submitted to the deities (sớ cúng) in Chinese and Vietnamese, according to the model that he learned from his predecessor. After the sacrifice, it was taken away and burned. On the occasion of the Mazu death-day festival, some Minh Huong people from the United States often came back there to worship. They were originated from this Minh Huong village and often contributed more money to the temple.

The cost to perform the ceremonies was taken from donations of people. The village had no funds for a long time. Previously, the temple had some costumes for ritual such as clothing, flags, ... but in 1999, these outfits were damaged by flood. Since then, the organizers often rent outfits of neighboring villages at the ceremony.

In the past, on the occasion of sacrifice at the temple, when preparing the feast, they arranged the seat for participants in the order



of rank like feasting in the communal houses of the Vietnamese. An author stated that the regulation of sacrifice and feasting at the Mazu Palace was established by Trần Tiên Thành and that it has been existed until today<sup>31</sup>. This is probably one of the most strongly Vietnamized elements of the Mazu cult there.

Before 1945, the temple was organized and managed by a ritual committee (including high priest/ village chief, assistants and patriarchs) and by an administrative board (including head of a commune and the assistant dignitaries). From 1946 to 1975, these two boards were replaced by the Board of Tri hương (including dignitaries who managed ceremonies and finances of the village) and the Board of Management (consisting village chief, vice- village chief and Secretaries). From 1976 to 1989, the village management board (head of village and village fatherland front) managed all local activities. Since 1990, beside the government apparatus, the village has had set up a Communicating Board to manage and to preserve the historical and cultural relics and village rites. These the apparatus have included entirely Kinh people, only the Communicating Board has consisted Minh Hương people.

The Cult of Mazu in the Minh Hương village has been largely changed by the process of co-existence, the long-term communicating, especially, the mixed blood between the two ethnic groups Chinese-Vietnamese through many generations. Many Vietnamese elements culture have been introduced into all aspects: architecture, decoration, legend, ritual, festival, art performances and participants... As a temple with traditional Chinese architectural features, it has become a temple with many similarities to the Vietnamese communal temples and pagodas. Some deities of the Vietnamese have been worshiped in this temple such as the god of Land, the dignitaries of the village and the Buddha Guan Yin. The specifications and costume of sacrifices, worship and the organization of feasting at the temple on specific ceremonial occasions have been identical to those of the Vietnamese communal temples. The Mazu legend there was different from the legend in China. Currently, the offerings have been the Vietnamese dishes which replaced those of the Chinese.

This transformation led to the loss of some old cultural patterns, the introduction of some new ones, as well as, some old ones have been deformed. At present, the “cổ con” ceremony at the First Full Moon Festival, the festival for Goddesses (hội các bà) on August 16<sup>th</sup>, the winter solstice ritual, the Mazu death-day festival on September 9<sup>th</sup> and the traditional singing (tục hát bội) was removed. Some new cultural forms have been introduced such as the worship of the Buddha Guan Yin, the statue of Uncle Hò, the luminescent light on the back of the Mazu statue, the wallet worn on her hand, the custom of borrowing money, of paying by offerings, and asking for sacred card, etc.. Many old cultural patterns in this cult were “deformed” such as Văn Xương - Phúc Đức festival has become the occasion of the students demand for being successful in education; achieving good grade; the ritual of the Goddesses on January 17<sup>th</sup> (sacrificed by the Minh Huong men) has been the ritual of praying for having child, safe birth, thanksgiving (organized by women), the Sarana ceremony (conversion to Buddhism for elderly people); Tomb-Sweeping Day of the Minh Huong people which was held on the Qingming or Ching Ming Festival occasion, has been changed to Vietnamese custom, hold at the end of the year at present; the management board of the relics and festival as well as the practice of religious beliefs were mostly Minh Huong people in the past, nowadays they are mostly Vietnamese and Minh Huong people have been Vietnamized. Thus, a series of cultural adjustments have arisen, led the cult of Mazu in Minh Huong (Hue) today to a new look with Vietnamese features, similarity to the cult of Goddesses and the Mother Goddesses of the Vietnamese. It has been different from this cult in its native country.

### **5. Conclusion**

Therefore, the cult of Mazu in Minh Huong village has lost some elements of traditional Chinese culture, some elements of Vietnamese culture have been introduced, as well as, some elements have been preserved but have been transformed following the trend of gradually losing the traditional Chinese cultural factors and of increasing the Vietnamese cultural factors. It is the result of a process under the

influence by many factors such as humanbeing, nature, society, economy, and historical context.

The cult of Mazu is a prominent folk religion of the Chinese and one of the nuclei reflecting their traditional cultural identity. Along with the immigrated Chinese to many parts of the world, the acculturation of this cult with beliefs of the local residents in many countries gradually created new cultural patterns and traditions. As a result, the inceptive basic features of the cult have been preserved with the global unification, the Mazu worship has also been localized with regional nature and diversity. In the current context of globalization, along with the presence of the Chinese all over the world, the worship of God has been spreading widely, multiplied in number. The process of exchanges and acculturation with the local religions will be continued. I can be said that, in the future, the theme of Mazu will be not only prospect of the cultural studies but it will also a source of inspiration for artistic creation. /.

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**NOTES:**

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- 22 “Cổ lớn” tức cổ lớn; “cổ con” tức cổ nhỏ. Đây là phương ngữ Huế.
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- 24 Chế Thị Hồng Hoa, *ibid*: 93 - 94.
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- 27 Chế Thị Hồng Hoa, *ibid*: 83 - 84.
- 28 Huỳnh Đình Kết, *ibid*: 37.
- 29 Phỏng vấn ông L.N.T ngày 02/10/2014, tại cung Thiên Hậu
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