

## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF DAO PEOPLE IN VIETNAM

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**Abstract:** *Religious belief of the Dao in Vietnam plays an important role, not only the representative for the spiritual life but also a fundamental factor, in the formation of this minor ethnic's cultural identities. The paper deals with two questions: what is the traditional religious belief of the Dao? And what are its changes at present? Regarding the first question, the author discusses traditional rituals such as: ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương or ritual of worshipping ancestors; ritual of title conferment; rituals related to agricultural activities such as praying for a good harvest, offering god of field, etc. Regarding the second question, the author discusses issues such as the early accept of Protestantism of the Dao in comparison with other ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous area of Vietnam; the appearance of new religious phenomena in this community known as cults of "Thần Hùng" and "Đương Văn Minh". The author comments that until present, the conversion to the new faith among the Dao remains outside of most populated residential areas. The approach toward new faiths poses serious questions, and becomes a challenge for the preservation and promotion of the Dao's cultural identities in Vietnam.*

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### Introduction

In Vietnam there are many ethnic minorities; Dao people have a population of 700.000 inhabitants. Dao People are living from valleys, midlands to high mountain areas. Their living compass influences their cultural characters. Furthermore, their culture is governed by complexity and diversity of Dao groups. However, these aspects never influence estimates of scientists on Dao people. Dao people have a traditional culture which has developed brightly. Their religious beliefs have an important position not only expressions in spiritual life but also basic

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elements in establishing Dao people' identity. What are traditional religious beliefs of Dao people? What are their changes at present? We would like to answer these questions.

### **I. The traditional religious beliefs of Dao people in Vietnam**

The traditional religious beliefs of Vietnamese ethnic communities as well as of Dao people are influenced by ancient religious elements such as Animism, Totemism, Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism influence strongly traditional religious beliefs. In the religious beliefs of Dao people there are three typical and important religious activities: ancestral worship, ritual of title conferment and religious beliefs relate agricultural activities

#### **1- Bàn Vương and ancestral worship**

Bàn Vương called Châu Đàng by Dao people. He has been considered to creator of each family, each line and whole community. Who is Bàn Vương? From ancient document "*Quá sơn bãng*", the olds still relate their descendants that Bàn Vương (Bàn Hồ) was a beautiful animal (it looks like a dog) falling down from the sky, Bình Hoàng loved and bred this animal in his palace. When Cao Vương fought against Bình Hoàng, Bàn Hồ helped Bình Hoàng to kill Cao Vương then Bình Hoàng married his daughter to Bàn Hồ and Bàn Hồ was appointed to be Bàn Vương. Bàn Vương had 12 children, 6 sons and 6 daughters. These 12 children founded 12 families; the family name of his oldest son was Bàn. The family names of his other children was Lan, Mã, Uyển, Đặng, Trần, Lương, Tống, Phụng, Đới, Lưu, Triệu....Undergoing many years Bàn Vương's descendants multiply rapidly, they lived every where then created Dao groups at present<sup>1</sup>. Although this story is legend, Bàn Vương – Châu Đàng is considered the creator of all families. In the traditional beliefs of Dao people, the worship of Bàn Vương is the typical ritual.

The worship of Châu Đàng is an important ritual because the "angry" or the "support" of Bàn Vương influences the fate of each family, each line and whole community. So that Dao people often worship simultaneously Bàn Vương, family ancestors and the other genies as rice genie, hunting genie.....in the traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Bế Viết Đăng, Nguyễn Khắc Tụng, Nông Trung, Nguyễn Tiến Nam. *Dao people in Vietnam*. Social Sciences Press, Hanoi, 1971, p. 18-21.

festivals... According to our investigational documents and books on Dao people<sup>2</sup>, main ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương is often carried out by families. The head of family decides when the worship of Bàn Vương to be carried out. This ritual often is carried out when disasters, misfortunes... are threatening the members of family. Dao people carry out this ritual to implore Bàn Vương, genies and their ancestors for favor. The ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương is the greatest one. It called *Chầu Tôm đàng*. It is noted that the ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương is the costly ritual so families have to contribute much money, small and poor families shall meet many difficulties to carry out this ritual.

Although the customs of every region, of every Dao group are different, the main ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương is described as follows.

*Khất hứa ritual:* Dao people of many regions call this ritual *Niên cán*. It means the ritual of asking for postponement of promise... It is the first etiquette of the ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương. After the head of family decides to carry out the ritual of Bàn Vương worship, his descendants prepare a small offering and invite sorcerer to ask Bàn Vương and their ancestors for help and support. They promise that they will offer Bàn Vương and genies many offerings. After this ritual, they begin to feed two pigs. These pigs are offerings for the main ritual of Bàn Vương worship. These pigs are brought up carefully they are considered to be pigs of genies. Nobody dare to beat and scold these pigs. Families have to prepare necessary offerings according to regulation of their line.

*The ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương:* After *Khất hứa* ritual a period of time, the great ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương is formally carried out. This ritual called *Pìa miến* by many Dao groups. In feast-day the sorcerers are invited to set up altar. After some necessary formalities, the sorcerers pray for inviting Bàn Vương, family ancestors and genies to testify this ritual. Then they kill these two pigs. One pig is offered family ancestor and genies. One is offered Bàn Vương. In Bàn Vương altar there is a bowl of water, a bowl of rice, bottle of wine, money, some pairs of chopsticks and a pig which is placed on food stray. Three sorcerers and three elder men are sitting face to face, they turn and turn read prayers. These prayers are tales which relate the beginning of heaven and earth, the history of Bàn Vương, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 271-276.

migration of Dao people. After these prayer speeches three young couples of girls and boys are chosen for singing the praise of Bàn Vương's great merits toward Dao people.

*The ritual of seeing off or the ritual of seeing off genies:* Some Dao groups call this ritual as *Phúng miến mùa* with the meaning to see off Bàn Vương and the other genies when they came back their world. After *Khất hứa ritual*, the sorcerers burn votive papers and see off Bàn Vương and the other genies to come back their world. This ritual is carried out in courtyard while three couples of boys and girls are singing. Then the sorcerer carries out formality, its name is *Tò pèng mùa* (muster troop) to withdraw gold soldiers after they complete their duties. According to traditional speaking the end of the ritual of Bàn Vương worship is *tàn lễ*

It is able to say that the belief of worshipping Bàn Vương is specific cultural characteristic of Dao people because rare community has conception and ritual like that. This worship satisfies spiritual need of people, it also presents clearly outlook on life and world view of Dao people as well as the history of Dao people's move to the South<sup>3</sup>.

In the small category, ancestors of Dao family are the deceased including parents, grandfather and grandmother, great grandfather.... Dao people have popular custom to worship 9 generations. Every Dao family has an ancestral altar. This altar is cubic parallelepiped, it is placed in the middle room (if the house has three rooms) or in living room (if the house has two rooms). It is higher than the foundation of house about 1.6 -1.8 m. On the altar there is joss-stick pot, a bowl of water. In front of joss-stick pot there are three small wine cups. Tom-tom, bell, horn... are hung beside altar. Many pictures of genies are stuck inside altar. The altars of some families are divided three stories: Supreme, Middle and Inferior. The altars in some Dao regions are simple. These altars are boards or small shelves with roofs. The father undertakes the ancestral worship then he hands down this responsibility his oldest son. The ritual of ancestral worship is carried out in the occasion of Tet and rites: rite of New Year, wedding, funeral ceremony.....

## 2- Ritual of title conferment

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<sup>3</sup> Vương Duy Quang. *The ritual of Bàn Vương worship of Dao people. Thế giới trong ta Review*. N<sup>o</sup>. 14, 1995 p. 33.

**What is ritual of title conferment?** Ritual of title conferment is an important religious activity of Dao people; it has borne many stamps of Shamanism and Taoism. According to Dr. Lý Hành Sơn, name of these ritual results from the man who experiences this ritual to be received a certificate written by demotic Dao<sup>4</sup>. This certificate recognizes the man who experiences this ritual to be maturity and he has right to take part in religious and social activities in accordance with Dao customary. Dao people in North – West region call this ritual *Lập tỉnh* (*Lập tỉnh*, *Lập tịch*) or *Cấp tỉnh* (*Cấp tỉnh*) Some Dao groups in Bắc Cạn, Cao Bằng, Hòa Bình, Sơn La, Phú Thọ call this ritual as *Quá tang*, it means ritual of wearing a lamp or ritual of giving light because receiver is enlightened by many lamps. But the other Dao groups call this ritual as *Chay sáy* or *Phùn vòong*<sup>5</sup>. Thus, Dao people call this ritual by many names because of their different ways of looking at this ritual. Though this ritual has many names, its most importance is to affirm maturity of man then he has right to carry out his role and responsibility in communal activities in particular religious and traditional activities.

#### ***The procedure of ritual of title conferment***

Ritual of title conferment has different levels in accordance with low to high. The different Dao regions have different regulations on levels of this ritual. In some regions this ritual only has 4 levels: *Quá tang* with three lamps; *Thất tỉnh* with 7 lamps; *Cửu tỉnh* with 9 lamps; *Thập nhị tỉnh* with 12 lamps. In other regions, this ritual has three levels: *Quá tang*, *Thất tỉnh*, *Thập nhị tỉnh*. In some regions, Dao people only carry out two levels *Tam thanh* and *Tam nguyên*. Because different regions have different specific characteristics so the contents of this ritual are different. However, the main procedures and active contents of this ritual are often carried out in accordance with common form. We try out best to introduce some rituals as follows

##### ***a) Ritual of invitation of sorcerer***

It is important preparation for ritual. The family of receiver sends representative to invite sorcerer for ritual. The representative carries himself a small pack of salt and two short sticks. After meeting the sorcerer, the representative

<sup>4</sup> Lý Hành Sơn. *The main rituals in the life of Dao Tuyền people in Ba Bể, Bắc Cạn*. Social Sciences Press, Hanoi, 2003, p. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Lý Hành Sơn, *ibid.* p. 93.

explains why he meet the sorcerer then he sticks two short sticks into wall beside the ancestral altar of sorcerer then he puts a pack of salt on altar. This pack of salt means “letter of invitation”. If the sorcerer does not react, it means the sorcerer accepts invitation and the representative comes home. The sorcerer asks his ancestor and ghost soldiers to help him to complete his business. According to Dao people’s view, *Quá tang* ritual needs three sorcerers *Thất tinh* ritual needs 7 sorcerers.... So the representative has to carry out ritual of invitation of three sorcerers, first of all the representative invites main sorcerer then two assistant sorcerers

After completing the invitation of sorcerers, family invites three couples of boys and girls. They serve this ritual.

b) *The ritual of receiving lamp- Quá tang*: This is the most important formality of the ritual of title conferment. The main sorcerer and two assistant sorcerers carry out the ritual of receiving lamp for receiver. They make offering to receiver’s ancestors and deities and ask them for driving the bad and ignorance out of receiver, then make him clever and pure. After asking, the sorcerer places lamps on his head and shoulders. They dance round receiver with aim to preserve the light. After dancing the sorcerers carry out *the ritual of lower lamps and giving yin name for receiver*. This ritual is very simple and ends by tossing two coins for prophecy, if one heads and one tails is good omen. Then the sorcerers carry out *the ritual of supply of ghost soldiers* with 36 coins symbolizing 36 ghost soldiers (in *Quá tang* ritual) and 72 coins (*Thất tinh* ritual). After this ritual is *ritual of overcoming of border pass* then *the ritual of dancing practice*. The receiver wears a mask of a deity. According to the guide of sorcerers receiver and the others dance 7 traditional dances. The sound of drums, gongs cymbals creates animated atmosphere that make dancers excitingly. At last, the sorcerers realize *the ritual of sorcerers’ dances* to see off deities. Since then the receiver is considered as “adult” in accordance with custom of this ethnic group

**c) *The ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương - Chầu Đàng***

This is an important etiquette in the ritual of title conferment. In this ritual, Dao people kill two pigs to offer Chầu Đàng and the other deities. In this ritual three couples of boys and girls with the sorcerers recite and sing deities’ praises.

d) *The ritual of seeing off sorcerers*: After completing the ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương, master of house and the sorcerers realize *the ritual of seeing off the sorcerer*. This ritual's aim expresses families thanks to the sorcerers, deities, ghost soldiers. This ritual is simple. It ends with 12 drum beats of sorcerers.

### **3- The religious beliefs relate to agriculture**

Dao people are agriculturalists so their religious beliefs relate to agricultural activities. As the ritual of title conferment, local factors and farming habits of Dao groups create common and diversified aspects relating to agriculture. Basically, there are some typical following rituals.

*Ritual of praying for good harvest*: (*Shsip khát lòng đao miến*). According to the custom, this ritual is carried out in the first lunar month or in time form the end of the third lunar month to the beginning of fourth lunar month. This ritual has many names. Normally, families prepare big feasts including chicken, steamed glutinous rice, wine and votive paper then they place this big feasts in *Điềng*, *Miù* where tutelary god is worshipped or in field. In some regions, Dao people organize this ritual one every two or three years, villagers contribute offerings. Although this ritual takes place in different durations, the etiquette of praying heaven- earth and deities is the most important. In this etiquette the sorcerer in the name of whole villagers prays heaven- earth, god of agriculture, ancestor of Dao people and other deities to help and support villagers so their yields of rice are great than usual and villagers are happy. After praying, the sorcerer burns votive papers and tosses two coins for prophecy. At the end of this ritual all families enjoy offerings in the place of this ritual.

#### ***Ritual of worshipping rice seed (Shsip xú truồng)***

This ritual is very simple and carried out in each family but it is indispensable belief activities in the custom of Dao people. This ritual aims to ask spirit of rice to make family prosperous. When the sorcerer is saying prayer the house hold does not allow the strangers to get in his house and his members are not allowed to come into other houses, because they are afraid of the spirit of rice follows stranger, it is bad omen.

#### ***Ritual of seed sowing (Shsip truồng bèo, Shsip dộp bèo)***

This etiquette is carried out in milpa of each family. Traditionally, household chooses the happy day to hold ritual in his milpa. The household offers god of soil or god of milpa, his ancestors and Dao people's ancestor big feasts including chicken, steamed glutinous rice, wine. He prays them a main crop abundant than usual. After that the members of family sow seed. In some regions this ritual is more complex. Dao people in low-lying fields hold *the ritual of transplanting of rice seedlings* (*Ship chép linh miến*). This ritual is similar to *the ritual of seed sowing*.

#### ***Ritual of worshipping god of milpa (Ship liêng miến)***

This ritual has another name *ritual of worshipping milpa*. In this ritual Dao people pray god of agriculture, god of milpa and other deities for defending their milpa against insects and wild beast.

#### ***Ritual of New rice (Ship shiêng nshăng, Nhiêng shiăng háng)***

In the harvest, the head of family gathers fresh rice plants for the ritual of new rice to thank his ancestors. He sticks these cooked rice plants in joss stick bowl on altar. In front of altar he prays his ancestor for help and supports his family.

Besides the above rituals, Dao people hold *the ritual of worshipping spirit rice* (*Ship bèo vuôn*) before the end of harvest to thank god of rice; Dao people hold *the ritual of open the forest* is praying god of soil to support their family; *the ritual of exploiting plant* (*Khoi đao*) is carried out when Dao people till the fields *The ritual of praying rain* (*Ship chiu tàn*)

## **II. Some changes in religious life of Dao people in Vietnam at present**

### ***1. Protestantism and the foundation of Bắc Sơn church***

Protestantism came in Vietnam later than Christianity. In 1911 the first basic of The Christian and Missionary of Alliance (CMA) was established in Đà Nẵng and Vietnamese protestant church was established in 1924. In the first time Protestantism operated mainly in the provinces and towns in plain, the protestant missionaries tried their best to develop Protestantism in mountainous regions. One of these trends was the presence of missionaries in Lạng Sơn province and the preaching began to carry out in ethnic minorities. The missionaries lived with people in Chi Lăng, Bình Giả district and Lạng Sơn town. The preaching for Dao and Nung people met many difficulties because of reaction of people. In 1939, missionaries began preaching to Dao ethnic groups in Bắc Sơn district. After a period of time preaching, the first five



Dao people in Trấn Yên village became believers of Protestantism. In 1940 a few Dao people converted to Protestantism. The Protestantism in Trấn Yên village spread to Vũ Sơn village then Tân Tri village. Since then Bắc Sơn Protestant church came into the world. According the reports of Bắc Sơn provincial bodies, from 1939 to now, Protestantism has developed normally in Bắc Sơn province; it only exists in Dao people. From 1991 the dioceses of Bắc Sơn Protestant church have been spread to six Dao villages in Khau Kiêng mountainous region. In 2001, Protestant believers were about 1335<sup>6</sup>. However, the development of Protestantism in Bắc Sơn district has been not flowing. In 1950-1968 Bắc Sơn Protestant church met many difficulties because many believers in Trấn Yên, Tân Tri, Vũ Sơn, Đông Ý villages seemed not to be interested in religion and their religious activities were not active. In some feasts, vestrymen prayed to God while were praying ancestor, even vestrymen were sorcerers in ritual of treatment<sup>7</sup>. However, these changes did not prevent Protestant development in Dao regions. Basing the amount of believers in Bắc Sơn province we find that the development of Protestantism has been a graph of advance equally for many years. It is noted that Protestantism has only existed and developed in Dao inhabitants living in villages around Khau Kieng mountain. It does not penetrate into Dao different villages.

In the first period, the number of believers was small so they had not condition to build chapel, the mode of church's operation centered small group. After many years Bắc Sơn Protestant church has developed wide and deep. It has had bases for collective activities<sup>8</sup>.

## **2. The phenomena of Thìn Hùng and “Dương Văn Minh” sect, the change of attitudes of Dao people in the regions under the influence of Protestantism.**

### ***2.1. Sùng Máng event and the problem of converted Dao people***

Beginning of 2001, some Dao people in Sùng Máng visited Dương Văn Minh who was living in Yên Lâm village, Hâm Yên district. Dương Văn Minh was a leader of the sect called “belief of *Dương Văn Minh is the unique and eternal belief*”. This sect had just established and prepared to present itself before public. After that,

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<sup>6</sup> Vương Duy Quang. *Bắc Sơn Protestant church in the past and at present*. 2002, p. 2-5.

<sup>7</sup> idem.

<sup>8</sup> idem.

all Dao people of this village have followed this sect for 10 years. A question has been set up how this sect develops?

Dương Văn Minh had been a Hmong people in Bảo Lộc district, Cao Bằng province then he moved to live in Tuyên Quang province. In 1987 he followed the advice of FEBC radio to establish “*xung vua đón Vàng Trứ*” movement in Hàm Yên district. His brother in law who was living in Bảo Lâm district also followed Minh. Since then some Hmong and Dao people in Bảo Lâm, Bảo Lạc district, Cao Bằng province followed Dương Văn Minh a Dao man living in Sùng Máng village, Mèo Vạc district followed Minh and propagated Minh’s sect for his villagers. He and others called upon Dao Tả Pan people to follow and support money to Dương Văn Minh. All those who had accepted to follow Dương Văn Minh were forced their joss-stick bowls in small caves in the mountain and they had to leave traditional customs. They declared that “heaven and earth will be collapsed and flooded in water; all those who follow Dương Văn Minh will be survived. Minh will be a king of Hmong and Dao people”. Any one who had not followed Minh were threatened. In January, 2001 there were 174 Dao households in Sùng Máng village to follow “Dương Văn Minh” sect, it was called “*belief of Dương Văn Minh is the unique and eternal belief*”<sup>9</sup>.

While all Dao Tả Pan people followed Dương Văn Minh, the end of 1988 Cháng A Sầu with two Dao Đồ people in Nam Quang village, Bảo Lâm district, Cao Bằng province came to Sùng Ú village of Dao Tiểu Bản people to propagate Thần Hùng – “king of heaven” for people. They organized the ritual of leaving the ancestral altar for the followers. They explained that. “Burning altar will eliminate diseases and devils.... Thần Hùng will guard houses for his followers”. The ritual of leaving altar of every family was carried out at night about 10 minutes. Every night they only realized this ritual for some families and house holders had to pay them wages. As Dao people following Dương Văn Minh, the activities of Thần Hùng followers have been secret. When this event was discovered there were 350 Dao people in Sùng Ú, Sùng Máng villages to follow Thần Hùng and 106 Dao people in Niên Sơn village, Mèo Vạc district also accepted to follow Thần Hùng<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Vương Duy Quang. *Real situation and some urgent problems on the situation of Vàng Trứ, Thần Hùng and Protestantism of Hmong and Dao groups in North mountainous areas*, 2002, p. 53-54.

<sup>10</sup> idem.

## ***2.2. The situation of Thờ Hùng and Protestantism in mountainous regions of North Vietnam***

After Sùng Máng event, some Dao people in mountainous regions of North Vietnam has began to accept Thờ Hùng. From 1994 some Dao groups who were living in Mường Tè, Sìn Hồ, Tam Đường, Than Uyên, Mường Nhé districts in Lai Châu, Điện Biên provinces had left their altar for following Thờ Hùng. In 2000, 794 Dao people living in old Lai Châu province followed Thờ Hùng. In Lào Cai province, the development of Thờ Hùng Tao happened from 1994 to 2002; many Dao people in Bát Xát, Sa pa, Bảo Thắng provinces followed Thờ Hùng. In Cao Bằng province, there were many Dao people to follow new faith. In 1998 the trend of following Thờ Hùng developed strongly in Bảo Lâm, Bảo Lạc and Nguyên Bình districts with happenings like Vàng Trứ phenomenon of Hmong people. They were announced that Thờ Hùng- king of heaven will appears and all people should follow him to have a happy life. As hearing threatening news about “*xung vua đón Vàng Trứ*” movement, Hmong and Dao people were fear. They contributed money and prepared to meet him but in vain. Some leaders of this movement propagated that Thờ Hùng would return surely in 2000 all those who have not followed him will not have good life. Dao naïve people continue to wait for him. In 2001 there were 2.235 Dao people in Cao Bằng province to follow Thờ Hùng. Majority of these people lived in Bảo Lạc, Nguyên Bình and Bảo Lâm district. After 2000, Vàng Trứ movement has been influenced strongly by Protestantism. However, this movement has only existed in Dao small groups who have already followed Thờ Hùng-Protestantism before. From 2003 Protestant churches were established some villages. Actually these churches have developed from 2006 up-to-now.

We can say that the problem of Dao people following Protestantism has many different religious nuances; some Dao people only have followed Dương Văn Minh, majority of Dao people have followed Thờ Hùng then moved to Thờ Hùng-Protestantism. They have been influenced strongly by Protestantism. Some people truthfully believe in Triune God of Protestantism, the other people only believe in Thờ Hùng - “king of heaven” of Dao people.

### **III. Some remarks and conclusions**

#### ***1- The traditional religious beliefs of Dao people are important elements of Dao's cultural identities***

In history of Dao people, their traditional religious beliefs are important elements to create the unity of community. These elements help Dao people to remain firmly before historical changes. The ritual of worshipping Bàn Vương and ancestor is an important activity in Dao people's religious activities. This worship expresses the deep gratitude of Dao descendants to their ancestor and the dead. This worship helps Dao descendants to remember their source. The ritual of title conferment not only expresses humanism but also special religious activity of Dao people. Dao people have plentiful agricultural belief system

The traditional rituals as: the ritual of Bàn Vương worship, the ritual of ancestral worship; ritual of title conferment... have contributed in creating cultural tradition of Dao people.

#### ***2- Dao nation is one of the ethnic minority groups in North mountainous region which has accepted Protestantism early with the establishment and developing of Bắc Sơn Protestant church***

Surveying religions of residents in North mountainous regions for a century, we find that Hmong people have been the first people to accept Catholicism. The first Catholic church was established in Sa Pa in 1905. Dao people have been the first people to accept Protestantism with the foundation of Bắc Sơn Protestant church. Though Protestantism has existed in a part of Dao people living in Bắc Sơn region, it has been present in Dao people for many years. As already stated, in Bắc Sơn Protestantism has developed step by step with over 1000 believers. It is considerable amount to compare with Protestant churches in Red river plain.

#### ***3- Thìn Hùng phenomenon proved that some Dao people looked for a new faith at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century***

Before Thìn Hùng phenomenon, some Dao people in Bắc Sơn district, Lạng Sơn province left their ancestral faith to follow Protestantism. This action has lasted for many years then it has gradually become normal. Thìn Hùng phenomenon appeared in 1990s although its expression has not spread over, it marked Dao people to look for a new faith at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Dao people received a religious phenomenon (Thìn Hùng, Thìn Hùng Jesus). When taking shape and developing, this phenomenon has been mixedness including native beliefs, Christianity, Protestantism and some different elements which do not belong to any

religions, then these elements have been influenced by Protestantism. There are some Dao people follow “Đương Văn Minh” sect beside. However, Đương Văn Minh followers are very few and their activities only take place in some provinces in North mountainous regions.

#### ***4- The problem of cultural identity of Dao people and some challenges at present***

We can find that Dao people have followed new faith to be different from Hmong people because their following has not conflicted with the other in their community. But it influences culture and cultural identities of Dao people. Basing on some documents and survey data we find that the cultural identities of Dao people in some regions are influenced by new faiths (including Protestantism). Some Dao people have forgotten their history and source. They do not know who Bàn Vương was. Some the olds are unable to relate a paragraph of “*Quá sơn băng*”, the famous traditional document. Behavioral traditional culture of Dao people fall into oblivion. For a long time, Dao converts have not organized “ăn ước” ritual – the important village meeting of Dao people. The relation between Dao converts and non- Dao converts is loose. In some villages, Dao language- original element of Dao culture has lost its role in community. Most of Dao people read prayer book and sing hymn or listen to preaching by Vietnamese (although the preacher and hears are Dao people)<sup>11</sup>. When preaching Protestantism to Dao people, missionaries learnt Dao language for approaching to Dao people. The missionaries translated the songs in praise of Savior into Dao language for Dao people reading. In 1950s- 1960s some Protestant believers secretly prayed God and ancestor together.... Clearly, these changes offend against the national identity of Dao people. Hmong people in Sa Pa and Trăm Tàu following Christianity is difference. Passing over century, Hmong people have remained their native culture in line with respect of God (in particular, behavioral culture). Dao people following Thần Hùng, Protestantism or Đương Văn Minh in particular Dao Sủng Máng people have lost their cultural identities<sup>12</sup>.

The role and importance of national identities are affirmed in the policy line of Vietnamese State. In Resolution of the 5<sup>th</sup> Central (8<sup>th</sup> Legislature) dated July 1998, Vietnam Communist Party brought out cultural strategy in the period of development of industrialization and modernization in order to build an advanced Vietnamese culture deeply imbued with national identity. This policy is most important to help Dao people in particular and the ethnic minorities general speaking to preserve their cultural identities in the background of integration, change and development. /.

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<sup>11</sup> Vương Duy Quang. *ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> Vương Duy Quang. *ibid*.