

SOME FEATURES OF PHẬT ĐƯỜNG NAM TÔNG (MING SHI DAO)

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Abstract: *Ming Shi Dao is a religion born in China, under the Tang Dynasty and a saviour nature religion, Buddha worship, and religious activities under Confucianism. Ming Shi Dao's dogma heightens universalism, but its canon law closed again. After outlined the history of Ming Shi Dao in China, the author presents the way of spreading Ming Shi Dao in Vietnam. Such some religions born in Vietnam as Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia... are also under the influence of Ming Shi Dao's dogma. Some cloisterers of Ming Shi Dao took part in founding Caodaism in 1926. Ming Shi Dao's history in Vietnam associated with patriotic movements in near-modern history of Vietnam (1858-1975). On August 17th, 2007, Ming Shi Dao was granted registration of religious activities by Government Board of Religious Affair.*

Phật Đường Nam tông (Ming Shi Dao) was appeared in the Tang dynasty and introduced Vietnam in the Nguyễn dynasty (the 6th year of Tự Đức regime). In the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, this sect influenced strongly native religions and the South religious beliefs. Ming Shi Dao is worshipping Buddha and practicing Taoism. The doctrine of Ming Shi Dao consists of two parts: Gradual awakening and Immediate method. The doctrine of Ming Shi Dao gives prominence to universal salvation but its canon law is closed.

Phật Đường is a sect of Buddhist worship in China

According to the history of Phật Đường, Pan Zu Ru Lai has 17 Patriarchs. Huang Ren was the first patriarch. He had 700 disciples but Shen Hsiu and Hui Neng were the most excellent disciples. When Huang Ren died Pan Zu Ru Lai was handed to Hui Neng. At that time Bodhidharma school (the Southern sect) was divided into northern and southern. The northern sect was under Shen Hsiu; the southern sect was

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under Hui- Neing. The researchers call two sects as “Northern gradual” and “Southern immediate”. Since then Buddhist movement in China developed strongly.

Hui-Neng was the 6th patriarch. When living he foretold that: “When I died, Buddhism will come to standstill about 70 years then two Bodhisattvas appeared in the Orient: one was a Buddhist monk and other was a retired scholar. They developed Buddhism together”. Just as prognostication, Dao Yin Mu Gong and Bai Yu appeared in 783. They were born in Xi Jiang. They were taught by Nam Yue then they became the 7th patriarchs. They developed Buddhism and built over 800 pagodas in China. Afterward, Buddhism was divided into 16 sects (Phật Đường developed in Dong Chang An, it called Dong Lin sect).

When Bai Yu patriarch died Luo Gong Hui became the 8th patriarch. He went to Hei Bei, Jiang Nan to develop religion. Because he was virtuous and generous so Tang king invited him to manage Kai Yuan palace. He was scholar so he predicted that Buddhism would be ruined in the future. For preventing from accident, he allowed his disciples to wear the black shirt substituting for Buddhist robe. He allowed his disciples to teach Dharma and practice meditation. At the same period, the countries which were depending China, respected and remained Dharma. Gao Zu king of the post-Liang dynasty promulgated royal ordinance that courtier should go to pagodas. In Buddha’s birthday Zhong Sun king of the post Tang dynasty established *Trai Tang* association in palace. Gao Zu king of the post Jin dynasty also promulgated royal ordinance that courtier should go to pagodas.

Shi Sun king of the post Zhu dynasty did not like Buddhism. In the second year of Xian De regime (955) the king ordered to destroy pagodas, monks were constrained to return the secular life. The famous monks were kept in the prison. This accident destroyed 662 temples. Only 2694 temples were remained. All of them were famous temples. Patriarch Luo Gong Hui was arrested and he died on January 1st, 956 in prison because of ‘destroying pagodas’ movement so Buddhism was brought to a standstill for 8 centuries but Dharma was handed down. After 800 years, Phật Đường sect was recovered in the Ming dynasty. In the 3rd year of Tian Kai era (1623) Huang Gong De Hui became a monk, he was transmitted Buddha mind by a ‘stranger’. He became the 9th patriarch. He propagated the Dharma and developed religion in Jiang You, Jiang Xi.

According the history of Phật Đường, Huang Gong De Hui died, Jing Lin Wu Gong became the 10th patriarch then Hui Ming He Lao became the 11th patriarch.

Cu An Yuan Lao was born in Gui Zhou, Long Li district, he was an unusual ability and talent so he was invited to help court. But he went to forest to learn method of attain nirvana. The 11th patriarch found Cu An Yuan Lao to be true monk and good at Buddhist scriptures so he appointed Cu An Yan Lao to be the 12th patriarch.

The 13th patriarch of Phật Đường consisted of two patriarchs. They were Xuan Xu Wang Gon and Ci Xuan Wu. Ci Xuan Wu developed Phật Đường in Guang Dong province; Xuan Xu Wang Gong developed Phật Đường in the North.

The period of Dong Chu patriarch was in the 2nd year of Tong Zhao era (1863). It was the same period of the Nguyen dynasty (the 16th year of Tự Đức reign). According the order of De Yi Dao patriarch, Dong Chu overcame many difficulties to develop Phật Đường in Thailand and Vietnam.

The way of Phật Đường Nam Tông (Ming Shi Dao) in Vietnam

As you know, Dong Chu patriarch met many difficulties when he proclaimed the Buddhist truth and developed Phật Đường in Southeast Asia. After “Taiping Heavenly Kingdom” event in China in the middle of the 19th century (1850- 1864) the monks of Phật Đường had to evade in Hu Nan where was the center of “Abolishment of Mo and restoration of Ming” movement. The monks and believers of Phật Đường migrated to foreign countries. Some of them emigrated to Vietnam and some regions of Southeast Asia. The doctrines of Phật Đường were close to our popular beliefs. Although Phật Đường believers were not many, they lived dispersedly in cities, and provinces, Phật Đường influence was strong. The native religions as Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, and Caodaism were influenced by Phật Đường. Before becoming monk of Phật Đường, Ngô Viên was a master of another sect (in Thất Sơn region). Trần Đại Quang and two his disciples, Trần Đạo Tính and Trần Vận Chánh were monks of Phật Đường Nam Tông (Ming Shi Dao). They mobilized Nguyễn Văn Nguyệt, Nguyễn Văn Tương, Trần Văn Thu and some monks of Phật Đường Nam Tông to take part in founding Caodaism in 1926. In 1934, Trần Đạo Quang and Cao Triều Phát went to Cà Mau to establish Cao Dai religious society.

Phật Đường Nam Tông sect was introduced in our country in the Nguyễn dynasty (the 16th year of Tự Đức era). In order to develop this sect Dong Chu patriarch built the First Buddhist Temple in Cầu Kho (Chợ Lớn). Its nickname was Chiêu Minh Phật Đường. Then he came back China to hand over patriarch to other. He went to Thailand to develop Phật Đường Nam Tông. Because of obstruction he did not arrive at Chợ Lớn on the way home. He only visited Chinese people in Hà Tiên and built the second Buddhist Temple in 1863. Its nickname was Quảng Tế Phật Đường. After Dong Chu Zhang Lao came back China, Zhang Dao Xin Zhang Lao was sent to Vietnam, he developed Phật Đường Nam Tông and built a Buddhist Temple in Cù Mông mountain (Bình Định). After a period of time, he died in this temple.

In the process of developing Phật Đường Nam Tông, Dong Chu patriarch and Zhang Dao Xin master attracted many Vietnamese people. Many of them became the believers of Phật Đường Nam Tông. Some of them became theas and great monks, for example: Ngô Quang Đạo, Lưu Đạo Nguyên, Ngô Đạo Chương, Ngô Minh Tuấn (Ngô Minh Chiêu's father), Ngô Viện, Trần Đạo Quang....In 1895 the great monk Trần Đạo Quang built a Buddhist temple in Chợ Đệm (Bình Chánh district, Sai Gòn city). After founding Phật Đường Nam Tông in Bình Định, monk Ngô Đạo Chương built Quảng Nam Phật Đường temple in Cầu Bông region (Đà Kao). The essential Chinese believers visits this temple. Before 1975 this temple was revolutionary base.

When studying Phật Đường Nam Tông we find that: when Phật Đường Nam Tông was introduced in Vietnam, the movement "Abolishment of Mo and restoration of Ming" became the movement "Abolishment of French and restoration of Vietnam" of Vietnamese believers of Phật Đường Nam Tông. We find that the history of Ming Shi Dao in Vietnam related to patriotic movements in modern history of our nation. So that the activities of Phật Đường Nam Tông were "semi public". Quảng Nam Phật Đường temple was the underground agent of revolutionary fighters who acted secretly in Sài Gòn-Gia Định. Many patriots who took part in Đông Du and Duy Tân movements hidden in Nam Nhã Buddhist Temple. Phan Bội Châu and Cường Để discussed state affair in this temple. Ngô Gia Tự, one of the leaders of Vietnamese Communist Party had lived in this temple. Afterward, Nam Nhã temple became communication place of Hậu Giang region Party Committee.

Because of active activities in Đông Du and Duy Tân movements, Long Khê monk of Nam Nhã Buddhist Temple (Cần Thơ) was arrested by French colonialism.

At that time many patriots intended to elect Long Khê monk to be province chief of Cần Thơ province when anti- French colonial resistance movement won victory.

In Gò Công, many believers of Phật Đường Nam Tông took part in the patriotic movements in Sài Gòn- Gia Định and Cần Thơ. In 1920, Lê Nghiêm monk of Đông Nam Phật Đường temple (Gò Công) invited junior doctor Nguyễn Sinh Huy (Hồ Chí Minh's father) to live in temple. Đình Đạo Ninh monk of Vạn Bửu Phật Đường temple became a revolutionary fighter in 1929 so this temple became headquarter of the Revolutionary Youth of Gò Công province. Đặng Vương Tá, Nguyễn Văn Côn were revolutionary fighters (Nguyễn Văn Côn was the revolutionary fighter). In the middle of 1936, great monk Đình Đạo Ninh was sent to Khánh Hà and Hải Phòng, he practised religion while was participating in revolutionary activities. He was arrested and imprisoned in Côn Đảo in 1940. When the August Revolution succeeded he was free.

According to documents of Cao Dai department (The Government Committee for Religious Affairs), after appearing in Vietnam Phật Đường Nam Tông presented in 18 provinces and cities with 51 Buddhist temples and 10.000 monks and believers. *The history of Phật Đường Nam Tông* written that “Ming Shi Dao was introduced Vietnam by patriarch Dong Chu, Zhang Dao Xin Zhang Lao, Lu Lao Su and Wu Dao Zhang. At present, Vietnam has 37 Buddhist temples, Vương Đạo Thâm in the name of Trần Tây patriarch handles Ming Shi Dao's affairs in Vietnam”

Carrying on the Ordinance on Belief and Religion which was passed by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly (2004), Phật Đường Nam Tông (Ming Shi Dao) registered an annual program of religious activities. It was issued license on August 17th, 2007 by the Government Committee for Religious Affairs. The members of mobilization committee for Conference of Phật Đường Nam Tông (Ming Shi Dao) were recognized. /.