

Clan stelae and some aspects of clan culture in Vietnam

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Received 10 January 2022; published 15 September 2022

Abstract: *Family stelae has a valuable meaning for each Vietnamese clan. Before 1945, most of the clans owned this type of stelae, which was often erected on the occasion of big events such as the construction of clan worshipping house or the election of people to be worshipped in the presence of their members. Nowadays, a large number of these stelae still exist which accounts for a significant proportion of the stone stelae in Vietnam. The study of these stelae shall be greatly useful to understand clan regulations, genealogies or family members who achieved high results in academic exams. Based on documents and data about the stelae inscriptions available at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences), the article analyzes the characteristics of the Vietnamese clan culture through stelae inscriptions following the main themes including clan worshipping house, clan genealogy, clan descendants, clan conventions, and clan members who passed the confucian exams.*

Keywords: Clan, Clan Stelae, Clan Culture, Vietnam

Introduction

Clan stele inscriptions are those about families, usually erected at family worshipping houses. The content of these inscriptions covers some topics, such as the clan's origin and development, the family genealogy, the construction of the family worshipping house, praises to family members who passed the royal exams, the family conventions, and the like. In Vietnam, there are now approximately 1,300 stele inscriptions of which rubbings are mainly kept by the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences). In

terms of design, the stelae are mainly flat in shape, most of them have one or two sides but some have 3-4 sides. Flat-shaped stelae have the advantage of being easily carved and engraved. Decorative patterns on the stelae are quite simple because most of the stelae were made under the Nguyen Dynasty: A stele's lunette is normally carved with dragons, the Sun, and clouds; its decorative border with floral patterns. These decorative motifs are similar to those on other stelae of the same period. But clan stelae have a special feature in comparison with other types of stelae. That is, several

authors of the stele inscriptions were descendants in the family, with the desire to make their contributions to the building of the stelae at the family worshipping houses to pay respects to ancestors. For example, Tong Duy Tan wrote *Thiên tu từ đường bi kí* (The stele inscription on the repair of the family worshipping house) for the Tong family in Vinh Loc District, Thanh Hoa Province; Pham Tong Tien composed *Nga Sơn Thạch Giản hậu trạch Phạm tộc bi chí* (the stele inscription of the Pham family in Nga Sơn Thạch Gian) in Nga Sơn District, Thanh Hoa Province.

In Vietnam, most of clan stelae belong to families in 20 provinces, including Ha Noi, Nam Dinh, Ha Nam, Quang Ninh, Hai Duong, Thai Binh, Thanh Hoa, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hung Yen, Ninh Binh, Vinh Phuc, Vinh Phuc, Hai Phong, Ha Tinh, Thai Nguyen, Thua Thien Hue, and Quang Nam. The rubbings of the stele inscriptions of about 50 families are kept at the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, notably those of the Pham in Thai Binh; the Le in Thanh Hoa; the Tran, the Do, the Bui, the Lam, and the Dinh in Nam Dinh; the Truong and the Mai in Nghe An; the Vu and the Ngo in Quang Ninh; the Trinh, the Kieu, the Luong, the Phan, and the Dao in Ha Noi; the Nguyen in Bac Ninh; the Dang in Hai Duong, the Duong in Ninh Binh. The rubbings of the Nguyen family's stele inscriptions are preserved in the largest number, around 550 stelae. This is understandable because the Nguyen is the biggest family in Vietnam, with many branches. Clan stelae are not only valuable to the family that owns those artifacts but contain many values in terms of culture, history, archaeology, ethics, and education.

1. Stele inscriptions about family worshipping houses

A family worshipping house is a place for a family's ancestral worship, where all members of the family look up to on festivals, holidays, or ancestral anniversaries. Thus, the family worshipping house is very important for any family. It is estimated that there are about 400 stele inscriptions about family worshipping houses, founded in Nam Dinh, Ha Nam, Nghe An, Quang Ninh, Ha Noi, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Ha Tinh, Hung Yen, Vinh Phuc, Thua Thien Hue, etc., among which Ha Noi and Thanh Hoa have the largest number of stelae (50 and 38 stelae respectively). The stelae about family worshipping houses mainly date to the Nguyen Dynasty (over 90%), the remaining are in the Restored Le and Tay Son Dynasties. Formerly, most families had stelae about their family worshipping houses. Due to many subjective and objective reasons, many stele inscriptions about the family worshipping houses have been lost. The families that have many well-preserved stelae about the family worshipping houses are the Nguyen and the Hua in Hai Duong; the Le, the Truong, the Vu, the Tong, and the Phan in Thanh Hoa; the Tran in Vinh Phuc; the Dang, the Hoang, the Dao, the Doan, and the Mac in Ha Noi; the Bui and the Dinh in Ha Tinh; the Mai and the Pham in Thai Binh; the Ngo in Bac Ninh; the Doan in Bac Giang. In terms of content, the family worshipping house stelae mainly record the construction and repair of the houses. The *Thiên tu từ đường bi kí* stele inscription at the Tong family worshipping house in Vinh Loc District, Thanh Hoa Province, composed by

Doctoral Laureate Tong Duy Tan, writes: “The worshipping house is the permanent residence of ancestors, unchanged forever, the place of worship activities according to the clan’s rituals for generations. In Pho Giang under the reign of the Trinh, our clan started. Right since the first generation, our family worshipping house was built and it has been a long time so far. The old worshipping house in Ngo Thi degraded over years. Planning to move the house to another place, the family purchased a 1 *sào* 9 *thước* land plot (approximately 800 square meters) in Ngo Mieu and built a tile-roofed three-compartment house, facing to the north. The votive tablets of the progenitorial father and mother are to honor the ancestors. The right compartment is for the worship of Tong master who was conferred the title the Marquis of Van Kieu, and the left one is for the Marquis of Toan Phu. What a glory! Other altars are for worshipping ceremonies. The construction started in mid-spring and finished in mid-summer” [composed in 1881, call number¹: 48354]. At the end of the inscription, it writes: “Compiled by a 14th generation grandson, Tong Duy Tan”. This inscription provides us with information: The Tong family in Vinh Tan Commune, Vinh Loc District, originated from Pho Giang District and Doctoral Laureate Tong Duy Tan was a 14th-generation descendant. The content of the stele inscription reveals that the Tong family worshipping house in Vinh Loc District, Thanh Hoa Province, dated back to the time of their progenitorial parents in the reign of Trinh Lords (1545-1787). This

¹ Call number at the archive of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies.

is an important detail in studying the Tong family there. For a family, the worshipping house is very sacred because it is the gathering place for both ancestral spirits and family members. Therefore, many members of the clan, over generations, have strived their best to build a spacious and solid family worshipping house. This helps to create the clan’s cohesion and unity as well as the aggregative strength of all members. The previous generations started the construction, inspiring descendants of the next generations to realize their dreams.

2. Stele inscriptions about family genealogy

The genealogy stelae are important to families. There are an estimated number of about 200 stelae on genealogy. Most families have their genealogy stelae, such as the Nguyen, the Trinh, the Truong, the Doan in Ha Noi; the Pham, the Dang in Hai Duong; the Hoang, the Do, the Mai, the Ha in Bac Ninh; the Le in Thanh Hoa; the Bui in Hung Yen... The Nguyen family still keeps the largest number of stelae (more than 30). These stelae are mainly found in the Red River Delta provinces and the northern part of Central Vietnam, including Ha Noi, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Vinh Phuc, Vinh Phuc, Ha Tinh, Hai Phong².

² Studying and introducing the genealogical stelae in Vietnam, there are noticeable articles such as: Thuy, Truong Thi (2007), “The inscription about the Trinh family worshipping house in An Chan Bai Khe) in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (2008)”, *Notice of Sino-Nom Studies in 2007*; Thuc, Nguyen Huy (1989), “The genealogy inscribed on stone of the Ngo family in Dong Do”, *Sino-Nom Journal*, No. 1; Mai Hong (1988), “Le Sao and his clan through the stele at the Le family worshipping house in Pham

Stele inscriptions about family genealogy are an important part of the system of clan stelae found in all families, from commoners to mandarins, even in the royal family. Family genealogy inscriptions carved on stone stelae are more enduring than family annals written in paper, being able to last for thousands of years if they are well preserved. This type of inscription often transmits information about the origin, death anniversary, tombs, and merits of a family's ancestors. For family members, genealogy inscriptions of their own family are very important, even more than other kinds of stelae, because, through these inscriptions, they can find their origin and better know their ancestors' merits, and valuable teachings from their predecessors. *Lê thị phả hệ huân nghiệp bi kí* (the inscription about the genealogy and merits of the Le family) found at the worshipping house of the Le Si family in Hoang Giang Commune, Nong Cong District, Thanh Hoa Province, compiled in the 25th year of Canh Hung (1704) is a quite early stele with genealogy inscription. The content records the family background, learning process, examination, and mandarin career of Doctoral Laureate Le Nhan Triet and his son, Doctoral Laureate Le Si Can [year of compilation: 1704, code: 55644-55647]. This stele provides a lot of information about the well-known Le family in Nong Cong District, about the background, origin, and biography of Doctoral Laureates

Le Nhan Triet and Le Si Can, especially the year of death of Le Nhan Triet that cannot be found in any document. According to the stele inscription, he died in the year of Binh Dan (i.e. 1686), so he lived to be 74 years old.

Trần tộc bi kí (the inscription about the Trần family, code: 1271/1297/1298) at the worshipping house of the Tran family in Dan Phuong District, Ha Noi, provides quite a lot of information: i) This Tran family originally came from the Nguyen family. All ancestors from the fourth to eighth generations had the surname Nguyen, only from the third generation onwards the surname was changed to Tran. ii) The Tran family in Dan Phuong District is the family of Doctoral Laureate Tran Danh Tieu, pen-name Phac Nha, pseudonym *Cổ Trai tiên sinh*, who passed the royal exam in the year of Quy Suu under the reign of Long Duc (1733). His biography and background are incomplete in documents, especially his year of death and life span. Fortunately, the stele inscription notes that he lived to the age of 72. Thus based on his birth year of 1709, his year of death can be determined as 1781. The inscription also clearly states that he died on the first day of the ninth lunar month. In addition, the inscription reveals many of his titles that are not mentioned in other documents. The inscription also provides information about his two wives' names and death anniversaries. This is very important information about a Vietnamese scholar.

Nguyễn Thám hoa gia phả kí (the inscription about the family genealogy of the Third Highest Doctoral Laureate Nguyen) at the worshipping house of Nguyen Huy Tu in Can Loc District, Ha

Xa, Dinh Xa, Binh Luc - Ha Nam", in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (1988), *Notice of Sino-Nom Studies in 1988*; Hoang Le (2000), "Another genealogy inscription on stone", in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (2000), *Notice of Sino-Nom Studies in 2000*, etc.

Tinh Province records the genealogy of the Third Highest Doctorial Laureate Nguyen Huy Oanh. The ancestor of this Nguyen family was originally born in Chenliu District (China) and was a scholar sent to the South (Vietnam) by the Tang Court. The inscription provides a lot of valuable information about the famous Nguyen family in Can Loc District: the family's origin and background, the biography of Third Highest Doctorial Laureate Nguyen Huy Oánh. The inscription fully records the date of birth, learning process, marriage, building a house, examination, mandarin career, building a bridge, and founding a market [year of compilation: 1754, call number: 56682-56683]. This inscription is compiled by Nguyen Huy Oanh himself, so information about this Nguyen family is highly accurate. This is a vivid panorama of this well-known Third Highest Doctorial Laureate.

In the stele inscriptions about family genealogy, we could meet several famous scholars and doctoral laureates of the country.

3. Stele inscriptions about reciprocity-based family worship (*hậu tộc*)

These are a part of the system of worshipping stelae found in Vietnam (Buddhist cult, god worship, sage worship, family worship, etc.). At the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, there are about 120 rubbings of *hậu tộc* stele inscriptions. Like other kinds of worshipping stelae, those about *hậu tộc* originate from good sentiments between people and people in conformity with the practice of “*đầu dào báo lý*” (receiving a peach and returning a plum). A difference between the *hậu tộc* stele inscriptions is that they show emotional reciprocity

within a specific family. Most families in Vietnam have this type of stelae, notable the Nguyen, the Tran, the Dang, the Vu, the Ha, the Ngo in Hai Duong; the Le, the Doan in Thanh Hoa; the Pham in Nam Dinh; the Hoang in Hung Yen, etc. Like clan stelae in general, the *hậu tộc* stelae are mainly seen in the Red River Delta and the northern part of Central Vietnam; the provinces with the largest number of *hậu tộc* stelae are Ha Noi (33 ones) and Hai Duong (30).

Hậu tộc stele inscriptions mainly date back to the Nguyen Dynasty, the earliest is *Trần tộc bi ký* (the inscription about the Tran family) at the worshipping house of the Tran in Truc Tri Commune, Thanh Lam District, Hai Duong Province, compiled in the 17th year of Canh Hung (1756) [call number: 37326-37327]. It is possible to say that *hậu tộc* stelae started to appear under the Restored Le Dynasty and exploded in the Nguyen Dynasty, especially in the reign of Bao Dai (30 stelae).

Hậu tộc stele inscriptions reflect the reciprocity among members of the clan over many generations. The structure of a *hậu tộc* inscription is often divided into two specific parts: the first about the reason for the election of worshipped persons, and the second about the worshipping rituals. The worshipped person can be a person donating money or his relatives; this depends on the agreement between the donator and the family. The worshipping regulations are very clear. Depending on a family, the way of worship is different, but generally votive offerings include liquor, meat, areca and betel nuts, a bunch of bananas, and votive papers. These are traditional offerings in worshipping ceremonies conducted by Vietnamese people.

Hậu tộc bi kí (the inscription about the family worship) at the worshipping house of the Tran family, Quoc Tuan Commune, Nam Sach District, Hai Duong, writes: “It is said that a person presents a peach, we return a plum’ - does it mean reciprocation here? Our clan, in the year of Tan Mui, built a two-compartment ceremonial hall, at a high cost. A woman in the clan, Tran Thi Quy, contributed 30 silver coins and gave 15 coins for the clan to spend. Grateful for her contributions, the clan elected her parents for the family worship. Annually, on their death anniversaries, the clan sells crops from the family’s fields for two silver coins to cost the anniversaries. Every year during the Lunar New Year festival, they are worshipped together with Mr. Vuong. On the death anniversaries (of other people), they are also invited and worshipped at the left and right altars. This agreement is signed by all branches of the clan. The rituals are listed below and inscribed in the stone for transmission forever. Regulation: on the death anniversary, (votive offerings are) two chickens, a tray of sticky rice, a jar of liquor, and 100 votive papers. Regulation: after the ceremony, her family receives a chicken, areca nuts, and liquor” [year of compilation: 1931, call number: 37328-37329]. In this inscription, the worshipping regulations are very clear: Ms. Tran Thi Quy’s parents are elected to be worshipped, their death anniversaries are celebrated, they are invited on the anniversary of Mr. Vuong, and they are regularly worshipped at the left and right altars.

It is possible to see that those elected for reciprocation-based family worship enjoy high rights and privileges, being worshipped not only in normal ceremonies

but also together with the clan’s ancestors and people with meritorious services. The worship did not end in several years but lasted forever. The election of worshipped persons is an important family affair, so an agreement would be made and signed by the entire family. It is also written in stele inscription so that it will never be forgotten. This is a way to honor those who have great contributions to the family. The election of the family’s worshipped people is a cultural beauty of Vietnamese families, in line with the nation’s principle of “drinking water, remembering its source”. To some extent, it also partly reflects daily life in contemporary villages and communes. *Hậu tộc* stele inscriptions have their charm thanks to their practicality and humanity.

4. Stele inscriptions about family conventions

Family/clan conventions are the regulations on some common issues within the family/clan and are valid only for a specific family/clan. The covenants are created by families, so each family has its conventions. Not being the State’s laws, family covenants still have some certain coerciveness within a family: those who have merits are awarded while guilts are punished, or regulations on worshipping ceremonies and those on the family’s affairs¹. At the Institute of Sino-

¹ Studying stele inscriptions about family conventions, there are noticeable articles, such as Hoa, Nguyen Kim (1999), “Family conventions in some stele inscriptions at the family worshipping houses in Kien Thuy District”, *Sino-Nom Journal*, No. 2; Quynh, Mai Thu (2018), “Common property in the family life of Vietnamese people under the Le-Nguyen dynasties through family conventions written in stone stelae”, in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies (2018), *Sino-Nom Study 2018*, Thế giới Publishers, Ha Noi.

Nom Studies, there are about 70 rubbings of stele inscriptions on family conventions. This is a small number but it is enough to reflect regulations within families in Vietnam. Stelae about family covenants mainly concentrate in the Red River Delta and the northern part of Central Vietnam, Ha Noi, and v̄ Hai Duong are the two provinces with the largest numbers of these stelae, 19 and 7 respectively.

Vũ tộc thứ chi bi kí (the stele inscription of the second branch of the Vu family) at the worshipping house of the Vu family in Cam Dong Hamlet, Viet Hung Commune, Kim Thanh District, Hai Duong, notes:

“Regulation: on the 12th day of the second lunar month every year, for the worship of ancestors and predecessors, all family members, male and female, must contribute 5 strings of coins. On the day of the ceremony, money is collected for the full amount to purchase votive offerings. The entire clan goes to clean the graveyard. That’s regulation.

Regulation: For ancestors who are jointly worshipped, each pays three strings of coins. At the ceremony, a tray of food is prepared for the rituals at the worshipping house. That’s regulation.

Regulation: when still living, each person who will be worshipped by the family must contribute 1 *sào* of rice field to the family for cultivation. At the ceremony, 30 bowls of rice are used for making the meal. After the ritual, pork is presented to donators. That’s regulation.

Regulation: the clan repairs damaged ceremonial stuff at the worshipping house. That’s regulation.

Regulation: within the family, if a girl is born or gets married, she must present a pig

head, ten areca nuts, and three jars of liquor for the ceremony at the worshipping house. That’s regulation.

Regulation: if a member dies on the 12th day of the second lunar month when the ancestral worshipping ceremony is conducted, the clan offers him a tray of food. That’s a regulation” [year of compilation: 1867, call number: 41516-41518].

This stele reveals regulations on the ancestral worshipping ceremony, cleaning the graveyard, repairing ceremonial stuff, and paying tribute to the deceased.

Things mentioned in the stele inscriptions about family conventions are practices to remember ancestors and the clan’s deceased members, so these conventions are very humane. Caring for ancestors is a cultural value of Vietnamese people, coming from the love for family members. Though originally influenced by Confucianism, these stelae later developed with their characteristics of Vietnamese families. Family conventions are general regulations of a family, very necessary to maintain the family’s stability and development. There is a view that regulations in family conventions will bind and inhibit the development of family members. However, that is not the case. From a positive perspective, it is these regulations and covenants that promote the development of families and their members, so that they can live more actively and more responsibly for the clan and society. In addition, these family conventions also contributed to the stability of Vietnamese village culture for several centuries.

5. Stele inscriptions about successful examinees

Family stele inscriptions about successful examinees contain a lot of interesting and

valuable information. Stele inscriptions provide information about family members who were successful in exams, including many well-known scholars. There are about 40 family stelae about this topic.

Mai học sĩ từ đường bi kí (the inscription at the family worshipping house of the Imperial Scholar Mai) at the temple of Mai Anh Tuan, Hau Trach Hamlet, Nga Trach Commune, Nga Son District, Thanh Hoa Province, praises Third Highest Doctoral Laureate Mai Anh Tuan: He became a Third Highest Doctoral, he was a talented scholar and a treasure of the society [year of compilation: 1867, call number: 47308-47309].

Nguyễn tộc Thám hoa công từ bi kí (the inscription at the shrine of the Third Highest Doctoral Laureate of the Nguyen family) in Thanh Hoa City praises the Le-dynasty Third Highest Doctoral Laureate Nguyen The Khanh as a “great man of all times” who was good at literature since his childhood. According to the stele inscription, he became a Third Highest Doctoral Laureate in the royal exam held in the year of Dinh Suu and later the Second Deputy Minister of Rites. When his family’s dignitaries decided to repair the family’s worshipping house in the winter, a new three-compartment tile-roofed house was built for ancestral worship. He was worshipped in the central compartment [call number: 17736].

The two above stelae provide valuable information about Third Highest Doctoral Laureate Mai Anh Tuan Third Highest Doctoral Laureate Nguyen The Khanh in Thanh Hoa Province, affirming their fame and talent. Thus, the artifacts are very useful in studying the two scholars’ life and career.

In Vietnam, some successful families originated from other places. *Nga Son Thạch Giản hậu trạch Phạm tộc bi chí* (The stele inscription of the Pham family in Nga Son Thach Gian) at the Pham family worshipping house, Hau Thach Hamlet, Nga Thach Commune, Nga Son District, mentioning the genealogy of the Pham family, writes: “The Pham family previously lived in Suzhou. Under the Ly Dynasty, (the family) moved to the South, pursued a literary career, and settled down in Thach Tuyen, Nga Son District, for more than 1,000 years so far. The great patriarch is Huyen Khoa, pseudonym Phuong Son, his tomb is located right in the village, in the west facing the east. His death anniversary is on the 15th day of the second lunar month. His wife is Le Thi, pseudonym Dieu Tu, and her death anniversary is on the 12th day of the second lunar month. The great patriarch passed the royal exam under the Ly Dynasty and worked as an academician at the Royal Academy, posthumous name Chinh Thuan. The patriarch passed the royal exam under the Ly Dynasty and worked as the Rector of the Imperial University, posthumous name Y Duc. The patriarch passed the royal exam under the Ly Dynasty and became a scholar at the Royal Academy, posthumous name Hue Trung. The patriarch was promoted to be the Great Butler under the Ly Dynasty, then Senior Commander, titled the Marquis of Toan Nham, posthumous name Phuc Truc...” [year of compilation: 1909, call number: 47312-47313]. This stele reveals the background and origin of the Pham family in Nga Thach Commune, Nga Son District, Thanh Hoa Province.

This family originated in Suzhou and was a family good in literature, with many successful examinees who worked as courtiers in feudal dynasties in Vietnam (Ly, Tran, Le). The Royal Academy and the Imperial University are two highly-respected academic institutions, responsible for training the country's talents. The selection of people to work in these two institutions is very strict. Thus, with two people working for the Royal Academy and one for the Imperial University, the Pham family is proved to be a family of many talents and academic traditions. But why did the Pham family migrate from Suzhou to Nga Son District? This is an unanswerable question due to insufficient evidence. But no matter what reason they moved to the South, it is impossible to deny their contributions to feudal dynasties in Vietnam. Under these dynasties, they had family members who passed royal exams and became officials: eight under the Ly Dynasty, three under the Tran, four under the Le. The fact that the Pham family from Suzhou came to settle in Nga Son District, Thanh Hoa Province under the Ly Dynasty, many members took part in royal exams and worked as mandarins of the Ly Dynasty proves that the dynasty's policy on human resource was quite open. The dynasty was ready to recruit foreigners as long as those are capable and ready to serve the country. Regarding the place name Suzhou/To Chau, there are two places: Suzhou City in Jiangsu (China) and To Chau Ward in Ha Tien Town, Kien Giang Province, Vietnam (Chenla Kingdom under the Ly Dynasty). However, Ha Tien Town in Vietnam was established in the

mid-17th century by Mac Cuu¹; the name Ha Tien was also coined by Mac Cuu. Thus, it is speculated that the place name To Chau in Ha Tien appeared in the mid-17th century. Meanwhile, according to the stele inscription, the Pham family from Suzhou arrived Nga Son District, Thanh Hoa Province under the Ly Dynasty (11th-13th centuries). Therefore, it is assumed that this place's name is present-day Suzhou City in Jiangsu Province, China. At the end of the stele inscription, it reads: "Former Canton Chief Pham Ngoc Diem, conferred with the posthumous name Cung Phac, donates one side of this stone stele. The foreman is Pham Huu Bang. Examinee Pham [Tong] Tien respectively compiles. Examinee Pham Kim Cuc respectively writes. Elder Pham Gia Chi respectively inscribes". This shows that until the Nguyen Dynasty, in the reign of Duy Tan, third year (1909), descendants of the Pham family in Nga Thach Commune, Nga Son District still pursued literary and academic careers, becoming courtiers. It can be said that, for a millennium and through many dynasties as well as historical ups and downs, the Pham family from Suzhou still retained its lineage. It is rare. If the information in the stele inscription is verified correctly, it is a great contribution to the family stele inscription, revealing an important scholarly family in Thanh Hoa Province.

Conclusion

Clan stele inscriptions are an important topic in Vietnamese culture, containing valuable

¹ Mac Cuu or Mac Kinh Cuu (1655-1735) is a Chinese merchant who explored and formed the region of Ha Tien (Kien Giang) in the 17th-early 18th centuries in Vietnam.

information about family culture. In any place and at any time, the sense of ancestry and origin is always deeply ingrained in every Vietnamese's mind and blood. This sense is first and foremost expressed in ancestral worship. The death anniversaries of ancestors held at the family worshipping house, together with close relationships in daily life between family members and community activities, help to bring people together and promote mutual assistance. Family and clan relations are important factors in nurturing and developing the personality of each individual in society. Clan stelae and family culture help to form the national culture, and in some ways, also create and develop Vietnamese cultural identities □

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