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DE-TERRITORIALIZATION MENTALITY AND SOCIAL RECONFIGURATION IN THE CONDITION OF RELIGION IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM

***Abstract:** By the qualitative and quantitative approach, the article aims to study religion in the Central Highlands through the perspective of social institutions as tradition and modernity, formality and informality. The article focuses on the contents such as the de-territorial process of mentality, the occupation traditional authority of Christianity in the Central Highlands and social reconfiguration in the ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands.*

***Keywords:** De-territorialization, mentality, configuration, society.*

Introduction

Religion in the Central Highlands has been reviewed in term of the social institution between tradition and modernity, formality and informality as one of the key tasks of this study. To aim at examining the role of informal social institutions in the context of sustainable development in the Central Highlands, this paper focuses on the religious dimension of the Central Highlands in ensuring the spiritual needs, the spiritual life of the ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands.

The concept of sustainable development comprises many indicators in researching the development of a community, a region. The religious aspects determined within the spiritual field. Therefore, the main content of this article focus on the role of religion in the spiritual life of people. In addition, the author identifies the religious context in

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the Central Highlands in the relationship between traditional beliefs and the major religions in the world that have been introduced into the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands.

Therefore, this article indicates some hypotheses to explain the conversion (traditional religions) to the universal religions of the indigenous peoples in the Central Highlands. Is this transformation truly a process of dissolving traditional values as the previous viewpoints such as “Nearly a quarter of the total population of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands are no longer believe in the deities, they do not perform traditional rituals(Đình Văn Hạnh, 2010; Nguyễn Cao Thanh, 2013), Or is it considered as a process of “de-territorialization” (giải lãnh thổ hóa) and “re-territorialization”(tái lãnh thổ hóa) of the cultural mentality of the indigenous peoples in the Central Highlands?

“*Deterritorialization*” and “*Reterritorialization*” is a concept created by Deleuze and Guatteri. Its meaning has been in relation to the examination a social phenomenon in its process rather than a transformation between tradition and modernity. It is a process of “becoming different” rather than a framework of binary structural thinking, or a process of development according to the viewpoint of evolution. On the other hand, the deterritorialization is included within the territory as its variant vector. What is the operating mechanism of the deterritorialization? Deleuze and Guattari emphasized the way things work together rather than how they exist, considering the tendency to bring creative change rather than “reality” (Bùi Văn Nam Sơn, 2013). The term “mental territory” (lãnh thổ tâm thức) in this article implies a mental space, a worldview of the community rather than a conception of territory as the nation.

1. The historical context of religious institutions in the Central Highlands

The religious context of the Central Highlands at present is quite diverse with the forms of primitive religions. The previous research on the Central Highlands showed that the basic institution of ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands is the village (bon,

play, etc.). Therefore, the village institution is organized, operated closely with clear structure- function. In particular, the religious factor plays an important role in the management of villagers' social life. To indicate the village institution of the Rade people as follows:

According to Đỗ Hồng Kỳ (2010), the village of the Rade people include the inhabitant components as follows:

- Pô lãn is a woman who manages the land of the clan, the village. However, it is just nominal work. In fact, her husband does the job. Pô lãn also takes the role of Pô pin êa (owner of landing-stage or wharf). He is the owner of the village.

Pô pin êa guides the villagers perform the communal rituals (worshiping the landing-stage, the Land deity, leaving the village, etc.), resolves conflicts within the village as well as with the other villages. Beside the village owner, there are some village elders (khoa nông buôn) who help manage the land and take care the landing-stage.

The village owner is not elected by the villagers, someone is rich and has good knowledge of the deity, of the village work will be recognized and respected by the community. Successor the owner of the village is the best husband among his daughters' husbands.

- Pô phat kdi is responsible for reconciling the contradictions and frictions among the members of the village. He bases on the Articles of klei bhiã (customary law) to accuse someone of violating the custom.

- Pô riu yang (mystery-man) is the person who performs the ritual. Along with the mystery-man, diviner (mjào) is the spiritual leader of the Rade people who helps them relieve pressure when they are sick, there is drought and crop failure.

The rest are villagers. There are two types of people among them that need to attend: "dãm" and "hlun". "Dãm" is a common word to call the healthy, talented, courageous, young men. If there is difficult work such as hunting beast, fighting with people from outside), these men are directly involved. The word "dãm" is associated with a personal name, for example, Dãm Kô, Dãm Wôn, Dãm Sãn, etc..

“hlun” is a person (himself or his family) violates the customary law, he must become a servant in a rich family if he cannot compensate by wealth.

The inhabitants live in the Rade village called *mnuih buôn sang*. There is a customary law, they have to comply. If someone does not comply it, he/she is regarded as violating the customary law (Đỗ Hồng Kỳ, 2010).

However, since the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands have adopted the world religions, their spiritual worldview is affected, or they have to adjust to be suitable with the other spiritual worldview system so the village institutions in the Highlands probably have been changed in comparison with the traditional village institutions.

According to our survey data, the religious context in the Central Highlands is quite diverse with religions such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Caodaism. However, there is a domination of three religions as follows: traditional religion, Catholicism and Protestantism. It reflects the historical dimension of the Central Highlands' development associated with foreign missions, as well as, the migration of Kinh people.

According to Nguyễn Ngọc, French missionaries were the first missionaries spread Catholicism in the Central Highlands. Because of the “forbidden religion” (the Christian elimination) policy of the Nguyen dynasty, the Christian missionaries found the way to the Central Highlands. They travelled in many different ways, after several failures, they finally reached the Bana region in Kon Tum and established the first parish on the plateau. There is a museum (called Traditional Chamber at the seminary in Kon Tum town) illustrates quite vivid and accurate the route of evangelisation in the Central Highlands. Many missionaries were also devoted and erudite ethnologists. They left deep and varied research on the Central Highlands (Nguyễn Ngọc, 2008: 144-145).

Based on the life circle history, Catholicism was introduced in the Central Highlands for four generations (the Catholic families converted since the beginning). Thus, it can be said that these groups of people

have actually transformed their traditional religious mentality to the Christian mind.

If Catholicism settled in the Central Highlands for more than 100 years through the development of parishes and spreading among the ethnic minorities with many imprints of French missionaries, Vietnamese clergies, Protestantism was introduced and developed there later, especially during the Republic of Vietnam, with the imprints of American missionaries, then the indigenous people continued the evangelical mission and the Protestantism has been expanded in the Central Highlands at present.

The evangelical development in the Central Highlands has been clearly shown. By 2009, there were 362.689 Protestants in the Central Highlands, most of them were ethnic minorities: 98.3% in Gia Lai; 90.5% in Đắk Lắk. And that phenomenon is explained by faith itself with the following reasons: “Nearly a quarter of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands is no longer believing in the deities, do not perform traditional rituals, etc..” (Đình Văn Hạnh, 2010; Nguyễn Cao Thanh, 2013).

Therefore, it can be said that the Central Highlands’ religious context to be associated with the history of the land. Since the beginning of the last century, the Central Highlands has opened the door to world religions, which means that the Central Highlands accepted the ideological system of these religions with the Western thought. Like many other researchers, I wonder how the different, contradictory thought systems can coexist in many forms. As mentioned above, the content of this article indicates assumptions and interpretations of the transformation of mentality from the viewpoint of “Deterritorialization” and “Reterritorialization”.

2. Deterritorialization mentality and occupation authority

It can be said that in the traditional mind of indigenous ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, all beings/things have souls. The deities dwell in the objects around them. Therefore, in their worldview, they always comply with the customs, practices,

worshiping in order to pray peace and prosperity for the village. Their traditional religious life is a valuable framework that can regulate human behavior in that cultural space. It can be seen as a traditional institution of the indigenous peoples that governs and regulates social relationships in order to ensure the stability and preservation the communities' traditions.

However, the migration of other ethnic groups to the Central Highlands, the evangelization of religions such as Catholicism and Protestantism has created changes in many different dimensions. The traditional religion has been strongly influenced by the world religions' institutions. During my research conducted in the Central Highlands, I interviewed people who have good knowledge about the land and also noted the same thing as mentioned above of Đinh Văn Hạnh (2010) and Nguyễn Cao Thanh (2013).

A Rade mystery-man told us: At present, people in the village do not believe much in deities, if they believe they will invite me to worship, no one invites me to worship, so it means that people do not believe (Male, Rade, 85 years old, mystery-man of the village).

If the traditional values of the residents there have been eliminated, dissolved by the process of exchange, of acculturation. What made the Central Highlands' inhabitants quickly eradicated their traditional values in order to transform into another worldview in their spiritual life. Some viewpoints showed that the performance of traditional rituals, worshiping with the sacrifice of pigs, playing gong is considered as a "waste" and bad customs. However, despite the pressure of discourses from the Kinh people or the other major religions, this transformation is not simple, as it requires a change in the mind. If the change of the mentality of the Central Highlands' people is a de-territorial process of mentality, the other interpretations of the divine system.

2.1. "Yang" or "God": New interpretations of the divine

In the divine system of the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, Yang is a concept implied divine/ deity. According to the

view of each specific ethnic group, there are different Yang, and in their rituals, people often use the word “worship Yang” to show the practice of folk religion.

However, how did the world religions (mainly Christianity) enter into the life and change the worldview or deterritorialize mentality of the Central Highlands’ inhabitants? Please listen to the explanation of a Protestant minister on this issue: The Rade people worship many deities but the greatest deity called Yang (also God); Though they worship deities but the greatest deity they worship is God (Ông Tròi). Or the case of a village elder (Rơ Ngao people), he was asked that you are a Catholic, do you believe in Yang? He asserted: believe in Yang, believe in God (in the Heaven), believe in the society, the State, the Party (on the Earth), when I die I believe in God, my soul believes in God, my body believes the government so people say that *when we live, we follow the Party, when we die, we follow God* (a village elder of Rơ Ngao people, a Catholic).

Thus, this village elder, in his mind, identifies Yang and God is One. In addition, his words contain many social dimensions. He believes in Yang, in God, in the Party and the State. The traditional, contemporary, formal, informal social institutions are reflected in his perception. On the other hand, his worldview is not homogeneous according to a mental system, but it manifests interlacing of institutions and perhaps like the other people there in the process of transformation their mind.

2.2. Discourse on modernity and occupation authority

The other explanation of divine probably influences the change of mind, the world view of the people, which also leads to the possession of traditional authority by those who have the knowledge and knowledge of religion. Because when believers believe in the interpretation of religion, they also begin changing their cognition in the course of becoming another. This change will be shown by a story of the Catholic village elder who told about the ancestor worship as follows: we are Catholics, we do not worship our parents (when they died). We pray or demand priests pray, the Catholics do not

worship or offer offerings. People who practice the new house, new rice rituals are not Catholics, the Catholics do not practice these rituals. The Catholics just pray in every morning and every evening. (A village elder of Rơ Ngao people, a Catholic).

Perhaps the acceptance of a religion, believers have also begun to change their minds and adjust their ideas to conform to the principles of that religion and so can this process be considered as the reterritorialization of the mind, and the religious institution occupies authority. Believers voluntarily follow religious rituals and practices. On the other hand, those who do not follow any religion, but they just comply with the traditional customs, still maintain their traditional worldview of the polytheism, keep their ancestral traditions through the rituals.

God has been identified as the great god Yang. They think that it is enough to worship God, the spirit of Protestantism worshipping God in the heart and working hard to glorify God, it seems to be fit for the discourses of modernity which are supported by the official institutions of the State. At the same time, Catholicism is not much different from Protestantism, but it gradually introduces the traditional cultural activities into religious rituals (can be considered as a companion with the national culture). However, in the aspect of social institutions, it can be considered as the occupation of the traditional power within the ethnic minority community in the Central Highlands. The villages' customary laws have been gradually replaced by the religious principles and the canon (especially the aspect of marriage and family). For example, according to the canon, we are married, we cannot divorce. It is forbidden, if we believe in our religion, we will believe in the religious law that we cannot leave each other, if we divorce we will violate the religious law. In the past, we married, gave birth and earned for living. It is also a law, but now we comply with the religious law (the commandments), then the religious law is more strict, Catholicism is more strict (a male Catholic, Mạ people).

If the social institution of a village has binding that governs the behaviour of individuals in the community, the contemporary society

has competition among the social institutions. Individuals in the community must comply with the institutions and the institutions that are being formed. There are also conflicts, competition among institutions to individuals in the community find consensus.

Through the qualitative data, it can be said that the traditional or contemporary institutions have their own principles and operated mechanisms in order to maintain the stability of the system and of the social community. However, these principles and mechanisms must be consistent with the ideological configuration of the people and if the principles are no longer appropriate, they will be excluded from the operation of social institutions. The rules that are suitable with the ideological configuration also dominate the power, govern the behaviour of individuals in the community.

A number of research on the Central Highlands showed the power of the religious leaders in the Catholic parishes or Protestant local churches. They play a role and have a strong impact on the believers' life. It is possible that, in these cases, the authority of religious institutions overwhelms the authority of other institutions in the social community. Sometimes they also have mission of preserving the cultural and spiritual values of the community, speech of a priest as follows: I do not come there to break the your customs and habits, I would like to notice that you have to keep your customs. The issue of marriage, in particular, you have to register in the commune authorities, then come here to learn, when you finish your study, you can apply your custom, so you will ensure your life better. If you just love each other, then you agree with each other, then you come here, I could not arrange. You have to keep in your mind that I want to restore your culture, your grandparents' culture.

Thus, the religious life in the Central Highlands today has been tending to change the mind, or according to Deleuze, it is deterritorialization and re-territorialization of mind by the way of becoming other based on their own cultural background and their worldview. Yang is considered as the image of the greatest God. This process is considered as a rationalization of the image of God

according to the ethnic minorities' worldview. As a result of this deterritorialization process, the religious institutions dominates the traditional authority by the power of modernity discourse, which has been propagated and implemented by the State management agencies through cultural and social programs, policies.

Deterritorialization and reterritorialisation is a parallel process to the process of social modernization in the Central Highlands. The world religions' institutions have been introduced in the ethnic groups in the Central Highlands and they tried to unify the concept of divinity with traditional religious institutions. At the same time, the religious institutions encroach on the spiritual space, bring modern cultural values into the consciousness of the people. The cognitive space of the people is not only limited in the context of the village, but it also broadens the perception of the people in the context, values of globalization which is already contained in the world religions.

3. Transformation of the social configuration: the division of power, pluralism

The process of deterritorialization and reterritorialisation of the mind within the ethnic minority communities in the Central Highlands is a social process that has promoted the structural change of the villages in the Central Highlands. In the past, the village was the settlement of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands, the contemporary social structure is pluralism. Therefore, the social operating mechanism is more complex than the old social context, the old mind. Previously, in the village, everything was managed by the village elder council, they could invite mystery-man who heal physical and mental diseases when they needed.

In the context of contemporary society, the structure of the village has modern elements, but it is no longer plays a unique role, but it must share functions with the other social structures such as parishes, local churches. Each social structural institution will have leading individuals who play roles in their social institution. An individual can not play many roles in the community, but the contemporary society has many individuals with different roles involved in solving community's issues. Sometimes co-

operation, but also situations arise conflict conflict. Contemporaries in the current social context are fragmented, pluralistic, and indeterminate, which are characteristic elements of modern social context. Sometimes, people agree, cooperate, but conflicts can arise in some situations. Generally, fragmentation, pluralism and inhomogeneity is the characteristics of the contemporary social context.

In my research on the power structure between the village elders (già làng), the religious leaders (giáo phu) or the village headman (trưởng thôn), an interview as follows: Two men [village elder, religious leader] were the same, they had to discuss in order to have consensus. The village elders council, religious leader, reputable people had to discuss to make decisions (Catholic man, born in 1942, Rơ Ngao people, religious leader).

In addition, in terms of living space and social relations, the formation of Catholic parishes or Protestant local churches led the living space and social space of the village to the pressure of dissolving. Because religions also have their own operating mechanism with parishes, local churches. The parishioners meet, exchanges among the villages of a parish so they do not cluster in a village. It also changes the habits, social relationships and communication spaces for individuals in communities.

It can be said that the Central Highlands has now transformed into modernization so their cultural values is not only closed within a village scale, but they are also expanded into larger spaces along with religious institutions, the State. Individuals do not only behave according to the traditional values but they are also influenced by cultural values of the other institutions. The traditional belief institutions are no longer sufficiently capable of controlling and regulating the behaviour of the people. At present, the fragmentation, pluralism of mind has caused a complexity and a diversity in the social configuration of the Central Highlands' village.

In short, there are many different paths in the process of development, in the present situation, it is an illusion when dreaming about a simple space of traditional beliefs in order to keep the Central

Highlands intact. In the contemporary situation, the Central Highlands has been fragmented, divided into pieces and linked with the exogenous cultural pieces to form a new cultural and religious context. The world religions' organizations also have strategies of adapting to national culture to co-exist and preserve the traditional customs. If this is the way to be considered for development in the Central Highlands./.

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