

**MINH SƯ RELIGION IN SOCIAL LIFE OF INHABITANTS
IN THE SOUTHERN VIETNAM FROM THE SECOND HALF
OF THE 19TH CENTURY TO THE FIRST HALF
OF THE 20TH CENTURY**

***Abstract:** Minh Sư religion was introduced into Vietnam at the end of the 19th century by Dongchu monk of Xiantiandao in Chaoyuandong (Guangdong). Then this religion was spread over the country. During its most flourishing period, from the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, Minh Sư religion built more than 100 temples (often called Buddhist temple) throughout Vietnam, attracted thousands of the Chinese and Vietnamese followers. Over 150 years of historical vicissitude, Minh Sư religion has left more than 50 temples, mostly situated in the area from Hue city to the South Vietnam. Those temples with the Chinese style have preserved many cultural assets such as architecture, sculpture, image, plaques, parallel sentences, inscription, scriptures, etc. The temples were not only the spiritual space but also the convergence of the patriotic Vietnamese in the resistance to the French colonialists. It can be said that Minh Sư religion has influenced and had a great contribution to the development of the South Vietnam society.*

***Keywords:** South; Minh Sư religion; Xiantiandao.*

Introduction

In the fall of 2016, we had an opportunity to survey a folk religion in the South that was Minh Sư religion. The survey results at many locations such as Ngọc Hoàng Buddhist temple in Hồ Chí

*Department of Pedagogy, An Giang University

Minh City, Quang Nam Buddhist temple (Phật đường) in Hồ Chí Minh City, Quang Nam Buddhist temple in Vũng Tàu led us to survey temples of Minh Sư in Southwest (Tây Nam Bộ) such as Nam Nhã Buddhist temple in Cần Thơ City, Kim Sơn Buddhist temple in An Giang. Thanks to the documentary support and enthusiastic guidance of dignitaries, believers in the religion, we can indicate the religion that has been in the South for more than 150 years and has greatly contributed to Southern society.

The name Minh Sư religion or Tiên Thiên religion (Xiantiandao) has appeared in many studies on anthropology, religion, ethnography of Vietnamese authors such as Sơn Nam, Vương Hồng Sển, Phan An, Trần Hồng Liên, Huỳnh Ngọc Thu, Đinh Văn Hạnh, Lê Anh Dũng. Recently, many articles directly mentioned Minh Sư religion such as *Vài nét về Phật đường Nam tông Minh Sư đạo* (Discussion on Phật đường Nam tông Minh Sư religion) of Trần Tiến Thành, *Tông phái Minh Sư và giáo lý cứu thế* (Minh Sư religion and its messianic doctrine) of Trương Ngọc Tường, *Ngũ chi minh đạo - Minh sư đạo* (Ngũ chi religion and Minh Sư religion) of Huệ Nhân, *Giới thiệu về Ngũ chi Minh đạo và Minh Sư đạo ở Việt Nam* (Introduction to Ngũ chi religion and Minh Sư religion in Vietnam) of Nguyễn Ngọc Huân, *Minh lý đạo - Tam Tông Miếu tự tu tự độ hướng tới một xã hội hòa bình an lạc* (Minh lý religion - Tam Tông Miếu self-cultivation towards a peaceful society) of Nguyễn Hồng Dương. The authors provided an overview of the historical origin, development, doctrines, religious rites, social influence and showed many research questions.

Regarding this field, foreign authors also have many remarkable works such as Takeuchi Fusaji (Japan) *Sự truyền bá của tôn giáo dân gian Trung Quốc và quá trình bản địa hóa ở Việt Nam: Từ kinh sách được lưu trữ tại Viện Nghiên cứu Hán Nôm và Từ Tiên Thiên đạo đến Cao Đài: Tôn giáo dân gian cận đại Trung Quốc cắm rễ trên đất Việt Nam* (The spread of Chinese folk religions and the process of indigenization in Vietnam: research on scriptures

stored at the Institute of Han-Nom studies and Tiên Thiên religion, Caodaism: the Chinese folk religions in the early modern period in the Vietnamese land), Du Tử An (Hongkong) *Đạo mạch nam truyền: Sự truyền thừa và biến thiên của Tiên Thiên đạo từ Lĩnh Nam đến Việt Nam thế kỷ 20* (Propagation and variability of Tiên Thiên religion from Lĩnh Nam to Vietnam in the 20th century), Vương Thâm Phát (Malaysia) *Phát hiện mới về sự lưu truyền sớm nhất của Thanh Liên giáo ở Nam Dương* (New discovery of the earliest propagation of Thanh Liên religion in Indonesia), Ngụy Đình Minh (Hongkong) *Đại đạo hướng nam: Lưu truyền Tiên Thiên đạo ở Thái Lan* (Propagation of Tiên Thiên religion in Thailand). The aforementioned works provided valuable documents related to Minh Sư religion such as propagation, indigenization, religious activity, characteristics, social contribution, teachings, religious practices.

Based on the results of fieldwork surveys, scriptures, historical documents and the views of many scholars, this paper introduces to Minh Sư religion in the South Vietnam (Nam Bộ), and indicates contribution of this religion into Southern social development in the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century.

1. The introduction and influence of Minh Sư religion in Vietnam

Minh Sư religion's full name is Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư Đạo, French documents called đạo Phật Đường, it is a folk religion that was renamed from Tiên Thiên religion (Xiantiandao) in China when it was introduced to Vietnam in the middle of the 19th century. It can be said that Minh Sư religion has a close connection with the event propagation of zen by Dajian Huineng (the Sixth Patriarch or Sixth Ancestor of Chan) in the region of Lĩnh Nam (Southern Chan school of Buddhism). There are many different opinions about the name “đạo Minh Sư”. Some people believe that “Minh Sư” was the name of a leader who leads the devotees to pray; it means the last army (“Sư” in Chinese also means a military

unit) of the Ming dynasty who desired to “fight against Qing Dynasty”; “Minh Sư” was founded by a guru who lived under the Ming Dynasty. In my opinion, the first and second views are reasonable because they reflected patriotism and the aspiration to restore the former dynasty, on the one hand, they showed the believers’ attitude about the important role of the guru. It is possible that in the context of French invasion, the word “Minh Sư” was used to praise the ancestor of the religion, to show the non-political nature of the religion in order to avoid the supervision of the French colonialists.

Regarding the time of Tiên Thiên religion’s introduction, the hypotheses stated that it was introduced into Vietnam in the year 16th of king Tự Đức (1863). Based on records, this religion was propagated to Vietnam by the 16th patriarch named Đông Sơ from Bangkok (Thailand)¹, it was firstly spread among the Chinese immigrant community, then, it was propagated throughout the country. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, more than 100 Buddhist temples were built, which was the most flourishing period in the history of the religion. *Vô Cực Truyền Tông Chí* is a book circulated internally in Minh Sư Buddhist temples, it wrote about chronicles of Minh Sư religion from Shakyamuni Buddha to 1887, it particularly emphasized on the process of propagation in Southeast Asia². This book affirmed that Minh Sư religion inherited the meditation from Bodhidharma to Huineng (the Sixth Patriarch), the religion was interrupted for a while, Mã Công Đạo Nhất and Bạch Ngọc (a lay person) were considered as the 7th Patriarch. Later, this meditation was stalled for 700 years due to government ban and destruction. Since the Qing overthrew the Ming dynasty, the former mandarins were divided into two groups, the martial mandarins (officers) established Thiên Địa Association (Thiên Địa Hội), the civil mandarins founded Tiên Thiên religion (Tiên Thiên Đạo) who inherited the Buddhist school of La Úy Quân and became organizations with religious

sects and secretive gangs, nurtured the purpose of “against the Qing Dynasty, restored Ming Dynasty”.

Because the Qing were more and more powerful, constantly suppressed the opposition forces, the Minh Hương people immigrated throughout Southeast Asia, including Vietnam. Especially after the uprising of Nghĩa Hòa Đoàn, a part of the army fled to Vietnam, created the influence of Chinese religious beliefs in the South. Tiên Thiên religion spread to Vietnam through many routes. After a period of development, it was divided into 3 schools as follows: Tông Đức Tế was led by the great master Vương Đạo Thân; Tông Phổ Tế was led by the great monk Trần Đạo Quang and Tông Hoàng Tế was led by the great monk Lâm Đạo Nguyên. These three schools were divided into 5 sects such as Minh Thiện, Minh Lý, Minh Sư, Minh Tân, Minh Đường, they were commonly known as Ngũ chi minh đạo³.

In my opinion, before propagation of the ancestor Đông Sơ, Tiên Thiên religion had been present in Vietnam, it was introduced into Vietnam before the year 1863. Because the doctrine, religious rituals and cultivation method of Tiên Thiên religion that introduced into the North of Vietnam were different from the one that was taught by Mr. Đông Sơ in the South. Tonkin (Bắc Bộ) had existed Taoism, so Tiên Thiên religion was spread in the Taoist temples such as Ngọc Sơn, Quán Thánh, Bạch Mã without building new temples and shrines like in the South.

Since 1863, many Buddhist monasteries of Minh Sư religion have been built throughout the provinces and cities in the South. The earliest one is Quảng Tế Phật đường (Hà Tiên), Quảng Tế Phật đường (Hà Tiên), Chiêu Minh Phật đường (Cầu Kho, Hồ Chí Minh City), Long Hoa Phật đường (next to Chùa Ngọc Hoàng, Hồ Chí Minh City), Tam Tông Miếu (Hồ Chí Minh City), Quang Nam Phật đường (Hồ Chí Minh City), Nam Nhã Phật đường (Cần Thơ), Vân Nam Tự (Bình Định), Quang Nam Phật đường (Vũng Tàu), Vân Bửu Phật đường (Tiền Giang), Quán Âm Phật đường (Phú Quốc).

Tiên Thiên religion was gradually indigenized and popularized, for example, many Vietnamese deities such as Phù Đổng Thiên Vương, Công Chúa Liễu Hạnh, Trần Hưng Đạo, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm were worshiped along with the deities of this religion such as Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế, Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu, Tam Giáo tổ sư, Quán Âm Cổ Phật, Lã Động Tân. At the beginning of the 20th century, the movement of Fuji (a method of “planchette writing” or “spirit writing”) spread to the public, Minh Sư monasteries established mandala to pray, to cure illnesses or spiritual training, many Vietnamese deities also incarnated, taught and gave medicine.

On October 1st, 2008, the Government recognized this religious organization as Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư Đạo. The principle and purpose of the Church’s activities are “The quintessential unity of the three religions: Confucianism- Buddhism- Taoism in order to cultivate, practice, educate humanbeings towards goodness and deliverance”. Quang Nam Buddhist temple (Quang Nam Phật đường) in Ho Chi Minh City was chosen to be the headquarter. Master Trần Vận Như (Trần Tích Định) is the highest representative of the religion at present. According to statistics, there are 53 temples of Minh Sư religion in 18 provinces and cities, about 300 monks, nearly 12,000 followers.

2. The contributions of Minh Sư religion in the social life of the South

The spread of a religion to a new land is always associated with political, economic, cultural and historical factors. In the first half of the 19th century, the Qing Dynasty had to deal with the protest movements of many folk religions and the Western colonists’ invasion. The social context in China was similar to the one in Vietnam (the Nguyễn Dynasty faced the difficulties since the reign of Tự Đức king). The rise of folk religions in China was motivated by Taoists who believed in the power of theocracy, threatened the rule of the Qing Dynasty. There was main contradiction of society

such as the conflict between inhabitants and government (the Chinese and Mãn zú). Then, it gradually shifted to the conflict between the nation and the colonists (the Chinese and Westerners). The political movements of folk religions in Vietnam was the same “anti-French, restoration the country”.

Minh Sư religion was spread into Vietnam, Minh Sư temples became religious, cultural and educational centres in the South. They acted as a stronghold preserving traditional culture. Minh Sư religion had great contributions to Vietnamese society during the past 150 years, especially in the Southern region, where there are the most worshipping facilities. These contributions were divided into 5 aspects as follows:

2.1. Establishment a new cultivation in order to educate people

Three religions were introduced into Vietnam for a long time. Buddhism came from India and China in the 2nd century AD. Confucianism and Taoism arrived Vietnam during the Three Kingdoms period by the Sinology’s establishment of Shi Xie in Giao Châu. As a result of immersion in the atmosphere of the Three religions ideology for nearly 2,000 years, it is easy for the Vietnamese to absorb the innovative doctrines of the Three religions introduced from outside.

Minh Sư religion was officially spread into the South in 1863. The temples were built, attracted the attention of the Chinese and the Vietnamese followers. As a result of the acceptance of Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu religion, this religion believes that human nature is kind, however, after being born as a human, humanbeings lost the original source so it should restore the nature, if they success, they will return to the palace of Diêu Trì.

In the aspect of religious practice, Tiên Thiên religion (Xiantiandao) advocated the consolidation of the Three religions, practice Confucianism, preserve the Buddhist precepts and cultivate Taoism. It focused on basic of virtue such as cultivation,

maintenance of the three obediences (Buddha, Dhamma, Monk), five precepts. In addition to internal cultivation, Tiên Thiên religion also focused on external merits”⁴. Tiên Thiên religion worships the Goddesses Diêu Trì (Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu), it can be said that it is similar to the Mother worship of the Vietnamese so it has been easily absorbed by the Vietnamese.

Minh Sư religion proposed the concept of salvation from tribulation, reinterpretes the Three religions ideas. In the context of political and social fluctuations at that time, Vietnamese people needed a spiritual support, Minh Sư religion opened a door to lead, educate and save human beings, to enlighten them, it convinced a part of the Chinese and the Vietnamese to worship and cultivate.

2.2. Support for the patriotic movement and social reform

Vietnam passed a political crisis at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The Nguyễn Court was no longer rule the country, the French colonialists held power and suppressed the patriotic armed movements. Vietnamese society fell into a period of foreign rule, many patriotic leaders had many different methods of fighting to protect the country and promote social reform, they even used the spiritual method, a Japanese author named Takeuchi Fusaji stated that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the ouija (also known as a spirit board or talking board) movement was very popular in the North Vietnam. It can be said that it had a great effect on the folk religions, they penetrated the spiritual life of religious dignitaries and intellectuals. The religious activities were organized by intellectuals, the Confucian intellectuals in particular. Especially, since 1884, the French colonists officially took over and manipulated Vietnam, the intellectuals, on the one hand, tried to defend the villages, opposed the invading forces, on the other hand, they tried to preserve the traditional values that Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism through the ouija movement⁵.

During this period, many social innovation movement occurred along with many famous patriotic intellectuals such as Phan Chu Trinh, Phan Bội Châu, Phan Công Hón, Trần Cao Vân, etc.. They participated in the ouija of Taoist temple or Buddha temple to pray the way to save the country. For example, Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926) attended the ouija at Ngọc Sơn temple and Văn Võ shrine. Then, in 1908, the intellectuals of Reformed group began to promote reformed movement Duy Tân⁶. In 1913, Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Kỳ Ngoại Hầu Cường Để (1882-1951) stayed in Nam Nhã Phật đường (Cần Thơ) contacted with the intellectuals of Cochinchina as well as called for funds of Đông Du movement.

According to Trần Tiến Thành, *Nam Nhã Buddhist temple (Nam Nhã Phật đường)* used to be the headquarters of Duy Tân and Đông Du movement in the South. The monk Nguyễn Đạo Cơ of the temple directly involved Đông Du movement. The monk Long Khê and Mr. Nguyễn Đạo Cơ were imprisoned by the French because they supported for Đông Du movement. The monk Đinh Đạo Ninh of *Vân Bảo Buddhist temple (Vân Bảo Phật đường)* in Tiền Giang also directly participated in the uprising against the French and was exiled in Côn Đảo⁷. It can be said that Phật đường Minh Sư was the place where connected the patriotic intellectuals of the two regions: South - North in the liberation of the nation.

Đào Duy Anh spent a lot of time collecting and researching the ouija writing in the North (Bắc Bộ). He discovered that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ouija movement in the North of Vietnam, Ngọc Sơn temple published many the ouija books. The Sino- Nôm Institute's library still preserves about 150 the ouija books. Through the ouija, religious groups have made many types of propaganda notebooks, some Confucian intellectuals even translated them into Latin- Vietnamese (quốc ngữ) and spread them⁸. These ouija books called for social reform, education, acquisition science, economic development, promoting social modernization in order to catch up the progress of mankind.

2.3. Impact on the birth of other religions in the South

Minh Sư religion rapidly developed, deeply affected the folk religions of Vietnam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since the French invasion, the nationalist spirit have emerged in Vietnam, many religions also armed to protect themselves.

In addition to the sects of the “Ngũ chi minh đạo”, which have the same origin of Tiên Thiên religion and Minh Sư religion, there were the other religions such as Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, Caodaism. They has had an interaction with Minh Sư religion. These religions have similarities in many aspects such as ideology, doctrine, rituals and methods of practice. According to Trần Tiến Thành, the founder of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa was Ngô Lợi (1831-1890), he used to be a monk of Phật đàng sect. Similarly, the monk Trần Đạo Quang and two disciples: Trần Đạo Tính, Trần Vận Chánh practiced Minh Sư religion, then they encouraged the other believers of Phật đàng sect (Nguyễn Văn Nguyệt, Nguyễn Văn Tương, Trần Văn Thụ) to join the campaign to found Caodaism in 1926. In 1934, the monk Trần Đạo Quang and Mr.Cao Triều Phát returned to Cà Mau to form the sect Cao Đài Hậu Giang Minh Chơn Đạo⁹. It can be said that there are similarities of the scriptures of Caodaism and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa religion and Minh Sư religion when studying these religions’ scriptures.

2.4 The promotion activities of translation and printing books .

Minh Sư religion has many scriptures, in addition to the scriptures of the Three religions (Confucianism - Buddhism - Taoism), there are many types of scriptures that collect, comment and discuss on the Three religions handed down by common people, the ouija books internally circulated in some temples in particular. The familiar scriptures can be indicated as follows: *Ngọc Hoàng Kinh, Diêu Trì Kim Mẫu Kinh, Quan Đế Đào Viên Minh Thánh Kinh, Quan Thánh Giáng Bút Chân Kinh, Thái Thượng Cảm ứng Thiên, Thanh Tịnh Kinh, Cứu Khổ Kinh, Thiên Nguơn Kinh,*

Khổng Tử Tâm Kinh, Đạo Môn Nhật Tung, Thiên Môn Nhật Dung Kinh, etc... Our fieldwork results showed that Quang Nam Phật đường and Nam Nhã Phật đường have stored many precious books of Tiên Thiên religion, they were brought from Guangdong such as *Nguyên Đạo Chánh Nghĩa Luận, Khánh Chúc Biểu Văn, Ngọc Lộ Kim Bàn, Vô Cực Truyền Tông Chí, Ngọc Hoàng Hồng Từ Kinh*, etc,...

Most of Minh Sư religion's scriptures were in Chinese characters. The dignitaries were adept at Sino and Nôm characters, and had profound knowledge of sinologist (Hán học). However, most believers couldn't read Chinese characters, especially Vietnamese people. Therefore, the contemporary dignitaries and scholars have taken on the great responsibility of translating, compiling, and printing books to popularize the doctrine and awareness of believers about religion.

We collected a Vietnamese translation of *Ngọc Hoàng Kinh* in Quan Âm Phật đường (Long An) translated by Mạch Quốc Thoại translator. This sutta was written during Hàm Phong years of the Qing dynasty, describing the Jade Emperor's (Ngọc Hoàng Thượng Đế) mercy on the world that will be destroyed, moral decline, wicked humans so the Jade Emperor incarnation to teach, to save humanbeings. The book also indicated the legendary of Pangu (Bản Cổ) opened the Heaven and the Earth, the gods' incarnation in order to built the world life. It can be said that through this sutta, the cosmology, ethics, human life in *Chu Dịch*, the *Tao Te Ching (Đạo Đức Kinh)*, *Lý học Tống Minh* was popularized. The translation of scriptures led to the introduction of religions during the Qing Dynasty to Vietnam, it contributed to raising the social awareness of contemporary Chinese philosophy.

Ngọc Hoàng Kinh was just one of many Chinese scriptures introduced to the South from Guangdong. The team of translators, in addition to the high-ranking Chinese - Vietnamese dignitaries, was intellectuals who worked in various fields of society. For

example, the book *Dưỡng Chơn Tập* was circulated in Kim Long Phật đường, Nam Hòa Phật đường (Khánh Hòa) and Khánh Nam Phật đường (Hồ Chí Minh City) translated by Nguyễn Minh Thiện in 1957. In addition to this book, the intellectuals also translated a series of other scriptures such as *Minh Lý Yếu Giải*, *Nhị Thập Tứ Hiếu*, *Tứ Đại Điều Quy*, *Tam Quy Ngũ Giới*, *Hiếu Kinh*, *A Di Đà Kinh Diễn Nghĩa*, *Phật Giáo Tâm Lý Học*, *Thiền Pháp Yếu Giải*, etc,.. It can be said that the Chinese scriptures of Tiên Thiên religion from China were diverse, loved by believers.

2.5. Participation in social relief and charitable activities

Through a history of 1,5 centuries, Minh Sư religion has witnessed many changes of Vietnamese society. Minh Sư religion's monks have appreciated compassion, love, charity so they participated in many social relief activities, including pray for gods to give medicines, raising abandoned children, setting up Mandala to pray for the repose of the souls.

In the early period, the level of medicine was not developed, when serious epidemics occurred, many people used to come to the Phật đường to ask the monks who set un Mandala to pray for medicine. *Hiếu Đễ Liêm Tiết Khuyển Thiện Kinh* that was an ancient ouija book of Nam Nhã Phật đường (Cần Thơ) recorded the facts as follows:

“On October 4th, the year Ất Mẹo (1915), in Vĩnh Long province, there was a strange disease, people were fever, coughed, then quickly died, it was easily contagious, 18 people were infected, then died within a half of month, it also spread to the nurse, two of them died. I heard the news and wrote a letter, thanks to Mr. Bùi Hữu Sanh who was a virtuous monk of Minh sư religion, set up a Mandala, asked for medicine”¹⁰.

Đình Công Chánh was the leader of Long Tuyền commune, Cần Thơ province, incarnated after his death. The local officials who came to Minh Sư temple to set up Madala to pray, to ask medicine

for the people. Temples (Phật đường) were very popular at that time with responsibility to save humanbeings.

Many Minh Sur religion's monks were traditional medicine practitioners. According to the research of Takeuchi Fusaji, Đinh Đạo Ninh monk of Vận Bửu Phật đường (Gò Công) was a famous medical doctor, honored by the local people as a incarnation of god (Tiên y tế thế). The book *Khánh Chúc Biểu Văn* introduced the biography of religious dignitaries as follows:

“The monk was an intellectual, loved people, a famous person of Gia Định land. He was pious at a young age. When growing up, he was very intelligent. He propagated religion in South Vietnam, then spread it to the Centre and the North. He devoted himself to religion, taught everyone about virtues, kindness, saved people. He built Vận Bảo Phật đường to keep peace for people. He passed away after more than 10 years of building the temple”¹¹.

The above passage praised the genius of medicine of Mr. Đinh Đạo Ninh who cured people and was admired by people. When we were conducting fieldwork in Nam Nhã Phật đường, we have learned that the founder of this temple was Master Nguyễn Giác Nguyên. He was also a famous doctor in the area who was taught Sino-Nôm characters and medicine by an intellectual, patriot named Bùi Hữu Nghĩa (1807-1872). Currently, he and his son named Bùi Hữu Sanh are worshiped in the temple¹².

The author Du Tử An in a paper also mentioned charitable activities of Phật đường Minh Sur in Sài Gòn. He wrote: “In the context of war, many Phật đường of Tiên Thiên religion in Vietnam accepted, nurtured orphans. For example, Ms. Hà Kim Liên and Ms. Hà Khiết Khanh in Vĩnh An Đường (Sài Gòn) nurtured 10 girls. For the case of Vĩnh An Đường, the funding came from a vegetarian food restaurant and the money of donation. Every day, the monks celebrated prayer for the repose of the dead in the funeral according to customs of the Chinese for a few hours, they were paid 2 million đồng. Phật đường also organized a ceremony

to move the stars to avoid the risks, prayer for security (peace) in order to have funding for their activities”¹³. It can be said that Phật đường Minh Sư participated in many charitable activities, which was also consistent with material at many temples where we conducted survey.

Tiên Thiên religion followed the Chinese immigrants to Vietnam, it influenced within the Chinese community at the first period. Therefore, the survival of religion was closely linked with the Chinese society. In the process of development, many charitable activities directed to the Chinese community, the author Du Tử An wrote that “In the years 1950-1970, Phật đường of Tiên Thiên religion in Vietnam closely connected with the Chinese associations, temples and shrines in Chợ Lớn”. When conducting the fieldwork in the temples (Phật đường Minh Sư), we used to see many inscriptions of merit of the donors who were individuals and groups of local Chinese people. It showed that the good supportive relationship between Phật đường and the Chinese community there.

Conclusion

Currently, Minh Sư religion have 50 temples (Phật đường) in Việt Nam. Although Minh Sư religion does not have much temples in comparison to the Buddhist temples or the temples of folk beliefs, its historical artifacts are rich with precious historical and cultural values. With the unique architecture, rich scriptures and ouija poems, along with a large amount of antithetical couplets, and Sino-Nôm inscriptions, it can be said that the Minh sư’s temples (Phật đường Minh Sư) were a cultural exchange between the Chinese and the Vietnamese in the past. Minh Sư religion also had many contributions to the development of the southern society, which was not only a religious center, it was also a cultural and educational center, contributed to promote social cultural reform in the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century. Minh Sư religion has closely linked to the Vietnamese and the country for more than 1.5 centuries of existence in Vietnam

through many historical vicissitudes of the Early Modern and Modern periods of Vietnam. It has also promoted positive effects in turbulent social situations, concerned about human life, promoted social harmony.

Today, many strict regulations of the temples (Phật đường) have been revised to suit social situations, making it easy for believers to accept. For example, before the ordination, a monk had to pass the ouija, was voted the Council of Elders. /.

NOTES:

- 1 There is a different hypothesis that the monk Đông Sơ (1835-1879) firstly built Chiêu Minh Phật đường in Cầu Kho (Chợ Lớn), then he returned China. According to the monk Kim Bí, the monk Đông Sơ came to Thailand from Guangdong to propagated, then he introduced Tiên Thiên religion from Thái Lan into Hà Tiên, built Quảng Tế Phật đường. After his return to China, the monk Trương Đạo Tân arrived Việt Nam, he visited Quy Nhơn sea port (Bình Định), built Phật đường and spread Tiên Thiên religion in Trung Bộ. See: Trần Tiến Thành (2009), “Giới thiệu Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư Đạo” (Introduction of Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư religion), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 2, p. 29.
- 2 Tinh Không Đạo Sư (1887), *Vô Cực Truyền Tông Chí*, Tế Nhất đường printed in May. This book has been circulated internally in the temple of Tiên Thiên religion.
- 3 Huỳnh Ngọc Thu (2017), *Đạo Cao Đài ở Nam Bộ và các mối quan hệ* (Caodaism in the South and its relationship), Publishing house: Đại học Quốc gia. Hồ Chí Minh City, pp. 6-8.
- 4 Du Tử An (2010), “Đạo mạch nam truyền: Sự truyền thừa và biến thiên của Tiên Thiên đạo từ Lĩnh Nam đến Việt Nam thế kỷ 20” (Propagation, transformation of Tiên Thiên religion in Vietnam in the 20th century), Trần Tiến Quốc (General Editor, 2010), *Tôn giáo nhân loại học* (Religious studies, anthropology), Volume 2, Xã hội Khoa học Văn hiến xuất bản xã, Bắc Kinh, p. 234.
- 5 Takeuchi Fusaji (Luu Diệp Hoa translated, 2010), “Sự truyền bá của tôn giáo dân gian Trung Quốc và quá trình bản địa hóa ở Việt Nam: Từ kinh sách được lưu trữ tại Viện Nghiên cứu Hán Nôm” (The spread of Chinese folk religions and indigenization in Vietnam: Based on the scriptures stored at the Sino-Nôm Research Institute), *Thanh sử Nghiên cứu*, kỳ 1 tháng 2, p. 18.
- 6 Takeuchi Fusaji (Luu Diệp Hoa translated, 2010), “Sự truyền bá của tôn giáo dân gian...” (The spread of Chinese folk religions and indigenization in Vietnam: Based on the scriptures stored at the Sino-Nôm Research Institute), *ibid*, p. 18.

- 7 Trần Tiến Thành (2009), “Giới thiệu Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư Đạo” (Introduction of Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư religion), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 2, p. 27.
- 8 Takeuchi Fusaji (Luu Diệp Hoa dịch, 2010), “Sự truyền bá của tôn giáo dân gian...”, *ibid*, p. 15-16.
- 9 Trần Tiến Thành (2009), “Giới thiệu Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư Đạo” (Introduction of Phật Đường Nam Tông Minh Sư religion), *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo*, No. 2, p. 29.
- 10 Bùi Hữu Sanh (biên tập, 1966), *Hiếu đễ liêm tiết khuyến thiện kinh*, Printing house: Trần Đất, Cần Thơ, p. 77.
- 11 Takeuchi Fusaji (2014), “Từ Tiên Thiên đạo đến Cao Đài: Tôn giáo dân gian cận đại Trung Quốc cắm rễ trên đất Việt Nam” From Tiên Thiên religion to Caodaism: the Chinese folk religions were introduced into Vietnam during the Early Modern period), in Takeuchi Fusaji (2014), *Chiến tranh, tai họa và tôn giáo dân gian ở các nước Đông Á cận đại*, Công ty TNHH Yushi, Tokyo, tr. 271. Nguyên văn: “先師平恩志士，嘉定高人，髫年慕道，澄心空色相之天。弱冠修真，慧服脫塵根之網。道闡南越，其及中北。捨身辦道，遠近不辭。引眾調賢，素稱剛勇。魔者千般，勤勞萬狀。仙醫濟世，卻病扶生。堂啟運寶，座鎮永祐。任當十葉，普度殷勤。豈料身遇非災竟赴仙宮。”
- 12 According to Hồ Thanh Phong, a disciple, the 3rd generation of the monk Nguyễn Giác Nguyên, interview materials on August 31st, 2016.
- 13 Du Tử An (2010), “Đạo mạch nam truyền: Sự truyền thừa và biến thiên của Tiên Thiên đạo từ Lĩnh Nam đến Việt Nam thế kỷ 20” (Propagation, transformation of Tiên Thiên religion in Vietnam in the 20th century), in Trần Tiến Quốc (General Editor, 2010), *Tôn giáo nhân loại học* (Religious studies, anthropology), Volume 2, Xã hội Khoa học Văn hiến xuất bản xã, Bắc Kinh, p. 234.