

Religion Status in Coco China during the Period of 1939-1945 Reality and Some Characteristics

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Abstract The period of 1939-1945, under influence of historical and socio-economic conditions, religion affairs in Cochinchina took quick, complex and diversified changes. Besides established religions (Buddhism, Protestantism etc.), there was more others emerged (such as Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa – Four Great Services and Return, Cao daism, Hoahaoism etc.). Most of emerged religions utilized traditional ethic properties and theory of established ones with suitable adjustment by contemporary historical conditions. We can say that during the period 1939-1945, contribution of the religions for Cochinchina particularly, and for Vietnam generally, was significant important, manifesting by many aspects. However, in this article, we just focus on analysing reality and suggest some points and comments on Cochinchina religions in the period 1939-1945.

Keywords Characteristics, Period 1939-1945, Cochinchina, Reality, Religions

1. Introduction

Cochin-China¹ has been a long-term historical region in the process of establishment by the native people. From geographical location and natural features of this region to its natural progress contributes to making unique characteristics and strange face for religions here against that of other regions of Vietnam. Thus, extension of this newly-cultivated land has formed activeness, sensitiveness and spirit of “daring to think, daring to do” of the native people. Therefore, this is the land containing the most diversified number of religions over the country in term of both alien kinds of religion (Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) and native ones (Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Hoahaoism, Cao Dai etc.). During the historical course of Vietnam, the period of 1939-1945 was the stage influenced not only by outside conditions, but also by inner force of the people, among them direction of Dong Duong Communism Party, pioneer of the working class, and being

the leader of contemporary Vietnam revolutionary movement, took the most important role. Mixture of inner and outside conditions presents great impacts on all aspects of economy-politics, society and culture of the Vietnamese people generally, and of Coco China people particularly, among them status of Religion in Coco China that day. With such considerations, in this analysis of religion status during 1939-1945, we will draw some characteristics and comments on religion status in Coco China upon this period.

2. Content

2.1. Status of Religion in Coco China during 1939-1945

During the period of 1939-1945, Cochin-China consisted of 20 provinces (4 western provinces, 9 middle ones and 7 western ones) and two big cities (Sai Gon and Cho Lon). This age showed Cochin-China a land involving not only a big number of believers with various kinds of religion, alien and native, but also a place of mixed and complex religious practices. Religious statue in Cochin-China has always been under potential change and presented a deep and wide impact on national status of religion, politics and society. Therefore, religion issue in Cochin-China generally, especially during 1939-1945 has always attracted concern of researchers, both foreign and inland.

Cochin-China is a fruitful land for acceptance and development of religions. However, religions of this region bear feature and senses of the peasantry because they are not only the founder of such religions, but the believers of them on this land. In addition to religion adapted from exchanges,

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¹ Nam Kỳ (Han characters 南圻) is the South region of Dai Nam under Nguyen Dynasty, one of three regions constituted Vietnam. This name was set by King Minh Mang in 1832. After independence gaining for Vietnam in 1945, Nam Kỳ was changed into Nam Bộ (South Vietnam)

cooperation and integration with countries over the world, the remaining was inland found religions in Cochinchina which operated in the semi-feudal colonized society. Upon their births, thought of such religions quickly met the spiritual living demands of the native people. In fact, however, diversification and operation of the religion here during 1939-1945 happened in a complex manner causing impacts on national unification as well as force collection for the revolution in 1945.

2.1.1. Activities of Buddhism

In comparison with other religion, Buddhism appeared early in Cochinchina and formed a great impact on socio-cultural life of the native people. Buddhism followed the emigrants arriving this land from time to time with four main directions: *the first direction*, the emigrants from Thuan-Quang region with monks of Vietnamese and Chinese. They came along roads and waterlines from Dong Nai to Gia Dinh between 17th century to 19th century; *the second direction*, by the Chinese monks coming to Dong Nai, Gia Dinh, and My Tho for their missionary works (1679); *the third direction*, by Mac Cuu, a Quang Dong man, who arrived Ha Tien and built Tam Bao pagoda; *the fourth direction*, Ho Tong who spread Buddhism of Hinayana from Cambodia into South Vietnam². Due to differences of time and places for religious mission, Buddhism collected many conditions of economic-social conditions for its development, thus operation of Buddhism here presented a diversified background with many new features. Such characteristics matched with generous lifestyle of the native people.

Upon the invasion of South Vietnam by France, local Buddhism undertook many great changes with many pagodas and worship facilities destroyed and possessed to be military post and defence lines. Many monks were arrested to serve French military. Others hiddenly followed patriotic movements against invading French. Books were burned or lost. It can be said that this was a serious declined stage for Buddhism. In facing such reality, Buddhism Restoration Campaigns happened strongly late 19th century and early 20th century: propaganda and teaching activities in Khanh Hoa founder temple (Nhu Tri); the organisation of "Luc Hoa Lien Xa" in 1920; Buddhism-reorganizing articles in Cochinchina during 1923-1924; speaking activities on nation renewing, necessity of Buddhism-adapted life of Nguyen An Ninh and Phan Chu Trinh etc.

Especially in 1930, circled classes found by monk Khanh Hoa named "Phat hoc Lien xa" (Inter-commune Buddhism education) under teaching and fund by Luc Hoa Tang Nam Viet happened in Phuoc Long pagoda (Tra On), then Long Phuoc (Tra Vinh), Vien Gia pagoda (Ben Tra) etc. Each course attracted about 80-100 students³. Thus, from early

20th century to 1939 was the Buddhism Restoration period in Cochinchina: developing and lifting up responsibility, duty and education for the monks; conducting translation of some books into Vietnamese for accessibility of Buddhists; Buddhism activities expanded to meet socio-economic conditions, and conditions of spiritual life of the people.

On the basis of inheriting early achievements of the Buddhism Restoration campaign, from 1939, Buddhism in Cochinchina maintained three kinds of organisation: Buddhology Association; Pagoda Association and Nation Saving Buddhism Association.

In the Buddhology Association consisted various sub-associations time to time (Cochinchina Buddhology Studying Association born in 1931; Luong Xuyen Buddhology Association 1934; Vietnam Tinh do Cu si Buddhology Association 1934; Kiem te Buddhology Association 1936 etc.) Buddhology Association came into being as a firm confirmation for Buddhism Restoration in South Vietnam. Among found organisations, it is easy to find a combination between a nation-dominating and independence sense with Buddhism restoration spirit which inclined through its operation to express the national independence desire and foreign invader resistance spirit, such as: Cochinchina Buddhology Studying Association born in 1931 with the work "Phat hoa tan thanh nien" (Buddhism integration for new youth) born renewing though, lifted up independent national spirit, and expressed resistance opinion against the invader; Kiem te Buddhology Association 1936 also present a view of not only Buddhology spreading, but also "national saving and life supporting". Tam Bao pagoda of the association has become a secret resistance base of the revolution, a place to spreading patriotism, sense of French and its companies protesting, and a place to expanding ideas of socialism.

Pagoda Association (Mutual-aid association) was the organisation found by monks and Buddhists to help each other, so born manifestation of a mutual-aid society and common forks. During its operation, the association caught many difficulties caused by control of French, and inner instability. Since appearing influence of the monk Thien Chieu, however, association's operation was stabilized. Especially with direction of Indochina Communist Party, the association actively took in French's reactionary-offensing campaign and contemporary unreasonably taxes removing request. The association also strongly supported activities of Indochina Conference, and helped Cochinchina Common Battle.

With endeavours of true monks, nuns and Buddhists under direction of Indochina Communist Party, Cochinchina Buddhism with its efforts restored and gained many significant achievement through dogma teaching classes, many patriotic monks attended in propagandizing and fired patriotism, especially in Cochinchina villages.

2 According to Tran Hong Lien (2000), *Buddhism among Vietnamese groups in South Vietnam (between 17th century to 1975)*, Society and Science Press, Hanoi, p.8-9.

3 According to Tran Hong Lien (2000), *Buddhism among Vietnamese groups in*

South Vietnam (between 17th century to 1975), Society and Science Press, Hanoi, p.63.

In addition, since early 1940s, some pagodas in Cochina became meeting and hiding place for revolutionary soldiers (Long An pagoda, Gia Vien, Sung Duc, Giac Hoang etc.). Among them, the concept “Take off the robe to wear the war dress” of the elder monk Thai Khong in Phat hoc Luong xuyen pagoda was quickly spread through contemporary monks. Linh Thuu pagoda (My Tho) was a connect station between My Tho provincial Party committee with local sub-committees. In the Nam Ky revolution, Tam Bao pagoda (Rach Gia) was the place to hide weapons for the movement. Thus, patriotism of the monks and nuns and Buddhists in some Cochinchina pagodas set a background for patriotism and French resistance movement.

As we can see, among Buddhism restoration activities, many monks and Buddhist applied various methods to express their patriotism: Tri Thien master and Thien Chieu master was among others. They were the founder and pioneers of the Buddhism restoration campaign, the connectors of religion unification, evoker of patriotism standing against invasion the foreign enemy. It can be said that they were monks with enthusiasm patriotism and contributed a significant share to success of August Revolution 1945.

2.1.2. Activities of Christianity

Christianism entered South Vietnam by various ways and measures. Before invasion of Vietnam by France, emigrants from Dang Trong provinces (presently provinces in middle land) came to some localities in Cochinchina to live. Christians had arrived to Cochinchina even before arrival of the missionaries. They gathered into parishes, built churches, and invited Catholic fathers (priests) from other places to teach dogma and take missionary works. According to Louvet, on the date French occupied Sai Gon, there was about 27,000 Christians⁴ here. Religious operations, with many occident priests bearing true purpose of mission, was only for serving “Faith” and had significant contribution to national cultural development of Vietnam generally and of the South particularly: “... *It is not true in saying that there was no true missionary among the occidental priests who served their Faith only, and at the same time made some unique contributions in preading western civilization into Vietnam.*”⁵

Being different from arrival into the North and the Middle, Christianity was brought into the South rather easily because of absence of heavy restricts and prohibition by the Nguyen dynasty’ court. However, according to researcher Tran Bach Dang, the arrival of Christianity into Cochinchina caught different obstacles, Ancestor Worship Belief which had been rooted in the native people⁶. But over

a process of integration and changing, Christianity quickly grew and reached to some places such as: Cu Lao Gieng, Cai Mo and Tan Trieu etc. In the period of 1939 & 1945, Christianity continued to grow with limited number of Cochinchina believers, but they enjoyed a wealthier life in comparison to general life standard of Cochinchina people. This was a premise to form confidence for part of the believers and those with intention of entering the religion.

National Vietnamese script invention by occident missionaries was not restricted within the initial purpose of making a helpful missionary tool to teach prayers and books for the believers, or to train and educate western civilization, but it was also a background to upgrade awareness for the believers and people. For such reason, during that time, Viet Nam took advantage of the national script to erase illiteracy for the people. Vietnam considered it as a strong instrument in helping the people fighting against the cultural enslavement of the French invader, step by step building a culture of “nationa-science-commonness”.

In addition, for a well-exercised practice, in this period, Christianity continued to maintain and expanded printing and pressing activities with some publishers such as: Tan Dinh press, “Nam Ky dia phan” newspaper etc. Such activities helped to produce hundred of books and thousand of newspaper researching dogma, catechism, church history, Old-testament figures or saints.

As we can see, during this period, Christianity basically set its position among the religious circle of Cochinchina. With its rather close system of dogma as in the beginning, upon arrival into Cochinchina, Christianity avoided impact or being changed by the native culture. With *The decision to establish the Allied Anti-Imperialism Association* (18/11/1930) announcing that: “*ensuring religion freedom for the masses, destroy the contrary propaganda that claim the communism to be anarchical, no family and no religion.*”⁷, Christianity has always been considered as an important part in development of national unification, inheriting religious achievements in the national liberation work.

2.1.3. Tu An Hieu Nghia Religion

Tu An Hieu Nghia was a local religion of the South Vietnam, born under the direct control and interaction of socio-economic-cultural premises of this southern land. The course of cultivation and village-forming in some places integrated with development and acceptance of Tu An Hieu Nghia religion. From its birth, Tu An Hieu Nghia has always born characteristics of the southern land, can be defined as a unique feature of the people in the South. The unique characteristics was expressed in establishment of worship facilities (various kind of temples such as shrines, temples, communal house of village, Tam Buu house and

4 Nguyen Nghi, Khong Ngoc Thach, Hoang Minh Thuc (2007), *Christianism in Ho Chi Minh city, Ho Chi Minh city Generality Press*, p.33.

5 Do Quang Hung (chief editor) (1991), *Some issues of Christianity history in Vietnam*, Hanoi University Generality press, Hanoi, p.64.

6 Do Quang Hung (chief editor) (2001), *Religion and some religious issues in South Vietnam*, Society & Science Press, Hanoi, p.28.

7 Direction of the Central Government of Affairs on establishing “Anti-Imperialism association”, dated 18/11/1930, stored in *Archive storage, Central Party Office*.

accommodates) and customs and rituals (marriage, funeral, moral concept, duties for country, society and humanity).

Development of Tu An Hieu Nghia linked with Anti-French invader movement of a part of South people under guidance of Ngo Loi. Unfortunately, the collection of forces failed to fulfill its purpose of fighting French invader to serve “the homeland and compatriot”. In pressure of destroy and control by the French, operation of Tu An Hieu Nghia was divided into various separate places with different features and activities suitable to each place at that time. Until early 20th century, Tu An Hieu Nghia undertook development through two main systems: The first system of Tu An Hieu Nghia maintained and developed in the villages of That Son region (An Dinh, Anh Hoa – Ba Chuc, Anh Thanh – Phi Luong; An Lap – Le Tri; Vinh Gia etc.); the second system of Tu An Hieu Nghia with unique changes under impact of society and culture. This branch consisted of many senior disciples (Mr. Gang, Mr. Dao) who spread the religion over the South. One of the most prestige who succeeded in collecting the masses to people the wild lands into villages, teaching them martial art, preparing weapons, storing food with the purpose of building military power in fighting against the French until his death in 1935, was Le Van Muu.

The period 1939-1945, the high leaders of Tu An Hieu Nghia continued to grow dogma and directed the religion to the suffered and the miserable of poorness and pandemics. Many worship facilities was also built and expanded over the places printed with the footmark of Tu An Hieu Nghia believers. However, the outstanding of Tu An Hieu Nghia religion is the spirit of responding to “homeland and compatriot”, the spirit of patriotism and responsibility of fighting against French invader. In reconsideration of activities of Tu An Hieu Nghia during 1939-1945, we can say that: *“Anti-French movement of Tu An Hieu Nghia believers is in connection with patriotic movement of the people to the country. But with clear and particular concepts, and secret methods presented by this religion, Tu An Hieu Nghia took its certain position in evoking power to collect the peasantry against French invader”*⁸.

2.1.4. Caodaism

Cao Dai was a religion found in Vietnam during 1920s of 20th century (1926). The title “Cao Dai” came into being with the goal of *Dai Dao Tam Ky Pho Do* (means The Great Faith [for the] Third Universal Redemption). To express the worship, some Caodaists sometimes called their Faith way of the God. Literally, Cao Dai points to “a higher place” which in its implication points to the place of God; at the same time is the short-form of God’s title. Until now, Caodaism has been one of the most “young” in Vietnam.

During 90 years of forming and developing, Caodaism has expressed itself as a new faith inclining to mix various major religions in Vietnam, mainly the Three Religion. Many

dogma and practices of other religions are also expressed partly in Caodaism: *“Researchers agree that in addition to unique property, Caodaism presents clearly a trend of mixing other religion by the motto of Past-Present combination and West-East integration. For that reason, western scholars often consider Caodaism as a mixed religion”*⁹. As we can see, on a Caodaism altar are founders of various major religions such as Jesus, Gautama Buddha, Confucius, and Lao-tzu etc. Worship in Caodaism families presents an equal numerousness: we can see Gautama Buddha, Jesus, Cao Dai Tien Ông (The Highest Power Ancient Immortal Great Bodhisattva), Heaven Eye, Heaven symbol, Guanyin, Princess Lieu Hanh (called the divide mother), Tudigong (Lord of the Soil and the Ground), Caishen (God of Wealth) etc. Moreover, there are a Vietnamese Confucian, Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585), a French writer, Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and Ton Dat Tien, also Ton Trung Son, a revolutionary of China late 21st century and early 22nd century. Therefore, Caodaism bears a feature of respecting beliefs and customs, not forcing the believer to abandon or restrict their traditional belief practices.

Born within the social situation of 1920s 20th century when Vietnam was under domination of French invader, but as a tradition-protecting religion, Caodaism maintains strict and conservative regulations. Despite of being a new religion with rapid development in the early stage, Caodaism presented strict requirements of tradition aiming to preserving to the most level its characteristics. This was fact make Caodaism a unique religion in the South Vietnam. Furthermore, being suitable to conditions and demands of the Cochinchina people in its birth, Caodaism consisted right in the early stage of forming various components: peasantry, monks, hermits, artists, teachers and traders etc. Among them existed many patriotic individuals. They actively supported the anti-invader movement. Thus, the birth of Caodaism created a concern for French.

Upon their birth, Caodaism contained more than 10,000 believers. By 1930 (just four years later) such number increased to a half of million. Even if Caodaism existed in some localities, and undertaking many complex political condition during its development, Caodaism formed properties of a religion: maintaining a system of dogma, rules, rituals and a group of officers, organizing administration, and building worship facilities in the South and the Middle. In 1927, the first facility was built in Dat Do zone (Long Dat) by Nguyen Ngoc Tuong, an officer serving French government at that time. Since then, its appearance spread through Chau Thanh, Long Thanh, Bien Hoa and other districts over Dong Nai province (presently Ba Ria-Vung Tau). In the early stage of forming, Caodaism was a unified organisation with the headquarter being Holy See in Tay Ninh. However, till 1929, the internal of Caodaism happened division, many left the Holy See to create other

⁸ According to Dinh Van Hanh (1999), *Tu An Hieu Nghia religion of Vietnamese in South Vietnam (1867-1975)*, Ho Chi Minh city press, p.298.

⁹ Le Anh Dung (1996), *History of Caodaism in the potential stage 1920-1926*, Thuan Hoa press, p.15.

branches. Le Ba Trang and Nguyen Ngoc Tuong arrived Sai Gon, at first used Tu Van pagoda in Phu Nhuan, then Binh Hoa Temple in Gia Dinh, to be the headquarter for repairing Caodaism. Later, these two men came to Ben Tre and built An Hoi temple and set an Executive Board. Till June 1933, An Hoi temple was honoured to be the Superior Church. In 1934, the Council of Humanity conducted a meeting here, and the delegates voted Senior master Thuong Truong Thanh Nguyen Ngoc Tuong to be the Highest Founder and Senior master Ngoc Trang Thanh Le Ba Trang the Superior Dharma Holder.

From 1935 to 1945, in Sadec (presently Dong Thap province), Charitable Establishment was turned in to holy temples: My An Hung, Hoi An Dong ((1936), Sadec (1939). Tan Nhuan Dong, Lai Vung (including Phong Hoa, Long Hoa, Tan Hoa, Long Thang, Vinh Thanh (1940) and Cao Lanh (1943). Besides two main religion branches, Tay Ninh and Ben Tre, Caodaism in Dong Thap contained various branches such as Chieu Minh Dan, Chon Minh Ly (in Lai Vung). By 1945, Caodaism was divided into 12 branches; each maintained its own system of organisation.

In the article *Caodaism – an objective fact and a behavior situation* by Dang Nghiem Van, he pointed out some reasons for establishment of Caodaism: Caodaism exceeded others, which came in and went away, by a fact of understanding social thought of the contemporary southern peasantry; In term of religion, the most notable thing in Caodaism was its practice-focusing direction¹⁰.” Thus, after its birth and development, Caodaism regularly highlighted the national spirit, gathered its believers not only for religious purpose, but also meeting demand of current believers. Many activities of Caodaism attached with socio-political ones in Cochinchina generally. Until 1945, Caodaism consolidated its organisation and conducted integration into *Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội* (Vietnam Restoration League) found by Cuong De with the objective of taking advantage of Japanese power to gain independence for Vietnam. For that reason, upon the coup d'état of France by Japan on Mar 9th, 1945, Caodaism forces in Dong Thap enhanced their operation and formed a Provincial Headquarter of Caodaism to reorganize system of holy temples, unify forces and establish Youth of Great Faith League, urgently conducted military training to be ready for receiving the government promised by Japanese. But in fact, Japan set the League for Japan-Vietnam Defence with headquarters located in Sadec attracting many Caodaism youths. This organisation supported Japan in spreading the policy of “Great Western Asian”¹¹.

During the period of 1939-1945 we see that almost leaders of Caodaism in Dong Thap was patriots but lacking a

knowledge of politics which led them into scheme of Japanese. Until the government of Japan was set over the Indochina, and Minoda Fujio¹² was pointed to be Cochinchina governor, and upon his accession, he revealed clearly the scheme of making Japan the superseder of France to rule Indochina, leaders of Caodaism now fell into their dream-breaking. They recognized that the force for them to cooperate in gaining independence for the country was Viet Minh. In August Revolution 1945, numerous Caodaists, especially the youths of Great Faith, attended to seize the government under direction of Viet Minh.

As presented, Caodaism came into being as a new religious circumstance in the South Vietnam during modern age under deep impact of patriotic movements. During 1939-1945, despite of internal division into various branches, but the operation of Caodaism always connected to economic-political status of Cochinchina. Awareness of Caodaism was limited in the early stage but presented a worry and enthusiasm on national independence. Religious leaders and disciples became an important force in the struggle for national independence. In addition, the birth and operation of Caodaism contributed to diversification of traditional elements in the southern land of our country.

2.1.5. Hoahaoism

Under the same situation of birth, Caodaism coming into being in the east, Hoahaoism emerged in the west and developed mainly there. Hoahaoism was a branch of Buddhism found by Huynh Phu So, born in 1939 in Hoa Hao village, Tan Chau district, Chau Doc province (now Phu My town, Phu Tan Dist., An Giang province) in 1939, taking the Pure Land Buddhism methodology to be the basis and home practice direction: “*Hoahaoism started its being 13 years after Caodaism, but in term of origin, it was the restoration and new trend of Buu Son Ky Huong, a product in the middle of 19th century*”¹³.

Dogma of Hoahaoism highlights simple worship rituals which direct the people to their inner mind rather than outside world, as Gautama Buddha's original guideline. Worship ceremony of Hoahaoists lays in three levels of altar in their houses, including: *the first level*, Ancestor worship altar according to tradition of remembering the origin; *the second level*, Three Refugees altar: worshipping the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. This altar contains a brown textile fabric (called Tran Da) representing for release from secular world and unification; *the third level*, Heaven Connection altar: set outdoor. The way of Buddha offering is very simple also, just fresh water, flower and incense.

During religion opening, Huynh Phu So, also called “Teacher Tu Hoa Hao” claimed himself to be the one of “knowing life” who bears ability to look back the past and look through the future, live the same life of Amida Buddha

10 Religion Studying Institute (1995), *The first step into Caodaism*, Society & Science Press, p.49-61.

11 This is a system of rules of invasion and expansion policy of Japan proposed by Prime Minister Konoe on 1/8/1940 to form “an common prosperous area of Great Eastern Asia”. Minister of Japan State Department Masuoka explained that the content of this theory is based on four principles: 1. Uniting in foreign affairs; 2. Allying in military; 3. Cooperation in economy; 4. Independence in politics.

12 Civil governor of Japan (under authority in Vietnam from 9/3/1945 to 15/8/1945).

13 Do Quang Hung (chief editor) (1991), *Some issues of Christianity history in Vietnam*, Hanoi University Generality press, Hanoi, p.343.

and Gautama Buddha, coming into this world to spread thought of Buu Son Ky Huong with purpose of “restoring Buddhism, saving the human from the unawareness and taking them to the paradise”. He treated diseases for the people by prescription learned previously, at the same time through such act spreading dogma by lecture poems composed by him. So just within 2 years, 1937-1939, the number of believers increased quickly, and he became a popular figure in the region.

On Jul 04th 1939 when he was still under 20 years old, Huynh Phu So opened his religion. The place of opening ceremony was his house. Then, he was nominated as the Founder, and called him respectfully Founder Huynh: *“He has officially opened the religion. In the beginning is treatment of diseases. He can solve heavy disease with simple method of using leaf, water and paper only, suprising both western and eastern doctors, as well as popular magicians. In parallel with treatment, He teaches the Dharma attractively and endlessly. Many writers and poets, in hearing his reputation and coming to question him, consider him as a supernatural being. He composes many religious teaching poems with the content predicting the wide-spreading war, miserable of human and calling people to leave evil and come back to the good, exercising four favours, practising zen to turn into righteous people in the society, and looking forward to the paradise”*¹⁴.

Upon birth and impact of Hoahaoism, the founder was reported to French government: *“At the time of the announcement on Mar 15th 1940 of local authority on this secret faith, the government itself was surprised first by famousness of the youth Huynh Phu So, according to the announcement, which has attracted “believers from everywhere”, even many richers becoming his believers. Such feeling of being surprised puts a question of cause and time detecting this religious movement.*¹⁵”

By 1941, Hoahaoism continued to raise its number quickly. When Japan entered Indochina, in worrying about Japan’s potential taking advantage of Hoahaoism, French government arrested Huynh Phu So in Chau Doc, Bac Lieu and Can Tho. In 1942, Japan succeeded in encouraging Hoahaoism found leave for Sai Gon. Here He mobilized many Japan-sided policemen into Hoahaoism to raise his prestige, at the same time this was the period many youths of Hoahaoism attended Japan’s organisations. In 1944, Hoahaoism formed a armed force with the name “Guardian Force”.

South-west land was the place originating Hoahaoism. Most Hoahaoists was friendly people with nature patriotism. To conduct national unification policy, South People’s Committee newly established after August Revolution

invited Hoahaoism founder, Huynh Phu So, to hold the position of Special Commissioner of the Committee.

In 1945, facing miserable of the people and dangerous situation of the country, Huynh Phu So stood up for defending the country and saving the people, and established “United Buddhism Association” to unify Buddhism, and “Vietnam Independence Mobilizing Association” to gain independence for the country. After surrender of Japan, our people was living in the worry of inner enemy and outside invader, Huynh Phu So cooperated religious organisation into “United National Battle” against the alien invader. This battle was integrated into “Viet Minh battle” with the first representative in South Vietnam being Huynh Phu So himself. Later, Co-operated National Battle was set and after its dismissal, the leaders form another organisation called “National People League” to direct the anti-French struggle.¹⁶

As we can see, right in its birth, with the purpose of fighting against the enemy and restoring independence for the country, Vietnam has always risen the colour of national people union under guideline of gathering and connecting all people, without distinguishing of the poor and the rich, the old and the young, the men and the women, no distinguishing among religions and politic inclines. In the course of realizing national union and religion union, Vietnam has always highlighted religious leaders and believers of the religions with the common purpose, so *the Decision of establishing Anti-Emperialism League* (18/11/1930) declared: *“ensuring religion freedom for the masses, destroy the contrary propaganda that claim the communism to be anarchical, no family and no religion”*¹⁷. In 1941, for preparation of government seizing revolution, Viet Minh Battle was established with the guideline: *“gathering and connecting all people, without distinguishing of the poor and the rich, the old and the young, the men and the women, no distinguishing among religions and politic inclines”*¹⁸. As presented, the period of 1939-1945 in Cochinchina, some religions was established and developed in a diversified manner. In addition to long-term established religions (Buddhism, Christianity etc.) existed many new ones which came into being on the background of economy and society and politics, especially in facing invasion and strict domination of French invader. Common sense of the new religions in Cochinchina was not only to meet spiritual demand of the people (worshiping ancestor, parents and national heroes etc.) but also to reflect practical demand of independence of the people (who was suffering a difficult time of war). In studying this period shows that Vietnam’s policy on religion over the country generally, and in Cochinchina particularly has always placed religions in

14 Dogma Popular Education Board of Central Hoahaoism Center (2010), *Some features of Founder Huynh*, <http://hoahao.org/p4538a3953/vai-net-ve-duc-huynh-giao-chu>.

15 Pascal Bourdeaux (translated by Dang The Dai) (2015), *On origin of Hoahaoism*.

<http://ngghienquoc.org/2015/12/22/nguon-goc-lich-su-phat-giao-hoa-hao>.

16 Mai Thi Thanh (2012), *Impact of Hoahaoism on civilized spiritual life in Dong Thap province today*, Master thesis, Hanoi National University, p.21.

17 Direction of the Central Government of Affairs on establishing “Anti-Imperialism association”, dated 18/11/1930, stored in *Archive storage, Central Party Office*.

18 Vietnam Communist Party: *Party Complete Materials*, volume 7, National Politics Press, Hanoi, 2000, p/241.

unification in supporting policy of national union. Thus, in the reality of revolution, Vietnam has always utilized the positiveness of the religions, concurrently removed negative opinions and dated traditions, and always encouraged the people to attend in the mobilizing course toward independence of the country.

2.2. A Number of Assessments on Religion Status in South Vietnam during Period of 1939 - 1945

Firstly, in period of 1939-1945, the religions in South Vietnam always exist succession, interference, integration or even succession of doctrine from each other.

As we knew, *“Religion is a form of social consciousness which has originated and developed for thousands of years and it exists with human for a period that is difficult to define. During process of existence and development, the religion made a deep impact on political life, cultural thought, society and psychology, morality, lifestyle, customs and practices from many countries, ethnicities of levels of human, especially young generation”*¹⁹. It can be seen that the religions in South Vietnam (ancient or new religions) is same as mentioned above. South Vietnam is a new land so it has many conditions for appearance of religions. However, in period of 1939-1945, economic and socio-political situation of South Vietnam has negative changes under domination of French colonialists and reactionary henchmen. Historical background and life style here facilitate diversified development of religions. Doctrines and worldview of religions made a deep impact on lifestyle of people in South Vietnam.

In such historical background, ancient religions constantly increase their impact on people, but there are some changes in form of evangelism, even livings and worship of religions also change so that they are suitable. The new religions always have to start based on demand, livings conditions of people in area, towards storage of ethnic traditional values and proper behavior. Specially, for lifestyle of “valuing emotions do not care money”, the religion usually heighten the role of individuals in religions and mass movement. Therefore, the religions, especially new religions such as Hoa Hao Buddhism, Tu An Hieu Nghia Buddhism, Cao Dai Buddhism,... always have succession from views, traditional moral and human values of nation. Cao Dai even inherits deeply doctrine of Buddhism. In other words, doctrines of people here are religiousized.

In addition, the religions in South Vietnam in this period still keep succession, integration from beliefs of South Vietnamese. Due to poor-quality of life of disciples and people in this period, even shortage of spirituality, so the doctrines and worldview of religions inherit thoughts and viewpoints from beliefs of worshiping human gods and nature gods. Thanks to the interference and succession between religions, so in this period, the status of religions in South Vietnam is always diverse, rich in quantity of religions

as well as form of livings. That spirit is shown in beliefs of worshipping ancestry and clearly recognized in temples, shrines, mausoleums,... of people in South Vietnam at that time. They worship people having merit for family, village, countries that they honor and respect (a lot of people is worshipped for their merit by posterity in term of economy, politic, culture, society, education, health).

Although the religions had the interference, Catholic religion in South Vietnam at that time was not affected and changed from other ones because its doctrines are almost so complete that it cannot be added more factors from the others. Therefore, at that time of evangelism to Cochinchina, even in this period, this Doctrine denies all beliefs that are not within in its system of doctrine.

Secondly, most founders and disciples of religions are poor people.

Under the domination of French colonialists, feudal and henchmen, people of Cochinchina always had to suffer heavy oppression in all areas. The life of people, especially immigrants in the Eastern, Western of South Vietnam got difficulties. They have a patriotism but superstition and they often believe in god rights or leader to handle subrogation and they are also affected deeply by promotion of Taoist. Moreover, life of immigrants is shortage of spirituality. A number of leaders had to not only teach doctrines but also create doctrines. Therefore, in awareness of the people, these Taoists are not only “Prophet” but also “leader of clan”, so they can be protected in life if they follow these Taoists. The poor people here always believe in religions, especially new religions.

Due to condition and cognitive ability of founders and disciples, the religions from Buu Son Ky Huong, Tu An Hieu Nghia, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai tend to political nature in process of operation. Their system of doctrines and operation program are not close, even they changed depending on time and tend to reflect political target (Typically Hoa Hao Buddhism; Cao Dai Buddhism,...). Therefore, it is really difficult and complicated to entice them to patriotic movement.

Thirdly, target of religions in Cochinchina not only ensure spiritual life for people but also struggle for national independence.

In this time, religions in Cochinchina owned separate cultural features but all of them focus on their the faithful Truth - Completion - Beauty, and gradually meet the spiritual requirement of people here. Most religions are affected by ethnic traditional culture, which contributes beauty of diverse, rich culture in term of national identity. This factor helped educate and strengthen patriotic spirit and national self-respect for each believer, disciples to the invasion of the enemy.

After invading Vietnam, French colonialists and Japanese fascists always tried to take advantage of religions, especially their leader to make their machination for stabilizing political security, safety and order of society, which serves their target of domination. They distorted line, policy of belief freedom in Vietnam at that time. In every

19 Nguyen Tai Thu (Editor) (1997), *Impact of ideology and religion for Vietnamese today*. National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, pg. 206.

historical moment, colonialists and fascists also took advantage of leaders of some religions to against the revolutionary career. This is only a small part of the religions, but the majority of leaders and disciples in the religions have patriotism and spirit of struggling to against oppression, injustice and participating in national liberation movement in this period.

3. Conclusions

In period of 1939-1945, Cochinchina religion had a rapid change due to impact of historical, socio-social background at that time. Apart from ancient religions in Cochinchina (Buddhism, Protestant,...), there are new religions (Tu An Hieu Nghia; Cao Dai; Hoa Hao,...). New religions originated based on succession of traditional values; doctrines of some old religions and they change them in accordance with historical background. At the same time, doctrines of some religions are gradually simpler and easier to understand in order to be suitable with level and awareness, mentality of people in South Vietnam. Besides, people also practice easily doctrines in daily life. The number of dignitaries and job function and the faithfuls are increasingly crowded, rich in term of constituent but most of them are farmers. Most the faithfuls have difficult material and spiritual life in this period. Therefore, in this time, Vietnam communist had a policy to gather solidarity of religions in national unity strategy in order to achieve national independence. As we can see, most religions and the faithful heighten patriotism and there are many movement of struggling French colonialists with positive participation of dignitaries who lead the religions. However, there are some dignitaries and religions that did not understand deeply and assess objectively, had some improper pointviews and policies. However, thanks to proper policies and methods, Party gradually gathered revolutionary spirit, spirit of struggle and responsibilities of religions to against machination and action of enemy to get national independence.

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