수완나부미 제1권 제2호(2009년 12월) : 43~71

▣ 연구논문 ▣
ARTICLES

Influences of Protestantism on some Traditional Cultural Values of Hmong Ethnic People in Lao Cai Province of Vietnam

NGUYEN Van Hieu*
DO Quang Son**

Ⅰ. Introduction

In the multi-ethnic country of Vietnam, the Hmong ethnic group, or Hmong people for short, is one important member in the ethnic Minorities community. With a population of nearly 800,000, the Hmong people rank eighth in population among Vietnam's ethnic groups. Covering a wide region, they usually reside in areas from 800 to 1,000 metres above sea-level in almost all of the Northern mountainous provinces; alongside the Vietnam-China borderline and the Vietnam-Laos borderline, from Lang Son province to Nghe An province. The Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Son La, and Nghe An provinces in the Northeast and Northwest regions of Vietnam are home to most of the Hmong people.Mieu (Water Meo) (Tran 1999, 56). Some view Flower Hmong and Red Hmong as one group (Cu 1994, 23)

* Professor, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, nvhieu73@yahoo.com
** Director-general, Department of Culture and Information, Lao Cai Province, dqsonvhlc@yahoo.com

Scientific studies, as well as legends, say that "the ethnic groups using the Miao-Yao languages originated from the old days in China and during a long history, their ancestors from the hilly regions in the Huanan (花南) region of China migrated into Vietnam and some other countries in the Southeast Asian region to create a complicated ethnic map today" (Nguyen 2000, 130). The Hmong people migrated into Vietnam about 300 years ago at the earliest, and 100 years ago at the latest. Hmong is the self-called name of the Hmong people. Other peoples call them Miao, Mieu, Meo, or Mẹo. Based on ethnological and linguistic features, the Hmong ethnic group is divided into the following branches: White Hmong (Hmôngz Đơư), Flower Hmong (Hmôngz Lênhl), Red Hmong (Hmôngz Siz), Black Hmong (Hmôngz Đuz), Green Hmong (Hmôngz Njuôz), and Na Mieu (Water Meo) (Tran 1999, 56). Some view Flower Hmong and Red Hmong as one group (Cu 1994, 23).

Besides Vietnam, Hmong residents live in vast regions of South China, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. Notably, a lot of Hmong people, possibly hundreds of thousands, migrated mainly from Laos to the US, France, and Australia after 1975. Based on 1990 statistics, China is home to the biggest Hmong community of over 7 million; residing mainly in the Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Qichuan, Guangxi, Hainan and Hebei provinces. Among China's 56 ethnic groups, the Hmong people are behind the Han (Chinese), Zhuàng, Man, and Hui (Xin 1992, 1-2). The Hmong people in Vietnam retain close contact with people in their same family in other countries, especially in the borderline regions between Vietnam, China, and Laos.

The Lao Cai Province has a 203 kilometre borderline with China. In the past, it was the area that received the first large migrations of Northern ethnic peoples, of which the Hmong was one. Therefore, Lao Cai is considered to be one of the cradles of the Hmong people in Vietnam. In a 1999 total population survey, there were 123,773 Hmong

people in Lao Cai (61,553 male and 62.220 female). They resided in all of the province's 9 districts and cities, in 109 of 164 communes, and in 600 of 2000 hamlets. Of the 600 hamlets with Hmong residents, 433 were completely Hmong and 173 had residents of other ethnic groups.

Though they migrated to Vietnam and underwent a long period of cohabitation with other ethnic groups, the Hmong people still preserved their cultural identities. However, over the past few years, their spiritual and religious life has changed a lot as they accept new religions much different from their traditional beliefs. The most remarkable phenomenon is the promulgation of Protestantism, which directly affects their traditional culture in general and their traditional beliefs in particular.

Many researches of Vietnamese scholars have mentioned this issue (Tran 1996, 2004;Phan 2001;Luong 2001;Vuong 2004;Vu 2005; Nguyen 2006.). Despite approaching the issue from different angles, they have shown a panorama of the promulgation of Protestantism in Vietnam's Hmong community. In this paper, we will survey the influences of Protestantism on the Hmong people's traditional cultural values in a specific location so as to point out hidden contradictions between the traditional culture and the alien religion. Simultaneously, we hope to provide clear proof of the ways Hmong people receive Protestantism and make initial predictions of the status and role of this religion in the future of the Hmong people.

Ⅱ. Overview of the History of Promulgation of Catholicism and Protestantism in the Hmong Community in Lao Cai, Vietnam

Reality shows that when migrating to Lao Cai, including those in the last migration about 100 years ago; most of the Hmong people in their

spiritual life worshipped their ancestors and followed totemism, chamanisme, and polytheism. The worshipping of genies has obvious explanations and is usually related to their life. In a broader view, the Hmong people's religions can be placed among the common religions and cults of the Far Eastern region; "The rice-growing Far Eastern region gave birth to the tribute paying regime, leading to the ideas of polytheism and pantheism" (Dang 2001, 119). Facing the globalisation trend, the native cultural values have mixed with alien religions; creating both a natural and compulsory process, which can be seen clearly in the promulgation of Catholicism and Protestantism in the Hmong community in Lao Cai.

The Hmong people in Lao Cai received Catholicism quite early by a natural and intentional penetration by French priests during 1887-1904. Many of these churches are still present today: Ta Phin (1887-1904), Sapa (1905), Nghia Lo (1906). This time can be viewed as the start of Catholicism in the Hmong community in Lao Cai. From 1945 to 1960, the number of Catholicism practicing Hmong was low: "Before the August Revolution (in 1945), Sapa had 33 Hmong families following Catholicism. In the resistance war against the French to the end of the 1960s, the number of followers grew fast, there are only 7 families in Sapa" (Tran 2004, 67) and this situation lasted to until the early 1980s. Many reasons led to a change; such as widespread warfare, the disappearance of Catholic priests in the region, and, particularly, the government having applied tough measures to prevent and exclude religions under the political conditions that time.

From the middle of the 1980s, more and more Catholic followers appeared in Lao Cai. From 1991, some followers contacted priests in Yen Bai to say prayers and find out about Christ. Some submitted applications to become Catholic followers. Yet from 1993, some who listened to the FEBC (Far East Broadcasting Company in Philippines) regularly recognised that their Catholicism had differences in

comparison with the radio broadcasts, so they quit the religion and turned to Protestantism. From this point, Protestantism was promulgated strongly in the Lao Cai's Hmong community, creating a wave of followers. The Protestantism preached in the Hmong community is also called the Vangx Txir religion (the religion of God). According to researches (Phan 2001, Tran , 2004, Vuong 2004), the Vangx Txir religion appeared in 1980 in Colorado, U.S., where about 5,000 Hmong people lived. Soon after, the religion developed in California and other states. In 1984, it spread to Thailand and Laos; and to Vietnam in 1987. Some say Vangx Txir resulted from the meetings of American Protestants with the Hmong people in Southeast Asia (Dinh 2006). At that time, Lao Cai was one of the regions with the most Vangx Txir Hmong followers; up to 18,000 living in 180 hamlets in 37 communes, and 7 of the 10 districts (at that time Lao Cai included the Than Uyen district, which belongs to the Lai Chau Province today). The Bac Ha district had the biggest Vangx Txir group; 3,262 Hmong in 502 households quit worshipping their ancestors to follow Vangx Txir. These days, the number of followers is approximately 10,000; mainly in the Bao Thang, Bac Ha, and Bao Yen districts (Tran 2004, 69). Recent surveys also reveal the development of Protestantism in the Hmong community in Lao Cai (see statistics of Protestantism following households in a hamlet in the Sa Pa district).

According to Tran Huu Son (2004, 70), the issue of the Hmong people following Catholicism and Protestantism in Lao Cai has taken place in three periods:

From 1918 to 1945: Catholicism infiltrated the Hmong society. Due to cultural differences and the hermetic Hmong society, Catholicism entered mainly into two hamlets of the Hang Da in the Hau Thao commune, Sa Pa district. Though a church and a religious mission was built, the number of followers was low (25 households only).

From 1946 to 1986: Consolidation of Catholicism. From 1946 - 1975, the number of Catholicism following households fell in some places, but went up overall, mainly due to population growth. From 1976 to 1986, Catholicism tended to grow in both quantity and organizational scale.

<Table 1> Development of Protestantism in Y Linh Ho Hamlet, Sapa (Statistics in 02/2006)

Thời gian	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**2004**	**2005**	**2006**	**Total**
Number of following households	**12**	11	2	6	11	1	43 /253 households (17%)

From 1987 to date: The number of Protestantism followers rose sharply. From 1987 to 1991, the Hmong people accepted Protestantism and followed Vangx Txir. Since 1992, Protestantism has developed to its heyday.

Currently, Protestantism is developing vigorously in Lao Cai and the route is through natural direct or indirect promulgation measures. This is the leading way of Protestantism. In addition, the forcible way happens within families and family clans where some members are Protestantism followers, especially in families where Protestantism followers play a high family role. They will use their status to spread the religion to other members and this way is force to some extent. For example, in the Chu Lin hamlet, the Trung Chai commune of Sapa which had 31 households, the followers' structure varied; 7 households had only the wife and children being followers, 3 households had the husband being a follower, and the remaining households had all of their members being followers. Some families saw three consecutive generations be followers, such as that of Chau A Re who followed first and then spread the religion to his offspring.

Inspecting the places with Protestant Hmong followers in the Lao Cai province, three key reasons explain why Hmong people accept the religion:

(1) Economic reasons: As far as we know, the Hmong ethnic group has a lot of difficulties in their socio-economic development. Their main economic practice is growing maize and rice in mountainous fields using backward techniques and having low productivity. The burnt-over land economy badly affects the environment, causing exhaustion in land and forest resources and fostering shifting cultivation and migration. In addition, under Program 06 of the Vietnamese Government, opium plants which used to greatly profit the Hmong people have been eliminated, making their life tougher. In this context, the number of Protestantism followers surged. Poor economic conditions lead them to rely on religious beliefs in hope for a better life. Some followed Protestantism in hope to receive specific materials from evangelists. Poverty makes them believe in the supernatural power of Vangx Txir, the incarnation of Christ.

Another economic reason is that the Hmong people have backward and burdensome customs which have ruled their lives for ages, causing ideological rigidity. For instance, they place much importance on funeral activities, weddings, and ceremonial offerings which cause much waste in their spiritual and productive lives. Meanwhile, Protestantism has simple rules and rituals which easily fit the expectations and awareness level of the Hmong people.

(2) Gender inequality: One surprising fact is women overwhelm and pioneer in the Protestantism following communities. For example, in the Chu Lin hamlet (Sapa – Lao Cai), women made up 73 per cent of the followers and they were the first in the family to follow the religion. This phenomenon can be explained as follows:

a. Women are easily approached and persuaded. Of note, most of the Hmong women do not know the popular Vietnamese language and

have limited social connections; so this is very favourable for those who carry on missionary work in the Hmong language.

b. Within Protestantism's organization, there are groups and boards helping each other; making the women's work less heavy. Moreover, the religious rulings ban violence, obscenity, and thievery; laws which women really need for their family life, especially in case of small families today.

c. There are also religious rulings to ban drinking wine and to impose the one-wife-one-husband marriage regime, which can help women "manage" their husbands better; and perhaps there is no better management way than that of God. Hmong women have long expected gender equality, so they will easily come to recognise and accept Protestant dogmas.

(3) Educational level and need for information: Hmong people in Vietnam in general, and Lao Cai in particular, have a low educational level. The illiterate rate of the Hmong people ranks second among the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. The rate of those graduating from school is low, also.

<Table 2> **Literacy Levels of Hmong people from Five Years Old to Above** (Total Population Survey in 1999)

Level Place	*Primary Education*	*Secondary Education*	*High Education*
Lao Cai	27.41	0.731	0.178
Lai Chau	27.11	0.730	0.113
Son La	27.48	0.724	0.089
Whole Country	27.76	0.760	0.110

Low educational levels, combined with the closeness of the society, limit communication of the Hmong people to within hamlets and family clans. It is difficult to find a Hmong person to interpret conversations in daily life. In addition, it is not easy for those who

can use the popular Vietnamese language to access newspapers daily. These limitations lead to the Hmong people's high demand for information. Most of them get information through families and neighbours in their hamlet and through a few audio-visual products. Community contacts are their most effective tool to communicate, which indirectly brings them to the new religious beliefs via the Hmong-broadcast radio or evangelists in the same family.

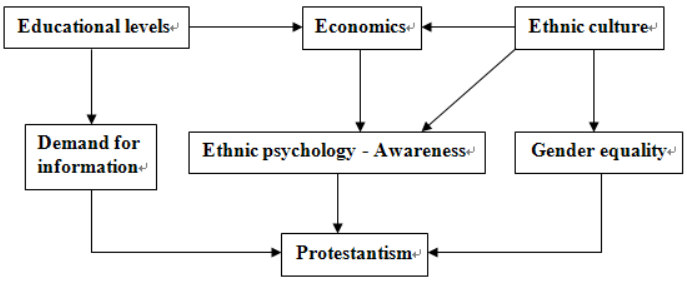
(4) Traditional cultural and ethnic psychological and awareness factors: As stated, the Hmong people have backward and burdensome customs which have ruled their lives for ages, causing ideological rigidity. For instance, they place much importance on funeral activities, weddings, and ceremonial offerings which cause much waste in their spiritual and productive lives. Meanwhile, Protestantism has simple rules and rituals which easily fit the expectations and awareness level of the Hmong people.

Hmong people reside across mainland Southeast Asia and South China, especially in the borderline regions among the five countries of China, Laos, Thai, Myanmar, and Vietnam. This survival space has aroused inside them the awareness of their ethnicity, national borders, and their history; which coincides with evangelists who want to spread their religion beyond national and territorial borders (Vuong 1994). Under the rule of the Han people(Chinese), they had to migrate Southward, becoming a wandering tribe, shifting cultivation, and gradually losing their cultural heritage and economic status. Moreover, as their lives became destitute, they always dreamt of a certain supreme savior who would liberate them out of their economic, cultural, and political miseries. If that savior cannot be found in politics, they will seek him in religious beliefs.

A belief crisis can be seen in most of the Hmong followers. They no longer believe in worshipping their ancestors as they feel the ancestors can not help them get out of poverty and misery. That is why

they wanted to have new beliefs and expected a new religion would improve their lives. At this point, Protestantism appeared and the Hmong people followed it voluntarily.

The above mentioned reasons are closely connected and dialectical. Economic reasons play a leading role, which gives birth to other reasons. In addition, traditional cultural and ethnic awareness are noteworthy. The following model points out how Hmong people in Lao Cai followed Protestantism:



Ⅲ. Influences of Protestantism on Traditional Cultural Values of Hmong Ethnic People

3.1. Influence of Protestantism on Traditional Social Institutions

3.1.1. Influences on Family Relationships:

Family is the smallest institution in the Hmong people's society. Unlike other Southern Asian ethnic groups in Vietnam's central highlands, the Hmong family model includes two or three generations, consisting of the parents, unmarried children, and their old parents. Hmong people follow patriarchy, so the husband takes charge of all heavy work such as cultivation, trading, and building a house. In the family,

the wife takes care of family work like getting water, breeding, weaving, or finding firewood. The work of the wife is not as heavy as that of the husband, but often lasts from 10-12 hours per day, sometimes 15-18 hours during harvest time. In the traditional family, Hmong people maintain gender inequality: the husband makes decisions, not the wife. Therefore, the wife's role is opaque and heavily restricted by harsh customs. The women live at the greatest disadvantage in the family. Everyday, they have get up early, do farming work till late in the evening, and return home; where a lot of work such as breeding, cooking, and weaving is waiting for them. In addition, backward customs force them to listen to and serve the husband, no matter if he beats them or insults them. Once married, they must live with the husband till the end of their life, and if they die, they become "the ghosts" serving their husband's family. However, Hmong women play an important role in the spiritual life in the family and society. Women are "the aunts" who are the unique people in charge of funeral or wedding rituals. They are also supervisors that monitor the practice of customs of other members in the family.

In the Protestantism following families, the two-generation model is maintained but the wife and the husband face a big conflict of status. Protestantism rules that the husband does not have the right to get married to another, drink wine, come to blows, or indulge in pleasures. The husband must work hard. These simple rulings are not forcible, but very profitable to women and meet with their expectations for liberation. In these families, the women no longer resign themselves; they stand up to seek equality. That explains why there are conflicts of lifestyle and viewpoints in the family when only the wife follows Protestantism. For example, at the Can Ngai hamlet, Ta Phin commune in Lao Cai, 7 of the 39 households with the wife following Protestantism saw conflicts that led to the wife leaving for her parents' home.

3.1.2. Influences of Protestantism on Family Clan Relationships:

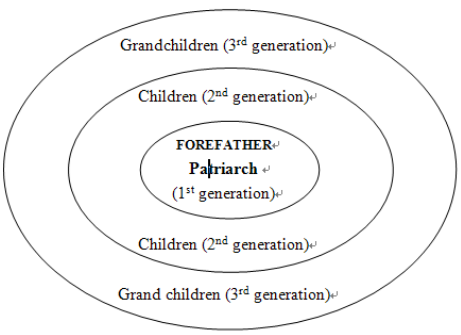
Hmong people have many family clans each of which have different branches. The traditional family clan structure includes two key relationships:

(1) Hmong family clan with the same blood relationship:

This family clan has up to 4 generations with a specific forefather. There are very close family relations under the impact of the family records; sharing the same taboos, rituals, and other customs. Another factor for close relationships is that the family clan often shares the same residential location.

The family clan is headed by a patriarch, who can be elected by family members or takes over the role from the late patriarch. The patriarch usually owns good moral records, prestige, and wide understanding of the family clan's issues (rituals for making ceremonial offerings, taboos, and other customs). He has the highest responsibility and status in the family clan, often representing other members to make decisions for the clan, and addresses social issues.

This model can be simplified by the following diagram:

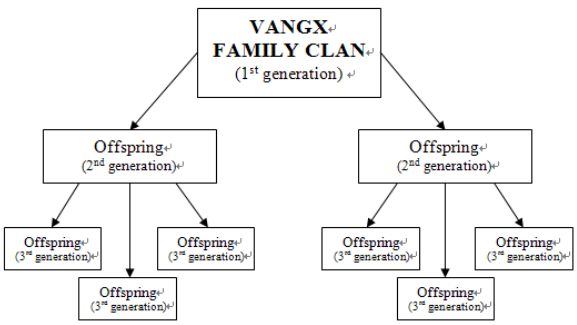


(2) Family clan relationships with the same family name:

Statistics show that in Lao Cai today, there are nearly 30 family names. Those of the same family name like Zangx (楊), Vangx (王),

Vux (吳), Thaox (陶), Hơux (候), Lil (李), Tsangv (張), Shôngx (熊) or Muôl (馬) consider each other to be brothers in the same family clan; despite of the fact that they do not have the same forefather or residential area. They can visit each other and there is no distinction of who is the guest or the host. Despite living far from each other, they are totally banned from marriage with each other. In this social structure, there is no patriarch or a leadership organization like that of the blood relationship structure, but some principles of behavior are maintained.

This structure can be seen in the following example diagram:



The traditional family clans of the Hmong people are usually hermetic and have little contact with each other. Connections usually take place among the members of the same family clan, so their traditional cultural values and customs are not easy to change. They are maintained almost entirely.

(3) Influences on Hmong family clans:

Those who accept and follow Protestantism the most are the members of the same family name. However, the influences of this religion come mainly from the members sharing the same blood relationship. As a result:

a. When Protestantism enters Hmong people's family clans, the roleof the family clan is reduced a lot, particularly concerning the role of the patriarch. In the traditional family hierarchy, the patriarch

usually holds the highest political status as a leader and representative for the whole family clan for any work related to his family clan. When Protestantism appears and overwhelm their spiritual lives, his role fades away and is replaced by the head of the religion. He no longer rules the whole community. Protestantism followers no longer listen to all his guidance and orders related to the observance of conventions or holding death anniversary rituals for their forefathers.

b. The spiritual unity of the family clan relies mostly on the members' memories of the forefather. They are memories and thoughts of the history and the role of the family clan; these memories are maintained by tales transferred from generation to generation. However, when Protestantism is promulgated, the followers will learn by heart the history and the promulgation of the religion of Christ, as well as his dogmas and behavior rulings. Consequently, the memories of the forefather will fade and decease.

c. The division among the followers and the non-followers in a family clan is deep. Due to the cohesion among the family clan's members, the behavior of family members is highly valued. However, the followers break this behavior mode, leading to conflicts with other members. The awareness of each member about the forefather, origins, and history (as well as customs and beliefs) have long lived and become overwhelming in their material and spiritual life; and once it is broken, the follower will be disdained and separated from the family clan and no longer participate in the traditional cultural practices.

d. The Protestantism following households have been confiscated with the land they had been allocated before and do not have the right to access rice seeds because they no longer worship their ancestors. The land will be given to the non-followers so that they can cultivate there and get products to help with worshipping the ancestors and join traditional practices.

3.1.3. Influences on Hmong Hamlet Relations:

A hamlet of Hmong people is a fundamental social institution consisting of a few houses; and the hamlet is called a “jaol.” The most striking feature of a Hmong hamlet is that the Hmong people usually live independently from other ethnic people. It is very rare to see a Hmong family live in a hamlet overwhelmed by people from another ethnic group. Each Hmong hamlet has a god of the soil and holds a festival every year called "naox cxôngx". Every day of the Dragon, on the first lunar month, heads of the “jaol”s hold a meeting under the chairmanship of the hamlet’s head.

The hamlet head and his assistant are elected on a yearly basis. This meeting is where the Hmong people discuss and come to agreements on some specific regulations concerning breeding, work, protection of crops, public security, fighting, robbery, thievery, and assisting some families. Each family head will drink a bowl of wine to swear to follow these regulations. The hamlet’s head and his assistant are responsible for monitoring the obedience of these regulations in the coming year, and punish the violators. The “naox cxôngx” meeting plays an important role in strengthening hamlet solidarity.

The hamlet’s heads, patriarchs, family clan heads, military heads, and sorcerers keep the roles as leaders of the hamlet. They are highly respected and admired by the residents, but they still join production activities. The hamlet members are managed by not only these leaders, but also the hamlet’s legal practices and regulations via the hamlet’s “public opinion.” The hamlet’s management force manages its members by administrative orders and sometimes by “violence” to ensure that the “laws” are obeyed. Legal customs and regulations affect the hamlet’s members by the public opinion, and punishments in the form of hamlet customs. The relations among households in the hamlet are equal, mutually aided, and closely linked by family clan relations and

the same religious beliefs See Hmong culture more detailed (Tran 1996).

Another noteworthy point in the structure of a Hmong hamlet is tha public activities are not frequent, unlike those of the residents in the Red River Delta or in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The biggest gathering is the "naox cxôngx" festival. Collective activities often take place in a wide area near the hamlet, the forbidden forest, and the place worshipping the god of the soil.

When Protestantism penetrates the Hmong community, the hamlet's people are divided into two groups: the non-followers who continue to maintain the traditional customs and relations, and the followers who do not join or obey the hamlet's regulations or the hamlet's festival and worshipping activities for the god of the soil. For the whole year, it seems that the Hmong followers do not organise any public activities outside their religious ones. As a result, the non-followers ostracize them. The biggest conflict usually happens between the hamlet's head, representing the power and interests, spiritually, and materially, and the head of a Protestantism following household. The former is no longer respected by the latter, and by contrast, the Protestantism following household is ostracized by the whole hamlet. They do not have any relations with or assistance from the community concerning such big issues as funerals, weddings, or building a new house. They also lose the public-allocated land and access to new rice seeds.

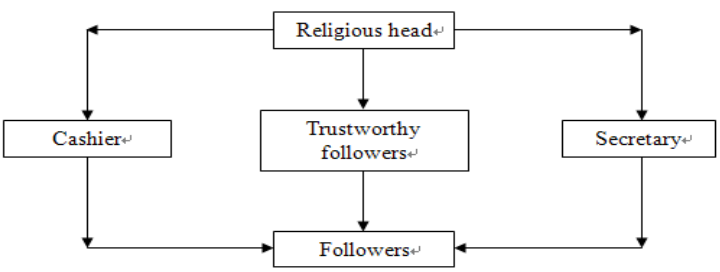
Conflicts in daily activities lead to production and residential relocation. The Protestantism following households manage to move outside of the hamlet or migrate to another place. For example, in the Can Ngai hamlet, Ta Phin commune of the Sapa district, there are more than 40 Protestant households which have moved to live in higher places; separating from the non-followers and causing much hardship for the management of residents. The household of Chang A Cang in Ta Phin is a special case. They have built a house in the

middle of a rice paddy so as to follow Protestantism. In 2006, Lao Cai witnessed 85 Hmong households, with 410 mouths to feed, migrate to other provinces.

As the followers say prayers everyday before having a meal and join a religious meeting every three days, some collective institutions have appeared in the hamlet with a large population following Protestantism. First, they contribute to building a simple chapel at the edge of the hamlet (for example, in Suoi Thau hamlet, Ta Phin commune), and then build a church for the hamlet or hamlets (Lao Chai commune, Sapa). They also set up basic religious associations and ordain Hmong shepherds for hamlets. The system of this grassroots-level religious association in a commune includes the religious head who leads, implements diplomatic work, determines activities, and allocates funding; the secretariat who is responsible for managing the number of followers, accepting new followers, and distributing learning materials; and the cashier who distributes money and bedding. In addition, there are trustworthy assistants who help with propaganda work and contact among followers. This system is a very new feature in the structure of a Hmong hamlet, as seen in the following diagram:

3.2. Influences of Protestantism on Hmong People's Religious Cults and Custom

3.2.1. Changing from Loose Polytheism to Monotheism:



(1) In the family, God plays the top role, forcing the ancestors and ghosts of the house out of the sacred places in spiritual life.

Hmong people like other ethnic groups have polytheism as their primitive cult in which worshipping the ancestors is a leading activity. They also worship the genies believed to keep the fate of the community, the family clan like house ghosts (the ghosts of the main pillar, the door, the room, the kitchen), and the god of the soil. They do not eat animals that are their totems (tiger, deer). But this worshipping is not clear.

Worshipping the ancestors is illustrated by rituals, taboos, legends of them, and the family clan. Hmong people believe their ancestors and the dead members of the same family clan protect the living offspring. The members of the same family clan are linked together by the same family records and forefather. Inside their house, there is a special area for the ancestor altar which looks somewhat simple. The biggest feature of this altar is a rectangular paper, 20x30cm, pasted on the wall and attached with fowl blood and feather. Some family clans set up larger altars where there are three incense burners to worship the ancestors, parents, and brothers. The altar is a holy place where only the head of the family can hold rituals and make offerings. Hmong people only make offerings on the occasion of a new year, a new crop, or when they have a disease. They usually get a sorcerer to determine which ghost caused the disease and then make offerings to that ghost. If this ghost remains unknown, all of the ghosts of the house will be made offerings to, causing a lot of waste. This kind of ritual does not have complicated procedures and sometimes the ancestors are viewed as the ghosts of the house and they all have the same status. The spiritual bonds between Hmong people and their ancestors, as well as the ghosts of the house, are not strong. They are not enhanced by periodical activities or complicated procedures. They make offerings only when there is a disease or when the new year comes. Therefore, these beliefs are easily replaced by new ones.

Due to the Hmong people's loose ties and perceptions about the role and status of ancestors, Protestantism has broken them and replaced the ancestors' monolatry; and this changes the following aspects:

a. The supreme power of Christ gradually overwhelms the spiritual life of the Hmong people. While the ancestors used to take a dim role, sometimes homogeneous with the ghosts of the house, the perception of Christ is clear-cut. Besides collectively reading and saying prayers, Hmong people always mention Christ in daily activities such as having a meal, and expecting something good, or luck. In other words, the connection with Christ is maintained at least three times per day. Protestantism also builds in Hmong people's minds the image of an honourable and friendly Christ, totally different from the image of their ancestors. Christ stands above the ancestors, hence able to suppress all of the ghosts of the house and making them unable to harm the family's owners.

b. Creating belief in the protection and salvation of Christ. This belief is materialised through normal living activities and objects such as money, blankets, mats, and clothes distributed to new followers. It is also close and simplified via the dogmas which tell them to live with good will as Christ expects.

c. Rituals of making offerings have been simplified. None of the Protestantism following households in such communes as Ta Phin, Chung Chai, and San Sa Ho, in Lao Chai, Sapa, have an altar for their ancestors, but they do for Christ. The followers all say that making offerings to their ancestors is costly; they have to slaughter buffaloes, pigs, and chickens, and carry out complicated rituals in hope of protection from their ancestors. This protection is not effective, while Protestantism does not require them to make offerings and brings them protection from diseases. The existence of backward customs benefits only some people, like the family clan's head or sorcerers. Some Hmong people say "anyway we have to worship a ghost and worshipping the "Christ ghost" is much less costly".

(2) In the community, for the first time, the Hmong people have a single god with a supreme power.

Unlike many other ethnic groups, the Hmong people do not have common genies. The worshipping of fate-protecting genies is strong in the Viet or Tay communities, yet absent in that of the Hmong people. Following Protestantism, the Hmong people have a supreme genie and the public rituals take place two or three times a week instead of one time per year. The location for making rituals is clear as well. The church or the house of the religion's head is a fixed place.

3.2.2. Public Festivals are Gradually Replaced by Collective Prayers at the Church or the House of the Religion's Head.

One of the Hmong people's most typical festivals is the "Naox cxôngx" of a hamlet-based community. Its main contents include making offerings to the god of the soil, discussion and agreement on community regulations, and electing a new head of the hamlet in the new year. The second festival, which usually starts from the second of the lunar January, is the "Grâul taox" to pray for prosperity and good health. Its main activities are singing and dancing for good luck, singing to express affection, competing in using the cross-bow, and blowing the pan-pine. These occasions usually have large parties that attract the participation of the whole community. For example, to hold a "Grâul taox" festival in a family to pray for having a child, the famiy has to borrow a lot to buy buffaloes, cows, and wine to entertain others, leading to a big burden on the poor family. Festivals also help consolidate community and family clan solidarity, preserving traditional cultural values.

However, these festivals are a big problem for poor families and they tend to fear these events. This is one of the reasons why they follow Protestantism (See Ⅱ). Protestantism deals a strong blow to the traditional festivals of the Hmong people, threatening to eliminate them.

Following Protestantism, the Hmong people have to give up their traditional religious rituals, as well as other cultural activities. In a survey conducted at Can Ngai hamlet, Ta Phin commune in 2006, 50 of the 103 households in the hamlet had one or all members following Protestantism. They tend to live in separation from others and do not join publicly held traditional activities. If all of the 103 households were to follow Protestantism, their traditional festivals would end altogether, along with other cultural features.

In the past, community regulations played a crucial role to stabilise the development of the community. These regulations are worked out at the Naox cxôngx meetings, and if these meetings are no longer held, the community stability of the Hmong people will be affected strongly.

3.2.3 Hamlet Regulations are Changed by God's Religious Rites.

Hamlet regulations have been built and preserved by many generations. Protestantism's dogmas and rulings are changing them. The following table points out the differences between them:

Hamlet regulations	Protestantism's regulations
-Using customs to regulate human behavior (including heavenly as well as traditional authority)	*-Using the name of God to impose and entice the followers to obey. Being unclear and invisible.*
-Shaped by community habits for a long time; used to be implemented voluntarily by community members	*-Newly-accepted and erasing traditional customs. However, they do not eliminate the natural and wild aspects in the Hmong people's life, so they are accepted.*
-Familiar, old, stable in spiritual terms, but wasteful in material terms; complicated in procedures	*-Creating sudden changes in lifestyles, but bringing immediate profits: Less waste in material life, and simple and stable spiritual life*
-Thinking that preserving these regulations will not make their life better or developed	*-Thinking that these regulations will lead to a better future, a society they expect*
-Punishing violations by material tools, sometimes by genies. The punished come under large pressure of the community	*-The highest punishment is expulsion from the religion and the community, as well. Meaning no longer protection by God. The punished come under internal pressure*

3.2.4. Customs and Ceremonies Linking Life Cycles Change by Taking the Ceremony's Subjects to the Central Stage, instead of the Ceremony's Object.

The Hmong people have many ceremonies related to important milestones in life.

(1)For giving birth and the care of newly-born babies: When a pregnant women finds it difficult to give birth, they do "Qur tu ci" rituals, with a dog being the offering. When the baby is three days old, the "Hu plis" ritual is made to call a soul for it. Offerings include one chicken and two eggs. When the baby is one year old, there is a birthday ceremony, with offerings being chickens and pigs. In case the boy is ill and difficult to rear, the Hmong people have a "Jênhv txir yaz" ceremony to accept a step-father for him.

(2)Wedding and marriage: The wedding of Hmong people in Lao Cai is composed of three ceremonies: proposing the marriage, offering the betrothal gifts, and holding the wedding. The wedding usually takes place after the harvest time. There are many procedures and taboos for a wedding; such as matching ages, seeing chicken legs to guess bad or good luck, choosing a good date, demanding gifts, receiving the bride, and seeing the bride off. To ask for a bride when she is still a little child, the family representatives bring two chickens and one litre of wine to the would-be bride's family and entertain with a meal. When the child is 15-16 years old, the offering is 70 – 120 silver coins, depending on the demand of the bride's family. Other offerings include a pig, weighing by kilogramme in line with the number of the coins, and 20-50 litres of wine. The bride and bridegroom's families slaughter the pigs and have a party for at least one day and one night.

(3)Funeral ceremonies of the Hmong people consist of unique rituals. There are 9 rituals, classified into two main ceremonies: the "fresh ghost" and "dry ghost" ceremonies. The "fresh ghost" ceremony

includes rituals for showing the road, blowing clarinets, chasing away enemies, paying condolences, bringing the dead to the burial ground, lowering the coffin into the grave, making rice offerings after three days, and sending off the soul. In the old days, the dead body was usually buried five to six days after death, and for these days pigs were slaughtered to provide food for meals. Many families must slaughter one or two buffaloes for these meals. Meanwhile, the "dry ghost" ceremony is set by the sorcerer. When the family faces some bad luck like a disease, they will invite a sorcerer home and he will decide whether to hold this ceremony or not. This ceremony is compulsory for a son who has been given land and helped get married by his parents. This ritual requires a buffalo to be slaughtered. Before the ceremony, a pig is killed to make offerings to the ancestors in hope that they will agree to the ceremony.

The "dry ghost" ceremony is important for it strengthens the solidarity among family members. Most of the funeral ceremonies of the Hmong people need offerings, from as small as chickens, to as big as buffaloes and pigs. So, they are really burdensome to poor families. Meanwhile, Protestantism advises its followers to quit these rituals and customs. The religion does not ask for worshipping paintings, images, or relics. Hymns are the leading communication tool and followers confess their sins directly to God. So the followers have all cut back on, or given up, the ceremonies concerning their life cycle.

(1) Protestantism does not require ceremonies for giving birth or taking care of a newly-born as the Hmong people's customs. So followers stop performing these ceremonies.

(2) Under Protestantism's rulings, weddings depend on the voluntary agreement of the couple and then they give each other a ring. The wedding is chaired by a shepherd. These rituals are simple and economical, so the Hmong people easily accept them. According to a survey of the Can Ngai hamlet in the Ta Phin commune, in a traditional

wedding, the bride's family usually demands from the bridegroom's family 70 kilogrammes of pig meat, 20 litres of wine, and 4-6 million Vietnamese dongs; quite costly for poor Hmong people.

(3)Protestantism requires only praying for the dead and attracting relatives to attend the funeral. These procedures are definitely simple. Meanwhile, to the non-followers in the Ta Phin commune, the funeral costs a buffalo, much wine, and some money. The dead are kept at home for a few days before burial. The "dry ghost" ceremony, one year after the funeral, also costs pigs, a day to organize, the invitation of a sorcerer, each offspring to needs to contribute 30 litres of wine, and 50-60 kilogrammes of rice. By contrast, the followers do not need to have a pig slaughtered and only say prayers. The old dead are buried after two days, and the young dead after only one day.

In short, Protestantism helps to change the customs of the Hmong people and their lifestyle as well. Now, the followers say prayers before having a meal, right after getting up, and before going to bed. They are not allowed to eat the offerings. There are marriages only among the followers and if one gets married to a non-follower, the latter must follow Protestantism. The couple does not need a prestigious person to broker their marriage. At funerals, there are no longer offerings after 13 days (after the burial date) or any need to hold the "dry ghost" ceremony. There is no need to choose a burial date. The dead has one only prestigious person to say prayers.

It is undeniable that Protestantism has a positive impact on eliminating the backward customs and habits which have long affected their lives of the Hmong people. It helps them save money; this is particularly important given a fact that most of Hmong people are low-income earners. On the other hand, Protestantism creates strong divisions among the followers and non-followers. Many Hmong people feel really insulted to see a person give up worshipping their ancestors, joining festivals, or holding traditional ceremonies. These

divisions will, in turn, cause negative impacts on family and community relations. There will be less solidarity among the followers and non-followers and many fair traditions and customs of the Hmong people are threatened to disappear.

Ⅳ. Conclusion

The Hmong ethnic community in Lao Cai has undergone 100 years' of contact with and acceptance of Catholicism; and the year 1918 can be viewed as the first milestone. Protestantism, however, has penetrated their lives not that long ago, and strongly affects their cultural and spiritual lives. Most of the Hmong followers have come to follow this religion voluntarily, through direct and indirect methods of preaching. In many localities of Lao Cai, some compulsory measures have appeared, especially in the context of a family or a family clan.

There are four key reasons that lead the Hmong people to give up traditional beliefs and accept the new religion: economic reasons, gender inequality, educational level and demand for information, and reasons related to traditional culture and awareness of the ethnic spirit. These reasons are dialectically linked and, in many cases, they are causal. Economics has been found to be the leading reason that changes the religious beliefs of the Hmong people.

Protestantism has dealt a great impact on the traditional social institutions of the Hmong people in various aspects. It arouses conflicts between traditions and new regulations as imposed by the religion, conflicts of roles in families between the wife and husband, cuts down the influence of the family clan on its members, and causes conflicts between followers and non-followers in hamlet relations.

Regarding traditional customs and habits, Protestantism, with its dogmas, shows noteworthy influences. First of all, the role of Christ is

supreme, taking over the power of the worshipping of ancestors and the ghosts of the house. Consequently, the Hmong people's polytheism is changing to monotheism. Second, traditional festivals have gradually been abandoned by the Protestantism followers. In some cases, the followers separate themselves from their cultural environment. Third, Protestantism's rulings change the community regulations of the Hmong people, leading the followers to accept new rulings. Fourth, in customs, habits, and folklore rituals, which are linked with lifecycle changes, the ceremony's subjects are taken to the central stage, instead of the ceremony's object.

The penetration of Protestantism in the Hmong people's community is changing their cultural values, giving birth to conflicts between the new and the old, as stated above. At the same time, Protestantism has also made positive impacts in eliminating the backward customs and habits of the Hmong people.

The trend of the Hmong people's following Protestantism continues in Lao Cai in particular, and in the localities with Hmong residents. What matters the most is harmonizing their traditional culture with a new religion; and this opens up new ideas for more research.

Key Words : Traditional Religion, Protestantism, Cultural Values, Lao Cai Province

참고문헌

Dang Nghiem Van. 2001. *Ethnicity-Culture-Religion*. Hanoi: Hanoi Social Sciences Publishing House.

Dinh Thai Binh. *Some Features in the Process of Receiving Good News of Hmong People in Vietnam's Northwest.* http://www.chuacuuthe.com/tailieu/9936hmong.html (2009.07.08)

Luong Thi Thoa. 2001. The Import of Vang Chu: Protestantism in the Mong Ethnic Group for the Past Few Years. *Historical Studies Magazine*.2.

Nguyen Chi Huyen et al. 2000. *Origins of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam's Northern Mountainous Regions.* Hanoi: Ethnic Culture Publishing House.

Nguyen Van Thang. 2006. Religion and How Hmong Behave to Diseases. *Religious Studies Magazine.* 5.

Phan Huu Dat et al. 2001. *Urgent Theological and Practical Issues concerning Ethnic Relations Today.* Hanoi: National Politics Publishing House.

Tran Tri Doi. 1999. *Research of the Languages of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Hanoi National Publishing House.

Tran Huu Son. 1996. *Hmong Culture*. Hanoi: Ethnic Culture Publishing House.

_____. 2004. *Building up Cultural Life in Highlands.* Hanoi: Ethnic Culture Publishing House.

Van, Cu Hoa & Nam Hoang. 1994. *Hmong People in Vietnam.* Hanoi: Ethnic Culture Publishing House.

Vu Truong Giang. 2005. The Thai People and the Hmong People and Catholicism and Protestantism in Mountainous Regions of Thanh Hoa Province. *Religious Studies Magazine*. 4.

Vuong Duy Quang. 1994. The Issue of Catholic Mong People Today. *Ethnological Magazine*. 4.

_____. 2004. Hmong People and Religious Phenomena related to Their Reaction in Southeast Asia: Past and Present. *Ethnological Magazine.*6.

Received: Nov. 01, 2009; Reviewed: Nov. 15, 2009; Accepted: Dec. 11, 2009

<국문초록>

베트남 라오까이 지역 흐몽족의 전통적 문화가치관에 미친 개신교의 영향

응웬 반 히에우
하노이국립대학교 교수

조 꾸앙 선
라오까이성 문화정보부 국장

베트남 소수민족 공동체 중 Hmong족은 중요한 구성원이라고 여겨져 왔다. 타지에서 베트남으로 이민 와서 다른 민족들과 함께 오랫동안 살아 왔지만 Hmong족은 자기의 민족문화 특색을 잘 지켜왔다. 그런데 지난 몇 년 동안 전통적인 종교와 달리 새로운 종교를 믿게 되는 방향으로 Hmong족의 심령의 종교는 많이 변하고 있다. 그 중에 특히 주목받은 것은 개신교의 유입이다. 개신교는 직접적, 간접적 선교 방법으로 Lao Cai에 있는 Hmong족 공동체에 자연스럽게 유입되었다. Lao Cai의 많은 지방에서 사람들이 개신교를 믿게 되었고 그 중에는 가족이나 종족 환경에서 강제적 선교도 일어났다. 개신교는 Hmong족의 전통문화뿐만 아니라 Hmong족의 전통 종교, 신앙에도 직접적으로 영향을 주었다.

이 글에서는 Hmong족이 살고 있는 Lao Cai 지방을 선택하여 고찰하며 Hmong족의 전통문화가치에 대한 개신교의 영향 및 원인을 살펴보기로 한다. 먼저 Hmong사람들은 전통신앙을 버리고 개신교를 믿게 되는 원인을 살펴보자. 주 원인은 다음과 같은 네 가지가 있다고 본다.

-경제와 관련된 원인
-성별 불평등과 관련된 원인
-학문 수준과 정보 습득 희망과 관련된 원인
-전통문화, 심리와 민속의식과 관련된 원인

그리고 다음과 같은 두 가지 각도에서 전통문화 가치에 대한 영향

을 알아보았다. 첫째는 개신교가 Hmong사람의 전통사회체제에 큰 영향을 준 점, 둘째는 개신교가 Hmong사람의 풍속습관 및 전통 신앙에 영향을 준 점이다.

개신교가 Hmong사람의 전통사회체제에 큰 영향을 준 점은 여러 방면에서 보인다. 전통적인 가치와 개신교의 새로운 규정 사이의 충돌도 있고 가족 안에서 부부의 위치상 충돌도 있다. 또한 Hmong사람들에게 전통 종족의 역할, 위치를 약화시키는 영향도 주었고 산골 마을에서 개신교를 믿는 사람들과 믿지 않은 사람들 사이에 일어난 새로운 충돌도 있다

개신교와 개신교의 교리는 역시 풍속습관과 전통신앙에 큰 영향을 주었다. 첫째는 예수의 역할이 가장 중요하고 조상 숭배나 "집에 있는 귀신 숭배"같은 것보다 강력한 것이다. 그래서 Hmong사람의 신앙, 종교는 원시적 다신교부터 일신교로 변한 것으로 보인다. 둘째는 개신교를 믿는 사람들이 Hmong족의 전통 민속축제를 점차 멀리한다. 어떤 경우에는 그 사람들이 자기 민족의 전통문화 환경을 떠나 버리는 일도 있었다. 셋째는 개신교의 교리가 Hmong족의 풍속 규정을 바꾸게 하였고 Hmong사람들이 새로운 종교의 교리를 집행시켰다. 넷째는 인간 인생 주기에 관한 풍속습관 및 민속의례들은 의례 대상보다 의례 주제를 중심으로 삼는 것으로 점차 변화했다.

대체로 개신교가 Hmong족 공동체에 유입하여 이 민족의 전통문화 가치는 변화했다. Hmong족 공동체에 오래 존재해 왔던 낙후한 습관을 개선하는 점에서 개신교는 적극적 역할을 했다. 현재 문제점은 어떻게 전통문화가치를 유지하고 새로운 종교와 같이 존재할 수 있느냐라는 문제이다. 이 문제는 다음 연구 대상이 될 것이다.

주제어 : 전통종교, 개신교, 전통문화가치, 라오까이 성