

THE RELATION BETWEEN RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND “NEW RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON” - SOME THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

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Relationship between belief and “new religious phenomena”. Theoretical and Practical issues

3. From popular beliefs to new religious phenomena

When studying new religious phenomena, Chinese researchers often classify new religious phenomena into 5 kinds depending on their origins

- The new religious sects come from Christianity such as : Children of God, The Solar temple

- The new religious sects come from Islam such as Baha'i sect

- The new religious sects come from Hinduism or Silk such as Krisna sect..

- New religious sects come from Buddhism, Shinto such as Soka Gakkai , Aum Shirikyo

The new religious sects come from the movement of *training of body and mind* such as Yoga, Transcendental Meditation

The Western researchers study ontologism of new religious phenomena and help us to know more obviously about the “religious origins” of “new religious phenomena”.

The French researcher F. Champion divided new religious phenomena into two sects : mystical religious sect and popular religious sect. According to her, the mystical religious sect is an important sect with following characteristics:

- This sect believes in “experience”
- The aim of believers of this sect change themselves by Yoga, meditation or sacred dance.
- The salvation connects closely actually happiness
- Moral love is corresponding to moral behavior.
- Moderate optimism

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The above analyses of F. Champion has active significance in studying the origins and main characteristics of new religious phenomena. When dealing with these characteristics she and other Western researchers stress on the attitude of believers towards Eschatological theory, Millennium theory. At the same time they point out that with new religious phenomena may believers ignore Dualism and optimistic attitude of Salvation theory¹. Dualism is an important doctrine of Christian Theology. So we can see that only new religious sects which come from Christianity are suitable to present condition

In Vietnam, many new religious sects which have been born in the North of Vietnam in recent years have different characteristics. Many new religious sects have connected with traditional belief or the values of the great religions.

In order to make more obviously this connection we give the results of investigation of two strange religious sects in Vĩnh Phúc province: Long Hoa Di Lạc sect and Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect. We chose Vĩnh Phúc province not that this province has many strange religious sects because this province is changing its economy and carrying out open-door policy.

Vĩnh Phúc province is located in ancestral land. It is not far from Hanoi. It has a special religious space. Many symbols of Vietnamese traditional religion and culture were born in this province. Sơn Tây region has tradition to worship Tản Viên saint.

Mê Linh land is related to the uprising of Hai Bà Trưng (two ladies Trưng). Vĩnh Phúc province and some other provinces have strange religious sects such as Đoàn 18 Phú Thọ, Quốc tổ Lạc Hồng; Thánh Minh vì Dân tộc.... In 2000 and 2001 we investigated these sects and found that these sects have been influenced by Mother Goddess cult. In recent years these sects have combined with each other to establish Hội Phật Mẫu with different names such as Địa Mẫu, Phật Mẫu society, Mẫu Hội Địa Cầu.... Hội Phật Mẫu thinks highly of “principle of Mother”. This principle is familiar to popular belief of Vietnam.

3.1. In Vĩnh Phúc province we were contacted directly with some people who have followed Long Hoa Di Lạc sect (Long Hoa in short) and Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect(Ngọc Phật in short). Most of them were old and have followed two sects for a long time, for example Madam. D.L was 82 years old , he was living in Phúc Yên town and has taken part in Long Hoa Di Lạc sect for 30 years;

¹ F. Champion is well-known researcher on “new religious phenomenon” in National Research Studies on Social Science in France . She writes many works on new religious movement in France

Madam M was 70 years old, she was living in Vĩnh Yên town, she has followed Long Hoa Di Lặc sect for 10 years; Mr. C was 70 years old, he was living in Minh Trí village, Phúc Yên district and he has followed Ngọc Phật for 15 years.

Before investigating in Vĩnh Phúc province we knew some thing about two strange religious sects. We read many articles to criticize the bad influences of these sects and superstitious activities of believers of these sects.

3.2 Some contents of interview

Thanks to the helps of Vĩnh Phúc province and Department of Information and Culture of Mê Linh district, we interviewed 3 believers of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect and Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect and found salient points as follows:

a- Madam. DL stressed on

- Superstitious activities;
- The influence of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect regarding abolishment of superstitious activities;
- Effect of worship regarding his health;
- The difference of the rich and the poor;
- The influence of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect regarding difficult situation of his life;
- His action in future.

b- Mr. D stressed on

- Ritual aspect;
- The effect of worship regarding himself;
- Thinking and attitude of the others regarding the worship of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect.

c- Madam M stressed on

- The difficulties of leading a religious life;
- Her process of leading a religious life;
- The effect of leading a religious life;
- Class status of believers;
- The characteristics of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect;
- The negative characteristics of popular belief;
- Hồ Chí Minh;
- Future;
- The relation of Long Hoa Di Lặc sect and other religions.

3.3. Some remarks on religious characteristics of these sects

On Long Hoa sect

At present Vinh Phúc province has two Long Hoa sects. One sect was established by Đào Thị Minh. Now, Mr. DL is the head of this sect. The other sect came from Tân Lập- Đan Phượng and its head is Nguyễn Ngọc Lợi. This sect is called Long Hoa Tam Hội. It has its foundation in Vinh Phúc province.

We were in contact with Madam. DL and Madam C. They were over 70 years old and they have taken part in Long Hoa sect for over 10 years. In general, they protected their belief. We have some remarks on religious characteristics of this sect.

a. The subject of worship are Di Lặc Tôn Phật, Hồ Chí Minh, Avalokitecvvara. Bodhi tree, parents.

b. According our study, Long Hoa Di Lặc phenomena reflects worry of some Buddhist believers about slow release of Sakyamuni so they respect Mitreya.

Long Hoa Di Lặc has existed in the South before 1975. May Đào Thị Hoa propagated this religious sect from the South? This question has still being examined.

Long Hoa Di Lặc worship Uncle Hồ and when did it start to worship Uncle Hồ?

According to DL, at first they only worshipped Mitreya. In the beginning of 1980s they found that virtue of Hồ Chí Minh was too great so they decided to worship Hồ Chí Minh.

According to us prayers of Long Hoa Di Lặc are very simple and few believers understand prayers of Long Hoa Di Lặc so they take advantage of Hồ Chí Minh to attract the masses.

When investigating Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect, we found that this sect did not ask for reinforcement of Mitreya.

This sect often discusses the problems of Sate affairs in its poems

- On Ngọc Phật sect

We came into contact with Mr. C, he returned from military service. He was over 70 years old and living in Minh Trí village, Phúc Yên district. He has taken part in Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect for over 15 years. He showed that subjects of worship of Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh sect were Heaven, Uncle Hồ. When speaking with us, Mr. C was often delirious. Sometimes he seemed to be Taoist hermit. He was different from two women of Long Hoa sect. Although two women were old they were very clear sighted women.

Ngọc Phật sect in Vinh Phúc province came from Sóc Sơn province. In 1990 Madam M and some others in Hiền Lương village established *Đoàn Ngọc Phật Sóc Sơn* sect. Then this sect has developed in around regions including Mê Linh district and it has hundreds of followers.

The way of religious preaching of Ngọc Phật sect is going into a trance. In the altar of *Đoàn Ngọc Phật Sóc Sơn* sect there are three incense burners; one for Hồ Chí Minh, one for revolutionary martyrs and one for Âu Cơ. In 1992 some hundred followers of *Đoàn Ngọc Phật Sóc Sơn* sect visited Hồ Chí Minh's mausoleum and pagodas in Hanoi.

** Some remarks on comparison of Long Hoa sect and Ngọc Phật sect*

After interviewing and investigating we have following remarks.

- On symbol and the way of religious practice

Two sects have worshipped and thought highly of Hồ Chí Minh. Only Long Hoa sect worships Mitreya.

Prayers of Ngọc Phật sect are simple. Ngọc Phật sect has altar at home. Its worship is related to National day, Hồ Chí Minh's birth day and Hồ Chí Minh's death anniversary .

Long Hoa sect combine Buddhist prayers with new prayers (believers of this sect believe that new prayers were written by Hồ Chí Minh). The content of prayers of Long Hoa sect is complicated.

It is noted that two strange religious sects begin to relate closely with each other when Long Hoa sect worships Hồ Chí Minh.

- On followers

According to the local data there are about 800 households to follow Long Hoa sect and 100 households to follow Ngọc Phật sect. We find that two sects are not scattered religious phenomena. They are special religious phenomena but they are smaller than other new religious movements.

On the social origin: Long Hoa sect pays attention to peasants , the poor . Madam DL often stressed on “ injustice”, the opposition of village and city.

The followers of Ngọc Phật sect do not deal with the opposition of the rich and the poor. They are interested in the opposition of the centre and village, moral corruption of administrative body and of the body of economic management ... The tendency of religious preaching of Ngọc Phật sect is not clear.

In general, both sects attract the attention of peasants, the poor and retired men.

- The attitudes of two sects towards history and reformed policy

Both sects emphasize on our historical and revolutionary tradition. But Long Hoa sect makes good use of history and symbol of Hồ Chí Minh. Nevertheless, “the social characteristic” of Long Hoa is more attracting so it is able to exist and develop than Ngọc Phật sect.

In Vinh Phúc province there are other strange religions such as: Đồng Nhân, Khất thực đạo Phật and some new Protestant sects. The role of Mother Goddess cult is manifested clearly in some new religious sects.

We can see that new religious sects in Hanoi, Hà Tây, Phúc Thọ, Vinh Phúc provinces, such as Ngọc Phật Hồ Chí Minh, Đoàn 18 Phú Thọ, Long Hoa Di Lặc... combine each other to establish a general “organization”. It is called as Trường Phật Mẫu Địa Cầu (2006).

Many new religious sects uses the methods of Taoism such as necromancy, magician

The role of traditional religious belief seems to correspond to change of new religious phenomena. The Mother Goddess cult meets the religious need of urban people.

In short, studying “new religious phenomena” in Vietnam helps us to see nuances, manifestations and the law of motion of new religious sects then we can see the change of beliefs and religions in our country at present. /.