Politics and Religion Journal 19, no. 2: 406-438
Review article
https://doi.org/10.54561/prj1902406v
Received: May 17, 2024; Accepted: November 22, 2024

Charity Work as the Core Religious Practice: A Case Study of Hoahao Buddhism in the Mekong Delta

Thang Van Vo[1], Hieu Trung Nguyen[2] and Phong Thanh Nguyen[3]

Abstract: Hoahao Buddhism in the Mekong Delta was born on the basis of combining Mahayana Buddhism with local ancestor worship and eschatological beliefs originated in southern China, thus extending the family bloodline culture to the society and becoming a special Buddhist sect in southern Vietnam. Hòa Hảo followers build their Buddhist faith on the Dharma platform, and the relationship between followers together and with outsiders becomes closer and more comprehensive. Despite the strong influence of the current market economy and the rise of materialism, Hòa Hảo believers still maintain their enthusiasm for social charity, which is most vividly reflected in the core concept of faith and the May 18 festival every year. How do Hoahao believers persist and maintain a spirit of compassion and charitable activities? How do Hoahao believers engage in local socio-political machanisms with such a socialized religious activities? This paper mainly uses Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the transformation of various types of social capital among the Hoahao Buddhist group and adopts semi-structured interviews, literature analysis, and other methods to demonstrate that the core concepts of repaying the country, repaying the

[1] Vo Van Thang is an Associate Professor at An Giang University, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. He earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 2005 from the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. He is the author and co-author of more than 100 papers, as well as 20 monographs and textbooks published in Vietnam and abroad. Contact Email: vvthang@agu.edu.vn

[2] Nguyen Trung Hieu is a lecturer at An Giang University, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. He got his Ph.D. Degree in Cultural Studies in 2020. Nguyen is the author and co-author of 8 books, more than 23 articles, as well as 30 other papers published in Vietnam and abroad. Contact email: nthieu@agu.edu.vn

[3] Nguyen Thanh Phong is a lecturer at the Faculty of Cultural Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City. He graduated with a master's degree in Chinese Linguistics and Literature from Yuan Ze University (Taiwan) in 2011 and earned a doctorate in Chinese Literature from National Cheng Kung University (Taiwan) in 2020. Nguyen is the author of one book and more than 20 journal articles published in Vietnam and abroad. Contact Email: nguyenthanhphong@hcmussh.edu.vn

Acknowledgment: This research is funded by University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City under grant number NCM2023-2. The fieldwork activities of this research is partially funded by the USAID Partnership for Higher Education Reform project.

people, repaying the parents and ancestors, repaying the Three Jewels contained in the Hoahao Buddhist philosophy constitute the organic compassionate mentality of believers in secular life.
Keywords: Hòa Hảo Buddhism, the Four Graces, charity, religio-cultural capital, socio-economic capital

Introduction and Literature Review

The birth of Hoahao Buddhism (in Vietnamese: Phật giáo Hòa Hảo) and its religious activities have attracted the research attention of many scholars at home and abroad. T Before 1975, many "Hoahao theorists" or "Hoahao scholars" were born, such as Dật Sĩ (Trần Văn Nhựt), Nguyễn Văn Hầu, etc., who constantly appeared in various works, for example, Dật Sĩ with *Thất Sơn mầu nhiệm* (Mysterious Thất Sơn Mountains, 1955), Nguyễn Văn Hầu with *Nhận thức Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (Understanding of Hoahao Buddhism, 1969) and *Năm cuộc đối thoại về Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (Five Conversations on Hoahao Buddhism, 1973), and so on. These works are important historical documents and have laid an important foundation for studying Hoahao Buddhism.

In 1967, U.S. Department of the Navy, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division published the book *The Religions of South Viet Nam: In Faith and Fact*, which mentioned the history, missionary activities, political activities and people's beliefs in Hoahao Buddhism founder, Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ. After that, Vương Kim (Phan Bá Cầm) and Thanh Sĩ published the book *Để hiểu Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (To understand Hoahao Buddhism, 1973), then Vương Kim published the book Đức Huỳnh Giáo Chủ (the Founding Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ, 1974) further discussed and analysed the life, achievsment of the founder, religious, political and military relations between Hoahao Buddhism, French colonialists and Japanese invaders, as well as the process Master Huỳnh implemented agricultural extension activities throughout the Mekong Delta region. Perhaps because they were conducting research at the same time and were both "insiders", Nguyễn Văn Hầu and Vương Kim's research content was quite similar.

Between 1965 and 1975, the Central Hoahao Buddhist Association published the magazine *Đuốc Từ Bi* (Torch of Compassion) to spread the teachings, practices, activities, and rituals of Hoahao Buddhism. Most of the articles in *Đuốc Từ Bi* magazine are similar in content to the reference books written by Dật Sĩ, Nguyễn Văn Hầu, Vương Kim, and others, because Dật Sĩ is the editor-in-chief and general manager of the magazine, while Vương Kim is a regular contributor to the magazine.

Some other researchers from this period can be referred to as Trần Nhựt Thăng (1973) with *Một lực lượng quần chúng ở Miền Tây: Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (A popular force in the Mekong Delta region: Hoahao Buddhism)*:* Mai Hưng Long

(1974) with *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (Hoahao Budhdism): Nguyễn Đức Phúc (1974) with *Sự đóng góp của Phật giáo Hòa Hảo vào vấn đề an ninh tại An Giang* (Contribution of Hoahao Buddhism to An Giang's security issues): Lê Thành Thảo (1974) with *Sinh hoạt Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong cộng đồng quốc gia* (Activities of Hoahao Buddhism in the national community): Nguyễn Ngọc Tuấn (1975) with *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong nền chính trị hiện đại* (Hoahao Buddhism in modern politics)*:* Hà Phước Thảo (1975) with *Sơ lược về các hệ phái Phật giáo tại Việt Nam* (Overview of Buddhist sects in Vietnam), etc., focusing on two main themes: (1) the history of the sect's origin, the missionary process, the armed forces—the Hoahao sect in the political and military context of Southern Vietnam from 1945 to 1975, etc., and (2) explaining the Hoahao Buddhism doctrinal system.

After the Vietnam War (1975), writer Hue-Tam Ho Tai published the book *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* at Harvard University in 1983, which introduced and discussed important issues of the messianic movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Hoahao Buddhism. The author scientifically introduces Hehao Village, the birthplace of Hoahao Buddhism, and studies the history of Hoahao Buddhism and the missionary journey of its founder/leader, as well as the political and military activities of Hoahao Buddhism in different periods. In 1991, Nguyễn Long Thành Nam published *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong dòng lịch sử dân tộc* (The status of Hoahao Buddhism in the national history), and Lê Hiếu Liêm (1995) published *Bồ tát Huỳnh Phú Sổ và Phật giáo thời đại* (Bodhisattva Huỳnh Phú Sổ and contemporary Buddhism). Both of them conducted research as "insiders" and were politically biased.

In 1999, Nguyễn Hoàng Sa wrote his doctoral thesis entitled *Đạo Hòa Hảo và ảnh hưởng của nó ở Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long* (The Hoahao Buddhist Philosophy and Its Impact on the Mekong Delta). The author discussed in detail the Four Graces (thuyết Tứ Ân), the concept of cultivating human nature and learning from Buddha, the concept of three phases of End Times (thuyết Tam kỳ Mạt kiếp), as well as advocated the direction and predictions of the future religious activities of Hoahao Buddhism. In his doctoral dissertation in history, entitled *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo - Hệ thống giáo hội và các tổ chức chính trị, quân sự thời kỳ 1945-1975* (Hoahao Buddhism: religious system and political and military organization from 1945 to 1975), Lâm Quang Láng (2008) studied in detail the process of "politicization of religion" in Hoahao Buddhism. In her master's thesis *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong đời sống văn hóa tinh thần của người dân An Giang hiện nay* (The role of Hoahao Buddhism in the cultural and spiritual life of the people of An Giang today), Đỗ Anh Thư (2010) discussed various aspects of the cultural and spiritual life of Hoahao Buddhists, where this religion is expressed through the beliefs and Buddhist practices of its followers. Other authors, such as Đặng Thế Đại (1999), Đỗ Quang Hưng (2000), Nguyễn Hữu Hiệp (2003), Nguyễn and Nguyễn (2005), Nguyễn Phú Tân (2007), Trần Tiến Thành (2009), and various authors contributed to the edited book *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo một tôn giáo*

cận nhân tình trong lòng dân tộc (Hoahao Buddhism, a human nature-based religion), etc., also made certain contributions to clarifying many aspects of religious beliefs, philosophy and outlook on life.

The issue of social charity among Hoahao Buddhist followers is not a new one in general: however, there has been no in-depth and systematic research to highlight it as one of the core essences of the religion. Dương Hoàng Lộc (2016), Hoàng Thu Hương (2018), Nguyễn and Phan (2021) emphasize the role and significance of Buddhist groups' charitable activities in contemporary Vietnamese society and propose new mechanisms and models suitable for the development of social networks and the rise of populist movements during this period. Recently, Ngo Thi Phuong Lan et al. (2024) published an article in *the Journal of Dharma Studies* titled "Righteous livelihoods and charitable donations: the practices of the Buddhist community in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, to advance a just and prosperous society," emphasizing that local Buddhist communities, including the Hoahao Buddhism community, practice righteous livelihood and charity based on the concept of samadhi and the pursuit of nirvana.

This paper applies Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of "capital", Maurice Halbwachs' (1980) concept of "memory", and Victor Turner's (1969) theory on the post-ritual "anti-structure", adopts the methods of semi-structured interviews (15 in-depth interviews with 5 Hoahao agents and 10 followers in Phú Mỹ Town, An Giang Province) and literature analysis to demonstrate that the family cultural factors contained in the philosophy of Hoahao Buddhism have restrained the destruction of the benevolent mentality of local believers by the rise of modernization and materialism.

The Birth of Hoahao Buddhism

The Life and Career of the Founder, Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ

Hoahao Buddhism (đạo Hòa Hảo or Phật giáo Hòa Hảo), was founded on May 18, 1939 (Lunar calendar). The founder is Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ, born on November 25 (Lunar calendar) in the Year of the Goat (1920), in Hòa Hảo Village, Tân Châu District, Châu Đốc Province (now Phú Mỹ Town, Phú Tân District, An Giang Province). Before and during the processes of formation and widespread of the religion, believers respectfully addressed him as "ông Tư Hòa Hảo (Mr. Tư Hòa Hảo)" or other names: "Đức Huỳnh Giáo chủ (Master Huỳnh – the Founder)", "Đức Thầy (Master)" or "Đạo Tư (Master Đạo Tư)". According to Lâm Quang Láng, Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ was also called Mr. Tư Xển (Xển Xên is the local Chaozhou Chinese pronunciation of his given name Sổ), Master Đạo Xển (see Lâm 2008, 24). He was the third child of a wealthy family in Hòa Hảo Village: his father was Huỳnh

Công Bộ, the village head governor, and his mother was Lê Thị Nhậm.

Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ was sent to the villge primary school in Tân Châu in his childhood. Later, he dropped out of school due to frequent illness and stayed at home to help take care of the family and farm work. According to Dật Sĩ & Nguyễn Văn Hầu, When Master Huỳnh was about 15 years old, he suffered from severe malaria several times, loss of appetite, lack of sleep, and physical weakness. His father and mother found many good doctors in and outside the village to treat him. Some of the treatments were very effective, but his condition did not improve at all (Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 183). During this period, the Seven Mountains region (An Giang Province) was a place of retreat and practice for Buddhist, Taoists masters and Confucian scholars from different origins, and many people who were proficient in medicine and had magical healing methods (i.e., spells and witchcraft) emerged. According to legend, there was a very famous master named Đạo Xom (real name: Lê Hồng Nhật) on Trà Sư Mountain, a disciple of Master Bán Khoai, a famous missionary in the Châu Đốc border area in the early 20th century (whose famous work, *Sấm giảng người đời* (The Oracle of Humanity) still exists today). "Mr. Huỳnh Công Bộ took Master Huỳnh to see Master Xom (Lê Hồng Nhật) to treat his illness. Master Xom not only cured his illness, but also taught him the principles of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa[4], many traditional medical prescriptions, and the philosophy of saving the world and people. Through Master Xom, he also learned about the occult religious anti-French activities of Nguyễn Trung Trực, Trần Văn Thành, Ngô Lợi, etc. and the Seven Mountains secret society movements. After Master Xom passed away in 1937, he returned to Hoahao Village." (see Lâm 2018, 24). Two years of medical and religious studies (1935-1937) enabled Mr. Huỳnh Phú Sổ to form a religious worldview and contributed to the birth of Hoahao Buddhism. At about 6 p.m. on May 18, 1939 (Lunar Calendar), an "Adopting the order from Buddha" (ordination) ceremony was held at his home (now called "Tổ đình/Ancestral Temple" by Hoahao Buddhists) (see Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 184), and from then on Hoahao Buddhism was born and began to spread. Recently, Nguyễn Trung Hiếu and Võ Văn Thắng researched Tứ Ân Buddhism, a locally-born religion in An Giang and Kiên Giang provinces, revealing the relationship between Master Huỳnh and Master Đạo Sáu (Trương Minh Thành), the founder of Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Buddhism (Nguyễn and Võ 2024, 21). Master Đạo Sáu was a disciple of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, practiced Buddhism on Mount Tà Lơn (now Mount Bokor, Cambodia), and later founded Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Buddhism (shortly Tứ Ân Buddhism) on August 12, 1947[5]. Therefore, in the Hoahao Buddhism, Master Huỳnh often mentioned the teachings and names of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect, Confucian and Buddhist

[4] Locally born religions based on the combination of Buddhism, ancestor worship, and patriotism in the mid-19th century.

[5] Followers of this religion live mainly in Tri Tôn District in An Giang Province and Hòn Đất District in Kiên Giang Province.

teachings, as well as the patriotic spirit of national heroes Nguyễn Trung Trực, Trần Văn Thành, Master Bán Khoai and work *Sấm giảng người đời.* People in the Mekong Delta believe that Hoahao Buddhism's practice and teaching methods are similar to those of the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương sect and that Master Huỳnh is the "reincarnation" of Master Đoàn Minh Huyên, Master Phật Trùm (Tà Pônl) and Master Bán Khoai.

The Formation of Hoahao Buddhism

May 18th (Lunar Calendar) - the day Master Huỳnh held the "ordination" ceremony, was chosen as the birthday of Hoahao Buddhism. In the early days of the religion, Master Huỳnh did not give the sect a name, just simply explained the doctrine to people, cured diseases, and saved lives. The name of Hoahao Buddhism or Hoahaoism was later used, "firstly because Master Huỳnh was born and grew up in Hòa Hảo Village: secondly, the term Hòa Hảo also represents the spirit of unity among all mankind based on universal peace and harmony, as expressed in his poetry and teachings: "Mảng chờ cho bá tánh thảnh thơi/ Khắp bốn biển liên dây hòa hảo (I hope everyone can relax and unite and blend in perfect harmony)", or "Ước mơ thế giới lân hòa hảo: Nhà Phật con Tiên hé miệng cười (I wish the whole world is of harmony: Buddhists and Taoist followers all can smile happily)" (see Thanh and Vương 1954, 8). In Lâm Quang Láng's study, when Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ established the sect, "most families in Hòa Hảo Village believed in Master Xển, and they turned the place where Master Xển lived into a temple. As the number of Master Xển's followers increased, people avoided calling the name "Xển", so the "Master Xển's religion" became the Hoahao religion (cited from Lâm 2008, 20). In our in-depth interviews, more people emphasized the original name of Master Huỳnh's birthplace and the meaning of the word "Hòa Hảo" itself.

The period when Master Huỳnh founded the religion was also a time when epidemics broke out frequently and killed many people in the Mekong Delta (see Nguyễn 1966, 191). Master Huỳnh used folk remedies and healing magic learned from Master Xom to treat diseases and was therefore trusted by many people (see Thanh and Vương 1954, 10; Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 186). Miraculous stories similar to the Master Huỳnh curing illnesses and saving lives not only occurred during the birth of the Hoahao Sect, but also before that, in the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa Sect, and others.

During the founding period of Hoahao Buddhism, Master Huỳnh traveled to the Seven Mountains (Vietnam) and Tà-lơn Mountain (Bokor, Cambodia) four times. Since then, many stories about his "holy deeds" (i.e., supernatural powers such as prophecy, communication with spirits and animals, etc.) have been widely circulated among the people, making him a "live Buddha" in the hearts of many believers in the Mekong Delta.

His residence became a center and gathering place for many believers, causing a "prominent event" throughout the Mekong Delta region. The French colonists, fearing that religious factions would gather military forces against them as they had before, suppressed them. On April 11, 1940, the French colonists arrested him and took him to Châu Đốc Province (now Châu Đốc City, An Giang Province). Due to his great influence, the French colonists did not put him in prison, did not allow him to preach in the province, but allowed him to freely choose where to live" (Thanh and Vương 1954, 28). On April 12, 1940, French colonists took him to Sa Đéc (now Đồng Tháp Province) to ease the situation (Nguyễn Văn Hầu 1968/2017, 39). During his stay in Sa Đéc, Master Huỳnh continued to spread Hoahao Buddhism, and many people converted to this religion. Faced with this situation, the French did not allow him to continue preaching. On April 17, 1940, believers took him to Nhơn Nghĩa Village, Cần Thơ Province, and lived in a believer's home. Master Huỳnh continued his missionary and medical work here. On June 30, 1940, the French decided to send him to Saigon's Chợ Quán Hospital "to check if he was mentally ill?" (Thanh & Vương 1954, 31). Master Huỳnh persisted in treating patients and promoting Buddhism inside the hospital, which won him the admiration of many people. In early June 1941, the French took him to a believer's home in Bạc Liêu, where he lived for a year. They kept him under strict control and did not allow outsiders to visit him.

At this time, the Japanese army invaded Vietnam. Faced with the profound influence of Master Huỳnh and Hoahao Buddhism, the Japanese army attempted to show its prestige to attract Hoahao Buddhist forces (Thanh and Vương 1954, 35). Master Huỳnh lived in Saigon for about a year under the protection of the Japanese army. During this time, he continued to write poetry, give lectures, and spread spiritual practices to believers in Hoa Hao Village and throughout the Mekong Delta. On the other hand, he founded *Việt Nam Phật giáo liên hiệp hội* (the Vietnam Buddhist Federation), which aimed to unify Buddhism into one organization but finally failed. Master Huỳnh continued to work on establishing the Vietnamese Independence Organization and called on all sectors of society and organizations to unite and fight for Vietnamese independence, but also failed.

During this period, famine occurred in Northern Vietnam, killing more than 2 million people, and the economic life of the people in the Mekong Delta was seriously affected. The Japanese army continued to use Master Huỳnh to travel around the provinces of the Mekong Delta to encourage the people's spirit and reconcile local Hoahao Buddhists to actively engage in production, improve their lives, and stabilize the people's hearts. Master Huỳnh carried out agricultural promotion work in the region for several months, "in some places, there were as many as 10,000 believers and people who came to listen to his sermons, and in other places, he attracted at least 2,000 to 3,000 people in each talk" (Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 246). After the agricultural promotion trip, Master Huỳnh returned to Saigon to continue his religious work and established political and military organizations, including the Bảo An (Security)

Army. He also brought in Hoahao Buddhists to conduct several protests in Saigon in order to gain prestige and strengthen his military strength. The unit clashed with the Viet Minh Army (then the Vietnamese communist army) many times. To unify the forces of all parties, the Viet Minh Army established the Southern Administrative Committee on August 25, 1945. On September 7, 1945, Master Huỳnh was appointed as a member of the Southern Administrative Committee. Later, in October 1946, Master Huỳnh joined the Viet Minh Southern Administrative Resistance Committee as a special commissioner. "He organized and reorganized the Hoahao Army, renaming the Nguyễn Trung Trực Revolutionary Defense Army as the 30th Defense Army to resemble the Viet Minh military organization. Hoahao security forces were still stationed in villages, receiving military training and organization similar to the Viet Minh guerrilla militia. To show his willingness to cooperate with the Viet Minh Army, Master Huỳnh ordered the Hoahao armed forces to prepare to join the Viet Minh Army and strictly prohibited them from engaging in anti-government activities, otherwise, they would be prosecuted by law" (Lâm 2008, 59). However, many extremists in the Hoahao Army instigated conflict between them and the Viet Minh, triggering new and more intense conflicts. They openly opposed the Viet Minh and refused to join it. Faced with this unfavorable situation, Master Huỳnh negotiated with the Viet Minh forces in the Mekong Delta. "Master Huỳnh made several contacts with the resistance forces in the Ba Răng - Đốc Vàng areas of Long Thạnh Thượng District (Chợ Mới), trying to resolve the conflict between the two sides, but to no avail. On April 17, 1947, Master Huỳnh disappeared, while bloody riots swept across the Mekong Delta between the Hoahao forces and the Viet Minh Army" (Lâm 2008, 62-3). Vietnam then entered a new period of resistance led by the Viet Minh Front, in which Mr. Mười Trí (often called " Sư thúc Hòa Hảo (Uncle Master Hòa Hảo)"[6] by his followers) participated, while pro-French extremists were almost killed by the French. Many Hoahao Buddhists awakened and supported the Viet Minh army in its victory over the French.

One of the important reasons why Hoahao Buddhism received a warm response from believers after its birth was the outbreak of World War II. The eschatology of the Hoahao Buddhism mentions the war that will occur at the end of the salvation period. When believers saw the outbreak of World War II, they realized that the prophecy of the Hoahao Buddhism had been fulfilled, and they joined the Hoahao Buddhism one after another. Invisibly, the power of this new religion grew in a short period. They realized that what Master Huỳnh predicted (the end of mankind, the chaos of war, the occurrence of natural disasters and epidemics, the expectation of the opening of the Longhoa Meeting, and the emergence of a wise king...) seemed

[6] According to Lâm Quang Láng, Huỳnh Văn Trí (Mười Trí) - former commander of the 4th Division of the Bình Xuyên Allied Forces, and the caretaker of Master Huỳnh when he fled eastward. Mười Trí was titled Uncle Master Hòa Hảo by followers and, from 1948, assigned to Long Châu Hậu Province (now the Long Xuyên and Châu Đốc areas).

to be becoming a reality. When the believers were confused and anxious, they found Master Huỳnh a respectable master who could help them overcome the difficulties. As a result, many people joined Hoahao Buddhism in a short period. There are no exact statistics on the number of followers during this period, but according to Dật Sĩ and Nguyễn Văn Hầu, Hoahao Buddhism had more than two million followers (Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 244; see further Thành Nam 1966, 59). Hoahao Buddhists were present in all provinces of the Mekong Delta, "and in the provinces south of the Mekong River, Hoahao Buddhists make up between 50 and 90 percent of the population" (Thành Nam 1966, 63), with the main concentrations in An Giang, Đồng Tháp, Cần Thơ, Bạc Liêu, etc.

Minh Chi cited Shawn F. McHale's statistics, saying that "between 1939 and 1944, the number of endogenous religious believers in the southwest reached 5 million" (Minh Chi 2017, 54). Among them, the number of Hoahao followers was the largest. After the "disappearance" of Master Huỳnh, some prominent followers of Hoahao Buddhism received support from the Ngô Đình Diệm government in Saigon and "held a national conference for the unification of Hoahao Buddhism in An Hòa Temple (Hòa Hảo Village). More than a thousand former Hoahao officials attended the meeting to establish the Hoahao Central Representative Committee" (Nguyễn 1965, 62). The Hoahao Central Representative Committee established executive committees in various localities to promote the spread of doctrine and the growth of believers. According to statistics, "in 1963, Hoahao Buddhism spread to 11 provinces in the Mekong River Delta and Saigon, established 11 provincial executive committees or equivalent organizations, 41 county executive committees, 275 township executive committees, 2,000 village executive committees, and issued more than 400,000 executive committee membership cards" (Nguyễn 1963, 62-3).

The number of Hoahao Buddhist followers has fluctuated over time in a decreasing direction. According to statistics from the Government Committee for Religious Affairs by 2021, "Hoahao Buddhism has about 1.5 million followers, living in 22 provinces and centrally-run cities, mainly concentrated in 09 provinces in the Mekong Delta region: An Giang, Cần Thơ, Đồng Tháp, Vĩnh Long, Bến Tre, Hậu Giang, Tiền Giang, Long An and Kiên Giang. Hoahao Buddhism is organized into two levels, including the Hoahao Buddhist Central Executive Committee (located in An Hòa Temple, Phú Mỹ Town, Phú Tân District) and 400 grassroots-level executive committees, as well as 14 provincial and centrally administered municipality representative committees" (Vietnam Government Religious Affairs Commission 2021).

Basic Hoahao Doctrines

In terms of doctrine, Master Huỳnh created many doctrinal poems, sermons, etc. in the process of spreading the Dharma for believers to practice. His teachings and doctrines were recorded largely by himself and some by his followers. After his "absence", prominent Hoahao followers came together and printed books to circulate among the followers. According to Hoài Dân (1966, 16-18), Hoahao Buddhism has the following teachings, sermons, and poetic works:

Firstly, "Sấm giảng khuyên người đời tu niệm (Sermons exhorting people to practice cultivation)", consisting of sixty-eight sentences and a total of 910 lines, and was written in the Year of the Cat in Hòa Hảo Village (1939). The content of the work predicts the miserable life and painful death of the people caused by wars and advises people to cultivate as early as possible to receive the protection of Buddha and God.

Secondly, "Kệ dân của người Khùng (The Madman's Sermon)", a seven-character version, 846 sentences long, written in Hòa Hảo Village, completed on September 12, the Year of the Cat (1939). The content indicates that a great disaster is about to befall the world, advises people to do good and avoid evil, and practitioners to cultivate their minds and their character, etc.

Thirdly, "Sấm giảng (Sermon)", written in hexameter and octameter, with a total length of 612 lines, in Hòa Hảo Village, and also published in the Year of the Cat (1939). The sermon teaches people to find the path of spiritual practice as soon as possible, return to family morality, stay away from the decadent lifestyle of civilization: worship ancestors, and be filial to parents: otherwise they will be punished. Master Huỳnh also specifically mentioned the bad habits and superstitions of this period. Thanh Sĩ và Vương Kim emphasized that "Master Huỳnh's sermons and teachings not only teach people morality but also tell people their upcoming fate in advance" (Thanh and Vương 1954, 23).

Fourthly, "Giác mê tâm kệ (Scriptures of Awakening the Confused Mind)", was written in the form of a seven-character poem in Hòa Hảo Village, with a total of 846 lines, and was published on October 20, in the Year of the Cat. The content of this work refers to the terrible disasters that the next generation will encounter, such as "being caught by a tiger", "dying with a broken body", "blood flowing like a river, bones piled up like a mountain" and so on: if you want to get rid of death and suffering, you must work hard to cultivate.

Fifthly, "Khuyến thiện (Good deed Encouragement)", written in Bạc Liêu in 1942, with 756 sentences. The content tells the life story of Sakyamuni Buddha, explains the eight kinds of suffering in reincarnation, tells the Pure Land Dharma, and encourages disciples to cultivate.

Sixthly, "Những điều sơ lược cần biết của kẻ tu hiền (Basic knowledge that practitioners need to know)", written in May 1945, while Master Huỳnh was under house arrest in Saigon. The work was written in prose, teaching how to practice, worship, adoration, funerals, and how to convert from one religion to another...

In addition to teaching and preaching books, Master Huỳnh also created many poems and paintings to respond to the Confucian scholars who came to "test" him... Most of these poems are in seven-character and eight-line or six-character and eight-line forms. The doctrinal poems were collected and compiled by believers into a book titled *Sấm giảng thi văn giáo lý của Đức Huỳnh Giáo chủ* (Sermons and the poetic teachings of Master Huỳnh). However, due to the need for spiritual practice, many believers printed out each small chapter separately so that they could carry it with them and recite it. This is why there are so many versions of the teachings today. According to statistics from the Central Executive Committee of the Hoahao Buddhist Association in 1966, "The scriptures of Master Huỳnh have been reprinted more than 300 times. It is estimated that the publication volume of each chapter (single volume) can reach 800,000 copies. Especially, the book *Những điều sơ lược cần biết của kẻ tu hiền* (Basic knowledge that practitioners need to know), to popularize among intellectuals at home and abroad, the Central Committee for Teaching and Propagation has translated into English and French and published it (Hoài Dân 1966, 22). Currently, according to the statistical report of the Hoahao Central Executive Committee, the total number of doctrinal documents published during the four terms (1999-2024) is 458,111 volumes.

The Core Philosophy of Hoahao Buddhism

Buddhist Thought in the Ideology of Hoahao Buddhism

In the Preface of the book *Những lời sơ lược cần thiết của kẻ tu hiền*, Master Huỳnh affirmed that the Hoahao Sect follows Buddhism. He wrote: "Recently, some people have misunderstood and done things that are not in line with the moral spirit, violating the compassion, charity, and noble spirit of Buddhism. Thus this little book was born. Therefore, I hope that all good men and women in the world in the future can use the wisdom briefly described below to think, abide by, and live according to this, avoid bad behavior, and maintain the reputation of Buddhism. In this way, we will not let down our gratitude to our respectful Shakyamuni Buddha for enlightening us about the Dharma and guiding sentient beings on the path to enlightenment" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 120). Even the name "*Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (Hoahao Buddhism)" indicates that Hoahao Buddhism follows Buddhist practices. In this work, Master Huỳnh also mentioned that Buddhist system has always been divided into two major practices: becoming a monk (standard Buddhist) and practicing at home (lay Buddhist) and advised his disciples to practice at home (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 122). However, a senior Buddhist believer affirmed that "Hoahao Buddhism adopted the essence of Buddhism, not all Buddhism's ideas"[7]. Master Huỳnh preached many folk Buddhist

[7] In-depth interview with Mr. N.T.D., 75 years old, member of the Central Executive Committee of Hoahao Buddhism, September 1, 2023

teachings, emphasizing that practicing the Four Graces (Tứ Ân) is the main content. In Buddhism, the concept of the Four Graces is mentioned in the *Mūlajāta-hṛ idayabhūmi-dhyāna-sūtra* (The Mahayana Sutra of Mental Contemplation during Earlier Births). In the Chapter on Repaying Gratitude, the Four Graces are clearly explained: repaying the gratitude of parents, repaying the gratitude of sentient beings, repaying the gratitude of the king, and repaying the gratitude of the Three Jewels. There are many contents about gratitude in Buddhist scriptures, and we can briefly review the following point:

Parental Grace: "The father has the grace of kindness, the mother has the grace of sorrow". "My mother's the grace of sorrow, if I only live one life to talk about it, it wouldn't be the end".

Sentient beings' Grace: All living beings have been rotating in the five realms of heaven, human, hell, hungry ghosts, and animals since time immemorial for hundreds of thousands of kalpas, life after life, and have always been our parents. Because we are each other's parents, all men and women are fathers, and all men and women are beloved mothers. And every life, past life, has great compassion, and the compassion of our present parents is no exception.

King's Grace: The ruler of a country is a person of all blessings [...]. He is a great sage king who spreads the Dharma, makes all beings happy [...], and makes the people prosperous and happy. The king who follows the Dharma has always played an important symbolic role.

The Grace of Three Jewels: This is an indescribable grace because the Three Jewels (including Buddha, Dharma, and sanghas) benefit sentient beings all the time (see Thích Tâm Châu trans. 2018, 22-35).

However, in Hoahao Buddhism, Master Huỳnh did not mention the order of four graces as in the Buddhist system but purposefully modified the names and arranged them according to the order of the most important merits under the Hoahao lay practitioners' viewpoint in society at that time: the Grace of ancestors and parents: the Grace of the country: the Grace of fellow human beings, and the Grace of the Three Jewels. It can be seen that although Master Huỳnh's Hoahao core values were based on Buddhist teachings, it was adapted to the historical and social background of the Mekong region of Vietnam under French colonial rule, in order to adapt to the cultural traditions of the local people, the consciousness of believers, and the national spirit that practitioners needed to pursue.

Like Buddhism, Master Huỳnh advised followers to honor their ancestors and parents through useful actions in daily life. Ancestor worship and filial piety to parents are the cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people. They are the root and the first step for people to cultivate spiritually. He said: "We are born into this world, growing up, gradually accumulating wisdom and talents. Over the years, our parents have experienced numerous hardships. We are born to be grateful to our ancestors, so when we are grateful to our parents, we should also be grateful to our ancestors. If we want to repay our parents, when they are still alive, we must listen carefully, not ignore

them, and not make them sad. If our parents do something wrong or against human nature, we should try our best to dissuade them. Furthermore, we also have to take on the responsibility of [...] ensuring that brothers and sisters live in harmony and that the family is happy [...] As for repaying our ancestors, we should not do anything bad or detrimental to our ancestors. If our ancestors did something wrong and brought pain and suffering to future generations, we must be determined to practice and sacrifice our lives to do what is right and wash away the shame of our ancestors" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 122-123). These explanations are divorced from the original Buddhist philosophy and are based on two foundations: (1) basic Buddhist ideology and (2) traditional moral thought and ancestor worship. In other words, Master Huỳnh combined Vietnamese traditional moral thought with Buddhist thought, thereby "sanctifying" it. The sanctification of traditional moral thought by Buddhist thought made the believers' faith deeper, their practice more firm, and more popular.

If Buddhism mentions and exhorts people to remember the kindness of the king, then Hoahao Buddhism teaches people to remember the kindness of the country, to serve the country with a grateful heart, and to repay the breadth and mission of the country and nation, rather than to serve individuals. It is for this reason that the Four Graces concept of Hoahao Buddhism has a national spirit. If one places southern Vietnam in the context of the French colonial period, it is understandable that the Nguyễn Dynasty no longer had the role and responsibility to defend the country. People at that time no longer counted on the king's merits (see further Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 123). "Because the king was only a "puppet king" when Master Huỳnh established Hoahao Buddhism. He [the king] did not perform the king's responsibility, therefore, there is no king's grace in our faith. The core concept of Hoahao Buddhism is to return to the ancestral and national ways first", said Mr. N.T.D. on September 1, 2023. Master Huỳnh connected the Grace of ancestors and parents with the Grace of the country, because "when the family is harmonious, the country will be peaceful and prosperous". On the contrary, if the country is invaded or destroyed, the family will also be destroyed: therefore, as a religious believer, if the family is well arranged, then the country should also be protected and repaid.

In today's era, Hoahao Buddhists have been tirelessly carrying out many charitable social activities for the community, practicing on the one hand to "accumulate merit" and on the other hand to "serve/repay the country." "The development of all social charity undertakings is inseparable from the repayment of the Four Graces. Generally speaking, repaying one grace is repaying the Four Graces. We believe that charity work is moral and if we do it, we will be blessed" (in-depth interview with Ms. A.A., peer member of the Central Executive Committee of Hoahao Buddhism, Phú Tân District, An Giang Province, September 1, 2023).

Master Huỳnh also taught his disciples the three karmas of Buddhism: physical karma, verbal karma, and mental karma. Physical karma has three evil karmas: killing, stealing, and adultery. Verbal karma has four evil karmas: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter. Mental karma has three evil karmas: greed, anger,

and ignorance (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 127-128). Master Huỳnh's explanation of the three karmas does not follow the form of Buddhist teachings, but the content is easy to understand, close to the religious life of ordinary people, and closely related to the natural geographical conditions of the believers' residence. He explained the karma of "killing" this way: "People are many times more cruel to animals, birds and creatures: they kill animals for food, for superstition, for pleasure. People can't stop killing animals for foods (chickens, ducks, pigs), but they shouldn't be too obsessed with the value of "animals feeding humans" (animals are born to feed humans). Just use it according to your food needs, and if this sacrifice does not benefit you much, don't sacrifice it wastefully [...]" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 128-129).

Master Huỳnh also explained the practice methods of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism to believers, with an emphasis on the practice of Pure Land Buddhism (chanting the Buddha's name). As for the Eightfold Path, Master Huỳnh merely borrowed the names of Buddhist doctrines (right view, right thought, right action, right effort, right livelihood, right speech, right mindfulness, right concentration—see Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 135) and explained the content of the Eightfold Path in order to avoid the pattern of Buddhist scriptures. To be sure, Hoahao Buddhism is a form of "Vietnamese Buddhism" that has been popularized to "simplify" the esoteric philosophy and framework of Buddhism to make it more suitable for peasants and to provide spiritual support for people facing historical and social shocks.

Confucian and Taoist Thoughts in the Ideology of Hoahao Buddhism

Confucianism has long been an important ideological foundation for Vietnamese society in education, morality, social behavior, religious beliefs, etc. Hoahao Buddhism was born in the context of Confucianism penetrating into human life and becoming a traditional moral ideology, and was influenced by Confucianism to a certain extent, but its influence was not as great as that of Buddhism. The Confucian thought in Hoahao Buddhism is no longer the profound Confucianism like the Four Books and Five Classics, but folk thought simplified to the lowest level, sometimes just text to guide moral behavior in daily life. For example, in the section "Advice to followers" there are 8 things that are the most basic and important spiritual teachings in the lives of people in the Mekong region. In the first article, Master Huỳnh taught his disciples according to Confucianism: "Don't drink, don't gamble, don't smoke opium, don't be a prostitute, and strictly abide by the Three Cardinal Bonds and Five Constant Virtues" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 152). He mentioned the Three Cardinal Bonds and Five Constant Virtues without any explanation (since they have long been popularized in the mind of the Mekong Delta residents. In the poetry and prophetic works of Hoahao Buddhism, Confucianism and Buddhism are juxtaposed and expressed in poetic language. Master Huỳnh taught his disciples: "[I] advise men and women to study the books of Confucius and Mencius and become moral people (...): Keep the

spirit of moderation and take Confucius as an example" (Nguyễn 1968/2017, 106), or "Women in our country must observe the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, and men must cultivate the spirit of filial piety" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 37).

An elderly believer said that "there is the concept of the Three Cardinal Bonds and Five Constant Virtues in Hoahao Buddhism, however, it is different from the original one. In terms of loyalty, Hoahao Buddhism advocates loyalty to the country and the people, rather than loyalty to the king. In the relationship between husband and wife, Hoahao Buddhism emphasizes equality between men and women, rather than the Confucian tradition of "male superiority and female inferiority". Master Huỳnh once taught: "Phận xướng tùy chồng vợ nhịn nhau (In a relationship between husband and wife, both parties should give in to each other.)". It can be seen that when explaining the moral relationship between family and social members, Hoahao Buddhism only absorbed and embodied the elements of "folk Confucianism".

The Confucian content of Hoahao Buddhism is nothing more than the "folk Confucianism" thoughts taught by grandparents, parents, village elders, and/or local teachers in the village school. Master Huỳnh was born, grew up, and studied religious doctrines, he was "immersed" in folk Confucianism (see further Nguyen et al. 2024, 65-100). Therefore, it was inevitable that he inherited and absorbed mass Confucianism in Hoahao Buddhism. However, in Hoahao Buddhism, "Confucian teachings are also limited to the precepts that enhance human beings' exemplary life in the secular world. The Hoahao Buddhists had to shoulder the burden of life and support the country during the turbulent years (under the French colonial rule), they always yearned to devote their lives to the Dharma. "They fulfilled their duties in secular life not to satisfy the Confucian goal of "governing the country and pacifying the world", but simply to create conditions for complete liberation" (Nguyễn 1968/2017, 107-108). Therefore, the Confucianism and Buddhism that Master Huỳnh taught his believers to practice are not contradictory, and their purpose is to make the believers more complete and perfect on the Dharma pathway.

In addition to Buddhist and Confucian influences, Hoahao Buddhism is also influenced by Taoism. However, it is not the Taoist idea of the universe, the unity of yin and yang, and the organic relationship between man and nature: instead, it emphasizes the image of Heaven and the fairyland that believers yearn for. Taoist immortality landscapes overlap with the Buddhist worldview. According to the Hoahao Buddist faith, if believers can concentrate and practice diligently, they will be able to return to the scene of "golden palaces and jade towers" in the fairyland, the lotus world, the paradise, and the Pure Land. Hehao Buddhist teachings are the second summarization and combination of teachings from folk sects (for instance, the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương), mass streams of the Three Teachings (the Pure Land Buddhism, mass Confucianism, and mass Taosim), and other folk wisdom. Mr. N.T.D. affirmed in his talk that "The basic teachings of Hoahao Buddhism include the essence of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, the wisdom of Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, traditional national ethics, and the personal thoughts of the founder, Master

Huỳnh. Hoahao Buddhism also contains selective concepts and ideas from different sources of East and Southeast Asian philosophies under the general framework of local folk customs and life experience in the early-twentieth-century Mekong Delta" (in-depth interview on September 1, 2023 in Phú Mỹ, Phú Tân, An Giang).

Hoahao Buddhism in its Social Relations

Hoahao Buddhism and Other Religio-Social Institutions

Social relations are an important issue in religion, which determines the existence and development of religion in the social and historical process. Many newly-born religions faced social opposition or conflicts with other religions. Hoahao Buddhism was born in the particular context of the Mekong Delta, where many religions and sects already existed, including Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, the Medicant Buddhism (hệ phái Khất sĩ), Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa, Christianity, Islam, Caodaism, and others, has Hoahao Buddhism encountered religious conflicts in the process of community building?

To be sure, Hoahao Buddhism has hardly encountered any major religious conflicts (except for some misunderstandings and clashes with the Viet Minh Army during the 1945-1957 period) due to its peaceful doctrinal ideas of harmonious unity and philosophical diversity. The same is true for the followers of the Hoa Hao religion, who always practice according to the teachings of their masters: worship their ancestors, be filial to their parents, do good deeds, love others as themselves, listen to Master Huỳnh's teachings every day and act accordingly, and interact with all living beings.

Before and during the birth of Hoahao Buddhism, there were some minor ethnic and religious conflicts in the Mekong Delta, especially conflicts between Christians and non-Christians as well as ethnic and cultural discrimination between main ethnic groups in the region. Master Huỳnh is well aware of this, thus teaching his disciples to always maintain good relations with "other religions and human beings". In the work *Những điều sơ lược cần biết của kẻ tu hiền,* Master Huỳnh taught his disciples:

> "For believers of other religions, their religious activities should not be criticized, and their freedom of belief should be respected. Most importantly, do not bully or speak ill of others. [...]We must always be kind to others and be patient even if they do wrong to us. We should always live in harmony with people, make both sides appreciate each other, sympathize with them, and do our best to help them if they need" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 146-147).

With these teachings, Hoahao Buddhists always live in a state of "non-resistance" in their spiritual life, being tolerant and charitable to everyone regardless of the situation. Based on the teachings of Master Huỳnh, Hoahao Buddhists always put the spirit of "harmony" first in their daily interactions, although some followers, influenced by social and political issues in historical periods, moved towards politicization and militarization during the mid-twentieth century. Bàn về vấn đề politicization and militarization, Master Huỳnh's mother, Mrs. Lê Thị Nhậm, called for followers' "return" in her teachings when celebrating the opening day of the sect on May 18, 1965 (Lunar calendar): "Some followers, because they have a clear mind but lack wisdom, are constantly being exploited and deceived" (Đuốc Từ Bi 6 1965, 5). Since 1975, Hoahao Buddhists have always followed the spirit of "harmony" in social relations proposed by its founder Huỳnh Phú Sổ when he founded the religion.

As mentioned above, Hoahao Buddhism originated from Buddhism, so it attaches great importance to social relations with local Buddhists. Master Huỳnh taught his disciples to always respect and accept the teachings of Buddhist monks and build more understanding on the path of practice: on the other hand, when Buddhist monks or believers are found to violate the Dharma, they should also try their best to persuade them to abide by the rules. "Hoahao believers can go to Buddhist temples to worship Buddha, burn incense, and offer flowers on Buddha's birthday, full moon day, and the 30th day of each month. If the temple is poor or damaged, it would be better if Hoahao believers could help repair it as much as possible. When believers go to the temples, they should respect the Buddha and everyone there and not slander them" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 145). To this day, many Hoahao Buddhists regularly visit local Mahayana Buddhist temples and Khmer Theravada Buddhist temples in the region, especiallt Tây An and Phước Điền pagodas in Sam Mountain (Châu Đốc, An Giang), Phật Lớn Pagoda on Cấm Mountain (Tịnh Biên, An Giang), Nam Hải Bodhisattva Temple in Bạc Liêu, etc. The Buddhist spirit of "loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity" and the founder Huỳnh Phú Sổ's spirit of "harmony" have enabled Hoahao believers to overcome cultural differences and live in harmony with other religions since their birth. They admire and fully abide by Confucius's famous sayings: "What you don't want done to you, don't do to others (in Chinese: 己所不欲勿施於人: in Vietnamese: *Kỷ sở bất dục, vật thi ư nhân)*" (see Đuốc Từ Bi 6 1965, 5-6). The Hoahao Buddhists often cooperate with Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in Kiên Giang and An Giang provinces, using donations from Hoahao believers or other sources to build rural transportation bridges and charity housing for the local Khmer people. Recently, they have done similar works in Hậu Giang Province.

Hoahao Buddhists are trained to "live in harmony" with Christian communities by emphasizing social contribution and charity work. In An Giang Province, Năng Gù (Bình Mỹ, Châu Phú), Cù lao Giêng (Chợ Mới, An Giang), and other places, many Catholics and Hoahao Buddhists live side by side. On Christmas Day, Hoahao

Buddhists also participate in the celebrations, and there is no division of public space between the two groups of believers. Especially in social charity activities, Hoahao Buddhists coordinated with local authorities and Catholics to improve rural roads in Chợ Mới and Phú Tân districts in An Giang province and built charity houses for many local Catholics. In many other social and cultural activities across the region, the two communities are closely connected and share responsibilities harmoniously.

An Giang province is home to the largest population of Chăm Muslims in the Mekong Delta: they live mainly in Tân Châu city, An Phú District, and Châu Phú District. Also in the spirit of "harmony" and charity, Hoahao Buddhists and Chăm Muslims live in harmony, and there has been no conflict in the nearly 100 years of coexistence. The Hoahao believers in Tân Châu city and An Phú District actively build charity houses for the Chăm people and are willing to share their farming, fishing, and business experiences. It can be seen that the Hoa Hao concept of repaying the graces of the country and the people has been concretized through practical actions, meeting the material needs of the people in the background, and winning their trust and love. As Mr. N.T.D continued, "Hoahao Buddhism provides charity regardless of religion or race" (in-depth interview on September 1, 2023).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many religious masters of different backgrounds and religious views were active in the Mekong Delta region, but they had two similar biggest goals: (1) to expel the French colonialists, liberate the country, and (2) cure people's diseases. It is because of these common points that Master Huỳnh and his followers have established harmonious connections with other masters and other religious sects. Huỳnh Phú Sổ was healed by Master Xom and had the opportunity to learn and talk with Master Trương Minh Thành in Cấm Mountain, Master Nổi in An Phú: Master Tưởng Lâm Văn Quốc in Tân Châu: Master Phạm Thanh Quang in Vĩnh Xương Village, Tân Châu District, etc. Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ was revered by Buddhist believers and was even regarded as the "reincarnation" of Buddha (Dật and Nguyễn 1955, 253). Between 1945 and 1947, Mr. Huỳnh worked under the Viet Minh banner in the Đồng Tháp Mười Basin and had a close relationship with Master Nguyễn Tấn Đắc, the leader of the Thường Lạc Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Sect. According to Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương follower of the Thường Lạc Group, Mr. N.M.T (65 years old), "Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ and Master Nguyễn Tấn Đắc exchanged catechism and poetry during their stay in Đồng Tháp Mười". At that time, the Hehao Buddhists and the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Buddhists established contact during their practice. It is important to know that the core teachings of the Thường Lạc Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Buddhism are "cultivating benevolence", "learning Buddha", and "performing the four graces" at home.

In the process of religious existence, the relationship between religion and local government is an important issue because it reflects the standard values and social support of religion, in which local authorities will create good conditions for the development of religion. Hoahao Buddhism is also not separated from this kind of

social relationship. Today, Hoahao Buddhist believers and Buddhist activities at all levels have close relations with local authorities. The grassroots-level Hoahao Buddhist Executive Committee has close relations with the local government, and religious activities receive the government's care and support. During every major Hoahao religious festival, representatives from the commune and district levels come to celebrate and preside over religious activities. In particular, many Hoahao Buddhists were elected as members of the Fatherland Front Committees at the provincial and district levels and members of the People's Committees at the district and commune levels. These believers are an important factor in actively guiding local believers to practice Dharma and participate in local charitable social activities. In social charity work, Hoahao Buddhists have always received support and active assistance from local authorities. For example, when building a rural transportation bridge, the local Hoahao executive committee and believers raise funds, and hire technical workers and labor to carry out the construction, while local authorities are responsible for clearing the site and applying for construction permits (in-depth interview with Mr. N.T.D. on September 1, 2023). Close and harmonious coordination between the Hoahao Buddhist Association and local authorities encourages Hoahao believers to actively participate in charity work and community service.

Social Charity – the Basic Link Between Hoahao Believers and the Larger Society

Hoahao Buddhism takes social service activities as its main method of practice, which is a specific way to repay the Four Graces. As the name of the religion requires, if everyone wants to "live in harmony (*hòa hảo*)", no matter what the circumstances, even in historical periods that are unfavorable to believers, believers should care for others, be tolerant of others, and help others in their lifelong practice. Hoahao doctrines said "[You] should have compassion on the disabled: Do not look down on poor people" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 39): "In the world of the living, one must try to be kind: do not value money higher than benevolence" (Phật giáo Hòa Hảo 1966, 28), etc. Hoahao Buddhism focuses on both "cultivation" and "practice". Master Huỳnh once emphasized "*Bởi chữ "tu" liền với chữ "hành"* ("Cultivation" is always linked with "practice"). A good Hoahao believer must understand the doctrine and then practice what he understands. Therefore, in the religious missions of the Hoahao Buddhist Association, there are four key religious missions, among which social charity work ranks third (including, (1) Institutional organization, (2) Mission, (3) Charity work, and (4) Supervision work).

From the perspective of Hoahao practitioners' faith, the spirit of serving the people and society is an organic religious practice, even if the people they serve have conflicts with them. According to statistics from the local government and groups in An Giang Province, "the total amount of money and materials donated by Hoahao Buddhists to people from all over the country from 1999 to 2004 is 22.34 billion

VND (equivalent to 912,000 USD). During that period, they donated to build 719 charity houses, constructed 193 bridges, and upgraded 191.947m of rural road" (see Phạm 2007, 154-155; see further Nguyễn 2017, 378). According to statistics, during the 5 years of the 4th Executive Committee of Hoahao Buddhism (2014-2019), Hoahao believers contributed to the economic, cultural, and social development of the Mekong Delta region through charity activities such as setting up free kitchens for the poor in hospitals, schools, orphanages, senior centers, and local communities. They donated gifts to poor areas, provided scholarships for poor students, built charity houses, repaired houses, built bridges, repaired roads in villages, planted pine trees, etc., with the amount of 2 trillion VND (~80 million USD) (see Nguyễn and Lê 2024). This figure is VND2.47 trillion for the period 2019-2024 (~100 million USD). They also actively participate in traditional medicine activities (free of charge), grow and process medicinal materials themselves, and have skilled personnel provide free diagnosis, treatment, prescriptions, and delivery of medicines to local people. In addition, every year they mobilize and donate many gifts (rice, food, vegetables, etc.) to the poor families to celebrate the Lunar New Year (Tiến Lên 2023, Ban Trị sự Trung ương giáo hội Phật giáo Hòa Hảo, 2024). Obviously, the charitable activities of Hoahao Buddhism transcend the values of the religious community and expand to be in line with national values and are trusted and supported by the local people and government.

How did Hoahao Buddhists pass on their practice from generation to generation, continue to carry out social activities, and become a religious tradition? Mr. N.H.T., A Hoahao Buddhist in Phú Mỹ, Phú Tân, An Giang have given a detailed and simple explanation as follows:

> "Hoahao Buddhism was born during the World War II. At that time, people faced many difficulties in their lives. The founder [Master Huỳnh] advised his disciples to practice well. The simplest practice was to help the poor, called "true practice". In this way, believers recite scriptures continuously throughout their lives and regard charity as a way of life and practice" (In-depth interview with Mr. N.H.T. on September 3, 2023).

The case of Ms. H.N., a 72-year-old female believer who has dedicated her life to serving religion and society, is worth further study. Together with a group of female Hoahao Buddhists in Phú Mỹ Town, Phú Tân District, she participated in activities to care for the sick and help the poor in a voluntary spirit. With the exemplary work and spirit of the H.N. group, they have influenced many male and female believers in An Giang Province and other areas: believers send money to the group to provide financial assistance and care for the poor and sick. Despite their age and frail health, Ms. H.N. and many lay women continue to serve the community. She said:

> "Since my parents believed in Hoahao Buddhism and often helped the poor, this concept was deeply rooted in my blood and I followed my parents. At present, my grandchildren are studying or working far away, and those who can afford it often send money back to support charitable activities such as building bridges/roads and alleviating poverty. [...] To practice and become a good Hoahao Buddhist, one must first have a righteous mind and a righteous nature , and then do activities such as giving alms, making donations, helping others, engaging in business, and doing good deeds. It's in my blood. A Hoahao Buddhist does good deeds without asking for anything in return, just to benefit others. If you put yourself in the position of a sick or poor person, how happy you would be if someone helped you..." (In-depth interview with Ms. H.N. on September 4, 2023)[8].

Some religions also practice charity to promote merit and virtue and as a prerequisite for the full realization of wisdom practice. Hoahao Buddhism also believes that it is extremely difficult to attain liberation, Buddhahood, or immortality, so they do charity work to make this life easier and "bring good luck in the next life". What is very special is that the Hoahao followers are a group with a low average income, many believers live in poverty, but they are enthusiastic about public welfare and charity. Regarding this spirit of worldly practice, N.H.K. (52 years old), a member of the Hoahao Buddhism Representative Committee in Hậu Giang Province, said:

> "When giving alms, one must have pure faith in all sentient beings and always follow Master Huỳnh's teachings on "giving alms in all forms" to follow the principles of Buddhist practice and to repay the Four Graces. [...] Master Huỳnh once taught: "Your own family is already well-arranged: do good together and realize benevolence and righteousness". In this spirit, the Hoahao Buddhist Representative Committee of Hậu Giang Province has constructed charity homes for needy believer families over the past decade. As a result, there are no more Hoahao believers with housing difficulties in Hậu Giang province. We are currently building charity homes for people in Cần Thơ, Sóc Trăng, and Kiên Giang provinces. The construction team is not allowed to receive anything during the construction of the house. They can have a meal if invited, but they are not allowed to require to eat well" (In-depth interview with Mr. N.H.K. on September 4, 2023).

[8] Madame H.N., 72 years old, Hoahao believer in Phú Mỹ, Phú Tân, An Giang. Interview on September 4, 2023.

There are many other examples of Hoahao followers participating in social welfare activities. They embody the spirit of serving the community and the nation as reflected in the religious thought of Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ. Hoahao Buddhism has made great contributions to the economic, cultural, and social construction and development of the Mekong Delta region. It can be said that Hoahao Buddhism is a religion that regards social service activities (socio-economic resources) as an important form of practice for every believer and group.

Contemporary Challenges

Despite being recognized as an official religion in Vietnam, there are internal conflicts and rifts among local groups of believers due to differences in beliefs, practices, and even ways of dealing with the government and society's views on Hoahao Buddhism. Some believers are unhappy with the overly close relationship between the central Hoahao Buddhist Association and local governments and do not accept them as representing their communities. This has resulted in many different groups among Hoahao believers and a lack of sense of belonging to the local Hoahao executive committee. In addition, the beliefs of the Longhoa Meeting still dominate several generations of believers, making them tired of the times and unwilling to integrate into social trends. Many believers even develop pessimistic thoughts and fears about life or easily imagine what tragic scenes will happen when the corresponding events in the vague information in the prophecy occur. With the development of information technology, this pessimistic thinking and fear are spreading among believers. For example, cases such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the Middle East conflicts, have directly reduced the prestige of religion. The authors believe that Hoahao Buddhism must undergo profound reforms to make their believers better adapted to modern society. Furthermore, many Hoahao believers believe that they can "live simply in pure happiness". Many young believers choose to live in seclusion, away from the secular world, disdain to improve their lives through labor, and value morality over wealth, resulting in the average income of Hoahao believers being lower than the local average and unable to keep up with the overall development momentum of the country. Last but not least, some believers regard Mount Cấm in An Giang Province as as the mountain of "Judgment Day" in their faith. While touring the Mount Cấm scenery, the delusional believers claim to be “attached” to the spirits and perform “unusual” behaviors (dancing, moving, speaking the language of the underworld, healing...) in order to win the respect of those around them. They "host" the images of the Jade Emperor, Earth Mother, Lady of the Five Elements, Tiger God, and other gods mentioned in Vietnamese folk beliefs and Hoahao Buddhism on themselves, embodying them in superstitious activities in shrines and temples, bringing trouble to the Hoahao community. On the other hand,

their treatment of local patients based on simple spiritual beliefs could be detrimental to human health.

The changes and problems that have emerged in contemporary Hoahao Buddhism need to be jointly resolved by the religious community and relevant parties. If this is not done, some groups of Hoahao believers will be further alienated from the traditional ideas and practices of the religion for a considerable period, which will have a significant impact on the material quality of life and spiritual development of believers and society.

The May 18th (Lunar Calendar) Festival in the Lives of Hoahao Believers

For religions, celebrating the founding day, the founder's birthday or the founder's death anniversary is the most important event. The same is true for Hoahao Buddhism. The founding day of the religion on May 18th every year is the most solemn celebration for believers. It can be said that the May 18 festival is also a pilgrimage festival for generic Vietnamese people in the Mekong Delta, not just for Hoahao Buddhists. At present, according to media reports, on May 18, hundreds of thousands of believers and ordinary people from all over the Mekong Delta participate in festival activities in An Hòa Temple in Phú Mỹ Town, Phú Tân District, An Giang Province.

The large participation of believers and ordinary people in the May 18 festival dates back decades. In 1965, *Đuốc Từ Bi* Magazine described the atmosphere of the ceremony as followed: "Arriving at the "Holy Land", the guests are even more amazed by the festive, lively and gorgeous decorations placed there to commemorate the founding of the religion by Master Huỳnh. The energy of millions of believers is very flexible in form and content, attracting audiences from all over the country who have the opportunity to visit the holy place. During the day, large numbers of people continue the pilgrimage, with countless banners and slogans praising the leader's achievements and holding high the banner of benevolence. At night, there are various groups of sampans on the river, and on land, there are all kinds of lanterns, fireworks, lion dances, dragons, and horses [...]. They only serve vegetarian food, free of charge [...]. From afternoon to morning, believers from all over the Mekong Delta gather together, from various provinces such as Phong Dinh, Ba Xuyên, An Giang, Bạc Liêu, Kiên Giang, Châu Đốc, Vĩnh Long, Kiến Phong, etc. They come to the festival in motorboats or rowboats... The boats are anchored in dozens of layers at the river, stretching for 4 kilometers" (Nguyễn and Huỳnh 1965, 65-66). They bring hundreds of tons of rice, salt, sugar, gourds, pumpkins... as offerings for this important festival.

During this period, religious activities were solemnly organized by believers, with traditional sacred symbols and means of transportation of the people of the Mekong Delta such as boats, sampans, canoes... The followers "used many large boats tied together like rafts of trees, on the rafts they used materials to design a pagoda or

rockery in the shape of a dragon, unicorn, turtle, or phoenix. By 1964, the number of boat structures had reached 100, not including numerous immovable sampans. The cost of each structure cost a lot of money, all donated by local believers. These majestic structures were colorful during the day and shiny at night, attracting people's attention and admiration. If tourists arrive in Phú Mỹ days before the festival, they will see many workers such as painters, carpenters, painters, tailors... working day and night in villages with no payment" (Nguyễn and Huỳnh 1965, 69). Currently, the celebrations on May 18 are the same as before 1975, such as making boat structures/rafts engraved with mascot symbols such as dragons, unicorns, turtles, phoenixes, and the "ông năm chèo (five-legged sacred crocodile)" logo, numerous motorcade performances and parades, celebrating this event. Many other cultural and communication events during the May 18 festival create a sacred space for the spiritual life of the people of the region. On the eve of the festival, believers from all over the Mekong Delta come to Hoa Hao center (Phú Mỹ, Phú Tân, An Giang) to participate in preparation works at two locations: An Hòa Temple and Tổ đình (Ancestral temple, the home of Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ). They participate in arranging flower beds, reciting doctrinal poems, building large ceremony platforms, decorating altars with colored lights, flowers, and brown ribbons (symbols of worship of the religion), arranging ceremony spaces, and preparing the banners "Welcome to the May 18th Dharma Assembly to commemorate the founding of Hoahao Buddhism by Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ" as well as banners about Master Huỳnh's well-known words and sentences about the Hoahao Dharma, the spirit of patriotism, and the Four Graces. In addition to preparing for the grand ceremony at the center of the temple area, the faithful and executive committees of the townships and administrative committees of Tân Châu City and Phú Tân District decorated flowery carts/cars and gathered at An Hòa Temple to hold a ceremony to welcome the image of Master Huỳnh back to their hometown at noon on May 18. The May 18, 2024 ceremony features more than 60 floats, more than 15 lion floats as well as two water raft structures (performed by devotees in Cần Thơ). Many believers from all over the region volunteered to cook in the charity kitchens, providing thoughtful vegetarian food service to people during the festival (on-site observation, 2024). Many of them deliberately spend vereral nights at Master Huỳnh's family graveyard behind the Tổ đình Temple.

Unlike other endogenous religions, which have more ceremonial activities and rituals in the annual festival, Hoahao Buddhism has fewer activities and rituals. This is because Master Huỳnh's ritual concept was relatively simple, and he even criticized the cumbersome rituals in religions and folk beliefs. The process and rituals of the May 18 festival are the same every year. The order of activities and rituals is as follows:

At 4:30 a.m. on May 18, the Central Executive Committee of the Hoahao Buddhist Association arrives at Tổ đình Temple on a float, with a horse-drawn carriage in front and grassroots-level floats following closely behind. This activity is called worshiping the Three Treasures, the nine generations of ancestors, and the image of Master Huỳnh.

Arriving at Tổ đình, the members of the Central Representative Committee, wearing áo dài - khăn đóng (long robes and headscarves), enter the temple in two columns. In front of them are believers holding flower baskets and fruit plates, which are placed in the center in front of the main altar. An old believer with a noble character in the council stands up and respectfully reports to Master Huỳnh's relatives (Ms. Tư, the current manager of Tổ đình) the idea of bringing Master Huỳnh's portrait to An Hòa Temple and asked for permission to carry out the ritual activities. The believers also report on the presence of the whole ceremonial delegation (the number of floats, waterway rafts, and religious executive committees in each province, the devotees, and all preparation works). After receiving the report, Master Huỳnh's relatives agreed to allow the delegates to enter the pavilion to perform the offering ceremony and take the master's portrait. After that, the delegation held a ritual at the Buddha altar, praying for Buddha's blessing. The master of the ceremony burns incense and chants scriptures to thank Master Huỳnh and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and pray for their protection and blessings of the country and the people. Each believer takes turns burning incense on the altar, kneels down, bows four times, and then stands up and prays. Afterwards, they perform a similar ritual at the altar of Master Huỳnh's parents inside An Hòa Temple. The person presiding over the ceremony recites scriptures praising Master Huỳnh's merits and asks for his permission to carry out other activities. They believe that Master Huỳnh is only temporarily "absent" and that when the Longhoa Meeting is held, he will come back to preside over the meeting, select talents, and create a peaceful and prosperous era, so they don't offer sacrifices in front of Master Huỳnh's portrait. After receiving the ceremony, the delegation takes the portrait of Master Huỳnh to a float, heading An Hòa Temple.

The solemn procession returns to An Hòa Temple and places the portrait of Master Huỳnh in the main hall. At this time, the believers put their hands together and bow their heads in salute, while another party beat drums. They place flower baskets next to the portrait of Master Huỳnh to show their respect. At 7:30 am, the executive committee members, believers, and guests attend the opening ceremony. The ceremony includes the singing of the national anthem and the raising of the national flag and the Hoahao flag. Afterward, representatives of the Central Executive Committee of the Hoahao Buddhist Temple review Master Huỳnh's background and career, summarize the report on religious activities throughout the year, and recite the Master's "Mission and Teachings" (Eight Commandments), reminding believers to abide by their practice, serve the people, and build an increasingly prosperous society. The Hoahao Central Charity Committee awards scholarships to students in Phú Tân District who have overcome difficulties and have excellent academic performance. After the ceremony, Hoahao Buddhists read oracles and chant doctrinal poems, calling on believers to practice, do good deeds, unite, and help each other. The doctrinal reading continues until 10 p.m.

The grand ceremony is held at An Hòa Temple right at 12:00 pm. 406 grassroots

executive committees, 13 provincial and municipal representative committees, and 7 central committees of religious groups across the region organize celebrations simultaneously in a grand, solemn, orderly, peaceful, frugal, and complete manner. After the ceremony at An Hòa Temple, a parade consisting of more than 60 floats, accompanied by numerous believers, head to Tân Châu City to participate in the local ceremonies (on-site observation, 2024).

On the second day of the festival, May 19, the Hoahao Central Committee and believers carry the portrait of Master Huỳnh from An Hòa Temple back to Tổ đình at 8 a.m., concluding the official May 18 ceremony. The ceremony is similar to the portrait procession ceremony in the early morning of May 18th. Although the ceremony has ended, thousands of believers are still participating in single ceremonies in An Hòa Temple and Tổ đình. The activities will not end until the end of May 20.

In general, compared with the celebrations on the festival days of other religions in Southern Vietnam, the May 18 festival of Hoahao Buddhism has few activities and simple rituals: however, it has left a deep impression on believers and tourists. Many return home with beautiful and meaningful activities and figures such as the parade with floats and rafts decorated with many symbols, expressing Buddhist consciousness and folk beliefs, joyful solidarity, and enlightened mentality.

The May 18th festival occupies an extremely important position in the spiritual life of Hoahao believers. It is an important mark to commemorate the history of the religion and the merits of the founder, Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ. On this "holy day", believers have the opportunity to carry out a number of social charity festival activities to fulfill the mission of the Four Graces. The event is an important milestone in the one-year cycle and serves as a reminder for believers to consolidate their faith and sacred duties, fulfill their mission on the Four Graces, and serve society.

Borrowing Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of "capital" and its related capital transformation, we can see that the core philosophical foundation of the Hoahao Buddhism and May 18th Festival plays the role of a religious cultural capital, and this capital is effectively mined and transformed into a socio-economic capital, which is specifically reflected in charity works, improving the lives of believers and community residents, uniting and sharing social emotions, promoting educational development, and sharing farming and business experiences. For Hoahao Buddhism, the religio-cultural field promotes and drives social and economic progress (the socio-economic field), not the other way around, as social responsibility is a core part of this religion's philosophy. The practice of the Four Graces (especially charity and social works) and the May 18 festival are also meant to remind and consolidate the historical and cultural memory of Hoahao Buddhism (to paraphrase Maurice Halbwachs' (1980) concept of "memory"), in which the collective crossing of boundaries during the liminal period during rituals by all believers can generate new initiatives related to the Dharma (see Turner 1969), thereby accelerating the process of building civilized society.

Conclusions

Hoahao Buddhism is a native Vietnamese religion born in An Giang Province under the background of French rule and World War II. Farmers therefore faced a serious psychological crisis, they sought "liberation" from real life, and became stronger spiritually in deep religious faith and actual practice. Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ spread ideas of the Four Graces and spiritual practices based on people's psychology and consciousness, becoming the spiritual fulcrum of Vietnamese farmers at that time. The religion continues the idea of the previous endogenous religion - Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, emphasizing ancestor worship and accelerating charity works. At the same time, it absorbs the ideas of many sects such as Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, folk beliefs, and other sectarian sects, and uses easy-to-understand language to facilitate people to learn, remember, and practice, embodying the two core characteristics of hybridity and inclusiveness.

Hoahao Buddhism adheres to the concept of "Four Graces" and strongly advocates charity and social work. This advocacy is so deeply rooted in doctrine and belief that Hoahao believers view it as an inherent responsibility rather than a religious action plan to accumulate merit for themselves and their families. By carrying out collective charity and social work, Hoahao Buddhists have effectively transformed religious and cultural resources into social and economic resources (in applying Bourdieu's concept). This has not only ensured unity within the religious system but also won the attention and sympathy of outside society and authorities. The commemoration of the founding day of Hoahao Buddhism on May 18 has become one of the few largest religious festivals in the Mekong River Delta, exerting a huge impact on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people in the region. It preserves and passes on religious history and culture as a "living museum" and serves as a "reminder" (in Halbwachs' words) for believers to strengthen their sacred religious beliefs, promote the unity of practice, and fulfill their social responsibilities. Hoahao Buddhism has thus effectively nurtured its core political and social foundations, contributing to the Mekong Delta region's economic, cultural, and social development.

References

Ban Trị sự Trung ương giáo hội Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (Central Executive Committee of Hòa Hảo Buddhism). 2024. "Báo cáo tổng kết hoạt động đạo sự nhiệm kỳ V (2019-2024), định hướng chương trình đạo sự nhiệm kỳ VI (2024-2029) của Ban Trị sự Trung ương giáo hội Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (Reports on the summary of sect activities in the fifth term (2019-2024) and the direction of the sect plans for the sixth term, 2024-2029)." Document provided by the Central Executive Committee Office of Hòa Hảo Buddhism.

Bourdeaux, Pascal. 2005. "Những ghi chép từ một tài liệu đầu tiên bằng tiếng Pháp thuật lại sự xuất hiện của một giáo phái ở làng Hòa Hảo (15-03-1940) (An early French document describing the emergence of religious sects in a Hòa Hảo village (March 15, 1940))", (Đặng Thế Đại trans.) *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies),* no. 6: 36-42.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Cultural reproduction and social reproduction." In *Power and ideology in education*, ed. Karabel, J. and Halsey, A. H., 487–511. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bùi, Hà. 1997. "Đảng bộ An Giang vận động tín đồ Hòa Hảo tham gia kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước (1954 - 1975*)* (An Giang Provincial Party Committee mobilized Hòa Hảo Buddhism members to participate in the struggle to resist the US aggressors and save the nation (1954-1975))." Master's thesis in Historical Sciences, Hanoi.

Bùi, Hà. 2002. "Đồng bào Phật giáo Hòa Hảo An Giang trong cuộc kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước (1954 – 1975) (Hòa Hảo Buddhist compatriots in An Giang during the period of fighting against the US aggressors and saving the nation (1954-1975))." PhD Dissertation in History, Hanoi.

Chánh, Tri. 2019. "The Fifth Hòa Hảo Buddhist Congress, term 2019-2024". https://pghh.org.vn/news/?ID=1924&CatID=63

Dật, Sĩ, and Nguyễn Văn Hầu. 1955. *Thất Sơn mầu nhiệm* (The mysterious Seven Mountains). Saigon: Từ Tâm.

Dương Quang Điện. 2016. "Hoạt động từ thiện xã hội của Phật giáo Việt Nam (Social charity activities of Vietnamese Buddhism)". *Tạp Chí Khoa Học Xã Hội (Journal of Social Sciences),* no. 10: 88–92.

Đuốc Từ Bi. 1965. "Huấn của Đức Bà trong cuộc lễ kỷ niệm đệ nhị thập lục chu niên ngày khai sáng đạo Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (Đức Bà's teachings at the 26th Anniversary of the Founding of Hòa Hảo Buddhism)". *Tập san Đuốc Từ Bi (Torch of Compassion Journal)*, no. 6: 5-6.

Đỗ, Hưng. 2000. "Vài suy nghĩ về tôn giáo Nam Bộ thời cận đại (Some thoughts on modern southern Vietnamese religions)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious*

Studies), no. 1: 14-22.

Đỗ, Hưng. 2001. "Hiện tượng tôn giáo mới – mấy vấn đề lý luận và thực tiễn (New religious phenomena: some theoretical and practical issues)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies),* no. 5: 3-12.

Đỗ, Thư. 2010. "Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong đời sống văn hóa tinh thần của người dân An Giang hiện nay (The influence of Hòa Hảo Buddhism on the cultural and spiritual life of An Giang people today)." Master's thesis in Cultural Studies, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Political Science, Hanoi.

Hoài, Dân. 1966. "Đức giáo chủ và công đức truyền giáo (The Patriarch and the merits of sectarian missionaries)", *Tập san Đuốc Từ Bi* (*Torch of Compassion Magazine)* 5: 8-19.

Hà, Thảo. 1975. „Sơ lược về các hệ phái Phật giáo tại Việt Nam (Overview of Buddhist sects in Vietnam)". Master of Arts Examination Thesis, Saigon University of Literature.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1980. *The collective memory*. New York City: Harper & Row.

Tai, Hue-Tam Ho. 1983. *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.

Hoàng Thu Hương. 2018. "Chuyên nghiệp hóa hoạt động từ thiện xã hội: Xu hướng nhập thế của Phật giáo Việt Nam đương đại (Professionalization in social charity activities: Incarnation trends of contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism)" *Thông tin Khoa học xã hội (Social Science Information),* 12: 20–28.

Lê, Thảo. 1974. "Sinh hoạt Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong cộng đồng quốc gia (Activities of Hòa Hảo Buddhism in national communities)". Master of Arts Examination Thesis, Saigon University of Literature.

Lê, Liêm. 1995. *Bồ tát Huỳnh Phú Sổ và Phật giáo thời đại* (Bodhisattva Huỳnh Phú Sổ and Contemporary Buddhism). The Institute of Buddhist Thought, USA.

Lâm, Láng. 2008. "Phật giáo Hòa Hảo – Hệ thống giáo hội và các tổ chức chính trị, quân sự thời kỳ 1945-1975 (Hòa Hảo Buddhism: religious institutions and political-military organizations, 1945-1975)". PhD dissertation on Vietnamese history from the Southern Academy of Social Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City.

Mai, Long. 1971. „Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (Hòa Hảo Buddhism) ". Graduation thesis, National School of Public Administration, Saigon.

Mã, Xái. 1974. *Các giáo phái miền Tây* (Sectarian groups in the Mekong Delta). Saigon: unknown publisher.

Mạc, Đường. 2004. "Đặc điểm tín ngưỡng và tôn giáo Nam Bộ theo cách tiếp cận dân tộc học tôn giáo (Analyzing the characteristics of faith and religion in Southern Vietnam using Ethnography of religion)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies),* no. 4: 73-78.

Ming, Chi. 2017. "Phong trào tôn giáo Hòa Hảo (The Hòa Hảo religious movement)".

In *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo một tôn giáo cận nhân tình trong lòng dân tộc* (Hòa Hảo Buddhism as a religion close to humanity in the hearts of the people), Trần Văn Chánh & Bùi Thanh Hải (eds.), 54-61. Ho Chi Minh City: Tổng hợp.

Mai, Hải. 2008. "Các "đạo" của nông dân châu thổ sông Cửu Long từ Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương, Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa đến Đạo Lành và Đạo Ông Nhà Lớn (The "religions" of farmers in the Mekong Delta range from Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương and Tứ Ân Hiếu Nghĩa to Đạo Lành and Đạo Ông Nhà Lớn)". *Tạp chí nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies),* no. 1: 65-71.

Nguyễn, Trinh. 1965. "Lược kê tin tức về hoạt động của Giáo hội Phật giáo Hòa Hảo kể từ ngày thành lập đến cuối tháng 1 (dương lịch) năm 1965 (Summary of activities of Hòa Hảo Buddhism from its establishment to the end of January 1965) . " *Tập san Đuốc Từ Bi (Torch of Compassion Journal)*, no. 1: 62-65.

Nguyễn, Trạch and Huỳnh Kỷ. 1965. "Sinh hoạt trong đại lễ 18-5 (May 18 Celebrations)"- *Tạp san Đuốc Từ Bi (Torch of Compassion Journal)*, no. 5: 65-68.

Nguyễn, Bình, and Quốc Phan. 2021. "Vai trò của Phật giáo Việt Nam trong công tác xã hội hiện nay (The role of Vietnamese Buddhism in social work today)". https://phatgiaodongnai.org/vai-tro-cua-phat-giao-viet-nam-trong-cong-tac-xa-hoi-hien-nay.html

Nguyễn, Kiểm. 1966. *Tân Châu (1870-1964).* Tân Châu: author published.

Nguyễn, Hầu. 1968/2017. *Nhận thức Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (*Understanding of Hòa Hảo Buddhism).* Hanoi: Tôn giáo.

Nguyễn, Phúc. 1973. "Sự đóng góp của Phật giáo Hòa Hảo vào nền an ninh quốc gia (Contribution of Hòa Hảo Buddhism to National Security)". Graduation thesis, National School of Public Administration, Saigon.

Nguyen, Phong; Nguyen, Tho, and Hieu Nguyen. 2024. "Mobilising frontiers: "heretical masters" and their ideological and religio-political change in the Mekong River Delta of Vietnam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries". *Asian Studies*, no. 3: 65-100. https://doi.org/10.4312/as.2024.12.3.65-100

Nguyễn, Tuấn. 1974. "Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong nền chính trị hiện tại". Graduation thesis, National School of Public Administration, Saigon.

Nguyễn, Nam. 1991. *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo trong dòng lịch sử dân tộc* (The Status of Hòa Hảo Buddhism in the National History). California: Đuốc Từ Bi.

Nguyễn, Hầu. 1972. *Năm cuộc đối thoại về Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (Five Conversations on Hòa Hảo Buddhism).* Saigon: Hương Sen.

Nguyễn, Sa. 2000. "Đạo Hòa Hảo và ảnh hưởng của nó ở đồng bằng sông Cửu Long (Hòa Hảo Buddhism and its influence in the Mekong Delta)". PhD dissertation, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Political Science, Hanoi.

Nguyễn, Cường, and Ngọc Nguyễn. 2005. *Tôn giáo tín ngưỡng của các cư dân vùng đồng bằng sông Cửu Long (Beliefs and religions of the Mekong Delta residents).* Cà

Mau: Phương Đông.

Nguyễn, Tân. 2007. "Vấn đề giáo lý của Phật giáo Hòa Hảo qua một số trước tác của Đức Giáo chủ Huỳnh Phú Sổ (The Buddhist thought of Hòa Hảo Huddhism from the works of Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies),* no. 12: 33-37.

Nguyễn, Hiệp. 2003. *An Giang văn hóa một vùng đất (An Giang: culture of a special land).* Hanoi: Văn hóa - Thông tin.

Nguyễn, Hiệp. 2010. "Căn cốt giáo lý của Phật giáo Hòa Hảo: Học Phật Tu Nhân hay Tu Nhân Học Phật? (The core teachings of Hòa Hảo Buddhism: Is it to learn Buddhism and practice, or to practice and learn Buddhism?)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies)*, no. 3: 41-45.

Nguyễn, Diễm. 2017. "Nhận dạng và xác định trách nhiệm của tín đồ Phật giáo Hòa Hảo đối với xã hội hiện nay (Identifying and defining the responsibilities of Hòa Hảo Buddhism to contemporary society)", in *Phật giáo Hòa Hảo một tôn giáo cận nhân tình trong lòng dân tộc* (Hòa Hảo Buddhism as a religion close to humanity in the hearts of the people), Trần Văn Chánh & Bùi Thanh Hải (eds.), 372-383. Ho Chi Minh City: Tổng hợp.

Nguyễn, Hiếu, and Thắng Võ. 2024. "Nghiên cứu tôn giáo Tứ Ân Đạo Phật ở tỉnh An Giang và Kiên Giang (Study on the Tứ Ân đạo Phật in An Giang and Kiên Giang)". An Giang University Research Project, VNU – Ho Chi Minh City.

Nguyễn, Đạt, and Nửa Lê. 2024. "Phật giáo Hòa Hảo đồng hành cùng dân tộc (Hòa Hảo Buddhism going along with the country)", in *Các tôn tôn giáo nội sinh ở Nam Bộ: Hội nhập và phát triển (Endogenous religions in the South: integration and development),* USSH, VNU - Ho Chi Minh City.

Phật giáo Hòa Hảo. 1966. *Sám giảng và Thi văn giáo lý của Đức Huỳnh giáo chủ* (Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ's lectures and poems). An Giang: Tây An Cổ tự.

Phạm, Hợp. 2007. *Người Nam Bộ và tôn giáo bản địa: Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương – Cao Đài – Hòa Hảo* (Southern Vietnamese and indigenous religions: Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương – Caodaism – Hòa Hảo Buddhism). Hanoi: Tôn giáo.

Thanh, Sĩ, and Kim Vương. 1954. *Để hiểu Phật giáo Hòa Hảo* (In order to understand Hòa Hảo Buddhism). Saigon: Long Hoa.

Thành, Nam. 1966. "Hậu Giang là vùng an ninh nhất (Hậu Giang as the safest region)", *Tạp san Đuốc Từ Bi (Torch of Compassion Journal),* no. 5: 57-64.

Thích Tâm Châu trans. 2018. *Kinh Đại thừa bản sinh tâm địa quán* (Mahayana Sudras of original mindfulness). Hanoi: Hồng Đức.

Thường Lạc Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Buddhist Committee. 1938/2010. *Thi văn giáo lý Phật giáo Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương của Đức Thầy giáo chủ* (Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Buddhist teachings of the master Đức Thầy). Hồng Ngự: Thường Lạc Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Executive Committee.

Trần, Thành. 2009. "Tính chất cứu thế trong giáo lý Phật giáo Hòa Hảo (The Nature of Salvation in the Teachings of Hòa Hảo Buddhism)". *Nghiên cứu Tôn giáo (Religious Studies)* 12: 31-33. [no DOI].

Tiến, Lên. 2023. "Tín đồ Phật giáo Hòa Hảo tỉnh An Giang thực hiện hoạt động từ thiện, xã hội trên 61 tỷ đồng trong 6 tháng đầu năm 2023 (Hòa Hảo Buddhists in An Giang province carried out charitable and social activities worth more than VND61 billion in the first six months of 2023)". https://btgcp.gov.vn/doi-song-tin-nguong-va-ton-giao/tin-do-phat-giao-hoa-hao-tinh-an-giang-thuc-hien-hoat-dong-tu-thien-xa-hoi-tren-61-ty-dong-post9DR33pbRLp.html

Turner, Victor. 1969. *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine.

U.S. Department of the Navy, Bureau of Naval Personnel, Chaplains Division. 1967. *The Religions of South Viet Nam: in Faith and Fact*. http://www.sacred-texts.com/asia/rsv/rsv40.htm

Vương, Kim. 1974. *Đức Huỳnh giáo chủ* (On Master Huỳnh Phú Sổ). Saigon: Long Hoa.

Танг Ван Во, Хијеу Трунг Нгујен и Фонг Тан Нгујен

Добротворни рад као централна верска пракса: Студија случаја Хоахао будизма у делти Меконга

Сажетак: Будизам Хоахао у делти Меконга настао је као спој махајана будизма, локалног култа предака и есхатолошких веровања која потичу из јужне Кине, чиме је култура породичне лозе проширена на друштвени ниво и створена посебна будистичка секта на југу Вијетнама. Следбеници Хоахао будизма граде своју веру на основама Дхарме, при чему се односи међу верницима, као и са онима ван заједнице, продубљују и постају свеобухватнији. Упркос снажном утицају савремене тржишне економије и порасту материјализма, Хоахао верници и даље одржавају снажан дух друштвене добротворности, што се најјасније огледа у основном појму вере и годишњем фестивалу који се одржава 18. маја. Како верници Хоахао покрета успевају да очувају дух саосећања и хуманитарне активности? На који начин учествују у локалним друштвено-политичким механизмима кроз своје друштвено ангажоване религијске праксе? Овај рад се ослања на теорију Пјера Бурдијеа о трансформацији различитих облика друштвеног капитала унутар заједнице Хоахао будиста и користи полуструктурисане интервјуе, анализу литературе и друге методе како би показао да основни концепти „отплате дуга према земљи, народу, родитељима и прецима, као и Три Драгуља“ у филозофији Хоахао будизма чине органску основу саосећајног менталитета верника у секуларном животу.
Кључне речи: Хоахао будизам, Четири захвалности, добротворност, религијско-културни капитал, социоекономски капитал