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Hoa- Viet cultural acculturation - integration in Ho Chi Minh city regarding religious aspects: Restrospects and prospects

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Abstract

This scholarly article examines the complex dynamics between Chinese and Vietnamese cultural paradigms, with a particular emphasis on their religious practices. The interplay between these two cultures has engendered a profound intermingling of traditions, illustrating significant mutual influence. The reverence for deities and the celebration of festivals serve as illustrative examples of their shared cultural practices. Vietnamese religious sites have drawn the attention of Chinese adherents, while simultaneously, elements of Vietnamese culture have been assimilated into Chinese traditions. This cultural interchange manifests across various domains, encompassing architectural styles, modes of religious expression, and forms of performing arts. The Chinese demographic within Ho Chi Minh City has further augmented the city's cultural fabric through the integration of Vietnamese cultural components. This phenomenon epitomizes the synergistic coexistence and reciprocal influence inherent between the two distinct cultures.

Keywords: acculturation, cultural exchange, cultural integration, syncretism.

Introduction

Cultural acculturation within religious practices is so intricately linked that it becomes challenging to delineate the origins pertaining to China or Lac Viet (Bach Viet). The traditions associated with the veneration of deities and spirits, the burning of votive paper, the organization of festivals, and the avoidance of taboo names exhibit considerable parallels between the Chinese and Vietnamese. The religious and spiritual practices of the Vietnamese are significantly shaped by Chinese influences. The veneration of Quan Cong, Tho Cong, Thien Hau, Than Tai, and Tho Dia by the Vietnamese illustrates the absorption of Chinese cultural elements. Conversely, the Chinese culture has also been profoundly impacted by Vietnamese traditions. Numerous Vietnamese religious sites, such as Ba Den Mountain in Tay Ninh and various Southern Buddhist temples of the Khmer, have attracted a substantial Chinese following, revealing deep cultural interconnections. The interaction and assimilation between Vietnamese and Chinese cultures are further evidenced through various domains including architecture, attire, religious gastronomy, religious practices, and associated performing arts. It is evident that the presence of the Chinese community, alongside their assimilation process, has significantly enriched the cultural tapestry of Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City. The

components of Chinese-Vietnamese cultural interaction have forged a complex characterized by vibrant coexistence, marked by unified nuances amidst the diversity inherent in the culture of Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City.

Literature Review

Cultural integration can be defined as the process of adaptation, assimilation, and incorporation of cultural elements to align with the distinctive characteristics of a community or nation-state, while simultaneously nurturing the cultural values of that community or nation-state without compromising its cultural identity. Fundamentally, cultural integration represents a complex, multi-faceted amalgamation of cultural elements encompassing both cultural exchange and cultural acculturation, driven by a variety of endogenous (superior social contexts) and exogenous factors. In this dual framework, cultural exchange operates as a mechanism of reciprocal cultural interaction predicated upon the principles of equality and mutual benefit, thereby facilitating enhanced understanding and the resolution of conflicts and requirements that may arise during the developmental trajectories of individuals, communities, or nations. The significance of cultural exchange extends beyond merely enhancing the visibility of national brands; it also plays a crucial role in addressing pressing needs that emerge within the context of international economic cooperation, while simultaneously fostering cultural development. Culture is characterized as an open system, perpetually evolving and adapting in response to human necessities; thus, cultural exchange serves as a foundational process that aids in the advancement of indigenous cultural systems, predicated on the preservation and transformation of traditional cultural elements. Within the framework of cultural exchange, exogenous cultural values coexist concurrently within disparate cultural contexts, maintaining their original characteristics without being assimilated into the indigenous culture (Ngô Minh Oanh, 2008). Conversely, the direction of cultural acculturation within the cultural integration process embodies a reciprocal dynamic, characterized by a phenomenon of mutual influence among two cultures that coexist over extended periods in environments marked by geographical and contextual similarities; in this scenario, components of the foreign cultural system undergo varying degrees of transformation as they align with the values of the receiving cultural system (Võ Thị Thu Thủy, 2013). Cultural acculturation represents the transformative process that ensues following cultural exchange, leading to an increase in similarities between two distinct cultures within a shared cultural milieu. Throughout the processes of cultural exchange and acculturation, it is evident that both cultures are subject to change; however, the dependent culture is typically more susceptible to significant transformation compared to the dominant culture. Cultural exchange can manifest in four distinct modalities: (1) between two or more regions, nations, and ethnic groups across a continent or among continents, (2) among multiple ethnic groups within the confines of a single nation, (3) between individuals residing within a nation who engage in sustained cultural interaction due to prolonged cohabitation in a specific locale, and (4) between an individual and an entire socio-cultural environment (Nguyễn Văn Kim, 2018, p. 52).

The phenomenon of cultural acculturation may manifest in one of two modalities (active acculturation, passive acculturation) across one of three tiers of acculturation (individual, local community, or entire nation), adhering to one of four predominant diffusion pathways (trade, migration, intercultural marriage, and warfare), evidenced in one or multiple distinct domains of acculturation (linguistic acculturation, artistic acculturation, religious belief acculturation, lifestyle and customs acculturation, literary acculturation), culminating in one of four classifications (1. acceptance - the symbiosis of external cultural elements with indigenous cultural elements, subsequently reformulated to align with the local cultural context, 2. mere preservation of indigenous cultural elements, 3. unilateral acceptance and appropriation of foreign cultural elements, 4. refusal to adapt traditional elements of the indigenous cultural framework alongside the appropriation of external cultural influences). Among these classifications, the mode of reception characterized by the symbiosis of external cultural factors with indigenous cultural factors, subsequently adapted to the local cultural milieu, represents the most prevalent and sustainable form of development. The acculturation process may transpire vertically, initiated by governmental actions such as warfare directed towards indigenous populations within specific locales, or it may disseminate circularly from a cultural epicenter to its periphery, akin to waves of civilizational encounter whose intensity gradually diminishes from the nucleus of the imported cultural origin towards the outer edges.

Cultural exchange engenders numerous ramifications, including (1) the obsolescence of the dependent culture, which transforms into a subculture of the dominant culture, (2) the complete assimilation of the dependent culture into the dominant culture following a cultural exchange that evolves into a voluntary appropriation process. The degree and intensity of external pressure exerted upon the dependent culture will be contingent upon prevailing conditions, wherein the dependent culture may autonomously select its trajectory during the acculturation process (Mead, 1956), or may also be subjected to coercive imposition during the acculturation process. Cultural exchange-acculturation may also serve as the focal point for a series of anthropological critiques, necessitating attention to locality while also addressing the inquiries surrounding cultural continuity or transformation that prior models have overlooked (Hans Peter Hahn, 2008, pp. 191-192). The eradication of a nation from the global arena or its assimilation into a minority ethnic group is contingent upon its capacity to uphold its national cultural identity alongside genuine economic and political autonomy.

Cultural acculturation, in this context, encompasses three distinct phases: the imitation phase, the integration phase, and the transformation phase, which aligns with the national ethos and societal context (Phan Ngọc, 1998, p. 147). From the process of cultural acculturation, a variety of cultural phenomena may arise during cultural exchange, including cultural de-culturation, cultural rejection, cultural assimilation, and cultural resistance (Phan Thị Yến Tuyết, 1994, p. 156). Cultural acculturation engenders modifications in cultures through a multifaceted developmental trajectory characterized by numerous significant turning points (Thomas Barfield, 1997, p. 94). In summary, acculturation represents the process by which an individual (or group)

continuously engages with another individual (or group), absorbing (either wholly or partially, voluntarily or involuntarily) the cultural attributes of that individual (or group) (Nguyễn Hoa Mai, 2019).

In this bidirectional phenomenon, cultural integration simultaneously fosters and enhances the cultural value framework of both the community and the nation-state, thus augmenting the cultural standing of these entities while simultaneously jeopardizing their capacity to formulate and cultivate the cultural values inherent to the community and nation-state. This phenomenon is evidently a byproduct of cultural globalization, as "the omnipresent influence of the largest media and entertainment industry brands today is instigating the formation of new social norms. Such potent cultural incursions not only jeopardize cultural diversity but also expose the populace to the peril of forfeiting the cultural identity of the nation" (Trần Thị Thái Hà et al., 2000, p. 05). The predicament concerning the advantages of the cultural hegemonies of major powers, which possess the capability to cultivate globally competitive cultural industries that are disseminated across all mass media platforms and social networks, also poses a significant risk, culminating in "the rift between tradition and modernity in developing nations. Over time, the youth exhibit a disinclination towards their mother tongue, ultimately forsaking the language of their ancestors. The cultural heritage of marginalized and disadvantaged ethnic groups is poised to gradually vanish" (Bjznova, 2005, p. 07). "Globalization has failed to fulfill the aspirations of a substantial proportion of the populace for dignified employment and a viable future for their progeny. A considerable segment of the workforce continues to endure the detrimental repercussions of globalization, even within nations endowed with advanced media, entertainment, and cultural industries. The scientific and technological revolutions increasingly exacerbate this intolerable and unsustainable global disparity" (Ủy ban thế giới về mức xã hội của toàn cầu hóa, 2004, p. 10).

When the Vietnamese migrated to the southern region, the Khmer were already engaged in commerce throughout the hilly terrains, while the Chinese had established their presence from the outset, coexisting harmoniously, exchanging cultural practices, and providing mutual support and protection. The Chinese arrived in Ho Chi Minh City via maritime and terrestrial routes, exemplified by the migration of the generals Tran Thuong Xuyen and Duong Ngan Dich, who were granted permission by Lord Nguyen to transport troops and vessels for the reclamation of the Can Gio estuary, subsequently establishing their presence in Dong Nai and Tien Giang (Li Tana & Nguyễn Cẩm Thúy, 1999, p. 51). Over time, a significant influx of economically disadvantaged Chinese immigrants from Southern China sought employment opportunities in Saigon - Gia Dinh, resulting in a notable increase in their population. Bien Hoa and Cho Lon emerged as the two primary locales of residence for the Chinese community (Trần Hồng Liên, 2007, p. 11). Saigon - Gia Dinh evolved into the commercial epicenter for the Chinese populace residing in Cho Lon (Li Tana & Nguyễn Cẩm Thúy, 1999, p. 44). While the faction of Chinese who "opposed the Qing and restored the Ming" sought refuge in Vietnam as political exiles during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, their descendants, who were compatriots, assimilated politically into Vietnam; conversely, the Chinese who migrated for commercial purposes from the

late 18th century onward have undergone economic Vietnamization, a process that remains in progression (Châu Thị Hải, 2006, pp. 146-154).

Demonstrations of Hoa-Vietnamese religious acculturation and integration in Ho Chi Minh City through the collection of worshipped items

In relation to the objects of veneration, the Hoa community also pays homage to cultural luminaries and national heroes of the Vietnamese populace, exemplified by the esteemed left general Le Van Duyet, whom the Hoa affectionately refer to as the son-in-law Jia Jia (interpreted as the father of the son-in-law, due to his having adopted a son, Le Van Yen, who was married to Princess Ngoc Ngon, the tenth offspring of King Gia Long). The Hoa individuals thrive, engage in commerce, and cultivate the streets within the Saigon - Cho Lon locality with considerable success. Consequently, they engage in worship as an expression of appreciation towards the left general, who provided encouragement, venerating him as a fortuitous deity of the Saigon - Cho Lon region, and perpetuating this tradition for posterity. This elucidates the prevalent practice among the Hoa to offer roast chicken, roast pig, and boiled duck daily at the Le Van Duyet Mausoleum, along with the burning of incense, votive paper, and the release of caged birds. On each vigil day, members of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City partake in the ritual of igniting a bundle of incense, allowing the aromatic smoke to ascend heavenward, facilitating the prompt conveyance and realization of their aspirations. The embrace of the worship of the Left General Le Van Duyet further exemplifies the cultural amalgamation between the Hoa society in Ho Chi Minh City and the Vietnamese populace, historically and contemporaneously, collaboratively contributing to the development of this territory. Throughout the duration of harmonious coexistence, accompanied by diverse socio-cultural influences, the Hoa community within Ho Chi Minh City has manifested their assimilation into the tapestry of Vietnamese ethnic groups across various domains, with the methodical arrangement of worship offerings at Le Van Duyet's mausoleum standing as a salient testament to the outcomes of this cultural and religious interchange and integration. Even during the New Year festivities, the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City frequents Le Van Duyet's mausoleum to seek the auspicious first fortune of the year and to solicit blessings on New Year's Eve, akin to the practices observed by the Vietnamese. The celebrations at the Le Van Duyet mausoleum were not solely established and evolved for the Hoa merchants and laborers who frequently faced adversities in business, seeking financial prosperity and immediate fulfillment of blessings within the year. The Hoa individuals who upheld the tradition of worshipping at Thien Hau Pagoda would visit Le Van Duyet mausoleum as a complementary practice, not in opposition to fundamental ethical standards, participating in the consumption of wine, fish, and meat, to aspire for joy and to reinforce unity within the expatriate community encompassing both Vietnamese and Chinese individuals, energetically engaging in commerce, competing in trade, exhibiting confidence and maintaining dignity, while also confronting the increasingly pervasive influence of Western culture (Đỗ Phan Kỳ Anh, 1997).

The examination of the object of veneration reveals that the southern region of Vietnam represents the area with the highest concentration of Hoa settlers. The Hoa who migrated to the South were individuals who placed great value on chivalric ideals and embodied a spirit of camaraderie; consequently, the veneration of Quan Cong by the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City reflects characteristics of Southern solidarity that transcends clan and class distinctions, demonstrating a remarkable hospitality, an appreciation for the literate, and a pronounced admiration for scholars in comparison to other regions. Furthermore, the reverence for Tran Thuong Xuyen at the Minh Huong Gia Thanh communal house retains elements of ancestral worship, representing the local tutelary deity of the Vietnamese, venerated by the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City as an ancestral figure interlinked with the spiritual existence of the Hoa, who played a pivotal role in facilitating the reclamation of the Saigon - Gia Dinh - Cho Lon territory by the Southern Chinese community. Thus, the worship practices conducted at these establishments serve not only to fulfill the religious and spiritual aspirations of the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City but also to foster a sense of unity between the two communities.

Moreover, at various religious sites such as Nghia Nhuan Assembly Hall, Minh Huong Gia Thanh Communal House, Thien Hau Temple, Tam Son Assembly Hall, and On Lang Assembly Hall, the Hoa engage in the veneration of the Thanh Hoang Bon Canh deity, akin to the Vietnamese, concurrently with the worship of other deities from Chinese tradition. This phenomenon illustrates the profound integration of the Hoa, who regard the Thanh Hoang Bon Canh deity of the Vietnamese as nearly equivalent to their primary deities; for instance, the Thanh Hoang Bon Canh deity is honored in the main hall of Phong Phu Communal House, positioned to the left of the altar dedicated to Quan Thanh De Quan at Nghia Nhuan Assembly Hall, at the central shrine of the main hall of Minh Huong Gia Thanh Communal House, and within the side chambers of On Lang Assembly Hall and Tam Son Assembly Hall.

In addition to the veneration of the Thanh Hoang Bon Canh deity, the Hoa have also established the legend of Ba Chua Xu, who is worshipped in the central hall of Thien Hau Temple in Ho Chi Minh City as a sister to Ba Chua Xu Chau Doc, thereby fostering profound devotion among the populace. This demonstrates that they revere two culturally interwoven deities of Hoa-Vietnamese origin simultaneously, honoring a divine figure believed to possess great sanctity and consistently bestow blessings upon her devotees. She serves as a symbol of protection and refuge for the community, transcending ethnic boundaries amid the trials of establishing themselves in a challenging new environment, thus catering to the needs of the Hoa who have integrated into this new territory but lacked the means to undertake pilgrimages to Chau Doc.

The Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City have also assimilated the Vietnamese belief in Ngu Hanh Nuong Nuong, crafting it from ancient Chinese philosophical principles and Vietnamese feminine cultural elements, as exemplified by the Ngu Hanh Nuong Nuong altar located in the left chamber of the main hall at Phuoc An Assembly Hall, as well as the Ngu Hanh Nuong Nuong altar situated in the main hall of Phu Chau Temple.

A more representative illustration of the profound amalgamation of Chinese-Vietnamese cultural elements can be observed in the Hoa's practices at Tam Son Assembly Hall, Thien Hau Temple, Quang Trieu Assembly Hall,

and Ha Chuong Assembly Hall, where they have incorporated the animist beliefs prevalent among the Vietnamese. This includes the placement of the Tiger God in a side chamber or corner of the main hall, akin to the positioning of other deities, with the expectation that the Tiger God will safeguard the newly acquired land from disturbances caused by malevolent entities and evil spirits (Trần Lâm, 1998, p. 25).

Additionally, the animist beliefs embraced by the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City involve the veneration of tree roots, monumental trees, and ancient trees characterized by unusual forms, which symbolize the abodes of deities worshipped in numerous villages that clandestinely contributed to the defeat of adversaries (Nguyễn Đăng Duy, 2001, p. 104).

Notably, even in Khanh Van Nam Vien, which exhibits minimal influence from Vietnamese culture, a distinction arises in the interpretation of Taoism as compared to its Chinese counterpart. In the Chinese context, Taoism typically associates Tho Dia and Than Chu (Tao Quan), whereas in Khanh Van Nam Vien, a distinct practice involves the worship of Ong Tao situated in a specific area of the kitchen, thereby differentiating it from Tho Than. This exemplifies the ongoing process of acculturation and the synthesis of Chinese-Vietnamese religious practices in Ho Chi Minh City.

Under the auspices of Vatican II, which served as a fertile ground for cultural exchange, the seeds of Vietnamese cultural practices flourished and evolved across various dimensions within the Notre Dame Cathedral of Hoa Binh and Cha Tam Church of the Hoa. This evolution encompassed architectural design, decorative motifs, anthropological characteristics of worship statues, and religious instruments rooted in Vietnamese tradition, thereby enabling Chinese Christians to engage with their faith in a manner consistent with the thought processes and behaviors of Vietnamese Christians.

Demonstrations of Hoa-Vietnamese religious acculturation and integration in Ho Chi Minh City through architectural sculpture and the system of horizontal lacquered boards, parallel sentences, statues and miniature statues

The predominant demographic of the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City originates from the coastal regions of southern China. In response to the consumer preferences and aesthetic sensibilities of their clientele, the Hoa have synthesized, adapted, and acquired insights from Vietnamese and Khmer traditions, thereby engaging in the exploration, research, and enhancement of designs, patterns, and forms reflective of their aesthetic consciousness. A notable aspect of the decorative content of statues at Tue Thanh Assembly Hall is the syncretism of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, complemented by forms of nature worship aimed at invoking blessings and averting calamities. Although retaining the stylistic features of ancient Chinese temples in terms of lines, architectural artistry, spatial configuration, and construction materials, and even adhering to Chinese architectural standards, the influence of the natural geographical milieu, social conditions, and cultural interactions with the Vietnamese, who constitute the primary labor force, has led to stylistic and thematic adaptations at the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall, influenced by Vietnamese culture. Folk themes that resonate with quotidian life, along with distinct variations, novel characteristics, and identities

unique to Hoa culture, have been incorporated, resulting in the religious establishments of the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City diverging from their counterparts in Southern China. These distinctions and characteristics have gradually crystallized into significant socio-cultural factors that contribute to the development of socio-cultural relations between the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City and the broader Southeast Asian context. The ceramic and miniature statues displayed at Tue Thanh Assembly Hall have also contributed to the manifestation of a quintessential ethnic community, reflecting the comprehensive historical narrative and the populace involved in the formation of Ho Chi Minh City, characterized by a unity within diversity (Nguyễn Thị Thu Trúc, 2007).

Another salient feature pertains to the intricate wood and stone carving artistry found within the Nghia Nhuan communal house, which, following its transformation from the veneration of the local tutelary deity bestowed by King Tu Duc to the reverence of Quan Thanh (Quan Cong), maintains the Southern stylistic elements. This artistry is characterized by motifs depicting inverted peach seeds, mangosteens, avian figures perched upon plum branches, apricot blossoms, chrysanthemums, wine gourds, poetry bags, grapes, pomegranates, custard apples, toads, crabs, shrimps, and fish intricately carved into the wooden surfaces of all door panels, altar panels, stone pillars, horizontal lacquered boards, pairs of parallel sentences, and octagonal column bases, symbolizing the rich, diverse, and bountiful nature and ecosystems of the Southern region. Notably, the depiction of the toad positioned on the balcony of the central hall within the Nghia An Assembly Hall epitomizes the profound amalgamation of Chinese and Vietnamese cultural elements, as the toad is regarded in Chinese culture as an unattractive, diminutive creature devoid of auspiciousness, whereas, in Vietnamese culture, the toad embodies majesty, strength, and an inherent beauty encapsulated within a modest form, representing exceptionally noble attributes (Hà Châu, 1984, p. 53). At the Hai Nam Lady Temple, several subsequent horizontal lacquered boards and parallel sentences are adorned with motifs reflective of local products, intertwined with Southern fruits, attributable to the shared habitation within a land esteemed as a second homeland, where daily practices have increasingly become ingrained in the consciousness of Chinese artisans, thereby precipitating a gradual evolution in the motifs and designs of the horizontal lacquered boards and parallel sentences at both Nghia Nhuan Communal House and Hai Nam Lady Temple. The incorporation of Vietnamese decorative art elements into the religious relic arrangements of the Hoa community in Ho Chi Minh City manifests as a vivid representation of the cultural exchange and integration between Hoa and Vietnamese traditions within a locale that necessitates their interconnection, unity, and shared experiences throughout the protracted process of coexistence. Within the On Lang Temple, the depiction of dragons on the horizontal lacquered boards and parallel sentences is notably rendered with a softer, more fluid, amicable, and accessible aesthetic when compared to the dragons depicted in Southern China. This suggests that the Hoa community has assimilated cultural adaptability, ethnic solidarity, and a pacific, flexible disposition, which can be modified in accordance with the exigencies arising from the challenging natural conditions encountered during land reclamation and the struggle against a common adversary. Moreover, the imagery representative of the Southern countryside is meticulously crafted on the

horizontal lacquered boards and parallel sentences, reflecting a tranquil and serene rural landscape, which serves as the second homeland for the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City. This might elucidate why the horizontal lacquered board in the main hall of Nhi Phu Temple is inscribed with the phrase *Ngo tho dia da* (This land is mine), signifying a deep-rooted connection to the birthplace. Additionally, there exists a horizontal lacquered board bearing the inscription *Than lam phuc dia* (God comes to the good land), which mirrors the collaborative spirit in community engagements with the Vietnamese populace, jointly embracing this locale as a fertile ground for avian habitation, a harbinger of good fortune, irrespective of ethnic distinctions.

The cultural interchange between the Hoa and Viet communities in Ho Chi Minh City is further accentuated through the parallel inscriptions found within Nhi Phu Temple, which state, "*Phuc tich dan nhan, dien Nam bang nhi huu trung tho; Duc triem tan thuy, tran Tay De di ho ha thuong*" (a rough English translation would be: "Blessings conferred upon the populace, affectionate towards the South while possessing kinship with the central territories; Duc immerses in the waters, tran Tay De (referring to Saigon - Cho Lon - TG) to assist traders") (Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, 2012). Moreover, another significant representation of the amalgamation of Vietnamese cultural elements by the Minh Huong community in Saigon - Gia Dinh is exemplified by the existence of seven sets of bronze alloy tripartite assemblages out of a documented total of nine ancient tripartite collections, all of which can be traced back to approximately the late 19th century and are sourced from foundries in Gia Dinh, established by Central migrants and Hue foundry guilds. The incorporation of religious motifs and folk beliefs has been adeptly harnessed by artisans in the embellishment of ancient incense burners, thereby producing an artistic legacy that resonates with Vietnamese cultural tenets while simultaneously exhibiting distinctive traits of Chinese tradition. Incense burners that originate from Saigon - Gia Dinh typically manifest in two varieties: green glaze and purple-blue glaze. A predominant characteristic of these pieces is their round form with circular openings, complemented by two handles intricately carved into lion heads, crafted from Saigon ceramic; thus, they project a more refined and delicate aesthetic in comparison to the Qing Dynasty incense burners, which, while similar in form, are constructed from stone. The incense burners emanating from Saigon - Gia Dinh have also played a pivotal role in the development of rich thematic elements that are deeply rooted in Vietnamese folklore and exhibit marked distinctions when juxtaposed with traditional incense burners from China. A salient characteristic that illustrates the process of Vietnamese cultural assimilation by the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as the phenomenon of de-sinicization within the Vietnamese populace, is manifested in the design of the incense burner characterized by a circular cross-section that progressively narrows towards the top, featuring a lion statue atop its lid, as opposed to the traditional unicorn statue prevalent in Chinese incense burners. Notably, there exist five bamboo-eyed bronze incense burners at Minh Huong Gia Thanh communal house that are entirely representative of the quintessential Vietnamese incense burner style from the 19th century, showcasing a decorative motif of "bamboo transforming into a unicorn," with the lid's apex adorned by a stylized unicorn figure derived from the form of a bamboo root, mirroring the decorative aesthetics found in the bamboo-eyed

bronze incense burners located at Le Chau temple, Nghia Thuan temple, and Phu Nghia temple. In three round ceramic incense burners produced in Saigon - Cho Lon during the 19th century, with a distinctive clear glaze at An Binh temple and Phu Nghia temple, the evidence of Vietnamization is prominently reflected in the design of the incense burner handles, which are crafted into stylized representations of a one-horned unicorn head (Đào Vĩnh Hợp, 2011).

In addition, the prevalent attributes of the religious institutions presently overseen by the Hoa in Ho Chi Minh City are characterized by roofs constructed with yin-yang tiles, which are designed to slope directly downward to facilitate rapid drainage of rainwater and to mitigate the oppressive heat of summer. Furthermore, the elevation of these roofs typically approximates two-thirds of the overall height of the structure, and they eschew curved tile designs in favor of substantial roofing materials, emblematic of traditional Chinese tiled roof architecture (Nguyễn Quân & Phan Cẩm Thượng, 1991, pp. 42-45). The Minh Huong Gia Thanh Communal House and the Phuoc An Assembly Hall serve as quintessential illustrations of an effective amalgamation of an appropriate overlapping beam framework with a substantial wooden framework, which is enveloped in thick roofing tiles, a hallmark of Chinese architectural style (Nguyễn Duy Hinh, 1998, p. 133). Additionally, the truss structural system represents a prominent innovation that has undergone minimal alteration owing to its compatibility with the tempestuous and flood-prone climatic conditions of Vietnam (Vũ Tam Lang, 1991, p. 194). Although the façade of the front hall bears resemblance to a Cantonese temple, the spatial organization of the Minh Huong Gia Thanh Communal House aligns more closely with the conventional communal houses of Southern Vietnam, which are systematically divided into three distinct areas (front hall, main hall, and back hall) when compared to the original assembly hall architecture of the Hoa. The Phu Nghia Assembly Hall and the Tam Son Assembly Hall further exemplify the architectural characteristics of advanced development manifested in the configuration resembling the letter "Tam" (contiguous houses, three parallel structures arranged in a roof-joined manner to minimize the necessity for an increased number of columns or greater height of the principal column, thereby creating a large, heavy roof area that is incompatible with the surrounding architectural context) as evidenced in Vietnamese architectural works. The Quan Tan Assembly Hall, Nhi Phu Temple, Thien Hau Temple, and Ha Chuong Assembly Hall further assimilate Vietnamese cultural elements, integrating indigenous knowledge to enhance Hoa national culture by repositioning the Thien Tinh courtyard from its traditional location in front of the main hall to a placement behind the main hall, thereby aligning with Vietnamese cultural traditions, circumstances, and customs. The decorative elements present within these structures are cultural products of Vietnamese origin, crafted in the workshops of Khuong Ky, Nhan Lap Ky, Tieu Lap Ky, and Hoa Hiep Ky in Saigon, which encapsulate Vietnamese cultural identity from the style of carving to thematic representation, a phenomenon that has been embraced by the Hoa and exists in a state of harmonious coexistence within the architectural framework of Hoa temples, occurring in a natural manner devoid of any sense of imposition. The artistry of carving on altars within the Tam Son Assembly Hall, Phu Nghia Assembly Hall, and the Thien Hau Temple also incorporates elements of

Vietnamese culture, specifically demonstrating a synthesis and integration of artistic styles characterized by simple, multi-layered motifs, an open and airy spatial configuration, and an elegant wooden surface adorned with gilding on a black background and gold lettering, as opposed to the vibrant gold background and black lettering typically found in traditional Chinese motifs. The imprint of Vietnamese culture is further evidenced in the lacquer painting measuring 150x40 cm, depicting Luc Van Tien on a white horse, wielding a stick, and combating Phong Lai, which is affixed to the left wall of the front hall of the Quynh Phu Assembly Hall, serving as a noble representation that reflects the Hoa's conceptualization of heroism as exemplified in this influential and significant series of paintings.

In particular, upon the altar situated in front of the altar dedicated to Thien Hau Thanh Mau within the Quan Thanh De Quan Temple, one may observe a relief depicting the illustrious and valiant uprising of Trung Nu Vuong, which serves to recreate the heroic narrative of the Vietnamese populace in their resistance against the Han invaders. This uprising is emblematic of the ancestry of one of the esteemed patrons of the Quan Thanh De Quan Temple, thereby supplanting the conventional national historical motifs that are deeply entrenched in Chinese cultural heritage, while simultaneously maintaining a level of acceptance that allows for an organic integration, akin to many other elements that coexist within the surrounding environment. The anthropological attributes of the Chinese populace as manifested in the statues of Quan Cong within the Nghia An Assembly Hall, Thien Hau Thanh Mau within the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall, Thanh Hoang Bon Canh at the Phong Phu Temple, Ngu Hanh Nuong Nuong, and the twelve midwives portrayed in the Minh Huong Gia Thanh Temple are progressively diminishing, exhibiting varying degrees of influence from Vietnamese cultural characteristics, thereby tending toward a Vietnamization of not only the human form, physiognomy, and facial features but also the ceremonial attire and costumes intricately carved upon the statues. A distinctive characteristic of the Chinese pagodas such as Long Hoa, Pho Da, Thien Y, and Tu An in Ho Chi Minh City is the feminization of the representation of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who is regarded as the first prince of the Holy King of the Wheel of Changes in China, alongside the notable influence of Vietnamese culture that has led to the relocation of the statue to the temple courtyard, thereby accommodating the hot and humid climatic conditions prevalent in the Southern region, in addition to catering to the spiritual needs of the populace, which fosters a sense of intimacy between the divine and the community (Nguyễn Đăng Duy, 1999, p. 214). The right corner of the Dai Hung Bao Dien within Long Hoa Pagoda, the first floor of Tu An Pagoda, the corner of the yard of Nam Pho Da Pagoda, and the entrance gate of Quan Am Tru Truc Lam Pagoda also reflect the influences of Vietnamese culture, as evidenced by the presence of an altar dedicated to ten types of wandering souls intended for the veneration of the spirits of those who have died unjustly, as well as fallen soldiers (Trần Hồng Liên, 2001, p. 307).

Conclusion

In a broad sense, the cultural essence of Vietnam is profoundly manifested through the array of worship artifacts, stylistic elements, decorative motifs, as well as the presence of statues, miniature sculptures, horizontal lacquered panels, parallel inscriptions, and architectural carvings found within the Chinese religious institutions located in Ho Chi Minh City, serving as a medium through which the Chinese community articulates their gratitude towards the land and the populace that have provided them refuge throughout their migratory experience. The Vietnamese cultural elements that have been assimilated by the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City represent both the culmination and byproduct of the dynamics of cohabitation, settlement, and harmonious coexistence with the Vietnamese populace in a novel environment fraught with numerous adversities and challenges; concurrently, these cultural exchanges also act as a catalyst that facilitates the cohabitation process with the Vietnamese, rendering it more advantageous, seamless, cohesive, and marked by enhanced growth and vigor.

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