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Historical and Cultural Values on Saigon Pottery Inscription at Faith-religious Establishments of the Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the names of pottery kilns appeared in the Saigon region such as "Dong Hoa Dieu", "Buu Nguyen Dieu"... on ceramic products used for construction, restoration, decoration or worship at temples, Chinese guild hall, etc. The emergence of Saigon pottery due to the demand for decorative pottery and worship items for new construction and restoration of temples and temples became more popular.

Through surveying and learning about the historical and cultural values on the inscriptions at the Saigon pottery

statues in Chinese religious and religious institutions in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City helps us partly understand more about the chronological value, origin, historical-cultural significance, and cultural characteristics through each theme, typical story, and unique arrangement of the two groups of Vietnamese-Chinese communities in Ho Chi Minh City. From there, scientific explanations and new perceptions are put forward, making practical contributions to the research, preservation and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural values.

Keywords: Saigon Ceramics, Flower Temple Architecture, Inscription..

1. Introduction

The Chinese are one of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. The Chinese play an important role in the reclamation and construction of the Southern land, especially the Cho Lon area, an area that is considered to have a large concentration of Chinese communities. According to the General Statistics Office, as of April 2019, there were 749,466 Chinese people (accounting for 0.77% of the country's population), mainly concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City with 382,826 people, accounting for 51% of the country's Chinese. Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City consists of many different groups, divided into 05 main dialect groups: Guangdong (廣東;), Chaozhou (潮州), Hainan (海南), Hakka(客), Fujian (福建). The division of these Chinese dialect groups is based on their native homeland and language The Chinese are one of the 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam. The Chinese play an important role in the reclamation and construction of the Southern land, especially the Cho Lon area, an area that is considered to have a large concentration of Chinese communities. According to the General Statistics Office, as of April 2019, there were 749,466 Chinese people (accounting for 0.77% of the country's population), mainly concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City with 382,826 people, accounting for 51% of the country's Chinese. Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City consists of many different groups, divided into 05 main dialect groups: Guangdong (廣東;), Chaozhou (潮州), Hainan (海南), He(客)¹, Fujian (福建). The division of these Chinese dialect groups is based on their native homeland and language.

The history of migration to form a Chinese ethnic community in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City lasted for many centuries, but the largest was around the seventeenth century (1679). The process of immigration and settlement of Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City is the process of integration into the host country's community through cultural exchanges and community cohesion. Along with the Vietnamese, the Chinese played an important role in building De Ngan (堤岸, usually anglicized as "Cholon") into a busy area with busy trade and trade. Along with economic development, the

¹ Also known as Hakka (客家).

Chinese attach great importance to preserving traditional cultural values, religions, beliefs and especially expressed through architecture.

Carrying unique cultural heritages, the Chinese in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City has created many unique fine art architectural works with outstanding colors and exquisite decorative art carvings on many materials such as wood, bronze and especially ceramics.

It can be seen that in the Saigon region, from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the names of pottery kilns such as "Dong Hoa Dieu" and "Buu Nguyen Dieu" began to appear on ceramic products used for construction, restoration, decoration or worship at communal houses, pagodas, shrines, assembly halls, etc. Previously, on these products, there were only the names of pottery shops or "department stores" where pottery was offered, such as "Nam Hung Xuong Diem To" (Nam Hung Xuong Tao shop), or "Luong My Ngoc Diem Tao" (Luong My Ngoc Tao shop), or personal names such as "Thach Loan My Ngoc Tao".

Saigon pottery is associated with the place name of Xom Lo Gom, now Phu Lam area in Ward 6, Ward 9, Ward 10 - District 6, is a famous traditional craft village, with a long history on the land of Saigon - Gia Dinh. This place name appeared on the map of Gia Dinh province drawn by Tran Van Hoc in the 14th year of Gia Long (1815). Saigon pottery is the product of many pottery kilns produced in the Saigon - Gia Dinh region in the past centuries, typically ceramics produced from Cay Mai pottery kilns and Hung Loi pottery kilns with different characteristics.

The development of the pottery profession must depend on many factors, especially the favorable location: Being a place with or near the source of raw materials, having a waterway system convenient for transporting goods to many places, near commercial centers to quickly grasp market demand... Lo Gom hamlet of Saigon in the past had favorable conditions, such as: The raw materials here are suitable for the production of household ceramics and construction ceramics. This craft village is in the middle of Saigon - where the most market streets in Gia Dinh were concentrated at that time. The South at that time was a land in the process of exploration, so the demand for household pottery was very large, so the market of Lo Gom hamlet was not only in Saigon-Ben Nghe but also throughout the vast South in the past.

The late and rare appearance of the name of the pottery kiln on Saigon pottery products used for decoration and worship can be due to the following reasons:

- Pottery kilns that still leave their names on some products, decorative and worship pottery may appear late or start producing decorative and worship pottery, around the end of the nineteenth century, when the need for new construction and restoration of temples and shrines became more popular. when the living standards of a part of the population in urban areas have become better.
- From the beginning of the twentieth century, decorative and worship ceramics were really popular. On the other hand, the fine art pottery kilns in Bien Hoa with 17 pottery kilns and brick kilns have been very developed for several years and seem to be gradually decreasing "according to an agreement with the Chinese in Cho Lon, the pottery kilns in Bien Hoa stopped producing

pottery called Cay Mai". Therefore, writing the name of the pottery kiln on the product as a mark of "copyright" of the Saigon pottery area has just begun and has become a practice.

Saigon pottery products have been preserved quite a lot, decorating on small groups of ceramic statues, especially on the roofs of temples, communal houses, and assembly halls,... often on the pottery write the name of the production furnace such as: "Buu Nguyen Dieu" (Buu Nguyen kiln); "Dong Hoa Dieu" (Dong Hoa kiln), in Thien - Hau - Tue Thanh Temple of Hoi Quan, Quang Trieu Assembly Hall, Minh Huong Gia Thanh communal house on the small statue complex clearly inscribed these two ceramic kilns, in Tan Lan - Bien Hoa communal house, there are also the names of Buu Nguyen and Dong Hoa kilns inscribed on the small ceramic statue complex on the roof of the temple. Saigon ceramic products can be found such as: Statue of Inspector, don, pot at Giac Vien Pagoda (District 11); Bodhidharma statue, Tieu Dien Dai Si statue at Phung Son Pagoda (District 11); statue of Chuan De riding the peacock at Giac Sanh Pagoda (District 11); statue of Tieu Dien Dai Si in Van Duc Pagoda and vase in Giac Lam Pagoda (Tan Binh district); a complex of statues, incense burners in Minh Huong Gia Thanh communal house (district 5), Ong Arc statues, incense burners in Phu Dinh communal house (district 6); incense burner in Phu Nham communal house (Phu Nham district); a small statue complex, the Sun God - Moon God at Thien Hau Temple - Tue Thanh Hoi Quan (District 5) and the statue complex at Phuoc Hai Pagoda at the Temple of Kim Hoa Saint Mother and 12 nuns. It can be said that Saigon pottery products, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are not only used in the Saigon - Gia Dinh region, but also popular in all parts of the country.

Today, we also see the small complexes of Saigon pottery statues present on the roofs of Chinese faith-religious institutions (communal houses, pagodas, shrines, assembly halls) in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City and many provinces/cities throughout the South. Appearing along with countless figures of people, palaces, and small statues are also written inscriptions. The decorative content of the ceramic statues on Chinese religious institutions brings a high artistic motif and conveys many valuable contents. Most importantly, Saigon ceramic products, in addition to fine art decoration, worship and other household items in daily life, currently Saigon ceramic products have the theme or decoration of inscriptions, paragraphs, dates, etc. such as the ceramic statues on the roof of the flower temple with production furnaces such as "Dong Hoa Dieu", "Buu Nguyen Dieu", or the lines of stray goods offered to the temple by people who come to the temple. Some Saigon household pottery products on the products are decorated with typical stories, poems, proverbs or dates showing the year of manufacture. These data have a scientific significance with high scientific value in studying the history of the formation and development of Chinese communal houses, pagodas, shrines, and associations, as well as the process of formation and development of a type of cultural heritage that is being promoted quite well in specific cultural institutions. showing the characteristics of the unique cultural values of the Chinese community.

2. Historical and cultural values on Saigon pottery inscription in the process of formation and development associated with Chinese religious and religious institutions in Ho Chi Minh City.

Saigon ceramics in general and the themes and examples of decorative texts on ceramics in particular reflect the reality not only in terms of politics and socio-economy: The period from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century of the Southern land in general, but also has a very important significance associated with the fine architecture of pagodas, temples and associations of the Chinese in particular. Although it is not possible to generalize everything about the process of historical formation, in a way, through the data that is still preserved on the Saigon pottery line, it has also helped us partly understand the connection between Saigon pottery and the belief and religious institutions of the Chinese people in the process of formation and development.

2.1 It is shown through the chronology and name of the pottery kiln, the name of the pottery production area on saigon pottery inscription.

Saigon pottery artifacts with inscriptions are still preserved here, through research, we have clearly seen their importance in understanding the formation and development of Chinese religious belief institutions.

About the writing on the pottery shows the era: Not only shows the age of the creation of the pottery and worship statue complex, but also shows us or compares it with the construction or year of restoration of these facilities.

On the inscriptions, the most common is the inscription with the name of the furnace and the date of creation. This type of inscription shows that in each relic, there is usually a small population of statues of a kiln, but there are also some relics with products of two or more furnaces, such as Tue Thanh assembly hall and Tan Lan communal house, both have a population of statues of Buu Nguyen and Dong Hoa kilns. The Quang Trieu Guild Hall also has two other ceramic statues: One dating back to the establishment of the association hall (1887) and the other dating to the major restoration of the association hall (1921).

The type of inscription indicating the date is a very common type on Saigon ceramic figurines. There are usually three ways to date pottery:

The first is the can chi as at the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall (戊申年立) "Mau Qin Nian"; Temple of the Holy Mother (辛亥歲立) "Tan Hoi Tue Establishment"....,

The first is the can chi as at the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall (戊申年立) "Mau Qin Nian"; Temple of the Holy Mother (辛亥歲立) "Tan Hoi Tue Establishment"....,

Thirdly, the way of writing a combination of can chi and year names such as the Jade Emperor Palace (光緒辛丑年立) "Quang Tu, Tan Suu year established (made in the year of the New Ox in the Quang Tu period - 1901)...².

In addition to the above three types of dating, in the complex of Saigon ceramic statues on the roof of the Chinese temple, there are also other types of dating, but they are quite rare, such as the year of birth of Confucius. Through the survey, it was only found in the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall in the small statue complex located on the left side of the incense house with the inscription (孔子式仟四佰伍拾玖穀 dan) "Confucius Two Heavens Four Hundred Hundred Fifty Ninety-Nine Years of the Cup" (Making a good day in the 2459th year of Confucius), i.e. in 1908.

Regarding the writing on the pottery, it shows the name of the pottery kiln and the name of the production area:

Regarding the name of the pottery kiln, 11 kilns are now known: Buu Nguyen, Dong Hoa, Phu Nhuan, Chinh Long, Hop Hoa, Quang Hop Thanh, Dao Xuong, Hop Hung, Quang Tu Thuan, Dat Thanh, Hung Loi. Among them, only 3 furnaces, namely Buu Nguyen, Dong Hoa and Dao Xuong, have products that are still seen on the roof of religious establishments in Ho Chi Minh City. HCM.

As on the roof of the temple of Tue Thanh Assembly Hall, Quang Trieu Assembly Hall or Tan Lan Communal House are decorated with 2 groups of ceramic miniature statues, produced by 2 different pottery kilns. The first complex of ceramic figurines with Chinese inscriptions indicates the name of the pottery kiln produced: 堤岸, 寶源造 "De Ngan, Buu Nguyen Creation" (Buu Nguyen kiln in Cho Lon artifact). More specifically, on the small statue complex of the Buu Nguyen kiln made on the left side of the Tue Thanh Assembly Hall, there is a line that tells about the area and location of the furnace in quite detail: "Nam Ky, De Ngan, Lo Gom Chewing Pottery" (Lo Gom street in Cho Lon, Nam Ky).

The second ceramic figurine community doesn't bear any creation dates, only the production area and kiln names: "Chợ Lớn Mai Sơn" (Mai Sơn Market in Cho Lon) and "Dong Hoa Dieu Tao" 同和窑造 (Đông Hòa kiln creation). Notably, the two words "Cho Lon" are written in Nom script—a creative script of the Vietnamese—rather than using the phonetic transcription in Chinese characters as "DE NGAN," as done by the Chinese. This is a particularly unique point because the Chinese cannot comprehend the Vietnamese Nom scrip³.

Additionally, at Thien Hau Temple (Quang Trieu Assembly Hall – District 1), among the ceramic figurine community in the temple courtyard, there are ceramic plaques with raised characters stating "Luong My Ngoc Diem Tao" (Luong My Ngoc's workshop creation), "Quang Tu Thap Tam Nien" (1887), and "Thach Loan My Ngoc Tao" (My Ngoc kiln in Thach Loan creation), "Quang Tu Dinh Hoi Tue" (1887). The character "Dieu" also appears in other relics such as at Minh Huong Gia Thanh Pagoda (District 5), where the ceramic figurine community is inscribed with "Mai Son, Dong Hoa Dieu Tao" (Đông Hoa – Mai Son kiln creation), "Thien Lien, Tan Suu Nien Lap" (1901)...

Thus, the presence of both the Buu Nguyen Chinese kiln and the Dong Hoa kiln is evidenced by the inscriptions on the two kilns, with Nôm script. This suggests the possible involvement of Vietnamese artisans.

² Nguyen Huu Loc, Inscriptions on Saigon ceramic figurine complexes, in Southern Land and People volume 9, Ho Chi Minh City National University Publishing House, pp. 169 - 183

³ Nguyen Huu Loc (2013), p 176.

On the main roof ridge of the Ngoc Hoang Palace, there is a group of small statues crafted in 1901, bearing an inscription as follows: '富定 - 同安窑造' which translates to 'Phu Dinh, Dong An Dieu Tao' (Dong An kiln in Phu Dinh created). In addition to providing the information about the kiln's name, Dong An, this ensemble of small statues also indicates the production area of the Dong An kiln, which is Phu Dinh⁴.

In terms of the production areas, Saigon ceramics were distributed across three regions: Hoa Luc and Phu Dinh, Cay Mai and Ceramic Kiln, Vin Hoi and Lieng Thanh (likely Vinh Hoi and Lien Thanh).

It can be recognized that Hoa Luc village (Ward 16, District 8) and Phu Dinh village (Ward 10, District 6), Cay Mai belonging to Long Quoi village (Ward 16, District 11), and Ceramic Kiln belonging to Phu Lam village (Ward 6, Ward 9, Ward 10 in District 6) are located in this area. Additionally, there are canals and ditches named Ceramic Kiln, along with related names to the pottery craft such as (Street) Ceramic Kiln, (Street) Pottery Village... Remnants include the relics of the ancient pottery kiln of Hung Loi (Ward 16, District 8) and the pottery kiln area of Cay Mai (District 11)⁵.

The remaining place names are Vin Hoi and Lieng Thanh (Can Hoi), which have not been definitively identified yet. According to our analysis, Vin Hoi is likely to be Vinh Hoi, while Lieng Thanh is likely to be Lien Thanh. In Trinh Hoai Duc's work "Gia Dinh Thanh Thong Chi," which introduces the various villages and wards of Phien An commune, there is no mention of these place names. However, in the Provincial Gazetteer of Gia Dinh established during the Minh Mang era, there is a mention of Vinh Hoi village under Tan Phong Trung ward, Tan Long district, Gia Dinh province: "Vinh Hoi village. To the east is Long Vinh village, with the river serving as the boundary. To the west is Thuan Duc village, marked by a wooden pole. To the south is Phong Phu village (Tan Phong Ha), also marked by a wooden pole. To the north are two villages, Tan Hoi and Tan Loc, with the river as the boundary." Currently, in Ward 13, District 8, there is still Vinh Hoi temple (at 46 Dinh Hoa Street, Ward 13, District 8), which was originally the temple of Tan Huong village (at the beginning of Chau Van Liem Street, District 5) relocated in 1889. Vinh Hoi temple still retains the spirit of King Tu Duc's decree from 1853, "Established for Tan Huong village, Tan Long district, as in the past. Tan Huong village is a historically significant settlement with early origins. According to "Gia Dinh Thanh Thong Chi," Tan Huong village belongs to Tan Phong Trung district, Tan Long county, Tan Binh prefecture, Phien An commune. The Provincial Gazetteer of Gia Dinh also mentions: "Tan Huong village. To the east borders Gia Dinh village, marked by a canal and wooden pole. To the west borders An Thoi village, marked by a wooden pole. To the south borders Dinh Long village (Tan Phong Trung), with the river as the boundary. To the north borders two villages, Tan Long and Tan Huong, with a celestial route as the boundary." It's noteworthy that in this area, within the three houses numbered 1-2-3 on Quai Testard, was the headquarters of Lien Thanh Huong Quan where, in 1910,

Nguyen Tat Thanh resided before embarking on his journey to seek the path of national salvation (now 5 Chau Van Liem Street, Ward 14, District 5). It is highly likely that the term "Lieng Thanh" mentioned by Derbès originates from the name "Lien Thanh Huong Quan," hence, the terms Vin Hoi and Lieng Thanh (Can Hoi) are Vinh Hoi and Lien Thanh respectively.

Furthermore, if we consider the old Saigon market (now the Central Post Office of Cho Lon - District 5) situated along the old Saigon River (now replaced by Hai Thuong Lan Ong Street) as the center, then the Saigon market and Vinh Hoi village are located on the bank of the old Saigon River, while on the opposite bank lies Lien Thanh (across the old Saigon River). Additionally, if we include the Dao Xuong ceramic kiln in Cho Quan market, slightly offset to the east, then Vinh Hoi and Lien Thanh become the areas closest to the Saigon market for ceramic production. Further west are the two areas of ceramic production: Hoa Luc and Phu Dinh, Cay Mai and the Ceramic Kiln. These were the three main ceramic production areas in old Saigon. Today, in Hoa Luc village (Ward 16, District 8), one can still see numerous fish ponds closely adjacent to each other, which are likely remnants of the clay extraction pits used for pottery making in the past.

Furthermore, the inscriptions on the ceramic figurine ensembles at the religious sites of Hoa temple also depict various styles, such as recording "the names of the offering donors," "the names of the artists and craftsmen," "names of historical events," "blessings and praises of beauty," or "Tang dynasty poems".... Therefore, the inscriptions on the ceramic figurine ensembles play a bridging role not only in the technical and artistic aspects of overall decorative architecture of religious significance but also hold significance for researchers studying this art form.

Through practical surveys, it can be observed that at the Hoi Quan Tue Thanh - Mieu Ba Thien Hau, during its formation and development, constructed by the Cantonese people from Guangdong around 1760, the site has undergone numerous major renovations, notably in the year of Mau Than 1908 (the 34th year of the reign of Emperor Quang Tu). During this renovation, the temple underwent significant restoration, and to this day, the original set of ceramic figurine decorations from the Buu Nguyen kiln remains preserved on the temple roof. These figurines bear inscriptions indicating the date of creation and the kilns of production, stating: "Crafted by Buu Nguyen kiln - Dong Hoa kiln - 1908." These ceramic figurines serve as the most vivid evidence for determining the date of the renovation.

At the Jade Emperor Pagoda, the ensemble of Saigon ceramic figurines on the roof also bears inscriptions clearly indicating the dates, such as "Quang Tu, Tan Suu nien lap" (constructed in the year of Tan Suu during the Quang Tu reign - 1901), according to research on the history of the formation of the Jade Emperor Pagoda. The Jade Emperor Pagoda, known in Han script as (Ngoc Hoang dien 玉皇殿), also referred to as Phuoc Hai Pagoda (Phuoc Hai tu 福海), is currently located at 73 Mai Thi Luu Street, Da Kao Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City. According to some sources, the Jade Emperor Pagoda is also known by two other names: Long Hoa Buddhist Temple (龍華佛堂) and Da Kao Pagoda (the name used by the French colonial regime) (Nguyen Dong Trieu, 7/2017). Regarding the establishment time of the pagoda, there are different opinions. According to

⁴ Dang Van Thang (2000), p 528.

⁵ Nguyen Thi Nguyet, Phan Dinh Dung, "Southeastern ceramic traditions", Workshop "Dong Nai ceramics and surrounding areas, traditional values and development", page 2.

Vuong Hong Sen, the pagoda was commenced in 1905 and completed in 1906 (Vuong Hong Sen, 2016, p. 211). According to Vo Van Tuong, the pagoda was established in 1900 (Vo Van Tuong, 1994, p. 488). Other research articles suggest that the Jade Emperor Pagoda was commenced in 1892 and completed in 1900, but it was not until 1906 that it was fully completed. With these arguments, it is difficult to conclusively prove the exact completion date of the Jade Emperor Pagoda's construction. However, based on the inscriptions on Saigon ceramics through the arrangement of figurines on the pagoda's roof, it can be determined that the completion occurred around 1900. Combining this with the lacquer plaque inscription (Ngoc Hoang dien - 玉皇殿) in front of the pagoda: (光緒廿六年庚子仲秋吉立) "Quang Tu trap luc nien Canh Ty trong thu cat lap" (Established on a propitious day in the eighth month of the twenty-sixth year of Emperor Guangxu), which corresponds to 1900, helps pinpoint the completion date of this pagoda. Thus, the completion year according to Vo Van Tuong is correct, while Vuong Hong Sen mistook the dedication date for the completion year.

At the Minh Huong Gia Thanh Shrine, also known as the Minh Huong Gia Thanh Assembly Hall, located at 380 Tran Hung Dao Street, Ward 11, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City. The shrine served as the communal house for the Minh Huong parish, a parish established in 1698, gathering descendants of the Chinese community at the Phien Tran estate. In 1808, King Gia Long granted the name "Gia Thanh Street," hence the shrine was also named Minh Huong Gia Thanh. In 1867, colonial authorities restructured the administrative system, and the shrine ceased to be the communal house and became the assembly hall of the Minh Huong Gia Thanh society. The shrine was built in 1797 and underwent renovations in 1839, 1901, and 1962. The last renovation utilized some modern materials and added an additional floor above the main hall (District 5 Cultural and Information Office, 2017, p. 90). With the inscription on the Saigon ceramic figurine ensemble on the shrine's front roof, "Thien van, Tan Suu nien lap" (constructed in the year of Tan Suu - 1901), it can be deduced that the Saigon ceramic figurine ensemble on the shrine's front roof was installed during the renovation in 1901.

Quang Trieu Assembly Hall, also known as Thien Hau Temple (Ba Cau Ong Lanh Pagoda), is located at 122 Ben Chuong Duong, Nguyen Thai Binh Ward, District 1. It is a relatively large assembly hall situated in a densely populated area. The assembly hall serves as a gathering place for the Cantonese Chinese community. The main deity worshipped here is Thien Hau, hence Thien Hau Temple is a common name for the Quang Trieu Assembly Hall. Opposite the assembly hall is the Ong Lanh Bridge Market, so people often refer to the assembly hall or temple by the name "Ba Cau Ong Lanh Pagoda" to distinguish it from the Ba Thien Hau Temple (Tue Thanh Assembly Hall, District 5) and the Ba Temple in District 3..

The Quang Trieu guild Hall was initiated in the year of Ding Hai - the 13th year of the Guangxu reign (1887). In 1920, the assembly hall suffered a fire, and by the year of Nham Tuat (1922), the Quang Dong community in Saigon contributed to rebuild the assembly hall and reconstruct the Thien Hau Temple. Based on the inscriptions on Saigon ceramics on the ensemble of ceramic figurines on the temple's roof, which reads (光緒十三年) "Guangxu shi san nian" (the 13th year of the Guangxu reign - 1887), it aligns

perfectly with the founding year of the Quang Trieu Assembly Hall and the Thien Hau Temple. What is particularly notable at the Quang Trieu Temple is the presence of two sets of Saigon ceramic figurines, produced and installed at different times. Some ceramic figurines and objects were adorned in 1887, while others were installed in 1922 after the Quang Trieu Assembly Hall suffered a fire and underwent reconstruction.

Furthermore, on the ensemble of figurines at the Quang Trieu guild Hall during the renovation, there is an inscription indicating the year as follows: (民國, 辛酉重建) "Min guo, Xin You chong jian" (Reconstructed in the year of Xin You, during the Republic of China era - 1921). This is a flexible way of expressing the "year" in a manner that reflects the sharp thinking of the ceramic craftsmen amidst the changing times, as during this period, the Qing Dynasty had collapsed, and the Republic of China had been established. This change also reflects their creativity as they constantly sought to innovate and replace what was no longer suitable. The inscriptions on Saigon ceramics, adorned in cultural and religious sites of the Chinese community, not only indicate the creation year of the figurine ensemble but also correspond to the year of construction or renovation of the cultural and religious sites of the Chinese community. Therefore, this serves as precise evidence in understanding the history and development of Chinese religious institutions.

2.2 Expressed on ceramic items used for worship

Alongside the ceramic figurine ensembles adorning temple roof edges, Saigon ceramics also encompass a significant collection of worship statues and objects crafted from terracotta, porcelain, and stoneware. These artifacts are preserved in numerous religious and domestic settings. Saigon ceramics often bear inscriptions indicating the year of production and the artisan's mark, including details such as the workshop or kiln. For instance, the statue of Giám Trai at Giac Vien Pagoda (District 11) is inscribed with details such as "Crafted by Nam Hung Xuong, Workshop To," and "Established in the Year of Canh Thin, during the spring season" (1880).

Among the household worship statues, smaller-sized ones include the Earth God, the Principal Deity of Prosperity, Quan Yin Bodhisattva, the Kitchen God, and the Holy Mother. Within religious establishments like guildhalls and shrines, one can find a variety of figures such as Mr. Tieu, Bodhisattva Dipamkara (Dizang Wang), Earth Store Bodhisattva, General Guan, Mr. Bon, and the God of Wealth. Additionally, there are ceremonial items like incense burners, candle holders, temporary altars, and sets of ceremonial utensils, all of which possess significant aesthetic and historical value (Huynh Ngoc Trang & Nguyen Dai Phuc, 2020, p. 112).

At Phuoc Hai Pagoda (Ngoc Hoang Temple), renowned for its sacred rituals and prayers, stands the esteemed shrine of Kim Hoa Holy Mother (金華娘娘), revered as the paramount deity of fertility. Known as Huệ Phước Phu Nhan in the Quang Dong dialect and affectionately addressed as Lady Giving Birth among the Hoa Minh Huong community, she is widely venerated as the Goddess of Fertility in Vietnamese tradition. Assisting Kim Hoa Holy Mother is the Twelve Flower Lady, who oversees childbirth and protects expectant mothers until their children turn one year old. Located within the eastern wing of the temple, the sanctuary

features an altar adorned with statues of Kim Hoa Holy Mother, Masters, Ancestors, Holy Teachers, and the Twelve Lady Deities. These remarkable ceramic sculptures, inscribed with the mark "Crafted by Bửu Nguyễn Workshop," originate from Cho Lon (Chinatown), showcasing exquisite artworks dating back to the late 19th to early 20th century, coinciding with the temple's establishment.

The Three Masters (Grandmaster, Patriarch, Holy Master), commonly misinterpreted as the Thirteen Masters by the populace, symbolize the three figures in the midwifery

profession: The Grandmaster, the Patriarch, and the Holy Master (representing those who teach, innovate, and pioneer in midwifery).

The set of 12 female deities at the Kim Hoa Holy Mother temple is symmetrically arranged with 6 statues on each side. According to locals who visit the temple for prayers, the 6 deities on the left are believed to grant blessings to male petitioners, while the 6 deities on the right are believed to grant blessings to female petitioners. (Nguyen Viet Vinh, 2017)



6 Bà mụ bên Hữu - nghe cầu tự đồng nữ

Source: Taken by the author in 2019



6 Bà mụ bên Tả - nghe cầu tự đồng nam

Photo of the altar of Kim Hoa Holy Mother and the 12 female deities at the Ngoc Hoang Temple.

Currently, many temples and guild halls of the Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City still preserve numerous ceramic statues and worship items made in Saigon. For instance, the Triad Altar set in the Phu Nghia Assembly Hall, also known as the Phu Nghia Temple of the Minh Huong association, features ceramic pieces inscribed with clear statements like "Tuệ Thành Assembly Hall - Kỷ Sửu year (1889)"; or the green-glazed ceramic incense burner labeled "Minh Huong Assembly Hall" at the Minh Huong Gia Thanh Temple; and the cobalt blue glazed ceramic incense burner at the Ngoc Hoang Temple. These artifacts, some bearing inscriptions and others not, are invaluable for understanding the historical context of these temples and guild halls. Expert examination by museum curators and archaeologists for dating purposes sheds light on the connections among these seemingly mundane ceramic items, offering essential scientific insights into the development of these religious sites within the city's Chinese community.

3. Conclusion

The formation and development process of religious institutions have been closely linked with the migration and settlement of migrant groups from Southern China to Vietnam and particularly the new Southern region since the 17th century. During the migration and settlement process in the new Southern region, they coexisted and prospered economically with the Vietnamese people, gradually becoming Vietnamese citizens. One of the many evidences of this integration is the presence of temples and shrines bearing the characteristics of Vietnamese-Chinese cultural exchange in general, and the temples and guildhalls

representing the religious beliefs of the Chinese people with distinctive decorative arts, terracotta statues of Saigon on the rooftops of temples and shrines.

Currently, the pottery village of Lò Gốm, along with its artistic ceramic products, has almost faded away. Due to subjective and objective reasons such as urbanization, the obstruction of trade routes by canal filling, changing consumer demands, the old pottery village of Sài Gòn has closed the chapter of its peak history in the land of Sài Gòn - Gia Định. In the former golden land of Southern Saigon pottery, the statues and terracotta ensembles in Chinese temples represent a harmonious integration of traditional techniques including round carving, bas-relief, and line work.

The art of decoration through statues and terracotta ensembles on the rooftops and eaves of temples is characterized by sophistication and intricacy, alongside diversity and flexibility in both form and decorative content. Moreover, these ensembles of statues and figurines also contain rich scientific and historical significance, as well as aesthetic beauty, achieved through the craftsmanship of artisans, pottery kilns, or directly commissioned by religious institutions, who intricately embed their cultural narratives within them.

The inscription content inscribed on the statues and terracotta ensembles, as well as ceremonial objects made of Saigon pottery in Chinese religious institutions, often includes information such as the date of creation, the name of the pottery style, the donor, the name of the artist or craftsman, the names of significant events, poetic verses, historical anecdotes, and more. These inscriptions provide insights into the economic, cultural, and social aspects of the

community at that time.

Furthermore, the arrangement of statues and terracotta ensembles, along with the embedded meanings in the textual inscriptions, also reflect the cultural consciousness and aspirations of the local people, expressing their desire for prosperity and peace in the land they have chosen as their home.

Some Chinese temples and guildhalls such as Minh Huong Gia Thanh Temple, Tue Thanh Guildhall, Quang Trieu Guildhall, and Ngoc Hoang Temple are historical and cultural landmarks, nationally recognized for their architectural artistry, bearing significant material and spiritual imprints within the overall cultural and historical landscape of Ho Chi Minh City specifically, and the Southern region in general. Studying architectural relics, particularly the examination of inscriptions on the system of statues and terracotta ensembles atop temple roofs and ceremonial objects, not only holds historical and cultural significance but also fosters cultural exchange between the Chinese and Vietnamese ethnic groups in this region. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable resource for researching the history and development of Chinese temples and guildhalls in general, as well as delving deeper into the renowned pottery tradition of the Southeastern region during that period, known as Saigon pottery.

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