

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES IN PRESENT-DAY HA GIANG PROVINCE

Nguyen T.P.¹, Nguyen H.T.²

¹Nguyen Thi Phuong - PhD student,

²Nguyen Huu Thu - PhD in Philosophy, lecturer,
FACULTY OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES,
VNU UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES,
HANOI, VIETNAM

Abstract: *In ethnic life, religious transformation is a change that is different from their traditional religion and beliefs. This is manifested in many forms, including changes in the content of faith, in ritual practice as well as in community organization. Ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province, in addition to maintaining traditional belief types, a part of the people have changed to follow some religions, at the same time, a part of the people have changed from following religion to returning to traditional beliefs and culture. The article contributes to clarifying the current situation of religious and belief changes of ethnic minorities under the influence of religion, specifically Protestantism.*

Keywords: Religious transformation, beliefs, ethnic minorities, Ha Giang

РЕЛИГИОЗНАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ СРЕДИ ЭТНИЧЕСКИХ МЕНЬШИНСТВ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ПРОВИНЦИИ ХАЗЯНГ

Нгуен Т.Ф.¹, Нгуен Х.Т.²

¹Нгуен Тхи Фьонг - Аспирант,

²Нгуен Хыу Тху - Доктор философии, преподаватель,
Факультет антропологии и религиоведения,
ВНУ Университет социальных и гуманитарных наук,
г. Ханой, Вьетнам

Аннотация: *в жизни этнических меньшинств религиозная трансформация – это изменение, отличающееся от их традиционных религиозных убеждений и верований. Это проявляется во многих формах, включая изменения в содержании веры, ритуальной практике, а также в организации сообщества. Этнические меньшинства провинции Хазянг, помимо сохранения традиционных верований, часть населения перешла к другим религиям, в то же время часть населения отказалась от религии и вернулась к традиционным верованиям и культуре. Статья призвана прояснить текущую ситуацию с изменением религиозных убеждений и верований этнических меньшинств под влиянием религии, в частности протестантизма.*

Ключевые слова: религиозная трансформация, верования, этнические меньшинства, Хазянг.

**This research is funded by University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University Hanoi, grant number CS.2025.33*

1. Overview of the religious life of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang today

According to the Department of Home Affairs, Ha Giang province is located in the far North of Vietnam, with a total of 19 ethnic groups living there, of which ethnic minorities account for nearly 90%, including Mong (32.9%); Tay (23.2%); Dao (14.9%), Kinh (Viet) (12.8%); Nung (9.7%), the rest are other ethnic groups: Pa Then, Giay, Lo Lo, La Chi... There are three religions in the province: Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Buddhism has 4,549 Buddhists, mostly Kinh people, a few are ethnic minorities. Catholicism has 1,881 followers, the majority of whom are Kinh people, a few are ethnic minorities. Protestantism has 27,273 followers, of which the number of followers are ethnic minorities including: Mong (24,088 people); Dao (2,882 people); Pa Then (140 people); Co Lao (35 people); Tay (06 people); Nung (35 people); Giay (51 people). The whole province currently has 1,149 people following and being influenced by new religious phenomena, of which: San Su Khe To has 198 households/739 people in 03 districts [Report: Results of State management of beliefs and religions in 2024 and directions and tasks in 2025 (Ha Giang Provincial People's Committee, Department of Home Affairs)].

Bac Quang, Meo Vac, Dong Van are all districts with many ethnic groups in Ha Giang province and currently have some major religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism and Protestantism. The whole Bac Quang district currently has 6,048 people of different religions, of which the ethnic minorities are mainly Protestant, including Tay: 26 people; Mong: 2,731 people; Pa Then: 141 people; Dao: 207 people; Nung: 4 people [Summary: Situation and results of implementing ethnic, religious and belief policies in Bac Quang district on July 2, 2024 (Bac Quang District People's Committee)]. The number of Protestants in Meo Vac is 2,919 people, mainly Mong people (2,131 people) and the rest are Dao people [Summary of

religious data in Meo Vac district as of October 30, 2024 (Meo Vac District People's Committee)], concentrated in some communes such as Sung Tra, Sung Mang, Thuong Phung... Besides, there are still 242 (Mong and Dao people) followers of the new religion San Su Khe To, mainly concentrated in some communes of Sung Tra, Sung Mang, Niem Tong [Statistics: The situation of new religions, “strange religions”, “heretical religions” in Meo Vac district as of October 30, 2024 (Meo Vac District People's Committee)]. Among the three districts above, Dong Van is the district chosen as a sample area for comparison, where the traditional beliefs of ethnic minorities are still very strongly preserved, with very few cases of following religion. In Dong Van district, there are 2 religions: Buddhism and Protestantism. Currently, there are 39 households = 214 Mong people following Protestantism, concentrated in the communes: Lung Phin, Thai Phin Tung, Pho Cao and Ta Lung. In addition, there are 19 households = 118 people following the new religion San Su Khe To [Report: Situation and results of work in 2024 and directions and tasks in 2025 in the field of beliefs and religions in Dong Van district (Dong Van District People's Committee)].

There are many research works related to the religious, belief and cultural transformation among ethnic minorities in Vietnam, including works such as: James F. Lewis (2006), *Messianism as A Factor in Vietnam's Hmong Mass Conversion to Christianity:1990-2005*, Bethel University Regional AAR meeting-Luther Theological Seminary; Vuong Duy Quang: *Religious Beliefs of Dao People in Vietnam*, Religious Studies Review, Vol.3, No.3&4-2009, analyzing insights into how and why the Dao people accepted Protestantism, as well as the impact of this conversion on community life; The monograph: “*Cultural transformation among ethnic minorities in Vietnam since the country's renovation to the present*”, Social Sciences Publishing House (2021) by author Nguyen Thi Song Ha; *Cultural and social changes of Protestant communities among some ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region (from 2005 to present)*, Social Sciences Publishing House by author Tran Thi Hong Yen; Nguyen Khac Duc: “*Protestantism among the Mong and Dao ethnic groups in the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam*” provides an overview of the traditional religions of the Mong and Dao people and the processes of converting to Protestantism of the two ethnic groups mentioned above; Nguyen Thanh Xuan - Nguyen Quynh Tram with the work: “*Religion in ethnic minority areas in Vietnam*”, Religion Publishing House in 2024...

In general, the above research works are valuable documents written about the transformation of ethnic minorities, but most of them are researched on a wide area, the whole country or the northern mountainous region, not many works focus on research in Ha Giang province. On the other hand, most of the works mainly approach from the cultural perspective, while culture is a very large topic with many different elements, or approach from the ethnographic perspective, there are still not many works studying cultural change of ethnic minorities from the religious perspective.

From a religious perspective, we chose ethnic minorities, mainly Mong and Dao people in some villages of the communes: Thai Phin Tung, Lung Cu (Dong Van district); Sung Tra, Sung Mang (Meo Vac district) and Dong Tien, Thuong Binh (Bac Quang district) as the survey subjects and used many research methods, specifically: document analysis; data synthesis; observation; participant observation; comparison - contrast and in-depth interviews with many different people, including people following traditional beliefs; religious followers; of both male and female genders; different in age, education level; cadres (district, commune, village), village chief, village party cell secretary, prestigious people, Protestant group leaders, shamans... Within the scope of this article, the authors focus on clarifying the fundamental changes in traditional beliefs of the people under the influence of religion, specifically Protestantism.

2. Fundamental changes in religion and beliefs among ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province today

2.1. Transformation of beliefs in the system of deities

The Mong people selected as the sample subjects for the survey in Ha Giang province include the local groups: Mong Trang, Mong Hoa, and a very small number of Mong Den. Although living in different areas, the Mong people's traditional religion and beliefs are basically the same, worshipping polytheists and ancestor worship - a particularly important form of belief that contributes to preserving the Mong people's culture during the migration process. In addition, the Mong people also worship Gods, the most important of which are the House God, the Door God and religious rituals in family relationships.

The Dao people in some sample areas in Ha Giang province are mainly Dao Ao Dai (Dao Tuyen) and Dao Ta Pan (Dao Do), they worship many gods, in which another unique feature is the worship of Ban Vuong (among Dao Do), who is considered the ancestor of the Dao people. In addition, the Dao people also practice ancestor worship, and at the same time, influenced by Taoism, they believe that every male has a guardian spirit. This is done through the “Cap sac” ritual for boys from the age of ten and up. They believe that humans and all things have souls, and when a creature dies, its soul leaves the body and turns into a ghost. The Dao people divide ghosts into good ghosts (ancestors' ghosts, Ban Vuong, Ngoc Hoang, Land Ghost, Kitchen ghost...), bad ghosts (Chicken Ghost and Ghost Unicorn who always harm humans and livestock) and Ma ngu hai...¹

¹Vuong Xuan Tinh (Chief author), *Ethnic groups in Vietnam, volume 4, book 1: Hmong - Dao and Tang - Mien language groups*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi 2018.

The Mong and Dao people have a rich religious belief system. These are the basic elements that create ethnic cultural identity and community cohesion, helping them to survive over time and historical events. However, since the end of the 20th century, many Mong and Dao communities in Ha Giang province have converted to Protestantism, which has led to fundamental transformation of beliefs in the system of deities, or in other words, the restructuring of religious beliefs.

Protestants no longer believe in traditional spiritual forces such as ancestral ghosts, good ghosts, evil ghosts, etc. Instead, they believe in only one almighty God. The concept of “polytheism” in their beliefs has been replaced by “monotheism” in Christian theology.

The Mong believe that the universe has two worlds: the earth where humans live and the heavens where God, deities and ancestors of the Mong people exist. The Mong also believe that they did not die before¹, but God forced them to die, so after death their souls will go to heaven. After a person breathes their last breath, that is, they have completed their duty to life to return to their ancestors, who are the ones who have built a career for their descendants, supervise their descendants in implementing the customs and practices of the community, and are also the ones who bless their descendants to do business smoothly... Therefore, any Mong people must remember the merits and worship their ancestors. The Mong people also believe in many different gods, each god governs a different area: house god, door god, mountain god, forest god,... These gods have both sacred and practical meanings and people must worship them to be protected. However, when converting to Protestantism, this system of deities was denied. However, when converting to Protestantism, this entire system of gods was denied. In particular, the belief in the human soul after death - the soul of ancestors continues to exist in the invisible world - which was considered the moral foundation, the core element of Mong culture, is now considered contrary to Protestant doctrine. Ancestors - considered the guardian spirits of the family - are no longer objects of worship but simply “dead people” [Interview with a female Protestant in Pu Don village, Dong Tien commune, Bac Quang district]. The spiritual relationship between generations is replaced by the bond of faith in the church community.

Similarly, among the Dao people, the Dao people's worldview and belief in Ban Vuong, in the power of gods such as mountain gods, forest gods, river gods, house ghosts, forest ghosts - forces that can control daily life and the fate of individuals and communities - has now also turned to absolute faith in God and Biblical Teachings. They consider the old rituals to be “evil” and “superstitious”, things that are contrary to the Christian faith. Thus, the Dao people's belief in the supernatural world also changes. Instead of believing that gods and demons can influence human destiny, the Dao people who follow Protestantism believe that everything is arranged by God. Illness and hardship are just challenges for them to practice their faith. This concept is of Christian philosophy, emphasizing rationality and is completely different from the emotional nature of traditional religion.

The abandonment of traditional deities is one of the clearest manifestations of the fundamental change in religious beliefs of the people after they converted to Protestantism. This process is not only a change in beliefs but also reflects the reversal of the cultural and spiritual value system that has existed for hundreds of years in the community.

2.2. The transformation of sacred symbols in religious and belief activities

In the study of Religious Studies, “sacred” is the central category to distinguish it from the profane, as Émile Durkheim argued: Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things². Within the limits of this article, the authors focus on some sacred symbols in religion and beliefs, which are images, objects, and sounds considered sacred in mundane life, playing the role of intermediaries between humans and the supernatural world.

The main entrance to the Mong people's house in Dong Van and Meo Vac districts has a red cloth pasted on the central door beam (in Bac Quang district, they stick votive paper) - the place to worship the “Door God” - the God who protects people and the family's property to avoid the intrusion of evil and bad things [Author's field sources]. From the story in the ancient legend of the Mong people, they choose the rooster as their door god. On the traditional New Year's Day, Mong families all hold a ceremony to thank the Door God, the god who has protected them throughout the past year, and ask the Door God to let the ancestors' souls enter the house to celebrate Tet with the family. The ancestral altar is the most sacred place, placed in the main room, no one is allowed to touch it. In the family, only the husband or father-in-law is allowed to touch the objects and clean the ancestral altar, women in the house are not allowed to touch it [In-depth interview with Vang Thi M - Vice Chairman of Meo Vac Town People's Committee]. Other accompanying objects such as: chicken feathers, water bowls, incense, votive paper, yin and yang divination (usually made of buffalo horn) ... not only have material value but are also sacred symbols, is a medium that connects with the spirit world. In addition, traditional costumes, especially the shaman's headdress, are also considered sacred symbols. The Mong people's Khen carries sounds that connect two worlds. The sound of the Khen is not only for performance but also has the function of calling souls, bringing souls back to the world of ancestors. This is most clearly seen in the funerals of the Mong people, through many rituals, in which the ritual of

¹ Nguyen Huu Thu, *The Hmong people's explanation of the world and people* (Through research on Tang ca (Kruoz cê) in Sapa), Journal of Religious Studies, No. 1&2, 2017, p.23

² Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford University Press, 2001, page. 36.

showing the way to the dead is the most important ritual. Each ritual in the funeral is accompanied by a Khen song with different melodies.

For the Dao people in Ha Giang province, the ancestral altar is considered the most sacred and sacred place in the house, usually placed in the middle of the house. Because they are deeply influenced by Taoism, the sacred symbol is not only present as an artistic image but also a religious culture, a cosmology of the Dao people. In their religious thinking, the universe is divided into three elements (Heaven – Earth – Human) and five elements (Metal – Wood – Water – Fire – Earth). These elements are not only abstract concepts but are also present in objects, worship paintings, clothing colors and especially in the Cap sac ritual. The dragon and tiger symbols commonly appear in worship paintings, costumes and ritual masks of the Dao people. The dragon symbolizes the authority of heaven and earth, while the tiger symbolizes the power of protection, therefore, in the forest worship ceremony, the image of the tiger is drawn or worshiped as a mascot guarding the border between the human world and the spirit world. In particular, fire, sword, worship painting, mask and shaman's costume are considered sacred symbols in the Dao people's Cap sac ritual. During the whole ritual, the fire must be maintained continuously as a sign of the presence of the gods [In-depth interview with Mr. Ly Van T - Dao Tuyen shaman, Thuong Binh commune, Bac Quang district].

The sacred symbols in the traditional religions of the ethnic groups are the crystallization of the philosophy of life, helping to maintain the relationship between humans and gods and playing an important role in creating ethnic identity in the midst of modern cultural flows. When the ethnic groups converted to Protestantism, the above sacred symbols underwent a profound restructuring of meaning. The Bible is considered a sacred symbol, not just a text or a book about religion. Almost every believer owns, preserves, and reads the Bible every day. The Bible also serves as a spiritual protector, replacing traditional sacred objects such as charms, ancestral altars, etc. The entrance doors of Mong houses are no longer covered with red cloth or votive paper. In the Hmong and Dao people's homes, there are no ancestral altars. Although they do not worship symbols, the image of the cross - a symbol of the crucified Christ - still plays an important role for Protestants. The cross symbolizes sacrifice and salvation, and represents a complete end to animal sacrifice in traditional religious practices. Many Protestant churches in the highlands display simple crosses. During religious services, songs praising the cross are used as a sacred means to connect the community with Jesus. In addition, churches and religious spaces are also sacred symbols of the Protestant community. This is a place where God's people gather, with both a religious function and a symbol of community cohesion, replacing the social role of traditional rituals [Author's field sources].

2.3. The transformation in religious practice

Religious ritual practices not only demonstrate the sacred connection between humans and the supernatural world, but also play an important role in uniting communities, transmitting knowledge and cultural values from generation to generation. Conversion is not simply a change in personal beliefs, but also entails a change in ritual practices, replacing them with new forms of Christianity, specifically:

First: the change in the role of sacred intermediary from the priest to the religious dignitary - those who perform the role of the master of ritual (ritual leaders)

For the Dao people, the shaman is the holder of spiritual knowledge and practices many rituals in the community. They are considered the bridge between humans and gods, ancestors and the supernatural world. In particular, the cycle of a Cap sac ritual must go through many steps and the indispensable element is the shaman. Mr. T said: "It is true that in the past, whenever the Dao people were sick, they would invite a shaman, but now that social life is civilized, they are taken to the hospital. But for a Cap sac ritual, the shaman must be asked" [In-depth interview with Mr. Ly Van T - Dao Tuyen shaman, Thuong Binh commune, Bac Quang district]. Not everyone can be a shaman among the Mong people, but they are not passed down from father to son, but they are people with their own qualities, who play an important role in finding the cause of illness and misfortune that comes to people and finding a way to cure it. The Mong believe that illness, misfortune or misfortune is the result of being punished by ghosts and gods, the soul leaving the body or violating taboos. In the past and even today, when someone is sick, the family often invites a shaman to perform the soul calling ritual (Hu Plig). Ms. Vang Thi C said: "Here, when people are sick, they still ask a shaman to perform a ritual, combined with taking them to see a doctor for treatment. Especially if someone is sick and goes to the doctor but is not cured, they must definitely invite a shaman to perform a ritual" [In-depth interview with Ms. Vang Thi C, Vice Chairman of Lung Cu commune, Dong Van district]. However, when converted, the role of these figures is downgraded or disappears: "If someone is sick, they are taken to the doctor or prayed to God for help or invited to the pastor or group leader to come to the house to perform a ceremony for them" [In-depth interview with Sung A T - Protestant, Party cell secretary and police officer of Khuoi En village, Thuong Binh commune, Bac Quang district]. In particular, in the funeral rituals of the people, this change in the role of the spiritual intermediary is most evident. Protestants no longer place their trust in shamans but instead place their trust in religious leaders such as pastors, group leaders or deputy leaders. This reflects a restructuring in the system of spiritual power in the community.

Second: changes in the way rituals are performed

For example, the traditional funeral ritual of the Mong people includes two main rituals: *ma tuoi* and *ma kho* [Author's field sources].

The *ma tuoi* ritual includes the following ritual steps: (1) Announcement ritual [In the past, families of the death had to fire three shots and blow three horns made of buffalo horn to signal relatives and friends, but now, shooting has been abandoned in all places. In the Dong Van area, the custom of blowing three horns is still maintained. In other places in the survey areas, most of the news was reported by mobile phone (Author's field source in Ha Giang province)]. (2) Ritual of inviting a shaman, a guide, a drummer, a flute player: to see a good date and time, prepare offerings, prepare a flute, etc. (3) Ritual of bathing the dead: boil water to wash the face, bathe and change new clothes for the dead. (4) Rituals to show the way to the dead: Master *Dờ mủ* (zuov muv) performs a ceremony to show the way including 36 funeral songs (*Tang ca song*), leading the soul of the deceased to the village or land of the ancestors, and then the soul will return to this life in a new destiny through reincarnation (5) Rituals to invite the deceased to get on a horse/embalming: the deceased is placed on a stretcher or put in a coffin. (6) Ghost chasing ritual: usually performed 3 times a day (morning, noon, afternoon or evening) simulating the fact that the Mong ancestors, when alive, were always attacked by enemies, had their country and land robbed, and were killed... (7) Ritual to visit the dead (8) Funeral and burial rituals. (9) 3-day rice offering ritual. After 13 days, the *ma kho* ritual will be performed, which also includes many steps such as: inviting a shaman, a flute master, and a trumpet master; preparing offerings; procedures to welcome the dry ghost; welcoming the dry ghost into the house and finally sending the dry ghost back to the ancestors.

Thus, the traditional funeral of the Mong people includes many layers of rituals, each containing its own meaningful rituals, very elaborate, complicated, costly, and at the same time, the sacrificial offerings are elaborately prepared (clothes, buffalo, cows, pigs, chickens, wine, rice, sticky rice cakes, votive paper money, etc.). In addition, some clans still hold conservative beliefs about not burying the dead in a coffin, slaughtering many livestock, and holding ceremonies that last for days... The multi-layered ritual reflects the Mong people's beliefs about the soul, about life after death, and the journey of sending the dead back to the world of ancestors. However, the way the ritual is performed still has many limitations and is not suitable for today's progressive lifestyle.

The way to organize a Protestant funeral includes the following steps: (1) Announcement: the bereaved person directly sends someone to inform relatives, especially the group leader so that the group leader can send someone to perform the funeral. (2) Funeral preparation: the pastor, group leader or church administrator comes to express condolences, pray and form a team to support the family. Estimate the expenses for the funeral. The family prepares new clothes, coffin for the deceased... (3) During the funeral: takes place at home or at the funeral venue and is attended by the church. There are rituals such as reading eulogies, praying, singing hymns, and proceeding with the burial [Author's field sources]... In conclusion, the steps to send the dead to God are simpler, more modern and less expensive than the steps to send the dead to their ancestors. The dead are forced to be placed in a coffin; there is no need to choose a date or time to hold the ceremony; there are no taboos; no sacrifices (usually avoiding slaughter, mostly buying food to serve the funeral); no complicated worship rituals; no sticking paper or any symbols on the coffin...

Thus, in terms of the structure and content of ritual practice, the traditional and Protestant communities are almost completely different, from the role of the ritual leader to the steps of organizing and performing the ritual.

2.4. The transformation in community organization

According to Emile Durkheim, community organization is a form of “solidarity system” where individuals are bound to collective institutions through religion, customs, customary law and informal social control mechanisms [1]. For ethnic minorities, community organization in the above sense is their traditional social institution. That is the structure of family, clan, village; village elder - village chief (prestigious person); customs, habits, customary law... operated in the close relationship of the ethnic community, creating cultural identity and stability, sustainability of the ethnic group [4, p.70-75].

The traditional community organization of the Mong people in Ha Giang province revolves around three main pillars: (1) *Clan*: is the core element that constitutes the society and cultural identity of the Mong. Clan can include many households residing in distant areas, but they all consider each other as brothers born from the same ancestor, called clan at the broad level. At the narrow level, clan is a family of descendants consisting of 3 to 5 generations, consolidating the bloodline community according to the paternal line. The head of the clan is the patriarch. (2) *Village*: is the basic and only social unit of the Mong people, formed based on the gathering of groups of people with or without blood relations. The village elder is the representative of the village, has the role of mediating disputes and organizing community festivals. Village communities are also places where customary law is enforced - institutions that are considered ideal norms that members voluntarily recognize and comply with [4, p.72]. (3) *Shaman*: not only is he a person who performs rituals, but he also holds cultural and historical knowledge of the ethnic group and has a profound influence on the spiritual life of the entire community.

The traditional community organization of the Dao people in Ha Giang province includes: clan – village – customary law. The clan is the basic unit, where each individual is determined by social position based on seniority, age and gender. The name and surname of the Dao people are closely linked to the origin of migration and ethnic legend, which reinforces the historical and sacred nature of the clan. The Dao people's residential territory is established and maintained through a

system of customary law, including communal land ownership, village boundaries, and sacred places such as forbidden forests, ancestral shrines, and local shrines. Shamans are key elements in community organization. They are the ones who hold sacred knowledge, perform initiation ceremonies, funerals, peace-praying ceremonies, and ancestral thanksgiving ceremonies, while also playing a role in educating the younger generation about traditions, ensuring the continuous operation of Dao culture [Author's field sources].

Thus, the traditional community organization of the two ethnic groups above is a multifunctional institution. That institution is based on blood relations, residential areas and is maintained by law and customary law. Under the influence of Protestantism, a new community organization was formed - the ethnic - religious community linked together on the basis of a common faith. The converted people no longer worship their ancestors, do not practice the Cap sac ritual, abandon traditional rituals... thereby weakening traditional institutions such as the role of clan leaders, shamans, village elders, village chiefs and customary law. The clan, which was the foundation of community organization, was weakened when ancestor worship rituals were no longer performed. The role of clan leaders was significantly reduced, and in some places, they were even replaced by church positions. Protestants no longer participated in the traditional village-clan system but organized their activities in religious groups. Prayer groups, Bible study groups, and local churches became the new centers of social-religious activities. Some Protestant groups operate in tightly organized communities based on the local-regional-national church model. This system is religiously administrative, relatively separate from the village structure, and internationalized, not based on blood relations but on faith-based connections. In addition to the law, the rich system of customary law of the people is now replaced by Protestant regulations and by biblical moral standards, in which behaviors such as drinking alcohol, worshipping, superstition... are all prohibited. Control is exercised through religious teachings and disciplinary forms in the church, not through village elders, clan leaders or material punishments. In the current research areas, although there are many differences of opinion between traditional and Protestant communities, in general, people live in solidarity and still support each other in life and when they need help [In-depth interview with Sung Mi G - Ha Pong Cay village - Sung Tra commune - Meo Vac district: "In the village, people do not distinguish between traditional and Protestant sides. When someone dies, they still come to offer condolences and help the family, but they do not worship or eat the food that has been prepared because Protestants believe that it is "unclean" because the food has been offered to the dead. If they were given a separate meal, they would eat it..."].

Conclusion

The process of transforming traditional religions of ethnic minorities in Ha Giang province is a complex socio-cultural phenomenon, not simply a change in the objects of worship or the ritual system, but a profound restructuring in spiritual life, in community organization and social value system. Following religion helps a part of the people to escape from some backward customs, forming a disciplined lifestyle, which creates the motivation to change society and raise individual awareness, but on the other hand, it also leads to the loss of folk knowledge, breaks cultural traditions and challenges the preservation of ethnic identity. Therefore, research needs to be placed in the dialectical relationship between conservation and development; combining interdisciplinary research between religious studies, ethnology, sociology, etc., in order to correctly understand the nature of change, thereby proposing appropriate policies that contribute to ensuring both respect for the freedom of belief and religion of compatriots and preserving the traditional cultural values of ethnic groups in the current context.

References / Список литературы

1. *Emile Durkheim*. The Division of Labor in Society. Free Press, 1997 (translation), Chapter 2: "Mechanical and Organic Solidarity".
2. *Nguyen Huu Thu*. The Hmong people's explanation of the world and people (Through research on Tang ca (Kruoz cê) in Sapa) // Journal of Religious Studies. 2017. No. 1&2.
3. *Nguyen Khac Duc*. Protestantism among Mong and Dao ethnic groups in the mountainous provinces of Northern Vietnam. Hanoi: Political Theory Publishing House, 2017.
4. *Nguyen Thi Phuong*. Promoting the value of traditional social institutions in building the political system of ethnic minority regions in present-day Vietnam // Journal of Theoretical Education. No. 375, p.70-75.
5. *Nguyen Thi Song Ha*. Cultural transformation of ethnic minorities in Vietnam from the country's renovation to the present. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2021.
6. *Tran Thi Hong Yen*. Cultural and social changes of Protestant communities in some ethnic minorities in the Northern mountainous region (from 2005 to present). Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 2018.
7. *Vuong Duy Quang*. Religious Beliefs of Dao People in Vietnam // Religious Studies Review. 2009. Vol.3. No.3&4.
8. *Vuong Duy Quang*. Spiritual culture of the Hmong people in Vietnam - Tradition and present. Hanoi: Culture and Information Publishing House and Institute of Culture, 2005.
9. *Vuong Xuan Tinh*. Ethnic groups in Vietnam, volume 4, book 1: Hmong - Dao and Tang - Mien language groups. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2018.