

The immigration and settlement process of the hokkien people in gia dinh-sai gon-ho chi minh city

(Case study in the history of formation and
development of Nhi Phu Temple in District 5, Ho Chi
Minh City, Vietnam)

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Abstract

From the 17th century, because of economy and politics, there were many migrations from mainland and islands of China to Vietnam. Because of the fluctuations of Chinese history, the number of the Hoa (華人) people's immigrations to Vietnam was increasing, especially in Cho Lon. The prominent among the dialect groups who first immigrated to Cho Lon was the Hokkien (福建) group. Within more than 200 years, the Hokkien people have imprinted in the economy, culture and society of the Cho Lon area. Notably, they built Nhi Phu Temple (二府廟) in the 18th century. Study the history of formation and development of Nhi Phu Temple bases on the historical documents on immigration of the Hokkien people to Cho Lon, the main statue in the main hall and the date of relics in the temple, we would like to debate more the immigration and settlement process of the Hokkien people in Gia Dinh - Sai Gon - Ho Chi Minh City as well as determine the date of building Nhi Phu Temple.

Key words: Cho Lon, Nhi Phu Temple, the Hokkien people.

Induction

The Hoa (華人) people have had a century-long history of formation and development in Southern Vietnam in general and in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in particular. HCMC today, i.e. Gia Dinh (嘉定) – Saigon (柴棍) in the past, is the place where the largest group of the Hoa people gather. According to the General Statistics Office, by April 2019, there were 749,466 the Hoa people (accounting for 0.77% of the country's population), mainly in Ho Chi Minh City with 382,826 people, accounting for 51% of the country's Hoa population , including 5 main dialect groups, namely Guangdong (廣東), Teochew (潮州), Hainanese (海南), Hakka (客), and Hokkien (福建).

Nhi Phu Temple, the first temple of the Hokkien group, has been presented in Gia Dinh for more than 2 centuries. The formation and development of the temple related to the process of the Hoa people's immigration and settlement in the southern region, especially the Hokkien group. In the process of development, the temple has the important historical and cultural values of immigration, the formation and development of the Hokkien people as well as cultural identity. In 1998, the temple was recognized as a National Cultural – Historic Site in 1998 and in 2006, the temple continued to receive the Third Class Labour Medal in 2006. These titles proved the value, position and role of Nhi Phu Temple.

However, there are still a few in-depth studies that mention the temple's history, even publications published by the temple Administration. There are only some flyers that introduce general information about the temple. Especially in 2019, author Dang Hoang Lan published the book “Nhi Phu Temple - National Cultural and Historic Site”, in which the author emphasized the formation process of Nhi Phu Temple. Therefore, in this paper, the author once again wishes to dig and discuss more about the building date as well as the cultural value of the temple. Then, the paper would like to indicate the immigration and settlement process of the Hokkien people in Gia Dinh - Saigon.

1 The General Statistics Office (2020), Completed Results of the 2019 Vietnam Population and Housing Census Statistical Publishing House, p.43.

2 Also called Viet (粵語).

3 Also called Khach Gia (客家).

Determining the building date of the temple based on the immigration and settlement process of the Hokkien people and the formation of the Nhi Phu Temple.

First of all, the period of immigration and settlement process of the Hoa people into Vietnam was most crowded in the 17th century (1679). During that migration, the Hokkien people had more favourable conditions in

economy, location, marine knowledge, trade, shipbuilding techniques, naval battle, etc. Those knowledge had helped them easily travel and live in Vietnam earlier than the other groups. From the border gates such as Nguyet Cang (月港), San Dau (汕頭) and Bang Ho, the Hokkien people had travelled by seaway to Vietnam, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc. Typically, the migration of Mac Cui (鄭玖) who brought his family to Mang Kham (茫坎) (now is Ha Tien Town, Kien Giang province) at the end of the 17th century.

According to Annals of Dai Nam (大南寔錄) in 1778, Tay Son (西山) army attacked along the river in Bien Hoa (邊和) and Gia Dinh , so some the Hoa people in Cu Lao Pho moved to Cho Lon area and called Cho Lon as De Ngan (堤岸). Although based on several bibliographies and artefacts at Tue Thanh Assembly Hall (穗城會館) and Nhi Phu Assembly Hall Quán (二府會館),... the Hoa people were proved to present in that land before 1778.

Most of the immigrant people who travelled to Vietnam and other countries from China, originated from Fujian and Guangdong. That indicated Fujian and Guangdong were the two centres of migration. Binh Duong and Dong Nai provinces were the first stops when they entered Southern Vietnam. That was proved by many temples of the Hokkien people in Lai Thieu, Thu Dau Mot, Bien Hoa, etc. In these places, they built many temples to worship gods who led

them in reclaiming new land, or protected their land. Therefore, depending on the people who are worshiped differently, there are temple names. Ong Bon is a noun used to refer to the gods who protect them in the new land.

From the Nong Nai Dai Pho (農耐大浦), Bien Hoa region, a bustling area was built by Hoa people's immigrants, along with the Vietnamese community. They gradually moved to Phien Tran (藩鎮) area, i.e. Ho Chi Minh City today, especially after the fighting between Nguyen Anh (阮暎) and the Tay Son army took place on Cu Lao Pho.

At Phien Tran, the Hoa people gathered and they considered that the land is "Birds perch in safe land" (萬鳥棲息地). Because of the important position in economy and culture, Cho Lon attracted hundreds of thousands of the Hoa people's immigrants. They opened many shops and built places for worship. Nhi Phu Temple was born in that context.

The Hokkien people were a prominent group and had a strong power in Gia Dinh. Their most import region was the area around Phung Son Pagoda (鳳山寺) and around Gia Phu and Tran Van Kieu Streets (District 6, Ho Chi Minh City). The Nhi Phu Assembly Hall which was the first their assembly probably built in the 18th century, before the year of the Rooster year (1765), was considered one of the oldest architectural works of the Hokkien group in Cho Lon.

The Hokkien people in Cho Lon usually live by trade, especially selling rice, second-hand goods and ironware. Tsai Maw Kuey has observed: *“Although the Hokkien group is relatively limited population, they kept an important position in commerce and had an important role in economic activity in the country (..) with the minority of 60,000 persons but they held in their hands all the rice trade and monopoly, including the trade of second-hand and ironware”*.

Nhi Phu Temple, also known as Nhi Phu Assembly Hall, or Ong Bon Pagoda, is located at No.264, Hai Thuong Lan Ong Street, Ward 14, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City. The reason it is called Nhi Phu Temple because it was founded by the contributions of the Hokkien people immigrants from Quanzhou (泉州) and Zhangzhou (漳州) of Fujian Province, China. They mainly came from the districts Yunxiao (雲霄), Zhangpu (漳浦), Nanjing (南靖), Haichang (海長), Zhaoan (詔安) (belonging to Zhangzhou); Jinjiang (晉江), Nanan (南安), Huian (惠安), Anxi (安溪), Dongan (同安) (belonging to Quanzhou).

At the end of the 17th century, many of the Hoa people belonging to the Hokkien dialect group moved to the Saigon- Cho Lon area to settle down and establish the Nhi Phu Assembly Hall. In order to have a place for worshipping and practicing religious rites, preserving customs and meeting between compatriots from Quanzhou

and Zhangzhou, (Hokkien Province, China), they worked together to establish a temple next to the assembly hall about more than 200 years ago. However, there was a dispute over the naming of the temple and the offerings, each group separated and built their own temple. The Quanzhou group established the On Lang Assembly Hall (溫陵會館) and the Zhangzhou group established the Ha Chuong Assembly Hall (霞漳會館) that not far from Nhi Phu Temple.

The birth of the two temples separated from Nhi Phu Temple, besides the disagreement reason, it was probably derived from a larger and more important reason. It is the result of a long and sustainable process of the Hokkien community. The Hokkien people from Zhangzhou and Quanzhou in Cho Lon were very crowded, so each group needed to have its own temple.

In 1871, Nhi Phu Temple officially became the assembly hall of Hokkien group, and it was called Hokkien Nhi Phu Assembly Hall (福建二府會館).

According to the surveys in the Hokkien temples, there isn't any temple that was built before Nhi Phu Temple. Besides, the Hoa

people's community from three southern provinces of China came the region, built the ancient temple of That Phu Vo Temple (七府武廟) in 1775 namely Fuzhou (福州), Quanzhou (泉州), Zhangzhou (漳州) (belonging to Fujian (福建)), Guangzhou (廣州), Chaozhou (潮州), Qiongzhou (瓊

州) (belonging to Guangdong (廣東) and Ningbo(寧波) (belonging to Zhejiang (浙江).

When the Hoa people settled in the Mekong Delta, they also built That Phu Temple (七府廟), made by 5 different dialect groups, from 7 Fu (府), such as That Phu Temple in Vinh Long, That Phu Temple in An Giang, etc. However, when the life was stable, each group of Chinese dialects separated and established their own temples such as Nghia An Temple Assembly Hall (義安會館) of Chaozhou group, Thien Hau Temple (Tue Thanh Assembly Hall) of Guangdong, Guangzhou city, etc.

Previously, in front of Nhi Phu Temple was the Saigon River, there was a Saigon market (now the Post Office of District 5), which had a convenient wharf for travel. It is *“An Thong river (安通河) often called Saigon river (柴棍河) in the southwest of the town; The old river from the Thi Thong bridge (氏通橋) across Saigon to the Lao river (牢江), but it has narrow, hidden banks with shallow water. In the spring of the year of the Cat (1819), the 18th Gia Long (嘉隆) era, the King had the deputy governor of Gia Dinh Citadel (嘉隆城副總鎮) Hoang Cong Ly (黃公理) command the people of Phien An town (藩安) with more than 11,460 people divided into three sessions. The township supplied rice, changed the old river, and changed the old river route to open a new canal. Start digging from Thi Thong bridge straight to Ma Truong river (馬腸江*

(Intestine of Horse river) 1 meter 2129, about 9 and a half mile, 15 meters in wide and 9 meters in deep, both sides leave bare land about 8 decimetres, wide to 6 meters to road. Start digging from January 23 to April 23, then complete the work. The King gave it the name An Thong Ha” . Over time, in order to facilitate transportation, the people filled the river to make a road.

From the site of Nhi Phu Temple, as well as many other temples, it is shown that most early Hoa people’s ancient temples were built on the banks of rivers or canals, as the case with Thien

Hau Temple (Quang Trieu Assembly Hall (廣肇會館) in District 1, HCMC on the banks of the Tau Hu canal; That Phu Temple in An Giang was built on the banks of the Ba Xuyen river; Phuoc Duc Co Temple (福德古廟) in Bac Lieu province was located on the banks of Ba Thac river; Thien Hau Temple in Khanh Hung commune, Tran Van Thoi district, Ca Mau province was located at the confluence of Nha May river and Kinh Ngang canal, etc. This is suitable for the immigration by waterway of migrants as well as the confluence of rivers and canals is also a place of convergence and trade to both waterways and land, and trading is their strength.

In particular, the Hokkien people in Gia Dinh - Saigon also had prominent work that made their remark in the De Ngan region. That was Phuc Thien Nghia Tu (福善義祠), the place for belief, ancestral worship as well as the place

for charities of the Hokkien community. Until now, there are no a precise evidence for the building date of Phuoc Thien Nghia Tu, but thanks to the information in the oblong board of the parallel sentences in the entrance, it said that it was carved in the third year of Quang Tu era, i.e. 1887. Phuoc Thien Nghia Tu was built to serve the ritual sacrifice and is the place to worship more than 200 tablets of the deceased who were buried in the cemetery of the Hokkien people . In addition, Phuoc Thien Nghia Tu was also a place for doctors and nurses to examine patients, make prescriptions, decoct medicines, and supply clothes to the poor and the lonely elderly.

In 1907, after the Guangdong group built a sanatorium for their community, the Hokkien (福建) people also started to build a hospital in the grounds of their cemetery - named the hospital number 3 in 1909 . In the period from 1909 to 1959, the Phuoc Kien Medicine Institute (福建醫院) was use the Oriental medicine methods for treatment. In 1959, the institute was expanded, named Phuoc Kien hospital and used treatments based on the Western medicine methods. After 1975, Phuoc Kien hospital continued to operate. In 1978, Phuoc Kien hospital changed its name to Nguyen Trai hospital until today.

Besides, the Hokkien people also took great care in the field of education for their children. In 1907, philanthropists and compatriots from Man Chuong district, Phuoc Kien province,

immigrated to Cho Lon. They enthusiastically contributed money to build a school, named Man Chuong School. The school's slogan is “An atmosphere of enthusiasm, not for self- interest”. In 1923, two assembly halls Ha Chuong and On Lang cooperated to rebuild the school, consisting of 2 floors, named Phuoc Kien Private Primary School. During the French colonial period, the school was named École de Foukien. In 1998, it changed its name to Tran Boi Co Junior High School. This is one of the oldest Chinese language schools in Saigon. The school was located on the campus of the Nhi Phu Assembly Hall.

Thus, from studying the history of the establishment of Nhi Phu Temple, Phuoc Thien Nghia Tu and Tran Boi Co Junior High School, that indicates that temples, assembly halls, ancestral temple and schools are the first relics that is the evidence of the migration process and long-standing community of the Hokkien people. The Hokkien people have chosen this place as their second homeland where they passed away at the cemetery and placed ancestral tablets in the ancestral temple, built hospitals and schools to take care of the health and education for their descendants.

The early appearance of the Hokkien people was also reflected in the naming of the street at the centre area of the Hoa people in Cho Lon known as China Town. The street was called Phuc Chau (福州) that was the name of the capital of the Hoa people in Fujian province,

China. Later, the street was renamed to Quang Dong (廣東) that was the old street of Cho Lon area. Under the French colonial period, the street was named Canton. On 19th October 1955, the Saigon Government changed its name to Trieu Quang Phuc, now in District 5, Ho Chi Minh City. This event also shows that the Hokkien people were present very early in De Ngan land, through taking the name Fuzhou, the capital of Fujian province for the street name.

When settling in the new land, the Hokkien people brought their beliefs from China, and especially the gods worshiped and revered by the Hokkien people such as: Thanh Hoang (城隍), Quang Trach Ton Vuong (廣澤尊王), Thien Hau Thanh Mau (天后聖母), etc. However, Nhi Phu Temple is the only temple of the Hokkien people who considers Ong Bon is Chau Dat Quan (周達觀). In some provinces in the Mekong Delta, there are places where Ong Bon is considered Trinh Hoa (鄭和), Truong Phuc Duc (張福德) (Southwest region), Quang Trach Ton Vuong (廣澤尊王), Huyen Thien Thuong De (玄天上帝) (Southeast region). So, why is Ong Bon being considered Chau Dat Quan at Nhi Phu Temple?

Determining the building date of the temple based on the main god of worship in the main hall.

Ong Bon means “progenitor” with “Bon” (本) means root. “Ong Bon” is just a symbol, not a specific person. Each Hoa group has its

own concepts and beliefs about Ong Bon . At Nhi Phu Temple, Ong Bon, the main god in the temple was a natural god, who protects the land of residence and concretized under the name Chau Dat Quan. This is a particularly interesting thing, because only Nhi Phu temple worship Chau Dat Quan as Ong Bon. In other places in the South of Vietnam, Ong Bon was considered as Trinh Hoa, Truong Phuc Duc, etc.

The Hoa people worship Ong Bon as a god who protects them in business overseas, helps them live prosperously and happily. Therefore, depending on the locality, Ong Bon has different names. The Hoa people in Southeast Asian countries, most of them worship Quan Cong (關公), Thien Hau (天后), etc. Especially in some countries such as Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, where the Hoa people live, there is always a temple to worship Ong Bon.

Unlike other gods, Ong Bon has many theories surrounding his identity. Some people consider him to be a human god, Chau Dat Quan (Nhi Phu temple- District 5, Ho Chi Minh City); some others think Trinh Hoa (1371-1433) (e.g. in Van Nien Phong Cung (萬年豐宮), Minh Duc Cung (明德宮), Van Ung Cung (萬應豐宮); Nien Phong Cung (年豐宮), Bon Dau Cong Mieu (本頭公廟); some others consider Bach Phi Hien (e.g. Ong Bon Temple in Philippines), Tho Dia (土地) or Phuc Duc Chanh Than (福德正神). The Hoa people who are descent in Jinmen (金門) Island say Tran Hien as Ong Bon, because he took people to

reclaim the island. Currently, he is worshiped in Phu Te Temple (濟孚廟).

While most of the temples and assembly halls of the Hoa people in the Cho Lon area worshiped Thien Hau Thanh Mau or Quan Thanh, the only Nhi Phu temple worship Bon Dau Cong (本頭公), the god protects land and people. At Nhi Phu Temple, the altar of “Phuc Duc Chinh Than” worshiped Ong Bon, occupied in the central position of the main hall.

At Nhi Phu Temple, there is a tablet “ 大伯公二府廟 ” (Dai Ba Cong of Nhi Phu Temple) and according to the temple's documents, Dai Ba Cong (大伯公) is Chau Dat Quan. Author Ly Van Hung wrote in Gia Dinh Buddha relics archaeology that “Ong Bon was Chau Dat Quan, Bon Dau Cong Bodhisattva. He is a diplomat of Chinese Court under the Yuan (元) dynasty in the 13th century, from Yongjia (永嘉) (Wenzhou District (溫州) Zhejiang Province (浙江) China). He participated in Chinese missions to many countries in Southeast Asia, including the South of Vietnam and Chan Lap (真臘) in 1296-1297. He was a famous historian and **traveller** in the history of China. Returning from Chan Lap region, he wrote the book Chan Lap Phong Tho Ky (真臘風土記), the recording about customs, land and people in Chan Lap. The book was completed in 1311, describing the land of Southern Indochina at the end of the 13th century .

In regions where the Hoa people came to reside early, the number of Ong Bon shrines is

many. Such as in Tra Vinh province, with 27 Hoa people's belief places in the province, there are 19 places worshipping Ong Bon. Phuoc Minh Cung (福明宮) in Tra Vinh City still has traces of the temple's building date in the main hall by these letters: “ 福明宮福建全體建設一五五六年 ” (Phuoc Minh Cung was built by the Hokkien people in 1556). Ong Bon, i.e. Phuc Duc Chanh Than, the god who was worshiped at the main hall of Phuoc Minh Cung, was a natural god, who protects the land according to Hoa people's beliefs.

According to some members of Phuoc Minh Cung Management Board, the name Phuoc Minh Cung contains the letter “Phuoc” (福) to refer Fujian province and indicate the Hokkien people; the letter “Minh” (明) refers to the Ming dynasty as well as the Minh Huong people (明鄉). The name implies that the temple belonged to the Hoa people community of the Ming dynasty, originating from Fujian province. Currently, the central position of the main hall has changed to Quan Thanh De Quan. The change also shows that the Ong Bon religion is the belief of the Hokkien people who immigrated to Tra Vinh in the first period. And now this group in Vietnam and the Southern in particular has gradually become a minority, so they “ceded” the management of the assembly hall to the other groups such as Chaozhou and Guangdong.



In short, in our opinion, because the Hokkien people came to Vietnam, especially in De Ngan, settled early, they tended to worship the god who protects the new land and must be the first person who guided the immigrants to go abroad and settle down. Obviously, the god worshiped by the Hokkien people at Nhi Phu temple is Ong Bon, who was visualized as Chau Dat Quan (1266-1346). In other words, because Chau Dat Quan was the first person who led people from China to abroad, unlike other temples, the concept of Ong Bon was Trinh Hoa. Trinh Hoa (1371-1433) who appeared nearly 2 centuries after Chau Dat Quan, was a mandarin of Vinh Lac (永樂) era, in the 15th century.

Determining the building date of the temple based on the relics.

Currently, Nhi Phu Temple still preserves many precious and valuable artefacts such as an ancient iron bell with many Chinese characters. The bell is similar to the bell found in Hoi An in design by the mouth in lotus shape, the features of the bell in the 18th century.

Figure 1: The ancient bell of Nhi Phu Temple

(Source: Author)

Figure 2: The letters “ 二府大 ” in the bell (Source: Author)

According to Figure 2, the bell was sculptured: 二府, the name of the temple and 大伯公, the god worshiped in the main hall.

One thing for attention, the Hoa people believe that there is a god who governs the land area of their family and community is called Earth God (Tho Dia (土地) or Tho Than (土神)). Besides, Wealth God (財神) is worshiped with the meaning of bringing a lot of fortune to their family. In fact, basing on Five Elements Theory(五行), the Hoa people consider that Metal (金) was born from Earth (土), so Earth God is also one of the Gods of Wealth.

In other words, because agriculture plays an important role in history, land and agricultural products are wealth and property. Thus, Earth God is also Wealth God. As a result, the Hoa people used the image of an old man with a white beard, wearing a shirt and hat, holding gold to describe Wealth God. On the horizontal board in the main hall of Nhi Phu Temple, it is

written that “地也土吾” (I’m the Earth Good) and “同治甲子年仲春吉日” (lucky day, February, the year of Mouse (1864), under Tonzhi King era). In addition, Nhi Phu Temple produced woodblock printings with Ong Bon's figure with the letters “二府本頭公鎮宅平安” (Ong Bon of Nhi Phu Temple helps to protect the house in peace).

In addition, in the main door of each Hokkien family, they often worship Earth God on a simple altar that is placed close to the veranda. That is called “門口土地接引財神” (The door has Earth Good will lead Wealth Good to house). The internal house, there are a large altar to worship Ong Bon with the tablet “本頭公”. Therefore, Bon Dau Cong has function not only “鎮宅” (keep peace for house) but “土地” (Earth God). In short, Ong Bon of Nhi Phu Temple is Chau Dat Quan. The Hokkien people consider him to be the “Bon Dau Cong”, both Earth God, Wealth God and “福德正神”.

If the Hokkien people call Ong Bon is “Bon Dau Cong” (本頭公), who is “Dai Ba Cong”(大伯公) on the ancient bell in Nhi Phu Temple? According to the tablet in the altar in Nhi Phu Temple, the official name of the god is Dai Ba Cong. In additions, according to the temple’s documents, Dai Ba Cong was identified with Bon Dau Cong (本頭公), Chau Dat Quan.

The Hoa people from Guangdong considered Ong Bon to be the Earth God. The first person who immigrated to the new land and passed

away will be called “Dai Ba Cong” (大伯公) and the next one will be called “Thu Ba Cong” (次伯公). These people were responsible for looking after the graves, ancestral temples so they also looked after and protected the newly discovered land. Thus, Dai Ba Cong also is Ong Bon. According to a member of Nhi Phu Temple Management Board “It must have been the



Guangdong people who casted and sacrificed the bell to Nhi Phu Temple a hundred years ago. So, they called it Dai Ba Cong”.

Figure 3: The Chinese characters in the bell (Source: Author)

According to figure 3, we can know more information about the bell, namely:

乙酉仲秋吉旦 : Lucky day, September, the year of Rooster;

沐恩弟子 : Grateful disciple;

金隆成造 : Kim Long Thanh made;

奉 : Sacrificed

Temporary translation: Grateful disciple is Kim Long Thanh who made the bell on the lucky day of September in the year of Rooster to give thanks.

Until now, the exact year of building of Nhi Phu Temple has still been unknown. Basing on the years of restoration of the two assembly halls (Ha Chuong Assembly Hall and On Lang

Assembly Hall) that separated from the Nhi Phu Temple, and the design of the bell that is similar to the one was made in the 18th century in Hoi An, we have enough ground to indicate the year of Rooster in the bell.

Ha Chuong Assembly Hall (霞漳會館) was built by the Hoa people from Zhangzhou, Fujian province. So far, it hasn't had any document that can prove the exact building date of the assembly hall. However, basing on the oblong board of the parallel sentences in Thien Hau shrine, it provided that “ 嘉慶己巳 ” i.e. 1809 (the year of Snake under Jiaqing emperor period). The assembly hall had been restored many times. There are two stone steles that recorded two restoration times of the assembly hall established in 1848 and 1871. On the stele established in 1848, the name of the assembly hall was changed to Ha Chuong. Consequently, Ha Chuong Assembly Hall must have been built at least in the early 19th century.

On Lang Assembly Hall (溫陵會館) is the headquarters of the original Hoa people from Quanzhou, Fujian province. According to the content on the stone stele established in 1869, the building year of On Lang Assembly Hall has still been unknown. However, in the year of Mouse (1828), under Dao Quang (道光) era, The header Thai Nguyen Hung, a member of Quanzhou group who collected ten thousand quan (貫) to restore the assembly hall. In 1867, the assembly hall was restored secondly, and completed in 1869. The next restorations were

carried out in 1897, 1993, and 1995. In addition, there are also many precious artefacts inscribed on the made year such as the pair of stone lions flanking both sides of the door is a special sculpture that was made in 1869, the great bronze bell was made in the year of Rooster (1885).

Based on all evidence, we consider that the year of Rooster inscribed on the ancient bell is 1765. Therefore, the bell was sacrificed by a group of indebted disciples, Kim Long Thanh, who were Guangdong people as a thanksgiving and the bell was made on a lucky day, September, the year of Rooster(1765). The bell was able to be sacrificed in the inauguration year, so Nhi Phu Temple was likely built in 1765 or earlier. Moreover, researching That Phu Vo Temple in HCMC, the stone stele in the temple said that it was built in 1775. Therefore, it is possible that the Nhi Phu Temple must have been established before 1765.

In addition, the Gia Dinh Phong Canh Vinh (嘉定風景詠) written by Trinh Hoai Duc, describing the landscape of Gia Dinh from 1770 to 1815, there is mention of Nhi Phu Temple as below: “Coi chùa Ông Bôn Đầu cân. Dám quên chữ ngọn rau tác đất”Temporary translation: “Looking at Ong Bon Dau temple, Dare to forget the word vegetables and soil”. In our opinion, Nhi Phu Temple must have been established before 1765. It is likely that it was built first, before the residents from the 7 districts

immigrated with all 5 dialect groups who established That Phu Vo Temple in 1775 .

Results and Discussion

The result of the surveys of the Hokkien's ancient temples which still exist in the area indicates that there isn't any temple that was built before Nhi Phu Temple. The Hoa people with 5 dialect groups came to Cho Lon and built the ancient temple, That Phu Vo Temple in 1775. Basing on studying the building date of That Phu Vo Temple in HCMC especially from the stone stele in the temple (the temple was built in 1775) and the bronze bell in Nhi Phu Temple (the bell was made in 1765) so Nhi Phu Temple must have been built before 1765. Besides, Gia Dinh Phong Canh Vinh written in the period from 1770 to 1815 also mentioned Nhi Phu Temple. Based on these reasons, in our opinion, the Nhi Phu Temple must have been built before 1765, and probably was built firstly, before the residents from 7 districts immigrated with all 5 dialect groups built. That Phu Vo Temple in 1775. The two main centres of immigrants from China in the middle ages were Fujian and Guangdong. Thus, it is also possible that the Hokkien group was the first group to immigrate to Cho Lon.

According to the survey results, Nhi Phu Temple is the first temple of the Hokkien people in Cho Lon and it is possible that it is the first temple of the Hoa people in De Ngan. The residing temporarily at Nhi Phu Temple before

building pagodas of monks from China expressed the community cohesion of the Hokkien group as well as the role of Nhi Phu Temple in the immigration area.

Nhi Phu Temple as well as other ancient temples were built on the banks of rivers or canals. This is suitable for the immigration by waterway of migrants as well as the confluence of rivers and canals is also a place of convergence and trade to both waterways and land, and trading is their strength.

Nhi Phu Temple is the only temple of the Hokkien people considered Ong Bonas Chau Dat Quan. In some provinces in the Mekong Delta, Ong Bon is considered as Trinh Hoa, Truong Phuc Duc (Southwest region), Quang Trach Ton Vuong, Huyen Thien Thuong De (Southeast region), etc. In our opinion, because the Hokkien people came to Vietnam early to settle down, they tended to worship the god who must be the first to send immigrants abroad to settle down and protect them in the new region. Ong Bon's belief affirmed that the Hoa people considered the new land as their home land and demonstrated the trend of changing from Chinese nationals to Vietnamese citizens. The existence of Nhi Phu Temple proved the early immigration of the Hoa people from Fujian province to Vietnam. During the immigration and settlement, the Hokkien people expressed their personality "respect for humanity" by worshipping the god who protected the new land, "Bon Da u Cong"

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