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## Interpretative essay on the "Hòa Hảo Revolution"

Hòa Hảo Buddhism is a Vietnamese “new religious movement” that appeared at the end of the 1930’s in the Mekong delta. With roots in the Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương Cult, Hòa Hảo Buddhism resulted from a broad movement for the Renovation of Buddhism in the first third of the 20th century. Its charismatic founder, Huỳnh Phú Sổ, reactivated a specific form of Buddhist millenarianism and unified a number of preexisting beliefs into a new religious system.

As soon as it appeared, this Cult has known different reprisals from the colonial authorities who suspected this new case of “mysticism”. This religious movement tried to institutionalize itself in the hard times of the Second World War (Vichy Regime, Japanese occupation and “coup de force”) and then in the turmoil of the August Revolution. Hòa Hảo Buddhism was at the same time a religious movement expressing cultural and moral reactions, a peasant movement reinterpreting a form of local patriotism, and a millenarianism based on the expectation of the Buddha of the future. It became de facto a major actor in the politico-military events in Southern Vietnam during – and after - the Indochina war.

This interpretative essay of the “Hòa Hảo Revolution” tries to redefine the role of the Hòa Hảo community in the Vietnamese Revolution. To do so, I use a micro-history point of view and try to go beyond the classical outlines of the political history. I postulate that we have to consider above all and simultaneously socio-cultural specificities of the Mekong delta, Hòa Hảo teachings and religious feelings of the peasants to analyze finally and objectively the involvement of this community during the first years of the cult appearance.

This paper aims to be an active contribution to the rethinking of politico-religious movements and sects in southern Vietnam, especially during the Indochina War. It is also a counterpoint to the contemporary historiography of Vietnam and aims to look at the 1940’s in a pluralistic and non-dualistic perspective. A more pacified reading of the events is also useful to study contemporary religious practices and beliefs (since the *đổi mới*) and the evolutions of the Religion-State relations.