LITURGICAL INCULTURATION IN VIETNAM
Outline

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1. The Inculcation of the Cult of Ancestors in Vietnam
Vietnam, along with other Asian countries such as Korea and Japan, has been heavily influenced by China, especially its Confucian culture. Big China is up north on the map. Vietnam is under 1000 years ruled by China. So their influence is huge!
This influence is most visible in certain funerary rites and especially in the cult of ancestors. According to Peter Phan, a theologian at Georgetown University, the Chinese Rites Controversy and Rome’s ensuing prohibitions against the cult of ancestors affected Vietnamese Catholicism profoundly.
In 1964 the Vietnamese Bishops Conference applied to Rome for permission to implement the 1939 decree of Propaganda Fide permitting ancestor veneration.
On June 14, 1964 the Vietnamese bishops issued a letter "The Veneration of Ancestors, National Heroes, and War Dead" spelling out the concrete norms to apply Propaganda Fide’s instruction. In general, the bishops distinguished three kinds of acts, attitudes, and rituals: those that are clearly secular, patriotic, and social expressions of piety toward the ancestors, national heroes, and war dead.
The ancestors are not only permissible but are to be encouraged and promoted; the national heroes are prohibited; and the war dead need to be examined according to the common local opinion: if they are generally thought to be of a nonreligious nature, they are permissible. If doubt concerning their nature persists, it is permissible to act according to one’s conscience.
On April 12, 1974 the Vietnamese bishops issued another communication in which they specified a list of activities, attitudes, and rituals deemed permissible:
1. An ancestral altar dedicated to the veneration of the ancestors may be placed under the altar dedicated to God, provided that nothing smacking of superstition is placed there.

This is an altar on which pictures of my grandparents, my father-in-law and my brother who passed away are displayed. They are placed beneath the Crucifix.
2. Burning incense and lighting candles on the ancestral altar, and prostrating with joined hands in front of the altar as you see in the pictorial demonstration; or the repository of the ancestors are gestures of filial piety and veneration, hence permissible.
3. On death anniversaries it is permissible to present the dead person with ‘offerings of commemorative cult’ according to local customs, provided that one eliminates things smacking of superstition such as burning paper money.

BTW, this is the death anniversary of my father-in-law last year
Death Anniversaries

It is also recommended that the offerings be reduced or changed to express more clearly their true meaning of respect and gratitude to the ancestors, for instance, flowers, fruits, incense, and lights as you see in the pictorial demonstration.
4. During the marriage rites as you see in the pictorial demonstration, the bride and groom are permitted to perform the ‘ceremony of veneration toward the ancestors’ in front of the ancestral altar. These rituals are expressions of gratitude toward, recognition of, and self-presentation to the ancestors.
5. This is the funeral of my father-in-law and we are grateful to have father Rutherford and Father Hosinski concelebrated with other priests. During the funerary rites: it is permissible to perform prostrations with joined hands before the corpse as well as to hold burning incense sticks in joined hands according to local custom, as a way to express veneration for the dead person, just as the Church permits the use of candles, incense, and inclination before the corpse.
THE CULT OF ANCESTORS IN THE VIETNAMESE MASS
In addition to the permission of these rituals of ancestor veneration outside of the liturgy, the Vietnamese bishops have introduced two liturgical innovations. The first is an expansion of the prayer for the dead in the Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass. This is the Annual Freedom Mass outdoor at Our Lady of Lavang.
In the second Eucharistic Prayer, instead of the simple formula "Remember our brothers and sisters who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising again," the Vietnamese version of the dead reads: "Remember also the faithful, our brothers and sisters, who rest in peace in the expectation of the resurrection, and the dead who can only trust in your mercy. Remember in particular our ancestors, our parents and our friends who have left this world...."
Obviously, the explicit mention of "ancestors" is an attempt at inculterating ancestor veneration into the liturgy. BTW, Bishop John Vlazny celebrate Vietnamese annual freedom Mass at the Grotto every year with about 5000 people attended.
The second liturgical innovation is the Masses for the celebration of the lunar New Year: For the Vietnamese New Year is the most important cultural and religious feast, the equivalent of New Year, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas rolled into one. In the picture is the bishop of Sydney Australia is playing with the New Year Fireworks.
Members of the family gather before the ancestral altar with the pictures of the dead ancestors displayed, make deep bows, burn incense, make offerings, and pray for their protection. Catholics say their prayers in front of the altar as you see in the pictorial demonstration, a Vietnamese priest praying in front of the Vietnamese ancestors.

On New Year’s Eve, the main ritual is to "welcome the ancestors" to the home. Culturally, Vietnamese New Year is the celebration of the family: all members of the family are supposed to return to the ancestral home to show gratitude to their ancestors and to renew the family bond. Religiously, it is the occasion for the most solemn celebration of the cult of ancestors.
Vietnamese New Year is celebrated for at least three days:

1. The first is reserved for the cult of ancestors and the living parents,
2. The second for close relatives,
3. and the third for the dead.
Alexandre de Rhodes, a Jesuit missioner to Vietnam, had attempted to Christianize Vietnamse New Year by suggesting that its three days be dedicated to the Trinity: "The first day in memory of the benefits of creation and conservation, which is dedicated to God the Father; the second in thanksgiving for the benefit of redemption, which is dedicated to God the Son; and the third in humble gratitude to the Holy Spirit for the grace of being called to be a Christian". In the picture is Father de Rhodes who came to Vietnam in the sixteenth hundred as a French Jesuit missionary who had a lasting impact on Christianity in Vietnam. He wrote the first Vietnamese Catechism, created the new Vietnamese writing system, using the Roman alphabet.
Given the central position of Vietnamese New Year, the Vietnamese bishops have undertaken to solemnize it with Eucharistic celebrations. Five Mass formulas have been composed to express the various meanings of Vietnamese New Year and are now in use:

- the first Mass for the end of the year is to give thanks and ask for forgiveness;
- the second Mass for New Year’s Eve to celebrate the passage into the new year (giao thua);
the third Mass for the first day of the new year to praise God and to ask for peace and prosperity;
the fourth Mass for the second day to pray for ancestors, grandparents and parents;
and the fifth Mass for the third day to pray for the sanctification of labor.
Prayer - Collect

Vietnamese prayer – collect
MENTION ANCESTORS, GRANDPARENT & PARENT
martyrs who were canonized by Pope John-Paul II in Rome on June 19, 1988. There were 130,000 Vietnamese Martyrs during the persecution lasted for 2 centuries from sixteen to eighteen hundred in Vietnam.
MENTION ANCESTORS, GRANDPARENT & PARENT

Vietnamese prayer over the gifts: Lord, accept our offerings and bestow your graces abundantly upon our ancestors, grandparents and parents, so that we may in our turn
Vietnamese prayer – Preface: **MENTION ANCESTORS, GRANDPARENT & PARENT**

In the picture is the tradition of Our Lady of La Vang dates back to the time when Catholics were harshly persecuted during the period of 16 to 18 hundreds. Many people who sought refuge in the forest of La Vang, reported that in many occasions Our Lady appeared to comfort them, to heal their illness, and to protect them.
Popular Piety and the Liturgy
PETER C. PHAN
THIS IS A CLOSER LOOK OF OUR LADY OF LAVANG

OUR LADY OF LAVANG

PRAY FOR US. AMEN
The inclusion of the veneration of ancestors in the Mass, and especially the mention of the term "ancestor" in the Eucharistic Prayer, mark a monumental step in liturgical inculturation in Vietnam. We have traveled a long way from the days of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Theologically, it is important, at least for two reasons.
First, in mentioning the ancestors explicitly in the Eucharistic Prayer and in praying for them, the Vietnamese text does not distinguish between Christian ancestors and non-Christian ones (among Vietnamese Christians attending Mass there are many whose ancestors did not receive baptism). In the cult of ancestors, the ancestors are venerated not because they have been saved or were holy but simply because they are ancestors. Simply in virtue of the physical bond with their descendants, the ancestors are bound to protect them, and the descendants to honor them. Furthermore, in describing the cult of ancestors, many Vietnamese bishops have used not only the word “to tien” (forebears) but also “thanh hien” (saint and sage) to refer to those who should receive this cult. Of course, they do not mean to say that these are "saints" in the Christian sense of being officially canonized, but clearly the old objection that the word "saint" should not be used for people like Confucius no longer holds, and of course there is no suggestion that the non-Christian ancestors have been damned simply because they were not Christian.
Secondly, there is in the prayers cited earlier an affirmation that somehow the ancestors act as mediators of the blessings and graces that their descendants receive from God. The descendants are said to "inherit" them from their ancestors. Of course, in these prayers the ancestors are not directly asked to "intercede" with God for their descendants, since these prayers are not addressed to them, in contrast to those said in front of the ancestral altar at home. Theologically, of course, there can be no objection to ask someone, dead or alive, canonized or not, to intercede for oneself or others before God. The old objection that the cult of ancestors, in so far as they are invoked in prayer, is superstitious is a red herring, since no Asian who practices this cult believes that the ancestors are divine, in the strict sense of this term.