

# The Global Catholic Missionary Societies and the Spread of Marian Devotion in Pre-Twentieth-Century Vietnam

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## Abstract

Dating back many years, Marian devotion is currently a ubiquitous phenomenon among Vietnamese Catholics in Vietnam. This article examines the endeavours of specific global Catholic missionary societies – the Society of Jesus (S.J.), the Dominican Order or the Order of Preachers (O.P.) and the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP) – in spreading Marian devotion in pre-twentieth-century Vietnam. In doing so, the article seeks to demonstrate that the prevalence of Marian devotion primarily resulted from the enduring efforts of global Catholic missionaries during the stages of proselytization. This argument aims to challenge the prevailing notion that the primordial Vietnamese cultural identity, widely known for emphasizing female status and Mother Goddess worship, exerted its influence on the elevation of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics during the course of history.

## Keywords

missionary societies – Jesuit – Dominican – MEP – Marian devotion – Vietnamese Catholicism

## 1 Introduction

In the pre-twentieth-century period, Vietnam witnessed the arrival of global Catholic missionaries from the Society of Jesus (S.J.), the Dominican Order – also known as the Order of Preachers (O.P.) and the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). Regarding their activities, the majority of extant research focused on examining their development of human resources and facilities, as well as their inculturation and invention of Vietnamese Romanized script in Vietnam (Hồng Lam 1944, Nguyễn Hồng 1959, Phan Phát Huồn 1965, Đỗ Quang Chính 1972, Bùi Đức Sinh Volume I & II 1998, Peter Cho Phan 1998, Trương Bá Cần 2008, Phạm Thị Kiều Ly 2018, Trần Quốc Anh 2018 and 2020, Anh Thuan Truong 2021, etc.). Some others paid attention to investigating their involvement in political and economic issues (Cao Huy Thuần 1990, Nguyễn Văn Kiệm 2001, Nguyễn Quang Hùng 2007, Hoàng Thị Anh Đào 2017, etc.).

In the realm of culturology, certain nationalist Vietnamese scholars have argued that the resurgence of Vietnamese cultural traditions led to the prevalence of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics during the interaction between Vietnamese culture and Catholicism. They have posited that a primordial Vietnamese cultural tradition, with an emphasis on the prominence of the female role and Mother Goddess worship, has consistently exerted its influence on Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics throughout history (Trần Ngọc Thêm 1999; Trần Quốc Vương 2004). This hypothesis has shaped subsequent scholarly inquiries into Marian devotion in Vietnam. Nguyễn Hồng Dương (2004) likely subscribed to this viewpoint, supposing that Vietnamese Catholics transformed and highlighted Marian devotion in the light of Mother Goddess worship. Such a perspective on Marian devotion finds echo in recent research studies generated by Trần Văn Nhân (2017; 2022) and some others in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, some overseas Vietnamese scholars, such as Peter Cho Phan (2003) and Tuan Hoang (2022) in the US, have initially shed new light on the role of global Catholic missionaries in spreading Marian devotion in Vietnam. They have also mentioned the influence of historical factors, including persecution and natural disasters, on the emergence of Marian piety in Vietnam. Both of them, however, have concurred with the hypothesis that Vietnamese familiarity with cults of female deities and Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara have shaped Vietnamese openness to Marian beliefs.

Concerning Marian devotion during the pre-twentieth-century history of Vietnamese Catholicism, French-language scholars have made significant contributions. Joseph Terres, O.P. (1902), in the book entitled 'Le Culte De La Sainte Vierge Au Tonkin Orienta' (The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Tonkin),

provided accounts of Marian piety, emphasizing the veneration of Our Lady of the Rosary in Hai Phong Diocese in the nineteenth century. Pierre-Marie Compagnon (1910), authoring a book entitled 'Le Culte de N.D. de Lourdes Dans La Société Des Missions-Étrangères' (The Cult of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Society of Foreign Missions), examined the dissemination of the devotion of Our Lady of Lourdes of the MEP in Tonkin (known as Northern Vietnam) and Conchinchina (known as Southern Vietnam). Another instance is the book chapter 'Le Culte Marial en Indochine' (The Cult of Mary in Indochina) by Guy Audigou, M.E.P. (1956), which provides an overview of Marian devotion in Indochina, including what is now Vietnam, until the early twentieth century. Audigou (1956) contends that the tradition of respecting the maternal figure in Vietnamese families exerted its influence on the spread of Marian devotion (pp. 1010–1011).

Among English-language scholars, Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. (1911), in a treatise entitled 'Lives of Four Martyrs of Tonkin Who Belonged to the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary in the Philippine Islands: Beatified the 20th of May, 1906', directly examined the interconnections between the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary in the Philippines and the evangelization of Catholicism in Vietnam. Cothonay also provided a few details on the practice of venerating Our Lady of the Rosary in Northern Vietnam before the twentieth century. Another instance is the case of Eugene Ostrowski (2006), who focuses on investigating Christology throughout the Nôm works of Geronimo Maiorica, S.J. He briefly mentioned Maiorica's contributions to disseminating the Catholic Church's teachings of the Blessed Virgin Mary and generally characterized Maiorica's texts in Nôm script as 'localized interpretations' of Marian devotion. Notably, Tara Alberts (2013), in her book entitled 'Conflicts & Conversion Catholicism in Southeast Asia, 500–1700', presented diverse forms of Catholic devotions, including recitation of the Rosary and reverence of images of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Vietnam. Alberts supported the hypothesis suggesting that the popularity of Quán Thế Âm (Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara) and local goddesses of the sea could smoothly transition into devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary as a familiarly divine form.

Generally, previous research studies touched upon certain facets of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics in Vietnam. To date, however, there has not been sufficient inquiry into how global Catholic missionaries disseminated Marian devotion in pre-twentieth-century Vietnam. Besides highlighting the spotlights of extant research, this article endeavours to systematically investigate the intricate roles played by specific global Catholic societies, namely the S.J., the O.P., and the MEP, in spreading Marian devotion

in pre-twentieth-century Vietnam. In doing so, we seek to challenge the prevailing notion that attributes the prevalence of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics to the influence of the Vietnamese cultural tradition, characterized by an emphasis on the female role and Mother Goddess worship. Instead, in the following pages, we will demonstrate that the pervasiveness of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics primarily resulted from the collective efforts of global Catholic missionaries during their proselytization in Vietnam.

## 2 The S.J. with Marian Devotion in Pre-Twentieth-Century Vietnam

The first Catholic missionaries arrived in what is now Vietnam in the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, their proselytizing efforts did not yield any significant results at that time. Their failure was attributed to various factors, including their insufficient comprehension of indigenous customs and languages (Hồng Lam 1944, 156; Trương Bá Cần 2008, 36 and 37). Missionary evangelization in Vietnam only achieved a turning point in the seventeenth century with the arrival of the S.J. This society was founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola, who committed himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary as his patroness (Alexander Wilmot 1904, 3). He also entrusted the S.J. to the patronage of Madonna Della Strada (Our Lady of the Wayside), known as one of the titles of Blessed Virgin Mary (Gregory Waldrop 2009).

Due to the demand for propagating the Catholic faith among indigenous inhabitants in Vietnam, certain Jesuits acquired proficiency in Nôm script (Nôm 喃), a script for writing the Vietnamese vernacular. They employed this script to compile catechisms and other religious books. Furthermore, many Jesuits significantly contributed to inventing a new language known as Vietnamese Romanized script (Quốc Ngữ). This innovative language was initially designed to facilitate their proselytization endeavours in Vietnam.

Between 1615 and 1788, seventeen Jesuits landed in Vietnam (Đỗ Quang Chính 1972, 22). One of them, Girolamo Maiorica (also called Jerónimo Majorica or GiêrôNymô Mayorica S.J.) (1591–1656), demonstrated his exceptional proficiency in both Vietnamese Romanized script and Nôm script. Arriving in Cochinchina in 1624, he resided in Nước Mặn for a few years. In 1628, Maiorica was summoned to return to Japan; however, his ship encountered unfavourable waves, diverting him to Macao (Brian Eugene Ostrowski 2006, 10). In 1630, Maiorica returned to Cochinchina and conducted missionary activities in the Champa kingdom (Brian Eugene Ostrowski 2006, 10; Nguyễn

Hai Tinh 2014). By October 1631, Maiorica had relocated to Tonkin and assumed responsibility for evangelization in Kẻ Rum, now situated in Nghệ An province. In 1650, he moved to Kẻ Chợ (now known as Hanoi), attempting to reconcile the prohibitions against Christians imposed by Lord Trịnh Tráng. Maiorica departed in 1656 after succumbing to an illness (Brian Eugene Ostrowski 2006, 27).

During his sojourn in Vietnam, Maiorica produced a corpus of Nôm works (Brian Eugene Ostrowski 2006, 1). One of his noteworthy works, 'Heavenly Lord's Revelation' (天主聖教啓蒙), crafted in 1623, is regarded as an early Vietnamese Catholic catechism. In this opus, Maiorica emphasized Mary's role as the Mother of God, aligning his exposition with the dogmatic framework promulgated during the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century (Tuan Hoang 2022, 129). He referred to dogmas on Mary in conjunction with the presentations of the Catholic Church's teachings on God (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003a, 42–43 and 57). Particularly, 'Heavenly Lord's Revelation' allocates a specific section to expounding on Preaching Ave scripture (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003a, 109–116).

Emphasizing the theme of Mary, Maiorica authored a three-volume composition in Nôm script entitled 'Heavenly Lord's Holy Mother' (天主聖母), for which the publication year is still unknown. While only two of its initial volumes have endured to the present day, these extant texts particularly concentrate on elucidating the Catholic Church's instructions concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary. These instructions explicitly aim to encourage all Christians to integrate Marian devotion into their religious observances and daily lives. Not only does 'Heavenly Lord's Holy Mother' offer the rationale for the veneration of Mary but it also underscores the core principles guiding the practice of this veneration. Therefore, this composition can be regarded as an embodiment of Mariology in seventeenth-century Vietnam (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b, 5).

Precisely, the first volume of 'Heavenly Lord's Holy Mother' extensively elaborates on Mary's biography, grounded in the foundation of the New Testament. This segment presents diverse facets of her life, encompassing her familial lineage, unwavering commitment to faith, reception of divine revelation, role in the nativity of Jesus, integral role in the ministry of Jesus Christ, existence after Jesus Christ's demise and ascension, as well as her own subsequent ascension (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b). Furthermore, it emphasizes the Church's praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary and explains why Christians should regard her as an aspirational model for their religious practices and daily lives, leading them to the final destination of heaven. Specifically,

the Catholic Church accords the Blessed Virgin Mary the pre-eminent status among saints (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b, 15). She is believed to assume a dual role, serving not only as a moral exemplar for humanity but also as a 'gateway to heavenly realms' (上天之門) (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b, 16 and 238). Every Christian should emulate her deeds to seek salvation in the celestial abode and recognize her as the genuine mother of Jesus Christ and a maternal figure endowed with divine virtues for the betterment of humanity (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b, 16). Humans, therefore, must venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary, surpassing even celestial beings and saints, to abstain from malevolent deeds (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003b, 17).

Within the second volume of 'Heavenly Lord's Holy Mother', Maiorica meticulously articulates the rationale underpinning the fervent devotion to Mary. Mary is construed as a celestial intermediary, positioned between God and humans, and endowed with the capability to transmit divine blessings to praying persons. Mary is further believed to be a guardian, fortifying humans staunchly against the lure of temptation and earnestly interceding in prayers to save human souls (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003c, 7). Additionally, in this volume, Maiorica (2003c) aims to guide Christians in the cultivation of Marian piety (p. 7). He demystifies three distinct modalities of venerating Mary: firstly, by perpetuating the veneration of Mary in both contemplation and deeds; secondly, through the physical gesture of bowing in homage; and thirdly, by emulating her virtuous qualities (GiêrôNymô Mayorica, S.J. 2003c, 77).

In addition to diligently learning Nôm script, missionaries of the S.J. employed Vietnamese Romanized script to compile religious texts and utilized it as a notable means to preach the word of God to the natives. Indeed, Alexandre de Rhodes (1593–1660), a prominent Jesuit, composed a catechism entitled 'Phép giảng tám ngày/ Cathechismus in octo dies divisus/ Catechisme divisé en huit jours' (Catechism divided into eight days) in both Latin and Vietnamese Romanized script in roughly 1630 (Trần Quốc Anh 2020, 75). Through presenting this catechism, Rhodes (1993) encouraged Christians to memorize the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (p. 133). He urged Christians to carefully choose the image of the Blessed Virgin Mother holding her infant Jesus to venerate Mary by bowing their heads to the ground. Before doing so, Christians had to pray the Trinity three times (Alexandre de Rhodes 1993, 167). Moreover, Rhodes (1993) systematically elucidated the deeds of Mary, emphasizing her esteemed status as a virgin and a saint (pp. 146–160).

The catechism compiled by Rhodes underscores the principle that the veneration of saints should be secondary to the worship of God, who is exclusively entitled to receive 'latría' (the highest adoration). Additionally, this catechism stipulates that while saints receive veneration at a general

level, known as ‘*dulia*,’ Mary is accorded the special and highest veneration, termed “*hyperdulia*” (Alexandre de Rhodes 1993, 285). To this point, Rhodes (1993) elaborates that Mary holds a unique position with great trust, as she collaborates with other saints in praying for Christians (p. 285). Moreover, through her intercession, it is believed that God, with His benevolence, will grant a love more profound than wrath upon His subjects, even when they stray in sin (Alexandre de Rhodes 1993, 286). Generally, Rhodes compiled the catechism in the form of a story and meticulously provided practical pieces of advice on the adaptation to local customs, presenting Mary as alive to local audiences (Guy Audigou, M.E.P. 1956, 1004).

Not only did Rhodes and his fellow Jesuits impart doctrinal matters of Marian piety but they also organized cohorts of catechists drawn from indigenous Christians. In the daily religious observances designated for these catechists, an imperative component was the recitation of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Phan Phát Huồn 1965, 102). In Tonkin, from 1627 to 1630, Rhodes ardently promoted the practice of Marian devotion by incorporating images of the Holy Mother of God in worship places. Between 1640 and 1645, he resided in Cochinchina for fifty months (Peter Cho Phan 1998, 65). During that time, Rhodes (1966) also appreciated and disseminated the practice of venerating Mary among Christians in Cochinchina (pp. 117–118 and 125).

From the perspective of Catholic monotheism, Rhodes found it impossible to integrate any form of folk religion into practising Marian devotion. This is evident in the instance where, while witnessing the cult of a female marine deity (*nữ hải thần*) as ‘*cua cuja*’ (Cửa Chúa Queen Port) in Tonkin, Rhodes criticized this deity as an ‘infamous girl’. He vehemently condemned this cult as a form of superstition (Alexandre de Rhodes 1651, 108; Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 69). Rhodes hoped that one day, through the power of God, the temples dedicated to such a female marine deity would be transformed into places honouring Mary, the Virgin Queen of Heaven, who deserves to be ‘the true star of the sea and the guide as well as the guardian of humans’ (Alexandre de Rhodes 1651, 109; Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 69). To Rhodes, the meticulousness in observing the religious practices of indigenous pagans in Tonkin was consistently evident at another juncture. At the time when converting a feudal mandarin and his family to Catholicism, Rhodes consecrated their house as a place for worshipping God. In preparation for the consecration ritual, Rhodes scrutinized the house to ensure that it had not previously served as a locus for the cult of ‘*idols*’ (*tà thần*) (Alexandre de Rhodes 1651, 197; Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 127). After verifying that this house satisfied such requirements, Rhodes proceeded with the arrangement of the altar. Solemnly, he placed an



image of the Mother of God holding her infant Jesus, the Saviour, adored by the Magi (Alexandre de Rhodes 1651, 197–198; Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 127).

To Christianize the Lunar New Year in Tonkin, Rhodes introduced new rites for Christians to observe on this occasion. Specifically, the first day of the lunar new year was to be designated for glorifying God's creation (Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 129). On the second day, the focus shifted to remembering the grace of salvation of the Son of God and the third day was reserved for paying tribute to the Holy God. Following this, the church celebrates the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple in the church. At the beginning of this ceremony, every new Christian holds a burning candle while walking into the church (Alexandre de Rhodes 1994, 130). As recounted by Rhodes (1994), these Christians felt extremely joyful to return home with these candles, which they believed were able to protect them as Christians from adversaries to salvation in case of demise (p. 130). Rhodes (1994) also documented instances where Christians in Tonkin believed in and prayed to the Blessed Virgin Mary in challenging periods of persecution (pp. 192 and 196).

As discussed above, Maiorica and Rhodes are typical examples of Jesuits who actively promoted the practice of Marian devotion in what is now Vietnam. Their laudable efforts left valuable legacies that helped sustain the practice of Marian devotion in Vietnam in subsequent times. Unfortunately, the decree entitled 'Dominus ac Redemptor' (Lord and Redeemer), enacted by Pope Clemente XIV in 1773, disbanded the S.J. It concurrently marked the end of Jesuit missionary activities in pre-twentieth-century Vietnam.

### 3 The O.P. with Marian Devotion in Pre-Twentieth-Century Vietnam

The O.P. was founded in 1216 and consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary as its special patroness (Denis Vincent Wiseman 2021, 249). Concerning the evangelization enterprise in the Far East, fifteen Dominican missionaries reached Manila in the Philippines on July 22, 1587 (Mathêo Hanh 1928, 133). In the same year, they established the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary in Manila, subsequently assigned by the Holy See with the mission of proselytization in China, Vietnam, Japan and the Philippines (Cha Chính Trình 1916: 16; Mathêo Hanh 1928, 135; Roland D. Macta, O.P. 2021, 1092; Đào Trung Hiệu 2016). In the Philippines, Dominican friars actively disseminated the veneration of Our Lady of the Rosary, one of the titles of Mary (Roland D. Macta, O.P. 2021, 1092–1093).

In Vietnam, the two first Dominican missionaries, namely Diego Aduarte and Alonso Ximénez, from the Manila base reached Đà Nẵng in 1596; however,



they were not allowed to preach there (Peter Cho Phan 1998, 9). The Dominican endeavours in Vietnam only achieved a pivotal juncture in the seventeenth century when they collaborated with their counterparts from the MEP. Firstly, in 1672, Bishop François Pallu of the MEP dispatched a Vietnamese missionary to Manila to learn Mandarin, hoping that this man could later engage in evangelization among Chinese merchants residing in Siam (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 15–16). In Manila, this Vietnamese missionary sought the support of Dominicans and expressed the need for Dominican missionaries to be sent to Tonkin. Subsequently, in 1674, priest Marquez of the Province of the Holy Rosary returned to Manila from Siam. He brought with him letters in which MEP missionaries appealed to Dominicans of the Province of the Holy Rosary for assistance in their evangelization in Indochina (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 16). Also in the same year, Bishop Pallu of the MEP, whose ship on its way to Tonkin had been diverted by a storm to Manila, petitioned the Dominican Order to dispatch missionaries to Tonkin (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 17).

In response to the above requests from the MEP, two other Dominican missionaries in Manila, namely Juan de Santa Cruz and Juan de Arjona, were sent to Hiên Port in 1676 (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 17; Mathêo Hanh, 1928, 136; Đào Trung Hiệu 2016). In 1677, one more Dominican friar landed in Tonkin (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 17). Before February 1679, Dominican missionaries had already organized rosary confraternities in some villages in Kẻ Chợ (Cha Chính Trinh 1916, 18). In September 1681, Dominicans established more rosary confraternities and instructed Christians to recite scriptures and rosaries (Cha Chính Trinh 1916, 25). Before 1693, only two foreign Dominicans operated missionary activities in Tonkin, yet their contribution was remarkable, as they established 70 chapels and converted 18,000 pagans (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 19).

The arrival of Dominicans in Tonkin had a lasting impact on evangelization and created a significant heritage of Marian devotion (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 141). This devotion found expression in diverse forms of devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary, including the contemplative act of praying to the Holy Rosary, the recitation of the Rosary, the observance of the Feast Day of Our Lady of the Rosary every October, and other religious practices. For instance, the funeral of Dominican priest, Jacques Chieu, in Bù Chu in 1683 witnessed the appearance of 150 brothers of the Rosary Confraternity, carrying rosaries and an image of Our Lady of the Rosary (Adrien Launay 1927, 383). By 1688, Dominican missionaries had set up roughly forty Rosary confraternities in Tonkin. Just a few years later, the recitation of the Rosary had become so widespread among Vietnamese Catholic communities under supervision by Dominicans that

twelve-year-old children could recite it from memory (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 142). According to Adrien Launay (1927), between 1709 and 1710, Christians in the Bù Chu region adopted the practice of reciting the Litany of the Blessed Virgin in Rosary processions (p. 463). Moreover, at that time, in the Bù Chu region, the practice of venerating Mary became part of the Holy Mass each month, where two girls held an image or statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in their hands and sang (Adrien Launay 1927, 463). Dominican missionaries also designated many sub-parishes under various titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary. For instance, in 1706, Trung Lao parish had two sub-parishes with their names as such, specifically named Our Lady of the Rosary (họ Đức Bà Rôsa) and the Seven Dolours of the Blessed Virgin Mary (họ Đức Bà bảy sự), respectively (Cha Chính Trinh 1916, 130).

In 1702, the Holy See consecrated Dominican priest Raymundo Lezolin as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Tonkin (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 19–20). The status of the Dominican Order in Tonkin was further solidified in 1756 when they assumed the mission of governing the Diocese of Eastern Tonkin, which now encompasses five dioceses, including Hải Phòng, Bù Chu, Thái Bình, Bắc Ninh, and Lạng Sơn. On the other hand, Dominican friars concurrently encountered increasing difficulties due to persecution carried out by the Trịnh Lords, who ruled on behalf of the Lê dynasty (Nguyễn Danh Phiệt 1988, 25). Inevitably, Christians found it challenging to express their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, primarily due to harsh penalties imposed on them by the imperial court, including imprisonment and the beheading of missionaries. Nevertheless, Dominican missionaries did not apostatize their faith in God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. One notable example was the case of Dominican missionary Francisco Gil de Federich (1702–1745), who staunchly protected images of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary for his faith during the persecution by Lord Trịnh Doanh. In doing so, he willingly accepted a death sentence rather than committing apostasy by trampling on those religious icons (Marie Bertrand Cothonay, O.P. 1911, 100).

Similar to Jesuits, Dominicans disseminated doctrinal matters related to the veneration of Mary. In around 1865, Emmanuel Riaño Hoà issued the ‘Scripture Recitations for the Entire Year’ (Bản Kinh tụng đọc Toàn Niên 本經誦讀全年), compiled in Nôm script for the use of Catholics in Dominican areas, such as Bù Chu, Hải Phòng, and Thái Bình dioceses (Emmanuel Riaño Hoà 2007, 5). This script lists a series of prayers for Mary, including the Ave Maria, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary and so on. Among them, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary contains numerous invocations of Mary utilized for seeking her blessing. Furthermore, in the ‘Scripture Recitations for the Entire Year’, Mary is honoured as a gateway of heaven and a queen of all saints (Emmanuel

Riaño Hoà 2007, 102). Additionally, within Catholic communities supervised by Dominicans, many folk stories emerged to recount miraculous occurrences attributed to Our Lady of the Rosary when Christians engaged in the recitation of the Rosary. An example is the account of Priest Ferez, recounting that around 1884 or 1885, a band of plunderers surrounded the Catholic village named Nam Am (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 156). In this circumstance, seminarians and Christians congregated in their church, recited the Rosary, cried, and invoked the Most Holy Virgin to seek her help. As a miracle, these practices caused pirates to hastily flee from the church and village (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 157). In 1884, as Dominican priest Liai recounted, a Professor from a minor seminary, accompanied by two others, was travelling to Hải Phòng. While crossing a river on their ferry, they were seized by pirates wielding swords and guns. Nevertheless, through fervent prayers to the Most Holy Virgin and the recitation of rosaries, they were miraculously released (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 159–160). Similarly, in another narrative dating back to 1899, a young Dominican named Ngoc in Ke Sat village fell seriously ill. After a priest put a rosary on Ngoc's neck and recited the Hail Mary, Ngoc experienced a remarkable recovery to a state of extraordinary well-being (Joseph Terrès, O.P. 1903, 160).

Furthermore, Dominicans integrated their veneration of Our Lady of the Rosary into the fabric of various churches and religious practices under their administration. For instance, the Kẽ Sặt parish, located in Hải Dương province and belonging to the Hải Phòng diocese, experienced Dominican influence. Indeed, in 1676, Juan de Santa Cruz, a Dominican missionary, carried out proselytization there for a period, and in 1702, Raimondo Lezoli, the first Dominican Bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Tonkin, was consecrated in this parish. Dominican missionaries continued reinforcing the veneration of Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Rosary in Kẽ Sặt parish. Another typical example is Búi Chu Church, which was built in 1885 and chose Our Lady of the Rosary as its patroness. Besides constructing dedicated churches to Our Lady of the Rosary, Dominican missionaries were also pioneers in establishing rosary confraternities, and their influence extended beyond the areas of Dominicans, reaching into regions administered by the MEP (Phêrô Maria Đông 1908, 82).

#### 4 The MEP with Marian Devotion in Pre-Twentieth-Century Vietnam

In June 1649, Alexandre de Rhodes of the S.J., returned to Rome, advocating for the Holy See to dispatch supplementary missionaries to Eastern Asia with the explicit objective of instituting local churches there (Nguyễn Quang Hùng 2007, 53). During this period, the extant cadre of missionaries was deemed

insufficient to effectively meet the pastoral needs of Christian communities in Indochina (Anh Thuan Truong 2021, 118). The request of Rhodes was not realized until 1658 when the MEP was founded in Paris to strengthen missionary activities and establish local churches in Eastern Asia. The Holy See decided to appoint Bishop Pierre Lambert de La Motte (1624–1679) of the MEP as the Vicar Apostolic of Cochinchina (IRFA n.d.) and assigned Bishop François Pallu of the MEP to become the Vicar Apostolic of Tonkin in 1658 and 1659, respectively.

On November 27, 1660, Bishop Lambert commenced his journey to Cochinchina; however, unexpected situations compelled him to reside in Ayutthaya, the capital of Siam, in 1662 (IRFA n.d.). He established bases in Ayutthaya to support the evangelization of the MEP in Cochinchina and Tonkin (IRFA n.d.; Nguyễn Thanh Tùng 2022). Bishop Lambert also took care of the spiritual lives of around forty Vietnamese Christians residing in a section of Ayutthaya (Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam 2020, 78). He paid the first visit to Tonkin in August 1669, then convened a synod and founded the first congregation of the Holy Cross Lovers in Phố Hiến in 1670 (IRFA n.d.; Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam 2020, 88). In 1671, Bishop Lambert travelled to Cochinchina, establishing the second congregation of the Holy Cross Lovers in Quảng Ngãi (Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam 2020, 88–90). In 1675, he visited Cochinchina for the second time and returned to Siam in the following year owing to certain disagreements with Jesuits in Cochinchina (Trương Bá Cẩn 2008, 224–225). Given the practices of venerating Mary, Bishop Lambert motivated sisters of the Holy Cross Lovers to diligently recite the Rosary on Sunday and participate in solemn rituals concerning Mary (Nhóm Nghiên cứu linh đạo Mến Thánh Giá 2020). Similar to Bishop Lambert, Bishop Pallu found it impossible to reach Indochina as expected. In January 1664, he arrived in Ayutthaya and worked together with Bishop Lambert to organize a synod there (Hội đồng Giám mục Việt Nam 2020, 33). Subsequently, Bishop Pallu made several efforts to travel to Tonkin but failed. Generally, endeavors made by Bishop Pallu and Bishop Lambert laid substantial foundations for MEP missionaries in Indochina in subsequent times.

In the eighteenth century, Cochinchinese politics became increasingly chaotic as Tây Sơn rebels emerged against Nguyễn Lord. Nguyễn Huệ, the leader of Tây Sơn's rebellion, overthrew both Nguyễn Lord in Cochinchina and Trịnh Lord in Tonkin, assuming the throne and establishing the Tây Sơn regime in 1778. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, a surviving member of the Nguyễn clan, took refuge in Siam, as well as the southernmost locations of Cochinchina. Determined to defeat Tây Sơn Court at all costs, he even sought the support of a French Bishop of the MEP, Pigneau de Béhaine (Cao Huy Thuần 1990, 11). Through the connections of this bishop, Nguyễn Phúc Ánh and the French king

Louis XVI signed the Treaty of Versailles of 1787 to exchange mutual benefits. Nevertheless, the 1789 Revolution prevented France from providing any military aid to Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in his effort to regain power. Subsequently, Bishop Pigneau de Béhaine and some deserters from the French navy, along with other supporters, assisted Nguyễn Phúc Ánh in taking over the country from Tây Sơn Court (Keith Weller Taylor 2013, 384–385; Nguyễn Quang Hùng 2007, 178). Nguyễn Phúc Ánh eventually assumed the throne in 1802, with the reign title of Gia Long. Despite prior agreements with King Louis XVI, the Nguyễn Court then deviated from them and drastically changed its attitude towards Catholic missionaries. Following Emperor Giang Long's demise, the successor emperors of the Nguyễn Court imposed stringent prohibitions with severe penalties on missionaries and Christians (Nguyễn Văn Kiệm 2001, 221 and 223; Lê Thị Thắm 2002, 42–43).

Under the pretext of safeguarding Christians, on September 1, 1858, the French-Spanish coalition opened heavy fire at Đà Nẵng Port. After achieving milestones on the battlefield in subsequent years, the French army compelled the Nguyễn Court to sign the Treaty of Saigon in June 1862, thereby assuming control of the three eastern provinces of Cochinchina. In 1867, the French took over the rest of Cochinchina, the three western provinces. The onset of French colonialism created a new turn for the operation of Catholic missionaries, notably MEP missionaries, in Indochina. To increase Catholic influence in the population there, the French colonial authorities boosted the construction of churches, subsidized missionary activities, religious festivals, and so on (Cao Huy Thuần 1990, 127).

Moving in line with the policies of the French colonial authorities, MEP missionaries strategically expanded their influence in Vietnam, fervently participating in the construction of churches. In Cochinchina, bishops of the MEP consolidated the church's organization and facilities. In 1863, Bishop Lefevere of the MEP, the Bishop of the Diocese of Western Cochinchina, obtained permission from Admiral Bonard in Cochinchina to construct a large church in Saigon, which was dedicated to the Immaculate Holy Mother as its patroness. Completed in 1880, this church is now known as the Notre Dame Cathedral of Saigon (Tòa Tổng Giám mục Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh 2015, 68). Its front gate bears an inscription in classical Chinese from 1880, stating that 聖母無罪元, which means the Immaculate Holy Mother (Tòa Tổng Giám mục Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh 2015, 68). In Tonkin, in 1887, Bishop Paul-François Puginier (1835–1892) of the MEP initiated the erection of the Kê Sở church, dedicated to the Immaculate Holy Mother as its patroness (C. d'Allenjoye 1896, 128). Beyond the title Immaculate Holy Mother, Bishop Puginier energetically promoted the devotion to Mary under the title Our Lady of Lourdes in both

the Hanoi church and the Hoang Nguyen minor seminary (Pierre-Marie Compagnon 1910, 161).

MEP missionaries also documented and disseminated doctrinal matters regarding Marian piety. In 1858, Priest Pierre Marie Lương of the MEP compiled and published a treatise entitled ‘The Month of Mary’ (Tháng Đức Bà 膺德吧), with the second edition released in 1906. Both editions were written in Nôm script. This opus informs us that the Month of Mary originated in Rome and subsequently gained widespread observance in other regions (Pierre Marie Lương 2006, 18). The Month of Mary aligns with April in the Chinese lunar calendar and May in the Gregorian calendar. During this month, every Christian is urged to devote themselves to the veneration of Mary. Marian devotion here includes a series of practices, such as offering flowers, executing a palanquin procession of the Mary statue, praying scriptures, reciting the Rosary, rendering hymns in honour of Mary, and so on (Pierre Marie Lương 2006, 20). During the Month of Mary, Christians are encouraged to observe three things that are believed to receive supplementary graces. Firstly, Christians should congregate at church during the evening hours to listen to sermons and contemplate the depictions and statues of Mary, so as to reinforce the veneration of Mary. Secondly, if feasible, Christians are encouraged to undertake daily rituals to express gratitude to God for the graces bestowed upon the Holy Mother. Thirdly, Christians have to participate in the sacrament of confession and receive communion at least once during the Month of Mary. When doing so, not only do Christians receive the blessings bestowed by Mary but they are also granted indulgences by the Holy See (Pierre Marie Lương 2006, 21–22).

In Western Tonkin, the practice of Marian devotion was fervently encouraged and meticulously regulated by MEP missionaries. On May 15, 1870, Bishop Paul-François Puginier, the Vicar Apostolic of Western Tonkin, issued a general letter with the overarching objective of summoning Christians to express their devotion to Mary. This letter further provided explicit guidelines for practising Marian devotion in May, denoted as the Month of Mary (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870). Bishop Puginier requested that Christians congregate at churches for collective supplications, engaging in practices such as reciting the Act of Contrition, perusing instructional papers teaching on Mary, and partaking in the recitation of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870). Reciting other scriptures is deemed acceptable as long as it pertains to the veneration of Mary (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870). During the Month of Mary, every parish in the Diocese is required to celebrate the palanquin procession of Mary on designated days of the month (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870). Bishop Puginier urged every Christian and parish to enthusiastically participate in



such religious practices throughout the Month of Mary (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870). At this point, every Christian, even those who are sinners, should observe to obtain Mary's blessings (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1870).

On May 12, 1885, Bishop Puginier, in another general letter, regulated religious practices concerning Marian devotion in October and designated October as the Month of the Rosary. These practices encompass the recitation of the Rosary within the domestic sphere, the repetition of the Rosary scripture either within the church or at home, the execution of the palanquin procession venerating Mary and the commemoration of the Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. Significantly, Bishop Puginier required that the celebration of this feast be observed more solemnly, surpassing what was done in previous years (Bảo-lộc Phước Vítvồ 1885).

## 5 Conclusion

We can conclude at this stage that, notwithstanding numerous impediments, missionaries hailing from specific global societies – the S.J., the O.P., and the MEP – consistently endeavoured to conduct their evangelization among Vietnamese people. Leading up to the twentieth century, they created great legacies that exerted a pivotal influence on the pervasiveness of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholic communities, spanning from Tonkin to Cochinchina.

Specifically, during their proselytization in Vietnam, they imparted the tenets of Marian doctrine to local inhabitants, rendering and spreading them through the translation and propagation of Catholic doctrines. By presenting doctrinal insights on Mary in both Nôm script and Vietnamese Romanized script, the global Catholic missionaries substantially engaged in the process of vernacularization and localization of Marian devotion in Vietnam, enabling this religious phenomenon to spread among indigenous devotees.

Alongside imparting doctrinal matters, global Catholic missionaries meticulously guided the practices of venerating Mary, consistently reinforcing Marian piety among Vietnamese Catholic communities. In encountering the local cultural and religious entities, instead of placing the Mother of God in the light of highlighting female deity worship in what is now Vietnam, the global Catholic missionaries adhered steadfastly to their doctrinal codes and religious customs. In doing so, these missionaries sought to reify Marian devotion in the form of popular piety, aligning it with the tenets of Catholic doctrine. Additionally, they documented many folk narratives recounting miraculous interventions attributed to Marian devotion that, in turn, could captivate a



growing number of adherents to Mary. Furthermore, the veneration of Mary became a widespread theme, represented in the architectural designs of many churches overseen by global missionary societies.

That said, the prevalence of Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholics primarily resulted from the persistent efforts of global Catholic missionaries. These missionaries played a crucial role as central social actors, catalyzing the formation and elevation of Marian devotion through their religious initiatives in pre-twentieth-century Vietnam. As such, this finding provides further evidence to call into question the idea that a primordial Vietnamese cultural identity, characterized by the emphasis on the female role and Mother Goddess worship, served as a substantial function in elevating Marian devotion among Vietnamese Catholic communities during the course of history.

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