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Localized elements in the Banian Ramuwan Festival Локальные особенностп проведения фестиваля Рамуван среди вьетнамской религиозной группы чам бани

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КИДАТОННА

Народ чам во Вьетнаме унаследовал культурную историю древней страны Чампа, которая блестяще развивалась в прошлом. В XIII веке народ чам принял ислам во время морской торговли с Малайзией и Индонезией. Однако после распада Чампы люди чамов больше не контактировали с международным исламом. Благодаря историческому процессу аккультурации, мусульманские элементы постепенно локализовались и превратились в местную религию, получившую название бани. Рамуван крупнейший фестиваль народа бани чам (называемый народом чам авал). Они не только исповедуют ислам, но и находятся под влиянием местной культуры, что отражается в мечетях, поклонениям, названии и времени проведения фестиваля Рамуван, его ритуалах, костюмов и ритуальных предметах.

ABSTRACT

The Cham people of Vietnam inherited the cultural history of the ancient Champa country, which developed brilliantly in the past. In the 13th century, the Cham people converted to Islam during maritime trade with Malaysia and Indonesia. However, after the collapse of Champa, the Cham people were no longer in contact with international Islam. Through the historical process of acculturation, the Muslim elements were gradually localized and developed into a local religion, called Bani. Ramuwan is the biggest festival of the Bani Cham people (called by the Cham Awal people). They not only profess Islam, but are also influenced by local culture, which is reflected in mosques, worship, the name and timing of the Ramuvan festival, its rituals, costumes and ritual objects.

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Ключевые слова: Вьетнам, ислам, Чам Бани, Чампа, локализация, Рамуван, Коран, мечеть Бани, месяц поста

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1. Bani Cham people in Vietnam

1.1. Population and place of residence

The Cham people in Vietnam are also known as Chiêm, Chiêm Thành, Hời, Cam, Champa, Chàm. The Cham people belong to the Austronesian race, one of the five ethnic races in Vietnam belonging to the Malayo — Polynesian language family (Malayo — Polinésien) (Phan 2019).

According to the results of the 2019 population and housing census, 167,729 Cham people are living in central Vietnam. In which, there are 67,274 people in Ninh Thuan province, 34,690 people in Binh Thuan province. The remaining Cham people inhabit in the South of Vietnam. Among them, Ho Chi Minh City has 10,000 people, An Giang has the largest number of Cham people, more than 14,200 (*Population and Housing Census of the year of 2019*).

The Cham people who follow Balamon have always called themselves Cham Ahier, while the Bani Cham call themselves Awal Cham (Phan 2006, 11). Amongst the 67,000 Cham people in Ninh Thuan, the Cham community following Bani consists of nearly 30,000 people, living in 10 villages, most populous in Xuan Hai commune, Ninh Hai district and Phuoc Nam commune, Ninh Phuoc district These 10 Cham Bani villages conduct religious activities in 7 mosque (Thang – Mwgik). Moreover, in 1962, more than 2,000 Islam people immigrated to Ninh Thuan².

1.2. Origin of the Bani religion

The Cham people in central Vietnam follow two main religions: Balamonism and Bani. They have adopted Balamonism since establishment of the country in the first centuries AD. For a long time, the Cham Balamon did not come into contact

¹ Before 2000, there were only 22 Cham villages in Ninh Thuan, by 2017, due to administrative separation, the number of Cham villages has increased to 29. Previously, there were only 7 Cham Bani villages with 7 churches, now divided into 10 villages, but the number of churches remains unchanged.

² We call the Muslim Cham community (Islam) to distinguish it from the Bani Muslim Cham community.

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with international Balamon, which localised the religon with many indigenous elements. During the existent period of Champa country, in the 13th century, the Cham people expanded their trade with Malaysian and Indonesian. As a result, they also adopted Islam. A large number of Cham Balamon community converted to Islam. After the country of Champa disbanded, even though Muslim society is patriarchal, with many religious dignitaries being men, the Cham Bani society as well as the Cham Brahmans in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan remained matriarchal.

1.3. Bani mosque

Different from the world mosques which require decorating, displaying of pictures and statues, keeping empty, high, wide, airy and clean space, Bani mosques are built in the traditional house style of the Cham people. Inside the mosque, in addition to the sanctuary (*Kanraong*) placed in the center of the western wall, is the place for the Acars to recite the Kuru-un (*Qu'ran*) during the fasting month of Ramuwan or the Friday Masses (*Harei Jamu-at*).

1.4. Dignitaries Bani

The team of Cham Bani dignitaries (only men) is the Acar system, including: Mudin, Katip, Imam, Po Gru (the Great monk) (Phan, Phan, Nguyen, 113-114). In which, the highest person is the Grand Master, who has the ultimate decision-making power in the religious life of each mosque. This team of dignitaries is in charge of reciting the Kura-un in honor of Po Awloah (God) and Nabi Mohamah (the angel Mohammed), administering the rituals in the mosque and taking care of the wor-

ship for the followers. Bani dignitaries are welleducated people who learn to write and read ancient Arabic script to read the Kura-un and ritual ceremonies.

Although Islam sosiety is a patriarchal and the religious dignitaries are men, the Cham Bani society as well as the Cham Brahmins in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan today still maintain the matrilineal system.

2. An overview of Ramuvan Festival of the Cham Bani

2.1. Festival time

Ramuvan festival is celebrated in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, called the fasting month. Every year, in the second half of August in the lunar calendar, all Bani villages eagerly prepare for the festival. Dignitaries prepare scriptures, costumes and ritual tools, whilst women buy ingredients and fruits to make cakes, gifts, creating new clothes for children.

According to the rules of Islamic globally, the fasting month of Ramadan is a quiet month, focusing only on praying in the mosque, without leisure activities. However, as for the Cham Bani people, in recent decades, at the end of August Islamic calendar, cultural and sports activities are organised for the Ramuvan festival, creating a joyful, jubilant and bustling atmosphere in Cham Bani villages. If the Kate festival is considered by the Cham Ahier as the "Tet" of the Brahmin-influenced Cham community, the Ramuvan festival might be considered as the "Tet" by the Cham Bani.

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Ramuwan festival of the Bani Muslim Cham is held in the ninth month of Islamic calendar. The ceremony consists of two parts: **Ancestor Worship** — **Pambang Muk Kei**, taking place in families (at the end of the eighth month of Islamic calendar) and **Lent** — **Ramuwan in the mosque** (the ninth month of Islamic calendar).

2.2. Ancestor Worship (Pambăng Muk Kei)

In Cham Bani villages, in the last days of Sha'a ban (the Eighth month of Islamic calendar)³, Ancestor Worshiping Ceremony includes 3 ceremonies: Grave Tending Ceremony (Kabur rak); Unofficial Ceremony (Da-a laba) and Official Offering Ceremony (Pambăng Muk Kei).

2.2.1. Grave Tending Ceremony (Kabur rak)

Different from the Islamic doctrine that only worships the supreme being, Allah (the Cham people call it Po Âwloah) and his angel, Mohammed, the Cham Bani in Ninh Thuan still worship polytheists according to the belief in animism. In which, there are natural gods, gos with meritorious services in history, gods who follow folk beliefs and especially still uphold the tradition of ancestor worship.

When a Cham Bani pass, they are buried in a cemetery called Kaburrak. The cemetery of the Cham Bani has its own unique characteristics. The grave is not protruded, but flat. There are large, round stones put on each grave and aligned with each other. Cemeteries are usually very wide and

flat land, with big and round rocks painted white, arranged in many long, straight rows. In the days before Ramuwan, family members perform tend the graves, cleaning and decorating their relatives' graves, inviting the spirits coming home to enjoy offerings during the holidays. On the day of the grave tending, people dressed in the most beautiful costumes gather at the cemetery. Whilst men carry hoes, water cans and ceremonial items, women wear trays of betel nut (Thon Hala), made of bamboo, and rattan (Nđôn Ganhaong, also known as Nđôn Sula) and other kinds of offerings, holding a papyrus mat (ciew bang) for Acar dignitaries. They pull weeds, clean graves, and paint the stones white. The Acar dignitaries sat in a long line along the rows of grave stones, carry out self-baptism rituals and prayed to the saints for permission to perform the ceremony. After completing the baptism ritual, wearing costumes, wrapping towels, they perform the ritual of cleansing the graves, by pouring holy water (ia gar)⁴ on the tomb stone and reciting prayers. Next is the ceremony of applying a mixture of water and orange bark powder onto the stone slab (luk ia kalik spray kruoc). In the smoke of fragrant incense, the Acar dignitaries and the deacons of the clan sit in rows along the tombs, chanting long prayers drawn from the Kuru-un (Qu'ran) in Arabic language. People in the clans kneel, put their hands on their heads and bow in front of the graves of their ancestors and families.

The offerings in the ceremony of the tending grave ceremony are pieces of betel nut *Dam-Dara*,

³ The Cham Bani calendar is calculated according to the Sakawi (Saka Jawi) calendar - the Malay sect, so there are changes that do not coincide with the Islamic calendar in Arab Muslim countries.

⁴ The Cham people believe that this type of water has the ability to cleanse impurities, including water, agarwood powder and convex sand.

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areca and lime are embedded on half of a betel leaf. These pieces of betel nut were prepared by women in the families from midnight until morning. At the end of the recitation, the Acar dignitaries hand over to the clans, and everyone to pray and bow.

2.2.2. Unofficial ancestor worship (Da-a laba)

While the people perform the burial ceremony in the cemetery, some of the women who prepare offerings to the spirits of their ancestors invite the gods to enjoy the holiday at their home. Depending on the economic conditions of each family, offerings of the unofficial ancestor worship are simple or numerous. In the villages in the area of the ancient cemetery — Darak Anaih (the villages of An Nhon, Phuoc Nhon, Luong Tri), the offerings in the temporary worship ceremony are richer, including foods, fruit cakes, and wine. In the area of Bani people in the villages of Ninh Phuoc district in the area of Dil ancient cemetery (Son Hai), temporary offerings are quite simple, only 2 plates of salad (laba), grilled rice paper and a little wine.

The person performing the ceremony is an elderly man in the family. Unlike the Acar dignitaries who worship the Qu'ran in Arabic, in the ceremony in their families and clans, the worshipers pray in Cham language.

2.2.3. Official Ancestor Worship (Pambăng Muk Kei)

The official ancestor worshiping ceremony is held after the unofficial. The celebrant, who is an Acar dignitary chosen from the family line, must be familiar with the Koran (Qu'ran) and in the manner of the ceremony. Acar's vestment is a long robe (Aw lah or aw loak), dressed underneath in a white

skirt, and a red tasseled white scarf on his head (Akhan mbrăm taibi), he sits cross-legged on a mat (ciêw bang) to worship.

In the official worshiping ceremony, each turn of offerings to an ancestral spirit consists of two trays of offerings: a salty tray and a sweet one which stand for the two elements vin and yang in the culinary concept of the Cham people. The sweet tray is offered first, consists of 2 cups of tea, traditional cakes of the Cham people such as tet don cake (paynung), it cake, gan tay cake (sakaya), ginger root cake (ganraong laya). The salty tray includes plain rice, dishes such as vegetable soup, fish, meat, eggs, wine and beer. Offerings are served on a high-legged offering tray (salaw takai) lined with banana leaves. After each turn of offerings to each spirit, the celebrant burns a piece of incense and chants a sutra, then continues to make offerings to other spirits so that relatives in heaven are invited to enjoy the offerings on Ramuwan's day.

2.2.3. The fasting month of Ramuwan

After Kabur rak is the fasting month of Ramuvan. This lasts the entire ninth month of the Islamic calendar (also the Muslim month of Ramadan), the Cham call it the month of Ramuvan. During the month, the Acar monks confile themselves in the mosque, celebrate five times a day and were only allowed to eat two meals per day, brought by their families. The women bringing food to the mosque always wear high-legged trays (salaw takai) on their heads. Acar monks are only allowed to only at times when there is no sunshine (before sunrise and after sunset). In folklore, the Cham people call it the month of *Balan ok* (the month of fasting).

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During the month of Ramuwan, all believers in the village are not allowed to kill for 15 days before the month (the first half of the month until the day of the Muk trun Mass — 15 days after the opening night). After that, the Awal and Ahiêr believers were also allowed to make offerings in the mosque. Every night, at the time of the Eâsha (at 19:00), the villagers come to the mosque to pray and make offerings (the main offering is betel nut (Dăm-Dara).

Masses in a day at the mosque

The Acar monks during the month of fasting at the mosque must perform five Masses per day in the following order:

- Subahik at 4 am.
- Wahrik at 12 noon.
- O'ssarik at 3 pm.
- Garipbak at 17 pm
- Eâsha at 19 pm.

To perform these, nine Acars must follow the following rites: rites of purification (*Muk ia*), rituals of beating drums to open the ceremony, calling for ceremonies, and Masses. Before performing any ritual, the Acars must perform a rite of cleansing to purify the body and purify the soul. When performing the ceremony, each Acar monk hold a copper cup or kettle in their hand, scarves over shoulders, performs actions such as washing the body, then tying the scarf, adjusts their suites, and enters the hall to perform identification operations in the sanctuary (Kanraong). When the teachers were seated, they beat the drums to open the ceremony. After the drum beat, Acar, the celebrant, stand in

the middle of the mosque to perform *the calling ceremony*. Everyone loudly chant long prayers and after finishing, each person returns to their place of worship. Next is Mass (Kakuh). The celebrant (Ba kakuh) instructs the monks to perform prostrations and recite prayers for others to join in. During the ceremony, the Acar monks keep holding rosary beeds (yap anhuk) with their hands until the Praying Mass ended.

2.3. Feasts in the month of Lent Ramuvan

Beside the first day of the festival, in the month of Ramuvan there are the following festivals:

2.3.1. Muk trun (ceremony of the Grandma coming to Earth) held on the 15th night, after Mass, believers offer sweet offerings, gum, sticky rice, and bananas. After this ritual, Awal and Ahier relatives are allowed to kill and sacrifice in the house.

2.3.2. Oâng trun ceramony (ceremony of Oâng coming to Earth) is held on the 20th night, after Mass, parishioners make sweet offerings like the 15th night. In this festival, they also organise "Ikak dadô" for the children who are usually vulnerable and sick. After this ceremony, devotees perform Bu Allahâm ceremony, for the children who have passed the Katat ritual at the age of 15, the offerings are chicken porridge, baked rice paper, fruits and cakes.

2.2.3. Tuh brah (Rice offering ceremony) is held on the 27th day, parishioners bring rice to offer with the meaning of offering rice to deceased relatives. This rice is distributed to the families of the monks who cook rice to invite their relatives, the elders in the temple village to eat at dawn on

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the 1st day of the 10th month Muslim calendar.

2.3.4. Talaih (The Ending Ceremony of Ramuwan) is held on the morning of the 1st of October in the Muslim calendar, to thank Po Aâwloah and the gods for helping the Bani Muslims completing the fasting month of Ramuwan. Devotees offer two sweet and salty trays alike the Ancestor Worshiping ceremony.

3. The first step of learning the indigenous elements of the Ramuvan festival

Through trade relations with the island countries Southeast Asian countries, a part of the Cham adopted Islam around the 13th century, much later than the time of embracing Brahmanism and forming the Islam community in Cham group. After a long time of being separated from the global Islam community, the indigenous cultural elements in the Southeast Asian wet-rice agricultural culture of the Cham people arose, mixed and transformed into religious life, dominating the teachings and canon of Islam, forming a separate religion called Bani (Cham Awal community). Bani is a form of religion that embodies both Islamic elements and indigenous cultural elements in Southeast Asia. Ramuvan festival is the main and most important festival of an Islamic year. In this festival, it also showcases indigenous cultural elements. In the process of studying and comparing, there can be seen the indigenous elements in the Ramuvan festival of the Cham Bani with the Islamic festival of Ramadan (Islam).

The influence of the matriarchy: Islam is a patriarchal religion with quite clear gender discrimination. But for the Cham Bani, the matrilineal system is still maintained today. This influences quite a lot in religious activities. Unlike orthodox international Islam, women are not allowed to enter mosques but for the Cham Bani during the festival season, women play an important role. Women prepare the trays of offerings, wear the most beautiful traditional costumes, do not have to cover their faces, and put on very beautiful trays for the dignitaries to perform the ceremonies.

About Bani mosques: Bani mosques are built in the style of traditional houses of the Cham people. The form is much different from international mosques. However, a common feature is that the inside and outside of the mosque must be very clean. The inside of the mosuges are not decorated with pictures; it is a spacious and vented area. The sanctuary (Kanraong) placed in the center of the western wall is a decorated place for the Acars to recite the Kuru-wn (Qu'ran) during the fasting month of Ramuwan or the Friday Masses (Harei Jamu-at). The rest of the mosque is not decorated or displayed with images or idols. The atmosphere inside the mosque is always quiet, creating a sense of sanctity and holiness. Unlike Islamic mosques where women are not allowed to enter, in Bani mosques, women and children are allowed to. During the Ramuvan festival, women wear very large and beautiful trays into the mosque for the Cars monks to perform the ceremony.

About the name of the Ramuvan festival: In addition to saying from Ramadan to Ramuvan, the month of fasting is called Pambăng muk kei or Pandih oh. In the Cham language, the word pambăng muk kei means the ceremony of worshipping ancestors, or pandih ok (fasting). Since the

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month of Ramadan, fasting and worshiping Allah and Mohammed, the Cham people have combined with the ancestry worshiping ceremony, giving an opportunity to tend graves, commemorate their ancestors and celebrate family members' meetings. Therefore, it is gradually considered as the "Tet" of the Cham Bani community.

About the festival time: the ninth month (Islam calendar) is the period of Ramadan, also the pilgrimage to Mecca for Islams around the world. But the Cham Bani do not perform the pilgrimage like the Muslim Cham people in Ninh Thuan. It is noteworthy that three days before the period, the Cham Bani people carry out the ceremony of grave tending (*rao ghun*) and then ceremony of ancestor worshipping (*ew muk kei*). Moreover, the ceremony of grave tending and worshipping the ancestors are organised like a real festival. Throughout the Cham Bani villages, cultural, art, and sports activities are held, which are taboo for people of Islam (Islam).

About rituals: Beside the ancestry worshipping ceremony, during the fasting month of Ramuvan, the Cham Bani also hold *Muk trun* and *Ong trun* (ceremony of Gandpa and Grandmom coming the earth) which is absent in the Islamic month of Ramadan Cham. Furthermore, Bani people are allowed to kill animals to make sacrifices in traditional rituals.

Unlike the ceremony of giving alms (*jakhat*) to the poor in the Muslim month of Ramadam, the Cham Bani have a rice offering ceremony (*Tuh Brah*). This is a rice offering ceremony for deceased relatives, not indeed an alms ceremony. The meanings of these two ceremonies are completely different.

About Costumes: The costumes of the Bani dignitaries in the Ramuwan ceremony are traditional Cham costumes. They are much different from the costumes of Islamic monks, such as hats, tai bri, and scarves. The costumes of the followers and the Bani community during the festival are also traditional Cham costumes. Men wear white shirts and *khan aban* (sarong). Women wear Cham Ao Dai (Aw atah), skirt, and scarf. Cham Bani women do not wear the Mat'ra scarf like the Cham Muslims in the southern provinces of Vietnam.

About offerings: offerings in Ramuwan include a sweet dishe (*kaya mun*) and a savory dishe (*kaya mbak*). These offerings are daily products in the life of the Cham people and according to the consistent yin and yang concept of the Cham people.

4. Conclusion

Ramuvan festival of the Cham Bani people in Vietnam is an intangible cultural heritage, conserving many of the Cham traditional cultural values, that have been formed throughout the cultural history of the Cham people. The transformation from the worldwide Islamic holy month of Ramadan into a national folk festival is an interesting cultural phenomenon. It firmly confirms the theory of acculturation. Ramuvan festival holds many layers of culture, the mixing of the exogenous culture (international Islam culture) with endogenous culture (indigenous culture of Southeast Asian wet rice agricultural culture) is an interesting cultural phenomenon, complying with the law of cultural change according to the natural environment and the social context.

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Today, in terms of strong culture exchange. Unlike Islam, which is a major religion globally, with an unified organisation, canonical teachings, powerful religious dignitaries and extensive international relations, Bani religion is still only folklore, locality, lacks of organisation, lacks of rigor, so making it vulnerable and easy to be erased by modern cultural trends. Therefore, it is necessary to take measures to preserve the culture of the Bani religion in Vietnam — that is also preserving the cultural identities of Vietnam.

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