

RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES OF THE CHAM PEOPLE IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

The Cham ethnic group was one of the first to settle in Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City. The Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City has formed a distinct identity despite the fact that the population distribution is far from the original community and, at the same time, under the influence and influence of many other cultural flows. The local character contributes to the diversity and richness of Ho Chi Minh City's cultural and human characteristics. Economic activities, social organization, and religious activities are the most visible manifestations of this cultural feature. The process of forming the Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as the characteristics of their religious activities, are discussed in this article.

Keywords: Cham people, religious activities, Islam, Muslim, Ho Chi Minh City

1) INTRODUCTION

Ho Chi Minh City is an urban center with the largest concentration of population in the country, one of the important political, social and cultural centers of the country. They have very diverse ethnic origins of which the most prominent are residents of the Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer and Cham communities.

The Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City have a population of over 10,000 people, a part of the Southern Cham people distributed in the provinces of An Giang, Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Binh Phuoc, Binh Duong and Ho Chi Minh City. Like other parts of the Southern Cham community, the Cham people of Ho Chi Minh City share the same origin as the Cham people in Central Vietnam, who, due to historical upheavals, have migrated to Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia before a part returned to Vietnam (Tay Ninh, An Giang) from the middle of the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century. In Ho Chi Minh City, through the process of migration of the Cham people starting in the 40s of the twentieth century until now (Ja Samad Han, 2005), fifteen areas of concentrated residence of the Cham people have been formed; each area is a group of inhabitants gathered around a mosque (masjid or surau).

Unlike the Cham in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces, most Cham communities in Ho Chi Minh City are Muslim. It can be said that Islam has profoundly influenced the spiritual life and at the same time strongly influenced all cultural, economic and social fields of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City, thereby creating a distinct nuance. Within the

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scope of this article, present the process of forming the Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City, thereby referring to the characteristics of their religious activities.

2) LITERATURE REVIEW

In studies on Cham religion, specifically on Islam, research works refer a lot to the Cham community in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan provinces. Some works can be listed here such as: "Notes sur les Cham Bani du Binh Thuan – Center Vietnam" (P. Rondot, 1949), published in *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* (1949); "A study of the Islam Religion in Vietnam: With a reference to Islamic religious practice of Cham Bani" (Yoshimoto Y., 2012). The articles detailed the relationship between Cham Bani and Cham Islam and the rituals associated with the month of Ramadan. The book of "Cham Culture" (1991) by Phan Xuan Bien, Phan An and Phan Van Dop also focused on the religion of the Cham people. Nguyen Manh Cuong and Nguyen Ngoc Minh's "Cham people - initial studies" (2003), taking the research subjects as Cham people, but mainly focusing on studying Cham Muslims in Vietnam. Author Tran Thi Kim Oanh discussed two Cham communities: "Cham Bani" and "Cham Islam" in her book "Islam and Islam in Vietnam" (2013). She raised a hypothesis about the formation time of the Bani religion, its origin, its name and discussed the similarities and differences between these two communities.

Currently, research on the Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City does not have a comprehensive study on aspects related to culture, society, and religious activities. It is limited in a number of articles published in journals or as a topic in a book chapter, such as in the following.

Regarding the history of forming the Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City, it is necessary first to mention the research work of author Nguyen Van Luan: "Muslim Cham people in the Southwest part" (1974). The author described the issues of race, migrations of the Cham people, religious beliefs, social organization and family practices of the Cham people in Saigon and the Cham people in the West of Vietnam.

Another early research was "Cultural and social life of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City today" (Phu Van Han, 2005). In this journal article, the author described the current situation of Cham people's life such as: population, intellectuals, religious benefits to the cultural life of the Cham community living in Ho Chi Minh city. The author also offers some solutions to improve the cultural life of the Cham community.

To date, there is a lack of complete, systematic studies on the Cham religious activities in Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, this monographic article on the religious activities of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City with being the first to contribute to the future studies on the Cham community in general and on the Cham community's religious activities in Ho Chi Minh City in particular.

3) METHODS

The authors primarily employ the ethnographic research method in this article. I conducted a field survey and generalized the process of how the Cham community was formed in Ho Chi Minh City using this research method approach. In addition, we describe and analyze the characteristics of Cham religious activities. The in-depth interview, which is also used to interview religious dignitaries and believers in the Cham community, is one of the most effective tools of ethnographic fieldwork. Furthermore, the article employs the method of analysis, which entails synthesizing data sources and data related to the article's content.

Overview of the Process of Forming the Cham Community in Ho Chi Minh City

In Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City, the Cham community is one of the earliest ethnic groups. In the developing process of the ethnic group, the Cham people also experienced many historical changes and also established famous cities and ports in the past.

Since the population distribution has been far from the original community, and at the same time, being influenced and influenced by many other cultural flows, the Cham community in Ho Chi Minh City has formed a distinct identity. Local characteristics have contributed to the diversity and richness of the cultural and human characteristics of Ho Chi Minh City. This cultural factor is most clearly expressed through economic activities, social organization, and religious activities.

The Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City are now part of a community group from Chau Doc - An Giang. They are all Muslims. After 1945, due to wars, religious conflicts and natural disasters, they were forced to leave their homeland to live elsewhere. From Chau Doc, the Cham people went everywhere in the South, such as Tay Ninh, Dong Nai, Binh Phuoc... and mostly in Ho Chi Minh City.

Traditionally, the Cham Islam community usually resides in groups of families and has close relationships with each other such as people from the same hometown or close relatives. In the new lands such as Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City, they continue to live in groups in areas that are lowlands, muddy, near canals, and river berths. The gathering into residential clusters is very convenient for the community's religious activities and to help each other in daily life. The communities being on the edge of the canal helps facilitate trade, and at the same time helps for traveling in the city and going back to the old hometown of An Giang, such as Cham hamlets on Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe canal (ward 13, District 3), Cham village near Cong Ly bridge (ward 15 and 17, Phu Nhuan District), Cham village on Ben Nghe canal, Cham village in Nam Long area (ward 7, District 6). The lowland area near Ong Lon canal has Te Ban Cham hamlet (ward 1, District 8), Rach Ong bridge Cham hamlet (ward 2, district 8), etc. In addition, Cham people also live near markets, such as the Cham areas on Huynh Van Banh street, located next to Phu Nhuan market, Cau Kho Cham near Nancy market (District 1), Truong Minh Giang Cham (now Nguyen Van Troi market, District 3), Thi Nghe Cham area near the market Thi Nghe.

Due to the attractiveness of Ho Chi Minh City's developed urban, industrial and service centers, the Cham people have come there to make a living in many different professions. But because of their low level of education and skills, and limited capital, Cham groups in Ho Chi Minh City tend to live in poor working-class neighborhoods.

Currently, the Cham community living in Ho Chi Minh City is distributed as follows:

- 1) Cham community area in Hoa Hung (Cach Mang Thang Tam Street), ward 10, District 3.
- 2) Cham community area in Truong Minh Giang, Ward 13, District 3.
- 3) The Cham community area in U Tau, Ward 1, District 4.
- 4) Cham community area in Nguyen Trai, ward 11, District 5.
- 5) Cham community area in Xom Chi, ward 13, District 5.
- 6) Cham community area in Nam Long, ward 7, District 6.
- 7) Cham community area at Rach Ong bridge, ward 2, District 8.
- 8) Cham community area in Te Ban, wards 1, 2 and 5, District 8.
- 9) Cham community area in Binh Dong, Ward 19, District 8.
- 10) Cham community area at Cong Ly bridge, ward 15, Phu Nhuan District.
- 11) Cham community area at Huynh Van Banh Street, ward 17, Phu Nhuan District.
- 12) Cham community area at Tan Phuoc repair factory, Thu Duc district.

Particularly, the Nancy area (District 1), now Cau Kho ward, is one of the first residences of the Cham Muslims in Ho Chi Minh City.

The Cham people who came to live and do business in Ho Chi Minh City in the early days were usually men. After finding a job and a stable place to live, they moved their whole family to the city. Therefore, the migration of Cham people to the city gradually increases.

The migration process of the Cham community to Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City is divided into 3 phases:

Phase 1: From after the August Revolution in 1945 to 1968.

After 1946, due to the influence of the war, the Cham people living in the border areas of Cambodia and Chau Doc had to migrate to Saigon to take refuge. They lived in groups, temporarily in Nancy (District 1), Te Ban (District 8), and Chi Hoa (District 10). According to Nguyen Van Luan (1974), until 1964, the number of Cham people in Saigon - Cho Lon was 1,000 people. The Cham people migrated to District 6 during this period in waves, so the population at this time was in the process of increasing along with the immigration of the Cham people here.

Phase 2: From 1968 - 1975

After the great flood in the West region in 1966, the Cham people in An Giang were forced to move to Saigon to live. Each concentrated residence area had about 20 to 30 households, most of which had blood relations and neighbor relationships with each other.

Phase 3: From 1975-1989

During this period, the population of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City fluctuated considerably. According to City Statistics Office dated February 5, 1976, there were 6,607 Cham people in the city, mostly in District 1, District 3, District 8, and Phu Nhuan District (Thanh Phan, 2015).

Thus, the Cham people living in Ho Chi Minh City origins mostly from Chau Doc, An Giang province, so their social organizational structure was not much different from the social organizational structure of the Cham people in Vietnam. The only difference was that the urban environment and living conditions did not allow them to live in the Palei (villages) in An Giang. They gathered into population clusters called Jamaat (area), living alternately with the Vietnamese and other ethnic minorities such as the Chinese, the Khmer, etc. Each Jamaat had a leader called Hakim, next to it. Hakim had one or two Naeps (deputies) and Ahli (village chiefs). They are all Muslims, living in poor neighborhoods. However, the community cohesion of the Cham people was great because they all shared the same homeland and the same religion, so cohesion was easily formed in urban areas.

Characteristics of Religious Activities of Cham People in Ho Chi Minh City

In general, like the Cham people in the South, the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City strictly adhere to Islamic canon law and have a close relationship with the Muslim community in the world. Five basic requirements for practice that the Islam are adhered to by the Cham people include:

1. Believing in God Allah as the only Supreme Being and Muhammad is the last messenger of Allah, the founder of Islam.
2. Each day and night must pray (Sambahyang) enough 5 times.
3. Must fast (Ek) the whole month of Ramadan.
4. To give alms (Zakat) to help people who have more difficulty in life than themselves.
5. If possible, at least once in a lifetime, pilgrimage to Mecca (Saudi Arabia) to celebrate Haji.

Islam had deeply influenced the spiritual life, and at the same time strongly influenced all cultural, economic and social fields of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City, thereby creating the Cham society here with distinct social features. Thanks to the practice of the Islamic faith that the mosques (Masjid) become the center of community activities of the Cham. Every mosque in the Cham areas has Quran classes in Arabic letters for the children of the community, voluntarily undertaken by Cham teachers (Tuan). The lesson plan is prepared by the Tuan himself. At the city level, the Cham Muslim community has a Muslim Community Representative Board as a bridge between the government and the community.

The Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City call the mosque Masjid Islam. The word Masjid is derived from Arabic, meaning place of worship, place of worship of Muslims. They believe that Masjid is the name that Allah has given in the Quran. Each mosque in Ho Chi Minh City has its own name in Arabic with its own meaning, including the good things according to the concept of Islam. The mosques in Ho Chi Minh City were built with the contributions of believers. Therefore, the mosque is considered the common property of the Muslim community. There are two types of shrines:

- 1) Large mosque: called Masjid, built in the East-West direction, with a harem (Mihrab) often decorated, beautifully carved, so that when worshipping, worshipers face the holy place of Islam - Mecca.
- 2) Minor cathedral: called Surau, also known as the chapel. These are houses that are often used as places of prayer and meetings.

In Surau there is no harem, usually only a wooden platform (Minbar) where Khotip stands to give teachings. Currently, in Ho Chi Minh City, there are 9 churches (Masjid) and 6 minor churches (Surau):

- 1) Nancy Cathedral at 459B Tran Hung Dao, District 1
- 2) Jamia Al Musulman Cathedral, No. 66 Dong Du, District 1. This cathedral is also known as Cantina cathedral or Dong Du cathedral. This is the largest mosque in terms of architecture in Ho Chi Minh City, attracting a large number of domestic and foreign Muslims working and residing in Ho Chi Minh City come to pray.
- 3) Phu Nhuan Cathedral, No. 52 Nguyen Van Troi, Phu Nhuan District. Here, the Cham community is mainly from Chau Giang and Lam Kinh hamlet (Chau Phong) in An Giang.
- 4) Al Rahim Cathedral, 45 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, District 1. This mosque is more than 100 years old, built by Muslims of Buwean Malay origin, Indonesia to live in old Saigon. In addition, Al Rahim Mosque is also known as Balai cathedral or Buwean cathedral.
- 5) Haiyatul Al Islam Mosque, No. 317/75 Cach Mang Thang Tam, District 10. When it was first built, it was just a surau; and later it was upgraded and remodeled into a mosque.
- 6) Jamia Alasadah Mosque, in Nam Long area, District 6. Some Muslims currently residing in District 8 also often come to pray.
- 7) Jamia Al Anwar mosque, in Te Ban area in Ward 1, District 8. Most of the Cham here are from Koh Tabong in Khanh Hoa commune, Chau Phu District, An Giang province.
- 8) Al Muwahhidin Mosque, in District 9. This mosque was built in 1995.
- 9) Al Jamia Cathedral, also known as Masjid Nguyen Trai or Cho Lon, 651 Nguyen Trai, District 5.

The mosque of the Cham people is always the most sacred and sacred place in their life. The cathedral is both a place of religious activities and a place of traditional cultural activities of the Cham people.

For religious ceremonies at the community level, Cham Muslims in the community must go to Masjid. On the occasion of festivals, especially the Ashoura festival (January 10 of the Islamic calendar) to thank God for giving people food and food, some Cham people when coming to the mosque also bring food to share with others. They believe that these gifts are blessings that God gives them. Cham Muslims believe that human beings are always under the control of God. They also believe in angels. For them, an angel is someone who has been assigned by God to observe all human actions and report them on the last day of judgment. Cham Muslims believe in the last day of judgment. On that day, all human acts while alive are listed and subject to God's judgment. Those who fulfill the obligations of Islam will be rewarded, go to Heaven (surga) and vice versa, will be punished and sent to Hell (norka). That belief encourages them to do a lot of good things so that later on, they will be rewarded by God and go to Heaven for a lifetime of happiness.

The Muslim Cham people also consider the Qur'an to be the moral standard on which to judge issues. Therefore, what is consistent with the Qur'an will be accepted by the Cham community as a sacred truth. They believe that the Qur'an contains the foundation of social principles, is the "greatest, most intelligent book" containing all the "truth and knowledge" of mankind. Therefore, every important event in life must necessarily begin with the recitation of the Qur'an. According to the concept of Cham Islam, placing a Qur'an in the house will avoid all disasters. When traveling, they believe people must carry with them the paper or leather samples with quotes from the Qur'an to make amulets.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, the Cham people always have to keep themselves clean and undergo trials. They have to fast all day, and are only allowed to eat, drink, and smoke at night. They are not allowed to sing, play, or have sex, not allowed to kill, fight, or quarrel, etc. On the last day of Ramadan, the Cham people hold the Raja Iadil Fitrah ritual to celebrate the community and themselves who passed the test during the month of Ramadan. After days of hunger and thirst, they understand poverty and the desire to eat and drink in daily life, through which they know and sympathize more with the poor. On this day, the community gathers at Masjid to thank God for blessing them during Ramadan. Everyone forgives each other's mistakes. After that, they visit the grave and pray for the deceased. On this occasion, they also visit and congratulate each other.

Every year, on the 12th day of the month of Rabiul Awal (March of the Islamic calendar), the Cham Muslim community celebrates the birth of the Messenger of Allah. They believe that Muhammad is the one who enlightened and passed on the best beliefs in this world. They reminded each other to follow the teachings of this Messenger. This is also one of the important festivals of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City.

Tolakbala ritual is held on the last Wednesday of the month Safar (February of the Islamic calendar) every year. The Cham people believe that, at this time, God sends disasters to the world, so they have to ask God to give them peace. Tolakbala is held at noon right at the center of the community to pray for God's blessings.

Due to the profound influence of Islam, the traditional customs of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City have changed radically. In contrast to the Cham Bani in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan, who still retain the matriarchal system, the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City have switched to rather evident patriarchy. Here, the son goes to ask his wife whether he is in-law or not, but the children must follow the father's last name. Marriage with a different ethnicity is also acceptable, provided that the bride or groom who is a non-believer must voluntarily converts to Islam. Girls are not allowed to have sexual relations freely, are not allowed to talk to any man outside of their family alone, and when they leave the house, they

are usually accompanied by a mother or an elderly woman. Pork/pig, dog meat, the meat of forbidden and dead animals, fat, the blood of animals in general, are strictly abstained according to the halal principle. Meat, such as chicken, duck, beef and other animals that are allowed to be eaten, must be cut off by Muslims themselves, and in the process of cutting blood must recite a passage in Arabic. That's why when they have to go out and can't eat at home, often Cham Muslims have to go to eateries specializing in selling halal dishes for Muslims.

Regarding mourning, the Cham people believe that the present life is temporary. Therefore, when someone dies, family members and relatives are not allowed to mourn, drape, or build an altar because they consider it is an arranged thing. When someone dies, they will notify other members to come and prepare for burial and join in prayer for the deceased person. The living person must wash the dead person thoroughly, called Mayit. As a rule, men bathe the male Mayit, and the women bathe the female Mayit. Then Mayit was wrapped in layers of shrouds called Kaphan. The shroud used for the shroud must be white. Men are covered with 3 layers of fabric and women are covered with 2 layers of cloth covering the whole body. Mayit is placed on the side, with the head facing South for male Mayit and North for female Mayit. After that, everyone conducts a prayer ceremony before being buried. When taken to the grave, Mayit will be tilted to the west and covered with soil. After the burial is completed, the deceased person's family, relatives, and friends gather to pray continuously for 3 nights, then stop until the 7th, 40th, and 100th dates from the date of burial. After that, it stopped completely, and there was no longer any form of ritual related to the deceased person. They also do not hold an annual death anniversary because the Cham people think that "death is just a long sleep to wait for the final judgment day of God".

Regarding commemorating the deceased person, the Cham people believe that the human being is composed of two parts including body and soul. When a person dies, the human body will decompose, while the soul comes out of the body to continue to exist around the human world. Therefore, the living people do not offend the souls of the deceased people. For the ancestors of the family, their family line, they often remember and organize visits in the last days of Ramadan. Although there is no longer a form of worshipping an anniversary, the family can organize a party to invite relatives to attend when they have good conditions. This is also an opportunity to pay respect to the deceased person and the filial piety and gratitude of descendants to their ancestors who gave birth and raised them.

Regarding abstinence, the Cham people have a lot of abstinence in life. In the house, they do not hang images of people or animals. They put all their faith in a single God that is invisible and cannot be described by any image, that is why they can only revere in imagination. Therefore, in the family, they do not hang pictures including the remains of the deceased person because they are afraid that the images themselves will distract from the faith.

Regarding the costumes of the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City, it is a combination of many factors. First of all, that is the traditional inheritance of their national costumes and then influences of ethnic costumes from neighboring areas. When interacting with guests or going out on the street, Cham women wear scarves on their heads to cover their hair and do not wear veils like Arabian women.

In terms of language, the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City and the Cham community in the South have different variations and characteristics compared to the Cham people in the Central region, although the two regions can still understand each other. However, there is a big difference in writing. While the Cham students in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan are learning the Akhar Thrah script derived from a Sanskrit system in southern India, the Cham Muslims in Ho Chi Minh only learned Akhar Qur'an and Akhar Jawi using the Arabic alphabet system.

Of course, not all aspects of the Cham people's life in Ho Chi Minh City have been transformed and modeled after the Muslim community in the world. While some fine customs of the Cham people are still inherited and preserved, such as: simple funerals, praying for the dead, Cham women absolutely do not have to use the veil which is common in Muslim Arab countries and in some South Asian regions. The birth of the Prophet Muhammad is also celebrated in the Cham's own way. Yet, in general, most aspects of the Cham's life have been strongly shifting towards integrating into the Muslim community in Southeast Asia.

Today, talking about the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City and the South, it is impossible not to mention Islam, just as when it comes to Islam in Vietnam, the Cham people must first be mentioned. Also, because of their attachment to Islam and all community activities that take place in the mosque run by the Board of Education, the Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City have so far remained a relatively closed community; authorities at all levels as well as researchers, cultural and art activities can hardly succeed if they infiltrate into the life of the Cham community without the consent and guidance of dignitaries or people with knowledge of the matter and reputation in the community.

3) CONCLUSION

Cham culture is an important component of the city's diverse and multi-ethnic culture in Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City, contributing to the enrichment of the city's common cultural assets. The majority of the Cham Muslim community in Ho Chi Minh City is from Chau Doc, An Giang. The majority of Cham people in Ho Chi Minh City are Muslims who follow the Qur'an as their religious guide. They unite Islam's five fundamental pillars. The Cham Islam community has significantly contributed to the enrichment of the City's general cultural nuances during the process of co-living with the Vietnamese and Chinese communities, as well as throughout the history of the city's development.

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