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**The Khmer Dance Art in the South of Vietnam:
THE TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION**

**Major: CULTURE STUDIES
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SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

1. Reasons for choosing the thesis

The vital cultural element in the spiritual life of the Southern Vietnam - Khmer is dance, the study of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance is urgently conducted under both in theory and practice.

Firstly, through the process of existence and development, Khmer people have created dances to diversify intangible cultural assets, including: classical dance, traditional dance and folk dance. In each form, there are many different types of dance, associated with its own performance environment: Some are reserved by the community as entertainment activities; There are dances preserved in the framework of customs - practices, religious rituals. The most special is the classical dance, which is preserved and performed with sincerity by the ethnic Khmer. In addition, Khmer people in the South also have three types of theaters including: *Ro-bam*, *Du-ke* and *Di-ke*. In each of these types of stage, dance is integrated, enhanced, regulated, showing distinct characteristics.

Secondly, before the whirlpool of modernization - integration led to many changes, including Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance. Many traditional dance forms are no longer performed. Some artisans who have practiced dance in traditional rituals are old, and some have passed away; the younger generation cannot inherit this dance form because there is no teaching class, and sometimes they are not interested because of the lack of a performance space. The penetration of contemporary art forms from the West has influenced Khmer dance art. Some traditional Khmer dances are now modified by choreographers, losing their inherent unique cultural characteristics and values.

The previous studies on Khmer dance were almost in the direction of Art Studies or majoring in Theory and History of Theater, this study chose to research Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance in Culture Studies. It can be said that there has not been a work until now that studying Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance in two aspects: tradition and change.

2. Research purposes

The thesis clarifies the characteristics and values of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance and explores the cultural changes in the current Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance.

With the topic “*Khmer dancing art in the South of Vietnam: THE TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION*”, there are two research questions: What are the typical characteristics of traditional Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance? What are the outstanding changes in Southern Vietnam - Khmer Dance nowadays? From the above two questions, the thesis proposes two research hypotheses: First, through the existence and development of the ethnic Khmer in the South of Vietnam, there is a dance style with the color of farming culture (characteristics of sacred dance mostly using hands). The second hypothesis: the process of modernization and integration has changed the culture of ethnic communities, and the ethnic Khmer in the South of Vietnam has also had a influence; however in a certain aspect, this process does not create uniformity, dissolve or destroy the traditional culture of the Khmer. Instead, by Southern Vietnam - Khmer behavior (based on the traditional cultural background, the development trend is defaulted by ethnic cultural traditions), the Khmer have created new forms of cultural practice in the modern dance.

3. Participants and scope of research

Participants: The thesis studies Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance: tradition and specific changes in three dance forms, including classical dance, folk dance, and theater dance.

Scope of the research: Two provinces: Tra Vinh and Soc Trang.

Research duration: after 1975, when there were many documents, and materials focused on the ethnic Khmer.

4. Research methods and sources

Qualitative research methods: fieldwork, observation, participation, experience, in-depth interviews with researchers, and historical retrospective interviews on dance performance by performers, dancers, artists, etc. The thesis collects information, data, and statistics on dance activities at Khmer troupes in Tra Vinh and Soc Trang Provinces.

Comparative method: We compare and contrast to clarify the movement and change of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance in both synchronic and chronological aspects. This method realizes the movement and development of Khmer dance in the South of Vietnam.

Interdisciplinary approach: applying an interdisciplinary approach to the bordering sciences of the social sciences and humanities: anthropology, sociology, and art studies. The systemic - structural approach helps the thesis approaches Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance according to the system: cognitive culture - behavioral culture in Khmer dance practice: The thesis researches Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance: tradition and specific changes in three dance forms, including classical dance, folk dance, and theater dance.

In addition, the thesis also uses common field work or field trips in scientific research, including: collecting and synthesizing previous research works, articles, and scientific topics to systematize theoretically and find suitable theory applied to the thesis, combined with interpretation and argument.

5. Scientific and practical significance

Clarifying the basis for the formation of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance in two aspects: the natural basis and the social basis.

Specifying the characteristics, meaning, and value of Southern Vietnam - Khmer traditional dance in three forms: classical dance, folk dance, and theater dance.

Analyzing and evaluating the change in Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance in the contemporary social context.

6. The structure of thesis

Besides the introduction, conclusion, references, and appendices, the thesis is structured into three chapters:

Chapter 1: Overview of literature review, theoretical and practical basis (60 pages)

Chapter 2: Characteristics and Values of traditional Southern Vietnam - Khmer Dance (50 pages)

Chapter 3: Transformation of Southern Vietnam - Khmer Dance (40 pages)

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BASIS

1.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1.1. Theoretical research group

1.1.1.1. Studies by foreign authors

White. Leslie A, Kutyrev V. A. *Culture studies and Culture of the Twentieth Century*; A.A. Radughin, *Cultural Studies lectures* translated by Vu Dinh Phong from the original Russian *Kulturologia*; Donald A. Macdonald with the research paper "Field: Collecting oral literature" and Bryman with the research paper "Interviews in qualitative research" in the work *Culture Studies - Research Methods* (Institute of Culture) - Information, 2007); Michael Pickering (editor), Nguyen Van Ha (translated 2018), *Research methods for culture studies - Culture studies*, Dan Tri Publisher. The documents on theory and methods of foreign authors presented above help us approach and inherit the following contents: qualitative method, fieldwork, attendance, and interview along with theory practical application function in the thesis.

1.1.1.2. Research by domestic authors

We approach the theoretical research on dance including *The Art of Dance* by Le Ngoc Canh; Do Van Khang (2001) *Art Studies*, National University Publisher, Hanoi. About the theoretical work on the approach to Art and Culture: "Cultural studies of art as a specialty of Culture Studies" published in *the Journal of Culture - Art*, No. 10, 2006 by Phan Thi Thu Hien. The thesis researches in cultural and artistic approach: studying the works and art of Khmer Southern dance, thereby showing the culture that has been produced, and nurtured and the environment in which dance has been performed off Southern Khmer.

1.1.2. Group of practical research works

1.1.2.1. Studies by foreign authors

a. Research on the ethnic Khmer and their culture

According to the author Truong Luu, foreigners who have studied Khmer culture include: Barrault, Francois Martine, Louis Malleret, and Georges Máspero, the magazines France-Asia, Extrême-Asia have had many articles about Khmer culture. However, the above documents usually do not distinguish between the Khmer in Cambodia and the Khmer in the South.

b. Studying traditional arts with the presence of dance

This thesis contact with the works of the authors, including Pich Tum Kravel, Preap Chanmara, the National Assembly of Cambodia, etc. These works present the traditional theater types: *Di-ke*, *Ba-sac*, *Khol*, and some other types of theater. The thesis uses the above documents to reflect on the traditional arts of the Khmer in the South.

c. In-depth study of Khmer dance art

Chap Pin, Peach Sol, Li Them Ten, Sdon Thu (1964), *របាំប្រជាប្រិយខ្មែរ (Khmer folk dance)*, Institut Bouddhique Publisher, Cambodia; Meam Si Na Ret, Nup Thida, Som Chan Thuong (2003), *Pestle dance*, UNESCO, Campuchia; Pruong Chean, Keo Ma-lis, Em Su-thi, Nup Thi-da (2002), *ក្បាច់មូលដ្ឋាន របាំប្រពៃណី១២ក្បាច់ (Basic traditional dance with 12 movements)*, Japan Foundation Publisher. From the above in-depth materials, the thesis compares with Southern Khmer folk dance to find similarities and differences.

1.1.2.2. *Researches by domestic authors*

a. Research on the ethnic and Khmer cultures

Before 1975, Le Huong had the work of Vietnamese origin as a panorama. After liberation, the study of Khmer people and culture in the South received more attention: Huynh Ngoc Trang, Dinh Van Lien, Thach Voi, Hoang Tuc, Phan Thi Yen Tuyet, Phan An, Truong Luu ... wrote about people, material cultural life, spiritual culture of the Khmer people in the South of Vietnam.

b. Studying traditional arts with the presence of dance

Many authors (1981), *Traditional culture and arts of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta; About the Khmer Southern traditional theater* (1998); In 2009, there was a research paper "Performing art of Khmer people in the South" by Dao Huy Quyen published in *the Vietnam Journal of Social Sciences*; In 2011, Hoang Tuc with his research work on *Southern Khmer Performing Arts*. In 2013, the issue of researching traditional Khmer Southern theater arose again, attracting the attention of many researchers, and leading to a conference science: *Theatrical art of Khmer Southern Khmer - National cultural heritage*. The above works help to generalize the people, culture, and art of the Khmer in the South, especially the content of the works. This refers to traditional arts with the presence of dance such as *Du-ke*, *Di-ke*, and *Ro-bam*.

c. In-depth study of Khmer dance

In 2004, Le Ngoc Canh had a research paper: "The Ancient Khmer dance art of Southern Khmer"; In 2012, Son Ngoc Hoang had the project "*Understanding the Khmer Dance Arts*" theater art of the Southern Khmer in Soc Trang province, jointly implemented by the Department of Science and Technology of Soc Trang province and the School of Culture and Arts; In 2013, Le Ngoc Canh announced the work of *Traditional Khmer Dance in the South*; In 2014, the Master's thesis: *Classical dance in the Khmer Khmer Roman theater in Soc Trang* by Lam Vinh Phuong; Recently, in 2017 there was the project "*Dancing in the Roham and Du-ke stage of the Khmer people in the South*" by Tran Thi Lan Huong.

General comment

First, about the group of theoretical research works, foreign and domestic authors have provided the necessary scientific theoretical premises, through which the thesis applies to practice the thesis implementation in the approach Arts and Cultural theory. This study uses qualitative, field, and participatory, interview methods.

Second, about the group of practical research works, this paper systemizes the works of foreign and domestic authors according to three contents: Research on ethnic and Khmer culture; Research on traditional Khmer art with the presence of dance; In-depth study of Khmer dance. The above works have made certain contributions by pointing out the characteristics of Southern Khmer dance art.

1.2. THEORETICAL BASIS

1.2.1. Dance and cultural studies and arts approach

1.2.1.1. Dance: is an activity that uses body language by moving movements in music to express thoughts, feelings or exercise the body.

1.2.1.2. Culture studies and arts approach

Culture is a broad category and in which art is one of the fundamental institutions of culture, having many-way interrelationships with culture. When choosing to study art from the perspective of culture studies, it is necessary to choose an approach to art culture. The researcher needs to identify culture studies and art studies as one of the fundamental institutions of culture, which, in its multi-dimensional

interaction with culture, has formed in the area of intersection between Art Studies and Culture Studies.

1.2.2. Ethnic culture

“Ethnic culture is the general elements of language, writing, material, and spiritual cultural activities, psychological and emotional nuances, customs and rituals... that make people discriminate among ethnic groups; ethnic culture is the foundation for the emergence and development of ethnic consciousness” (Ngo Duc Thinh, 2005, p. 107). In other words, ethnic culture is the material and spiritual cultural values that have become deeply imprinted symbols in the emotions and ideas of that ethnic group; and have the characteristics of distinguishing from other ethnic groups.

1.2.3. Regional culture and culture

In the book *General Culture and Cultural Foundations of Vietnam* (1996): “A cultural region is a whole - a system with a structure - system including sub-systems or sub-systems according to the systematic approach”. (Tran Quoc Vuong, 1996, p. 401)

In the book *Vietnamese Culture in the Southwest* (2014), Tran Ngoc Them defines a cultural region as follows: “A cultural area is a continuous cultural space in which a unified cultural subject exists, and that subject acts in the same direction for a sufficiently long cultural period, creating a particular value system that allows the distinction of the region in question from the regions concerned”. (Tran Ngoc Them, 2014, p.45)

1.2.4. Tradition

“Tradition” is a Sino-Vietnamese word. According to Le Gia: Tradition is: “Giving to many subsequent generations. The word “thống” is a clue. Continuing in the order” (Le Gia, 1999, pp.1278).

1.2.5. Cultural change

According to the definition in the *Vietnamese Dictionary* (2002): “Change is to transform into a different from before”. (Institute of Linguistics, 2002, p.64)

Cultural change is understood as the movement of the whole society. Cultural change takes place in many dimensions and has many factors (*political, economic, cultural exchange.*), depending on the community itself as well as having a significant influence on the people in the community itself. there. The object of research in the thesis

"Southern Khmer Dance" is not an exception to cultural change, when the Southern region is currently under the strong and continuous impact of trends and transitions. society.

1.2.6. Theory of cultural relativity and historical specificity

Cultural relativism was born in America, associated with the role of the German-American anthropologist, Franz Boas (1858-1942). Applying the theory of cultural relativity and historical characteristics in this thesis, we identify no culture without influences from other cultures. When considering the value of Southern Khmer dance, it should be placed in the context of cultural practices (*i.e. natural conditions, historical characteristics, and socio-economic circumstances*) such as knowledge of wet rice agriculture. in creating dances, creating Khmer dance movements based on nature, animals and plants, etc. The thesis emphasizes the general analysis principle in understanding Southern Khmer dance practices.

1.2.7. Some terms

1.2.7.1. *Classical dance*, Tiếng Khmer gọi là: រតន្ត្រីបុរាណ (*Rô-băm Bô-ran*), is a combination of two phrases "Rô-băm " and "Bô-ran" "Rô-băm" means dancing or a dance. "Bô-ran" means: ancient, old, ancient, long-standing, pre-existing.

1.2.7.2. *Folk dance*, known in Khmer as: រតន្ត្រីប្រជាជន (*Rô-băm Pro-chia-prây*), "Rô-băm" and "Pro-chia-prây". "Rô-băm" means a dance or a dance. "Pro-chia-prây" means folk, people, etc. This is a type of dance created by people through the process of labor, production, dance and singing activities in community activities, festivals.

1.2.7.3. *Dance in theater*: The term "drama" or "stage", in Khmer is called ល្បីក្រាម (*L-khôn*). In the South of Vietnam, the Khmer still exist three types of *L-khôn*, including: *L-khôn Rô-băm*, *L-khôn Dù-kê* và *L-khôn Dì-kê*. In these types of theater, dance still exists as its characteristics.

1.3. PRACTICAL BASIS

1.3.1. Population and residential areas

The Khmer population in Vietnam through Government surveys has increased in number. The Khmer are present in most of the provinces and cities in the country, but the population distribution of this group is concentrated in the Southern region, but most are in the

provinces of the Southwest region, also known as the Khmer people. Mekong Delta. We agree to use the latest census data of the General Statistics Office published in 2020: The total number of Khmer people in Vietnam is: 1,319,652 people (*over 1.3 million people*).

1.3.2. Material culture

1.3.2.1. Eating:: First of all, it is shown in the way of choosing food according to the season: the dry season and the rainy season. Second, reflected in the meal structure: The traditional meal of the Khmer is rice, vegetables, fish and salted fish. Particularly at parties, blessings, anniversaries, traditional New Year, they organize meals to treat guests solemnly.

1.3.2.2. Wearing: Former Southern Khmer men and women all wore silk sarongs they woven themselves. Today's youth class likes to wear casual pants with a shirt. In particular, in traditional festivals and weddings, Khmer men and women wear traditional clothes.

1.3.2.3. Accomodation: There are two architectural styles in the house on stilts and the house on land. Today, due to economic development, a number of Khmer households in the South have building houses, the walls are decorated with special traditional patterns or modern patterns. The residence unit of the Khmer in the South is called "phum" and "sroc" (soc). The Khmer people still live on the basis of the pagodas.

1.3.3. Intangible cultural

1.3.3.1. Beliefs and religions

Belief: The Khmer people in the South have animistic beliefs, ancestor worship beliefs, fertility beliefs (*Ling-ga, Yu-ni*), stone worship (*Neak Ta*), and guardian gods. They believe that in the peaceful life and production of individuals, families, and clans, they have protected by a powerful supernatural force such as A-rak. , *Neak Ta (god of stone)*, *Tevoda (god of care of the world)*, etc.

Religion: Previously, the Southern Khmer followed Brahminism; then Theravada Buddhism accompanied the nation, along with the development history of the ethnic group. However, some rituals as well as images of Brahminism still exist faintly in today's community.

1.3.3.2. Customs and festivals

The customs and traditions of the Khmer people in the South are plentiful and unique. Most festival customs are associated with

productive labor, family, society, the "Phum Sroc" community, and religious activities.

1.3.3.3. Arts and Literature

Folklore: prose divides into spoken and written. In terms of rhyme, it is also abundant, favored by the Khmer because of its attractive lyricism.

Art: there is performing arts (singing - dancing - music with the same type of stage as *Rô-băm*, *Dù-kê* và *Dì-kê*); Visual arts (sculpture, painting).

1.3.4. Establishment of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance

1.3.2.1. Natural condition

a. Natural characteristics contribute to the formation of dance themes: admiration for the power of nature, so natural elements (*sun, moon, wind, rain, water, earth, fire*) are respected by ethnic Khmer and elevate to: 𑄎𑄓𑄂 (Phreah) means "god". Many dance performances are created by Khmer people with the theme of praising the power of natural elements; To pray the natural deities to protect for their life in peacefulness and safety, such as: dancing for worshiping the moon, dancing for rain, fire dance, and dancing for the land god. (*Rô-băm Neang Hing*), dance the power of the Moon-god (*Rô-băm Ba-ra-mây Phreah Chan-tria*).

b. Animals and plants contribute to the formation of dance movements: Dancing imitates animal behavior and realistic images through observing the growth of plants. It can be seen that, based on natural conditions, people have both imitated the movements of nature and animals to create dance movements that make up the artistic characteristics of the ethnic group.

1.3.2.2. Social facilities

a. Indigenous cultural background includes: Folk beliefs - Formation of sacred dance; Activities of customs, practices, and festivals forming folk dances; Folklore (*myths, fairy tales, legends*) is the content of Southern Khmer dance.

b. Indian religion and literature include Imprints of Brahmanism in the formation of Khmer dance art; Imprints of Buddhism in the formation of Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance art thinking; Imprints of Indian literature in the formation of Southern Vietnam - Khmer - dance - art.

c. The relationship between Cambodian dance and Southern Vietnam - Khmer dance includes The relationship of co-ethnicity; Bilateral relations in two national territories.

d. Impressions of Chinese martial arts in dance in Du-ke: shown in Dance Huon. This choreography influences the Dance of Comedy (*Hu Quang of Chinese*).

e. Western dances - The basis for the formation of modern folk dance: *Cha-cha-cha*, *Madi-zon*, *T-vis* influences in Western. However, these rituals create and modify to suit ethnic and cultural characteristics.

Sub-Conclusion Chapter 1

(1) The researcher read, and systematized previous research works related to the thesis. The researcher grouped into two large groups: The theoretical research group and the practical research group. Within each group, the researcher continues to divide into groups of domestic and foreign authors.

(2) Carrying out this topic, the Ph.D. student follows the approach of culture studies and applies theories about ethnic culture, cultural regions and regional cultures, and cultural change theory; clarifying the application of cultural differences, cultural relativity theory, and historical specificity in the thesis.

(3) On practical basis, the PhD student presented the premises of the Khmer culture in the South of Vietnam: Names of ethnic groups, population and population distribution, tangible culture, and intangible culture of Southern Vietnam - Khmer people. To clarify the basis for the formation of Khmer dance in the South, the researcher developed into two aspects: the natural characteristics and social background.

CHAPTER 2. CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUES OF THE SOUTHERN KHMER TRADITIONAL DANCE

2.1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOUTH KHMER DANCE

2.1.1. Classical dance

2.1.1.1. Content - form: mostly focusing on the gods in the Brahmin religion, praying for their help and blessings for peace and happiness in human lives. The performer of the Ro-băm dance is a female dancer (*no male dancers*). The female role dancing in Ro-băm is called Neang, and the male role is called Neay-rong (*female pretending to be male*). In classical Khmer dance, the most easily identifiable audience is the costume, crown/mask, and dance props.

2.1.1.2 Body language and movements: The dance language in Khmer is called *Phia-sa Rô-băm*, and the dance moves in Khmer are called *Kai-vi-ca Rô-băm*. Before dancing to the classical form, Khmer dancers must learn through Bat Bô-rane. There are six groups of dances in Rô-băm, namely: Male dance group (*Neay-rong*); Female dance group (*Neang*); Monkey dance group (*S-va*); Ogre dance group (*Yeak*); Dance group of animals; Clown group. This dance form has the identifying feature that from fingers to toes, each has its voice and meaning. Through classical dance language, dancers can communicate with gods. It is a means to help dancers express their emotions of joy, anger, love, shame, communication, and emotional exchange between people.

2.1.1.3. Music: In classical Khmer dance, there are three types of performing music, including Five-tone music, *M-hô-ry* music, and *Rô-băm* stage music (*Vong Ph-lêng Rô-băm*)

2.1.2. Folk dance

2.1.2.1. Content - form: belonging to folk cultural activities. Performers are workers (farmers, actors, artists). The specific system of Southern Khmer folk dance forms: Belief - religious dance and custom-festival dance (*sacred substance*); Dance for exchange, communication, entertainment, and daily work (*worldly substance*).

2.1.2.2. Body language - movements: The language of Khmer folk dance movements often does not carry many deep meanings, mainly depicting realism or artistic stylization expressed in simulated movements. Over time, the Khmer have systemized their own rules on the language and basic movements of folk dance (Khmer called *Bat*

Pro chia-pray) including regulations on hand, foot, and 3 beats *Rom Vong*, 4 beats *Rom Vong*, *Rom K-bach*, *Rom Nhop (Lăm Liêu)*, *K-bach A-lê*, *K-bach A-lum-phum-phat*, *K-bach Phu-mia*, *Si Nuôn*, *Đom Nơ Sêk*, *Chao Pream*, *S-va Li Thmo*, *Ton Sôn*, *Panh-nha Đơ*.

2.1.2.3. *Music*: *A-răk* music for *A-răk* dance; Wedding music (*Ph-lêng Kar*) for dancing in the wedding ceremony, *Chhay-yam* music for *Chhay-yam* drum dance; Music for dances: *Rom Vong*, *Rom K-bach*, *Rom Sa-ra-van*, *Rom Lăm Liêu*, *Rom Ta-lung*. With the characteristics of open-exchange music and dance, though modern or old music, Khmer people can dance.

2.1.3. Dance in the theater stage

2.1.3.1. *Content - form*: At first, *Du-ke* was influenced by the *Rô-băm* stage, so the first play of the *Du-ke* stage was *Riem-Ke*. According to Sang Set (2019), there are 72 plays of Khmer Southern *Du-ke*, including 13 plays with ancient themes from folk tales, 52 plays from fairy tales; and 7 plays with modern themes. Particularly, the content of *Di-ke* mostly plays *Tum Têv*. Form: *Du-ke* and *Di-ke* are originally from theater performances, so the singing element runs through the performance. Dance in this type only acts as a supplement to the actors' actions and has many forms such as illustrative dance, atmospheric dance (*many people dancing*), and character dance of good and evil (*few people dancing*).

2.1.3.2. *Body language and movements*: *Du-ke* uses *K-bach Huon* choreography (magic movements) for each character; each role is different (*the protagonist and the villain*). The *Di-ke* uses *K-bach L-boi* (*gliding hand movements*). From the character action elements in the script stylized to the gestures, instinctive movements, creative improvisation, and development according to music; *Du-ke* and *Di-ke* also operating dances in Khmer culture (*classical dance, folk dance, and religious dance*) make Khmer theater more attractive. Although dance does not play a dominant role in theater productions, dance art in *Du-ke* and *Di-ke* has added aesthetic color to the work; dance helps to unite the characters in a dynamic state, create splendor for the stage and raise the level of the script.

2.1.3.3. *Music*: *Vong Ph-lêng Ba-sắc* has the main instrument as *Trô U Chom-hiêng*. The tunes of *Du-ke* include *Som Pông*, *Luôm*, *Phách Cheay*, *Nokor Reach*. In addition, *Du-ke* also received the music of

other art forms as well as the influence of some other ethnic groups. *Vong Ph-lêng Di-kê* has the *S-kôr Lăm* drum and the *Trô U* which are the main instruments in the orchestra. The tunes of the *Di-Ke* stage include the ancestor worship song with tunes: *Đao Lê*, *Cha Oh-ra-nô-nô*, *Sa-thu-kar*, *Ting Ka-bông*, *No-rê*.

2.2. VALUE OF THE SOUTHERN KHMER DANCE

2.2.1. Epistemological value (Integrity)

2.2.1.1. Sacredness

The dance performances show respect for the gods and the solemnity of the ceremony. Instead of worshipping *Siva* like in India, the Khmer people in the South worship the construction god (*Phreah Pissno-kar*). Before dancing, Khmer people are grateful to the teacher (*Rum-luk Kun Kru*). Music is considered the soul of sacred dance and has the role and function to lead the celebrant to perform sacred dance movements.

2.2.1.2. Harmony of Yin and Yang

The Khmer perceive a body (*Kh-luôn Pran*) and a soul (*Prô-lung*). When Buddhism was introduced, the Khmer community received and imbued with the philosophy that life is temporary, they believed that there was a place called "*Nirvana*" (*Niêp-pean*).

Samsara (animals and plants)

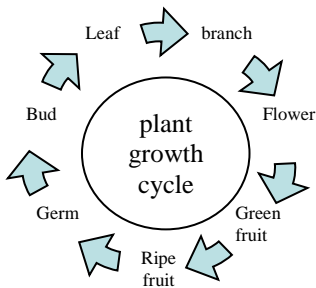


Figure 2.2: Growth life cycle model of plants.
Source: Son Cao Thang.

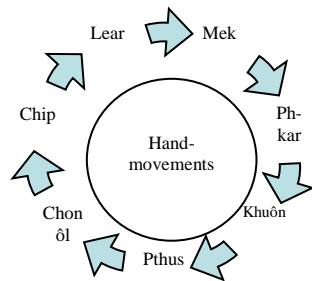


Figure 2.3: Names of dance collaborators corresponding to the plant growth cycle.
Source: Son Cao Thang.

Harmony of Yin and Yang shows dance with male and female; palm up (*yin*), palm down (*yang*). In the traditional collective singing dances: *Rom Vong*, *Lăm Liêu*, *Ta-lung*, *Chôk Kom-pus.*, flexible upside-

down hands intertwine signifying the tangerine and continuity. Footsteps in an even and odd rhythm..

2.2.2.3. *Femininity*

Females have chosen to be dancers for classical dances in classical dance and the *Ro-bām* stage, the female role dancer is called *Neang*, and the male role model is called *Neay-rong*. The most important festival events in Khmer culture are open art performances by classical female dancers.

2.2.3. Ethical values (Compassion)

2.2.3.1. *Peace and tolerance*: Khmer people often greet each other with "*Som-peas*". There are five ways to greet each other to show respect, respect for elders, respect for women, depending on the dance form, they use the appropriate greeting. In classical dance: bowing on the head (*showing respect or gratitude*) and bowing in front of the chest show peace and calm. Besides, the civilized lifestyle is reflected in the barrier dance: announcement, protection, and predestined relationship. Sharing spirit in Khmer dance (*the dancers not only the Khmer community but also guide other communities to participate in the dance*).

2.2.3.2. *Solidarity and goodwill*: expressed in dance (*Rom Vong*), music is connecting dancers and viewers. The dance in labor also teaches people solidarity, by working together to conquer nature (*the male dancers follow the form of a closed circle to catch fish*). Although there are good and evil roles, not all elves represent the villain. In particular, there is also a role of a clown (*non-protagonist and non-antagonist*). The motif of killing octopus often appears in Khmer ancient dance. Khmer people promote goodness by building the image of the monkey *Hanuman* (*a brave, heroic, chivalrous, brave, and loyal character*).

2.2.4. Aesthetic value (Excellence)

2.2.4.1. *Appearance beauty*: Curves in dance movements, the most obvious feature of classical Khmer dance is the bent fingers, bent wrists, and sometimes even bending the elbows. It is a concept of the beauty of curvature and points. The harmony and balance in dance forms: classical, folk, dance on the stage in terms of aspects such as each type of dance has its musical forms, specific, not mixed, ancient costumes classical dance service, folk costumes serving folk dance.

2.2.4.2. *Inner beauty*: beautiful in the way the dancers perform, most of them are gentle people, gentle from words to actions, with pure temperament.

Sub-Conclusion Chapter 2

(1) Characteristics: there are three forms of Khmer dance in the South (*classical, folk, and in theater*). We analyzed the content - form, body language - movement, and music of each dance form.

+ Classical dance: The content is about fairy characters, Taoists, kings, and royalty. Form: Classical dance performance and classical dance drama. Body language - movements: *K-bach Bat Boran* or dance movements of the characters (*fairies, humans, ogres, monkeys, Krud*). Music: 5 tones *Orchestra, String Orchestra, and Rô-băm Orchestra*.

+ Folk dance: the content talks about the people's activities in folklore. Forms have three groups: Belief-religious dance; Traditional dance festival; Dance exchange, communication, entertainment, and daily work. Body language - movements: *K-bach Bat Pro-chia-pray*. Music: using characteristic string orchestras.

Dance in theater: Contents of fairy tales or stories in modern society. Form: *Du-ke* and *Di-ke*. Regarding dance language: *Du-ke* uses the *K-bach Huon* dance system; *Di-ke* uses *L-bôi*. Music: *Du-ke* uses the *Ba-sac orchestra*, and *Di-ke* has *Skor Lam* as the main instrument.

(2) Southern Khmer dance has epistemological value (*Integrity*) expressed in sacredness, the harmony of yin and yang, and respect for women; Ethical (*Compassion*) values show in harmony - tolerance, solidarity - good direction, beauty in Southern Khmer dance; Aesthetic values (*Excellence*) reflect in the external beauty and the inner beauty in Southern Khmer dance.

CHAPTER 3. CURRENT TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN KHMER DANCE

3.1. BACKGROUND AND CAUSE OF CHANGE

3.1.1. Background: besides the traditional culture, the Khmer have absorbed and integrated the cultural quintessence of other ethnic groups (*opened structure of culture*); The cultural products of the era are applied by the Khmer in the traditional theater. Currently, Khmer dance art has developed, but it is inevitable to be influenced by many objective and subjective reasons.

3.1.2. Causes

3.1.2.1. Space, environment changes

First, *the folk environment*: countryside scene, banyan tree, wharf, gourd trellis, the landscape of Phum Sroc, Neak Ta house, or pagodas of Khmer Theravada Buddhist.

Second, *stage environment*: each type of stage has a different environment and scene. Previously, the scene of the backdrop was painted by Khmer artisans, artists, or painters on canvas with different materials. Modernly, with the development of led technology, led floodlight products are commonly used.

3.1.2.2. Awareness

+ *Simplify traditional rituals*: In the past, some traditional dance forms have been absent, such as the ancestor and Arak dance. Some rituals and ritual dances were lost gradually. The culture of worshiping ancestors and dancing is seen differently (*in the community and by some individuals*)

+ *Gender stereotypes*: Women, often dance corresponding to beauty, meekness, grace, flexibility - yin, including classical dance. In classical dance, there are no male dancers, men only join in folk dances, dancing with masks and clowns.

+ *Age of dancers*: dancers must be trained from a young(6 to 12 years old), but when recruited into a professional troupe, they are more than 18 years old, so it is difficult to practice classical dance.

+ *Dancers and audience*: Previously, the dance was almost stable, the artists only cared about how to dance evenly, to be flexible and beautiful. Currently, it has to be extended to suit the requirements of the audience. The extra awareness in traditional dance is the core of breaking the old form.

3.1.2.3. Practice

Creative subject: Khmer dance is popular, meaning folk creation. The role of dance creators in the Khmer community is usually relatively stable and long-lasting. Currently, there appears the term choreography (*individual role*); the choreographer's thinking develops traces of personal creativity.

Performers: Khmer people or non-Khmer people. Folk dancers, often perform stereotypically; professional dancers are those who express the entire choreographer's creative intentions. However, art creators and program directors who do not understand or care much about Khmer cultural identity are also one of the reasons. Their dancing understanding levels have not met the specific characteristics of traditional Khmer dance.

3.1.2.4. Cultural Exchange

First, *changes in Khmer dance movements:* Some Khmer art troupes in the South still retain the inherent characteristics of traditional dance movements. Besides, Khmer dance movements are created in combination with traditional dance movements in ballet dance, shrugging, hip-shaking, etc. Some dance movements have circus elements: acrobatic movements, carrying, calving, supporting, or standing on the body to form many layers (*Rô-băm Kon-đôp-ses - mantis* dance)

Second, *changes in Khmer dance music:* some places still keep the traditional string orchestra when dancing, sometimes open music files or live music concerts (*Western music*).

Third, *changes in dance costumes:* instead of wrapping *K-Binh*, some Khmer art troupes proceed to sew *K-Binh* pants to wear. *K-Binh* pants (garment) costumes are often highly stylized, and diverse in colors and designs (sometimes a bit flamboyant), not as the cultural identity of traditional *K-Binh* costumes.

3.1.2.5. Subsistence economy

In the past, more than 90% of Khmer people worked in agriculture, but today they have changed their economic structure. A part of agricultural laborers have switched to non-agricultural workers, hired workers, and engaged in services. Therefore, the preservation of traditional cultural values becomes passive. When Khmer holidays are not work-leave days, Khmer people have no conditions to practice

cultural dancing (*they cannot participate in festivals and dancing*), leading to the disappearance of traditional cultural values of the ethnic group.

Currently, in the Khmer community, a type of secondary livelihood is being formed, which is performing *Ream Ke* through dancing activities of Ogres and monkeys in ceremonies, especially New Year celebrations (*Chol Chnam Thmay*) with the meaning bring to Khmer people a joyful, happy atmosphere, belief about a peaceful life.

3.2. THE CHANGE OF THE SOUTHERN KHMER DANCE

3.2.1. Classical dance

Content - form: In the past, actors or dance directors understood very well the characters and plot while performing. Nowadays, the local dancers do not know the story of the epic *Ream-ke*; the large-scale *Ro-băm* perform the epic *Ream Ke*, is also gradually disintegrating. The performing duration of the *Ro-băm* is shortened to suit the conditions, the audience's enjoyment, or the specified time of a contest. Classical dance costumes are now being renovated and ready to be performed, but they do not guarantee the aesthetics and usefulness of the costumes.

In particular, there is currently a situation of men dressing up as women to dance in classical Khmer dance. Another aspect, the choreographer and dancer do not understand the characters that they are dancing to, so the costumes are not right according to the story.

Body language - movements: some standard elements in classical Khmer dance are gradually being popularized and popularized (outdoor stage or no platform); dancers are playing the role of fairies performing the act of kneeling prostrate to those who are eating food in restaurants or bars.

Music: Currently, there is a combination of tradition and modernity in the construction of dance music (*sometimes using an Organ to mix music, or using traditional music but complementing West instruments while making Khmer dance music*).

3.2.2. Folk dance

Content - form: Folk dances in the community with dark costumes, bared faces, or farming dance performances are worn in festival costumes; Dancing to catch fish, and catching shrimp traditionally uses *Xa-neng*, *Ong-ruth*, now replaces a basket. The Khmer

dance barefoot, but some "*pagan*" choreographers allow them to wear shoes or socks while dancing.

Body language - movements: Khmer dance shows the beauty in curves and the hands are not higher than the head. However, some people do not understand the meaning, so they do it carefree.

Music: Especially forming a live music culture in the community activities of the Khmer in the South. The Khmer's passion for singing has made live music a popular art.

3.2.3. Dance in Theater

Content - form: myth, fairy tale, folklore. Due to the characteristics of theater, singing, and dialogue are the main ones, dancing is just an auxiliary activity. Therefore, the art of dance in theater is only patchwork, appearing in a short time, with little investment in lines and formations. Limitation on duration: Even though a theatrical program wants to convey all the content of a play, it must be arranged in many broadcasts. Otherwise, the lack of continuity makes it difficult for the audience to enjoy. The use of modern scenes with led lights in the studio to perform classical plays is not very effective.

3.3. EFFECTS OF THE SOUTHERN KHMER DANCE CHANGES

3.3.1. Positive transformation

3.3.1.1. Adding new diversity in the practice of Southern Khmer dance culture

First: *Forming the choreography "K-bach Huon" featuring dance in the Du-ke stage with the colors of Khmer - Chinese arts.*

These are stage dances that take the martial arts of the Khmer and Chinese as the foundation, amplify and stylize them to perform into a series of conventional, symbolic, very flexible and powerful movements; showing the beauty and great creative mind of Khmer artists in the South of Vietnam. These movements are called Huon or Huône. (Thach Thi Omnara, 2014, p.191).

Second, Forming a modern folk dance with colors of Khmer-Western cultural exchange: besides the traditional dances of ethnic groups such as *Rom Vong, Rom Saravan, Rom K-bach, Rom Lam Lieu, Ta-lung* there are also Western influences dances such as *Cha-cha-cha, Tango, Madi-zon, Twist*. Music of the above dances, instead of dancing in the background of Western original music, the Khmer people flexibly harmonized that tune with their national musical instruments such as

Ph-leng Pin Peat, Ph-leng M-ho-ry or sometimes there is a combination of traditional music including musical instruments: *Tro, Chapai, Rooneat* with Western instruments such as Guitar, Organ.

3.3.1.2. *Enhancing the characteristics of Southern Khmer dance in the cultural life of the Khmer ethnic group*

First, *Improving performance techniques shown in dance movements and dance performance techniques, in addition to keeping the traditional features, also incorporates circus elements.* Currently, besides retaining the traditional inherent characteristics of the movement system, some dance movements have circus elements: acrobatic movements, carrying, calving, supporting, or a dancer standing on top of the rest of the dancers, clinging to form layers or stacking people into layers; hand and foot positions are flexibly combined. All these techniques are applied by choreographers in building new Khmer dance work.

Second, *Modernizing the space and environment for Khmer dance performance:* applying advanced technologies of science and technology such as backdrop stage, projection screen, lighting, led lights, and scenery.

Third, *Diversity in content and form of Khmer dance:* Currently, the dance of the Khmer ethnic group in the South has strongly promoted, not only in terms of genre, and quantity but also quality, not only with different ancient, myths and legends themes, but also topics reflecting the present life. Positive changes are reflected in the lineup, the dance line, and the composition of the work.

Fourth: *Khmer folk dance material is applied creatively:* Traditional folk dances (which are danced in daily life and rituals) have been systematized and enhanced by Khmer dancer artists; enhancing the aesthetics of these folk dances so that stage dances become professional dances. It is worth noting that many materials of Khmer folk dance have been put to use in the theater forms of *Ro-bām, Du-ke, and Di-ke*, combined with classical dances of the royal dance to the increase the unique artistic value of dance in the above three types of theater.

Fifth: *Establishing a remarkable Khmer dance achievement:* Recognition of program quality and performance quality.

3.3.2. Limitations

3.3.2.1. *Disappearing Traditional Khmer Dances*

First: *Oblivion of A-rak dance*. Khmer people no longer do *A-rak* dance to pray for worship or treat diseases like in the past.

Second: *Skipping the dances in the traditional wedding ceremony*. The younger generation shortens the wedding ceremony to focus on welcoming guests, so there is no space and time for traditional dance performances in the wedding ceremony.

3.3.2.2. *Distorting of traditional Khmer dance characteristics*

First: *Deformation and hybridization of Khmer dance movements*. Folk dances have absorbed the unique quintessence of royal movements such as the *Devi* - standing movement (*the flying fairy movement*). About hybridization: using the ballet (*Western*) in Khmer dance, the movement of arms and legs in *Kinh* dance is used in Khmer dance.

Second: *Distortion in Khmer dance music*. The combination of tradition and modernity in the construction of dance music (*sometimes using an Organ to mix music or using traditional music but with Western instruments accompaniment while making Khmer dance music*). Currently, in the art of *Ro-bām* dancing, the *Sro-lay* trumpet instrument rarely appears; several *Ro-bām* teams at pagodas and *Phum Srok* such as *Yeak Rom* in *Srok Cha*, *Yeak Rom* in *Tap Son (Tra Cu district)*, *Yeak Rom* in *Diep Thach Pagoda (Tra Vinh City)*, *Yeak Rom* in *Ba Si (Cang Long district)* replacing the *sro-lay* trumpet with the harp.

Third: *Deformation of dance costumes*.

+ Change of fabric: Classical Khmer dance costumes often have many layers of fabric and there are many ways of folding the fabric such as 07-folded fabric (*Som-pot Pram Pi Ph-not*), and Banana blossom cloth (*Som-pot Tro-don-chek*). Instead of choosing *Cho-ro-bap* or *Phamuong*, designers of Khmer dance costumes nowadays often choose to buy *Kate* or *Si bong* fabrics in the market to make it more convenient. It can lead to Khmer dancers wearing unflattering or too thin such as in lotus dance (*Ro-bam Ph-kar Chuok*).

+ Change the form: In addition to the patterns woven in the fabric, some artists who design dance costumes also attach beads to make the costumes brighter and more sparkling. There are some aspects of the inappropriate use of clothing in *Ro-bām* dance. The Southern

Khmer *Ro-băm* has distinctive colors and is broadcast on the VTV5 channel. However, the characters play as elder brother Prince *Phreah Ream*, the younger *Phreah Leak*, and *Seda* princess dressed in costumes of royal dance (*Ro-băm Phreah Reach-trop*).

Sub-conclusion Chapter 3:

1) Background and causes: Khmer dance is in the general context of present society. Regarding causes, we analyze aspects such as space and environment changes; Perception; Practice, and cultural exchange. The elements show that the current Southern Khmer dance subjects have changes in dance movements, dance music, and dance costumes.

2) The manifestations of dance change are shown in 3 forms classical dance, folk dance, and in theater, revolving around the issues of content - form, body language - movement, and music.

3) Consequences of changes manifest in two ways.

+ *Positive*: Adding new diversity in the practice of Khmer dance culture in the South (*Forming the "K-bach Huon" choreography, featuring dance in the Du-ke stage with the colors of Khmer- Chinese martial arts*); becoming a modern folk dance with colors of Khmer-Western cultural exchange. At the same time, improving the characteristics of Southern Khmer dance in the cultural life of the Khmer ethnic group today (*Improving performance techniques expressed in dance movements and dance performance techniques, and retaining the traditional features, also have a weak combination of circus elements; modernized Khmer dance performance environment; diversity in content and forms of Khmer dance*)

+ *Limitations*: Disapering a traditional Khmer dance (*A-rak dance and custom dance in the traditional wedding ceremony*). Distortion of traditional Khmer dance characteristics (*movements, music, costumes*).

CONCLUSIONS

The thesis “*Khmer dancing art in the South of Vietnam: THE TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION*”, concluded with three chapters of studying issues related to theory and practice. These conclusions are not only answering to the research questions and scientific hypotheses of the thesis but also show the newness of this research work.

(1) The thesis followed the approach of Culture Studies and Arts, concepts related to dance, tradition, and applied theoretical frameworks including the theory of ethnic culture, the theory of region of culture and culture in areas, the theory of cultural change, cultural relativism and the historical specificity. The thesis contributed to clarifying the contents of the Khmer ethnic group, the place of residence, and the movement of the Southern Khmer dance.

(2) Affirming that Southern Khmer dance, which is plentiful in content and diverse in form, exists in association with Khmer life. The thesis explained the terminology of each dance form, and dance characteristics in three groups of directions: content - form, body language - movement, and music.

(3) Clarifying cultural values of Khmer ethnic people through dance: epistemology (Integrity) expressed in sacredness, the harmony of yin and yang, and respect for women; Ethical values (Compassion) showed in harmony - tolerance, solidarity - good direction, beauty in Southern Khmer dance; Aesthetic value (Excellence) reflected in the external beauty and the inner beauty in Southern Khmer dance.

(4) Research results showed that Southern Khmer dance transformed. Through analyzing the context, the causes and the manifestations of changes through three forms of Khmer dance were found. The thesis analyzed the consequences of changes in both positive and negative visions. On the positive of change: the transformation added new diversity to the practice of Southern Khmer dance culture and improved the value of Southern Khmer dance in Khmer culture. On the other side, the changes: the disappearance of traditional Khmer dances and the distortion of traditional Khmer dance characteristics. In general, the thesis “*Khmer dancing art in the South of Vietnam: THE TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION*” has solved the research goals.

LIST OF WORKS RELATED TO THE THESIS

- [1] Sơn Cao Thắng (2016) “Sự biến đổi xã hội của đồng bào dân tộc Khmer, thành phố Trà Vinh trong quá trình đô thị hóa” (Social transformation of Khmer ethnic people, Tra Vinh city in the process of urbanization)
- [2] Sơn Cao Thắng, chủ nhiệm đề tài nghiên cứu khoa học cấp Trường (2017) *Nghiên cứu chế tác mũ, mặt nạ múa cổ điển của người Khmer Nam Bộ* (Head of university-level scientific research project (2017) *Research on making traditional masks and crowns of Khmer people in the South*)
- [3] Sơn Cao Thắng (2017), “Tri thức dân gian của người Khmer Trà Vinh trong sáng tạo nghệ thuật biểu diễn” (Understanding of Khmer Tra Vinh people in performing arts creation)
- [4] Sơn Cao Thắng (2017), “Tri thức của người Khmer Trà Vinh trong chế tác mũ, mặt nạ phục vụ nghệ thuật biểu diễn” (Knowledge of Khmer Tra Vinh people in making crowns and masks for performing arts)
- [5] Sơn Cao Thắng (2017), “Bảo tồn và phát huy di sản nghệ thuật biểu diễn truyền thống Khmer bằng hình thức đào tạo tại trường Đại học Trà Vinh” (Preserving and promoting the heritage of traditional Khmer performing arts by training at Tra Vinh University)
- [6] Sơn Cao Thắng (2021), “Nghệ thuật múa trong sân khấu Rô-băm của người Khmer Nam Bộ” (The art of dancing in the Khmer Southern Khmer theater)
- [7] Sơn Cao Thắng (2021), “Nhận diện biến đổi văn hóa truyền thống qua nghệ thuật múa Khmer Nam Bộ hiện nay”. (Recognizing traditional cultural change through modern Southern Khmer dance).