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DANH ÚT

**CHANGES IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF
KHMER THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS IN
THE SOUTHWEST REGION**

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THE ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

1. MOTIVATION OF RESEARCH TOPICS

The Mekong Delta or Southwest subregion is a subregion located in the lower Mekong peninsula which is a newly discovered land with a favorable location for exchanges, contact with other cultures such as India, China, and even Southeast Asia. On the other hand, this land is also home to many communities living from other places such as Kinh, Khmer, Hoa and Cham. Ethnic communities who came to settle in the new land brought with their own customs, culture and beliefs that helped the local culture, making the cultural, religious life of the Southern and Southwest region people more diverse and rich.

For a community, religious activities depend heavily on political and economic factors, cultural life and social conditions. A community tends to be organized and have operating rules, so the transformation in cultural life is an obvious fact to the general development rule of society, which is systematic - homogeneous. Obviously, it is very difficult to preserve the original traditions of a religious organization in the context of a constantly evolving society like our country today. Religion must transform itself to adapt to the evolving social environment and to survive in accordance with the world's rules of movement. Those are the common socio-economic problems of the whole community, not only individuals, but also the Khmer Theravada Buddhist community. For Khmer people, pagodas and monks play an important role in community life. If community life changes, it will lead to changes in monk's life through religious interaction - communication channels.

Khmer Theravada Buddhism has developed over the centuries, although there is a mixture of Eastern and Western cultures and beliefs, most Khmer people in the Southwest region have preserved their traditional cultural and religious identities. In the context that the country is constantly developing in many fields, many religions are intertwined that make the cultural life, especially of Khmer Theravada monks, always affected by many influences. Theravada Buddhism of the Khmer people in the Southwest region is an entity existing in the residential community. The Khmer Theravada Buddhist monk community is very large in number and has great contributions. However, the research on this community is still very limited; especially the aspect of changing the cultural life of Khmer Theravada monks in the contemporary social context.

For Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, daily activities are studying, reading and saying Buddhist chants or walking around collecting alms. It

seems that nothing has changed, but the inner values in the monks' life have changed, which follows the general development rule of society. The changing social life conditions affect the living conditions of monks, especially changes in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region.

Currently, in Vietnam, there have been a number of monographs studying the culture of the Khmer people and Khmer Theravada Buddhism but there have been no specialized studies on the cultural life and activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks. Therefore, the author chooses the topic "*Changes in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region*" as the topic for Cultural Studies doctoral thesis, with the hope that it can contribute to scientific achievements.

2. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

2.1 Related works on Khmer people

Up to now, research works on Khmer people have mainly focused on historical and cultural aspects, most notably customs, art, and community life. The researchers pointed out the close and parallel relationship between Buddhism and the traditional socio-culture of the Khmer people in the Southern region.

2.2 Related works on Khmer Theravada Buddhism and Cultural activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

The research works provide quite in-depth research in some aspects of Theravada Buddhism in the process of integration and development. They delved into the understanding of Khmer people in the Mekong Delta as well as cultural life, traditional education of the Khmer in the Southern region. From different views, these research works have mentioned many aspects related to Khmer culture, the role and influence of Southern Khmer Buddhism on the lives of the people in the Mekong Delta. Thereby, a fairly comprehensive picture of the natural features, history of the land, residence and activities of ethnic groups in the Mekong Delta was formed that helped us to have many documents to reference.

3. TARGET AND MISSION IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Target implementation

The thesis studies the changes in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region. Specifically, the thesis identifies changes in the material and spiritual cultural life and points out the positive and negative aspects of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks. Thereby, it proposes some recommendations to meet the needs of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks and improve their life today.

2.2 Mission implementation

To accomplish the mission, this thesis focuses on solving the following three research tasks:

- Firstly, survey and build theoretical and practical basis
- Secondly, identify the causes and nature of important changes in the material and spiritual cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, thereby initially determine the projections of future changes
- Thirdly, evaluate the impacts of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks' cultural life changing process in terms of Buddhist practice, propagation, and social inclusion.

4. OBJECTIVE AND SURVEY SUBJECTS

4.1 Objective

The thesis objective is the changes in the material culture and spiritual culture of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region.

4.2 Survey subjects

Survey subjects in this study are:

- Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks (abbots, bhikkhus, novices, etc. by position and age).
- The Administration Council of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in the provinces and districts.
- Patriotic United Buddhist Association.
- Leaders of departments and unions.

5. Scope of the study

5.1 Area range

The study focuses on 07 areas: Can Tho city, Tra Vinh province, Soc Trang province, Vinh Long province, Bac Lieu province, An Giang province, and Kien Giang province.

5.2 Time range

Our research time focuses on the period from Theravada Buddhism beginning to be introduced into the Khmer community until now (2021) in order to clarify the changes in cultural activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks' life from tradition to the present day.

6. RESEARCH METHODS

During the survey, we applied qualitative research methods, 12 in-depth interviews; quantitative research with 300 sociological questionnaires (convenience and purposeful sampling) to collect data for this thesis.

6.1 Synthesis and document analysis methods

Systematic literature reviews

6.2 Quantitative research methods

Select a quantitative survey sample

The main data source used in this thesis is from the survey results conducted by the author in November 2020 and April 2021 with 37 pagodas in a total of 07 areas selected for the survey by systematic sampling method with many stages and steps as follows:

Step 1: Select area range. Based on the consultation of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and Patriotic United Buddhist Association, the author selected 7 provinces and cities out of a total of 13 provinces and cities in the Southwest region, including: Can Tho city, Tra Vinh province, Soc Trang province, Vinh Long province, Bac Lieu province, An Giang province, Bac Lieu province and Kien Giang Province.

Step 2: Determine a sampling frame. Based on the Khmer pagodas which have lots of monks listed by Patriotic United Buddhist Association of provinces and cities, the results found 37 pagodas with a total of 837 monks.

Step 3: Select a survey sample. Based on the list of 37 pagodas in the sampling frame. Select a systematic sample with a sampling interval $k = N/n = 837/300 = 2.79$ (where N is the sampling frame, n is the sample size to be selected).

6.3. Qualitative research methods

Select sample for in-depth interview

To get more information and a multi-dimensional view on the issue of cultural change in the material life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, the author used an in-depth interview tool with 12 interviews.

7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

7.1 Research questions

To complete this thesis, the author focuses on the following two main research issues:

First, what are the basic changes in the cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region today?

Second, what are the main causes that create changes in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks?

7.2 Research hypothesis

The first hypothesis: Changes in the cultural activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks have been taking place in many material and spiritual aspects.

The second hypothesis: Culture is always closely related to the environment, economy and society. These factors constantly affect community cultural activities to create changes in appearance and internal structure.

8. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE THESIS

The doctoral thesis aims to make the following basic contributions:

Scientific contributions:

The thesis contributes to supplementing the theoretical basis of contemporary religious studies about changes in the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks.

- Practical contributions:

The research results of the thesis can be used as a reference source for researchers, teachers and students. This will be a new reference source to the study of Khmer Theravada Buddhism in the Southwest region.

9. THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Theoretical basis and overview of the Khmer people in the Southwest region

Chapter 2: Changes in the material cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region

Chapter 3: Changes in the spiritual cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region

Chapter 4: Consequences of changing cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region today

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL BASIS AND OVERVIEW OF THE KHMER PEOPLE IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

1.1 THEORETICAL BASIS

1.1.1 Related concepts

1.1.1.1 Culture

- *Cultural definitions from Western perspective*

- *Cultural definitions from Eastern perspective*

According to prof. Tran Ngoc Them, “Culture is an physical system of material and spiritual values created and accumulated by humans through practical activities, in the interaction between humans and the natural environment and society”

Some other scholars such as Tran Ngoc Them, Dang Nghiem Van, Ngo Van Le, etc also divide culture into 2 fields of material culture and spiritual culture. In which, material culture is the material products created by people in the labor process, including: tools of labor, weapons, means of transport, houses, constructions, and architecture. Spiritual culture is the product of human's intellectual labor created during the development of human history, including habits in productive labor such as customs, regulation, art, culture, religion, etc.

Thus, in this thesis, we agree with the cultural division of authors Dang Nghiem Van, Tran Ngoc Them, etc. that material culture is a product created by humans such as clothing, travel, eating, etc., while spiritual culture is the creativity in working habits such as beliefs, customs, thoughts, etc.

1.1.1.2 Spiritual culture

In terms of culture, spiritual culture is one of the important factors, which is reflected in the creation of culture by people in their working process. The formation and development of different cultures of each nation, each country cannot lack their core, which is spiritual culture.

The spiritual culture of society has a special place in the series of cultural phenomena. Spiritual culture appears on the basis of social existence; it is one of the basic contents of social consciousness.

From the above analysis, it can be generalized: spiritual culture is the totality of spiritual values created by human beings by their labor in the spiritual production field.

1.1.1.3 Material culture

The concept of material culture has a wide connotation with many different ways of understanding. Basically, it is possible to divide the cultural structure into three components, including cultural values, cultural activities and cultural products. These elements do not work individually but interact with each other in all the material and spiritual life aspects in a certain cultural environment to form the culture of the same subject: that is human. Material culture is an element of culture, so it is always inherited. Inheriting the material values of the previous generations creates stability and a premise for affirming new values

1.1.1.4. Cultural change

Cultural change is a process through which the patterns of activities in terms of social awareness, communication, behavior between people and the social environment, and the way in which community activities are constantly changing over time. Like in the natural environment, all human activities are constantly changing. The cultural activities of people in the community are always changing and due to frequent exchanges, it is constantly changing within itself.

1.1.1.5 Cultural life

The cultural life of monks is the life associated with pagodas, places of worship, places of religious practice, cultural exchange activities of monks with the social environment. It has an impact on material conditions to constantly develop. In addition, the exchange of Buddhism Sects with each other also led to changes in the lives of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in all areas of life, including culture.

1.1.1.6. Theravada Buddhism

Starting from India, Buddhism spread to South Asia including countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Southern Vietnam.

This Southern sect of Buddhism has many different names such as Southern Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, Pre-sectarian Buddhism, Hinayana Buddhism, Pali Buddhism. The second sect spread to Northeast Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc., and also has many different names such as Northern Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, Sanskrit Buddhism, etc.

In Vietnam, there are two sects of Buddhism, one originated from the North and the other from the South. The Southern sect, when it entered the South of Vietnam, was welcomed by a large number of ethnic communities living in the area, including the Kinh and Khmer. Therefore, until now, the term Khmer Theravada Buddhism is used to distinguish it from Kinh Theravada Buddhism.

1.1.1.7 Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, a monk is a spiritual person who vows to be ordained for the rest of his life, subject to certain abstinences and has a different lifestyle from ordinary people. This term is commonly used with Catholic dignitaries. Men are called monks and women are called nuns. Currently, the term monastic is used to refer to people who are ordained to practice religions, including Buddhism. According to the regulations of Buddhism, when entering the monastery, the cultural life of the Bhikkhus (tỳ kheo) must follow the Buddhist precepts. They are the four precepts (four grounds for the bonds of fellowship) that the bhikkhus must learn from the beginning when they are newly ordained.

1.1.2 Research theories

1.1.2.1 Cultural ecology theory

We apply the Cultural ecology theory to explain the changes of phenomenon in the cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks as compared to before, the changes of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks' culture in the process of coexistence with other ethnic groups in the Southwest region, gender perspectives and even issues of space and time in the cultural life of Khmer people in the Southwest. At the same time, the theory also partly explains the reasons why cultural life has changed rapidly and strongly in the process of integration.

1.1.2.2 Rational choice theory

In this research, we apply the theory of rational choice to explain the changes of phenomenon in the cultural life of the Khmer Theravada

Buddhist monks as compared to before, the changes of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks' culture in the process of coexistence with other ethnic groups in the Southwest region, gender perspectives and even issues of space and time in the cultural life of Khmer people in the Southwest. At the same time, the theory also partly explains the reasons and evaluates the causes leading to the rapid and strong changes of Buddhist monks' cultural life in the process of integration.

1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE KHMERS IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

1.2.1 History of Khmer people in the Southwest region

The Southwest region, also known as the Mekong Delta, covers an area of 40,602.3 square kilometers, with a population of over 17.2 million people (Department of Statistics, 2020). This area has been exploited for more than 300 years and has become the residence of many ethnic groups, mainly Kinh (Viet), then Khmer, Chinese, Cham and other ethnic groups.

The Khmer in the Southwest region is one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, with a long history of residence, specifically since the fall of the Funan Kingdom (7th century).

Khmer people in the Southwest region live mainly in Phum (hamlet), Sroc or sóc (village). The phum and sroc of the Khmer are built on the strips of land along the mounds, accreted by ancient alluvial soil or on the mound of sandy soil. Phan An stated "At the beginning when the Khmer came to the Mekong Delta, they chose mounds of land (called phnor in Khmer) which were ancient alluvial mounds 1.5 - 2.0m higher than the plain surface to establish residences that were organized in phum, sóc."

In general, the Khmer people in the Southwest region still have cultural, social and economic life that are strongly affected by subsistence and wet rice agriculture. Phum, sóc in the Southwest region plays the role of a community-based social organization of the southern rural village.

1.2.2 Overview of the history of Khmer Theravada Buddhism and the monastic class

Khmer Buddhism in the Southwest has its own characteristics compared to the Khmer in Cambodia. Like the Khmer in Cambodia, the Khmer in the Southwest region are influenced by Brahminism. While in Cambodia, people value the class, the hierarchical order, in Southwest Vietnam they seem to be more "democratic". For Buddhism, the situation is the same. In Cambodia, of the system of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the Sangha has a very important position. The Sangha has three levels: the pagoda level (phum), the district or provincial level, and the top is the

Supreme Patriarch. Khmer Buddhism in the Southwest has no such hierarchy (Nguyen Sy Tuan, 2004, pp. 723-724). For the Khmer, the Buddha is the most solid spiritual fulcrum - the most sacred being, and the monks are all those who wear robes and carry bowls, propagating in the name of Buddha. So they are highly respected and honored by everyone. If a Khmer's offering is accepted by the monks, they will feel happy as if they have been greatly blessed.

1.2.3 Cultural life of Khmer monks in the Southwest region

In the current period, Theravada Buddhism in general and Khmer pagodas in particular, play an increasingly important role in building cultural life. First of all, the pagoda has a religious function, a place to transmit the Buddha's teachings. During their training, young monks study both letters and Dharma. The book Khmer Theravada Buddhism accompanies the nation states that the pagoda is a good environment for practicing Buddhism and world learning.

Sub-conclusion of chapter 1

Thus, through the research and analysis of concepts and theories of many scholars related to the topic, it has helped the author to have a scientific basis, to identify and limit the object, scope of the study, apply relevant theories, analyze, interpret, and clarify issues that other authors have not mentioned in order to complete well for their research topic.

To clarify cultural changes in the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, the author chooses two research theories to apply to the thesis: cultural ecology theory and rational choice theory. This contributes to clarifying the objective and subjective causes leading to the change in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region today.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGES IN THE MATERIAL CULTURAL LIFE OF THE KHMER THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

2.1 CUISINE

2.1.1 Traditional cuisine elements in the material cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

Cuisine and Buddhist cuisine in particular are typical cultural features of each country. Buddhist cuisine in India at the time of the Buddha was the practice of monks walking around for alms, so the monks' food depended on the people's offerings. The food of the monks was from the people's offerings when they entered phum or sroc for alms, so the Buddha

could not completely forbid the monks from eating fish meat. Therefore, the Buddha allowed the Sangha to use "Three-kinds-of-purity meat which involve not hearing, not thinking, not seeing" which is dead animal meat without seeing people kill it, without hearing their cries, and without killing them for the purpose of making offerings to the monks.

The origin of the alms rounds: according to the old legend, when the Buddha returned to his own country, the Lord and the bhikkhus entered the city sequentially to do alms rounds. They went to each house with their heads bowed seriously, with humble gestures, making King Suddhodana very surprised.

Purpose of alms rounds: walking around for alms does not mean "begging for food", but a form of genuine self-support taught by the Buddha to his disciples when leaving home to become monks. Going for alms is also known as "bình bát" or "tri bát" (pindapat). The word "bát" here is derived from Sanskrit (Pāli, Saṅskrit or Pākṛit). Bat is half of Sanskrit, the two words Ta are removed, in Sanskrit it is called Bat Ta (Patta).

Regulations on alms rounds: Because of the need to practice and study, the matter of eating and drinking should be kept simple, food must be considered as medicinal food, so the Sangha of the Buddha's time had to go for alms. Alms rounds is the policy of practicing Dharma. The monks must keep an equal mind and go begging from house to house, regardless of rich or poor, rich or low, to give all classes of people the opportunity to practice almsgiving for blessings, on that occasion the monks also have the opportunity to advise other Buddhists to practice.

2.1.2 Changes in cuisine of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today

In the past, monks were only allowed to eat once a day, but now it has changed. Khmer Theravada monks can eat 2 meals a day, in the early morning and at noon but must be before Horse time in Chinese Zodiac Sign Hours (12PM noon). After 12 PM until the end of the night, you can use liquid drinks such as tea, milk, coffee, water, etc. (the Buddha made Bhesajja for Buddhist monks from 5 types of food that can be used according to the Vinaya rules such as liquid milk, condensed milk, oil, honey, cane sugar).

2.2 COSTUME

2.2.1 Characteristics of traditional costume of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

For Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, the costume rule for monks is the same through time, which means they are not allowed to change their

costume style. Therefore, wrapped robes are still commonly used among Khmer Theravada monks. The fabrics are not sewn together. They are just pieces of saffron-colored, brown or orange cloth wrapped and draped on the body in different ways.

The origin of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks costume: According to the legend of female disciple Visākhā, when she entered the Ky Vien pagoda- Jetavana Vihara to visit and pay respects to the Lord, she encountered the heavy rain of the first day of the Vassa season (Buddhist lent). The novices enjoyed bathing in the rain without using bathrobes. Visākhā thought that the scene was undignified and unsuitable, and she was afraid that outsiders would ridicule when seeing this scene. Then she went to meet the Lord and asked for his allowance of her making an offering of bathrobes in the early days of the Vassa season. Visākhā was also the first female disciple asking to offer Kathina robes for the monks when they finished the Vasa season.

Regulations on costumes for Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks: According to the law in the Khmer Theravada Buddhist system, Buddhist robe usually has 2 distinct colors: saffron yellow and orange (the color of the core of the jackfruit tree, this color is usually used for monks practicing dhutanga in the forest). In fact, in the Vinaya, there is no clear regulation for what color to wear, but only 6 types of dyes to dye the Buddhist robes which are:

- (1) The dye from the roots (Mūlarajanam)
- (2) The dye from the stem (Khandharajanam)
- (3) The dye from the barks (Tacarajanam)
- (4) The dye from the leaves (Pattarajanam)
- (5) The dye from the flowers (Puppharajanam)
- (6) The dye from the fruits (Phalarajanam)

2.2.2 Changes in costumes of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today

Depending on time, space, and social circumstances, Buddhism can be changed or even transformed to suit the living standards and beliefs of the people, but practicing Buddhism is adaptable to bring benefits to sentient beings. The Buddha's teachings are to make sentient beings benefit, happy in the present time, not regret the past, do not wish for far-fetched dreams, engage in service to the community without fear of difficulties and hardships without being apart from the purpose of "rescuing and saving from suffering", which is also the main purpose of Buddhism.

2.3 TRANSPORTATION

2.3.1 Traditional modes of transport of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

The monk's alms rounds always take place in the morning, whether it is rainy or sunny. Around 9AM - 12PM, the monks from the pagodas start their alms rounds journey through Phum, Sroc and end before noon. The number of monks participating in almsgiving is more or less, depending on the arrangement of each pagoda, but the way of walking and receiving food from the people is the same. They can go alone or in groups, with the ones in line following the leader. When one stops, the rest also stop, which creates a rule, a collective spirit. The monks walk gently in silence, leisurely with mindfulness praying for the Dharma from the Buddha and wishing all good things would come to the world. They walk barefoot, with their heads uncovered, walking in order, from house to house, without discrimination of food, looking straight ahead, with their eyes down and silently waiting in front of each door to see if food was offered by the people. All are barefoot (no shoes or sandals), with bare heads, in straight lines, quietly without talking, without looking back and forth, with a bowl in front of the chest.

2.3.2 Changes in the mode of transport of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today

Nowadays, the mode of transport of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks also has many changes compared to before. In the past, monks were only allowed to walk, especially when they were doing alms rounds, they had to go on bare feet. But at current times, in some pagodas, there has been a change in the organizing and the way of alms rounds, and the means of transport for monks.

According to the survey results, when monks go for alms, do they go by other means instead of walking? Up to 75% of respondents answered yes, 15% answered no and 10% gave other opinions. The ones with other opinions said that for many objective and subjective reasons, Buddhists disciples could bring food to the pagoda to cook for the monks.

In summary, the transport of Khmer Theravada monks, especially in terms of alms rounds, has changed a lot compared to before. Today, it is difficult to do alms rounds around phum sroc in accordance with the old law. This leads to the problem that maintaining alms rounds is difficult. Because monks, especially young monks, are busy studying full time and don't have time to go for alms. The current alms rounds are mainly based on the Wens (group of disciple households). Therefore, the nomination and

assignment of monks to receive food from households in the Wens of Phum Soc has become popular. This change in the method of begging for alms depends on each province and region, but there are differences in time and implementation. Thus, activities in the material and cultural life of Khmer Theravada monks, especially begging for alms, have changed and are no longer one of the main activities of theravada monks. Going begging, in order to practice altruism, giving alms to believers is only kept as a traditional custom. Some pagodas no longer perform alms rounds! The alms rounds in Khmer pagodas are gradually shifting to self-sufficient food and self-sufficient cooking in the pagoda.

2.4 RESIDENCE

2.4.1 Elements of traditional residence of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

In the past, Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks used to live in nature and they took an old tree, a rock or a mountain cave as a place to live. Later, the philanthropists who were wealthy devotees admiring the virtues of the Buddha and the monks in India donated some castles, land lots, or built their own monumental structures which were called a vihara, to serve as a place of residence and practice for the monks.

2.4.2 Changes in the form of residence of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today

In the past, the pagoda was established in the middle of Phum Soc. All Khmer youngsters who came of age were ordained for a period of 3 years to repay their parents' gratitude.

Therefore, there are always monks of those phums and socs besides the abbot in the pagoda. All activities take place in the pagoda, such as learning, practicing rituals, organizing festivals, etc Those activities become the general requirements to the monks.

At present, Khmer youngsters are aware that the period of cultivation is not only the time to repay their parents but to study and to be trained in order to attain at least one occupation for living, to take care of themselves and their families after completing the period of cultivation. For those who want to continue the monastic life, they have to research Buddhism diligently and try to achieve a degree in other fields such as law, culture, etc. Therefore, most monks are required to transfer to other pagodas in larger cities for the purposes of study and research.

Sub-conclusion of Chapter 2

Khmer Theravada Buddhism has increasingly played an important role. It affects not only a part but almost all of the Khmer community. In

that context, the government's regulations of religion and ethics are gradually open that facilitates all religions, especially Khmer Theravada Buddhism, to become more integrated in social life, actively strengthen national cultural identity, and promote the development of Khmer community, along with the growth of the nation and the world.

In the developing society, the preservation of the genuine traditions of religious organization is the challenge for religious activists. The religion has to change itself to adapt to the developing society and to comply with the general rules. That is the common economical - social concern for all communities, including Khmer Theravada Buddhism community.

It is found that changes in material life of monks is inevitable in an environment of developing society with diverse material conditions of increasingly advanced technology and science.

However, there are two aspects that come along in the changes of material cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhism: positive and negative aspects. It is the inevitable transformation of society.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGES IN SPIRITUAL LIFE OF KHMER THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

3.1 COGNITIVE CULTURE, COMMUNICATION CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

3.1.1 Cognitive culture of cultivation

Traditional factors in cognitive culture of cultivation of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks

Cultivation to become a good human being. This has been the most common concept of Khmer people since the past. The cognition of a Khmer Theravada Buddhist monk is not out of the borderline of general cognition of Khmer community in Buddhism. Since time immemorial, Khmer youngsters after being cultivated in pagoda and back to normal life tend to become more mature with calm attitude, good manners, deeper knowledge of customs and tradition of the community. Therefore, Khmer people respectfully name them as “Pandita (bòn-dit) which is called differently in folk as “on tit” (which means a cultivated and educated person).

Cultivation to repay parents: Khmer people have the concept as follows: “what parents do for their children is as great as sea and sky” that there is nothing to repay them but become a monk. Besides, cultivation is also a way of education, to equip oneself fundamental knowledge, to aware

and complete one's personality, to know how to meditate and to find the root of human in past lives, which Khmer people call as "đuông keo kom not"

Cultivation to liberate sentient beings: As people lack time to research and learn Buddhism teachings, the philosophy and Dharma due to their busy life of earning bread, the monks have to find the way to help those people regardless of Buddhist or not.

Changes in cognitive culture of current monastic life of Khmer Theravada Buddhism monks

Cultivation to facilitate youngsters to study: Currently, novices start their monastic life at a young age. Although they are too young to be interested in teachings, philosophy, nirvana, etc, they still go to pagoda to be trained under Buddhism rules, to study general knowledge, morality, their community's language of Khmer and to be equipped with other necessary skills to step into real life.

Cultivation to make family proud: Cultivation is considered as a way to achieve one's dream and make the family proud. Thus, every family of Khmer has the desire that their children could become a novice to study in the pagoda.

Cultivation to preserve the ethnic traditions: The Khmer people have the thought that the monks are the leader in preserving their traditions. The monks who are comprehensively educated in the pagoda, even when they are back to their ordinary life, are the ones who have deep understanding of traditions and never abandon their community. They always think for their community, which is the place they grow up and attach to. The monks are who guide Buddhist to practice Buddhism in accordance with the Buddhist standards.

3.1.2 Communication Culture

Traditional factors in communication culture of Khmer Theravada Buddhism monks

- In the education environment: Since the day of forming human society, people have had their fundamental needs including food, clothes and communication (in other words, it is the need of expressing themselves). All three needs are important. The need for communication, along with the labor process have made human's intellectual and linguistic thinking develop as they are nowadays. That process has also formed the communication culture of each community in particular, and of each nation, ethnicity in general.

In folk culture, people use the term "buôs ren" (monastic studying) that implies the true meaning of monastic life is studying. People who are

in monastic life have to study to be worthy of the sponsor and expectation of Buddhists.

The studying program of monks including these parts: *general knowledge, Pali, Buddhism teachings, meditation (kammaṭṭhāna)*

In the social environment: the tasks of monks are teaching for Buddhists' children to read and write, teaching Buddha's teachings for novices and Buddhists, taking care of the constructing and restoring the pagodas.

Changes in communication culture of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today

In the education environment: Currently there is no need to go abroad to countries such as Cambodia or Thailand to learn the Pali program but it could be studied fully in Vietnam. The program has been changed. For example: adding the intermediate class of Buddhism teachings, reducing the subjects from 12 to 10. The practice and learning of monks are changed completely to approach the advanced technology and science.

In the social environment: managing the place of study for Buddhist youngsters, organizing the meditation learning section, vocational training, constructing and preserving the pagodas. Since 1986, Communist Party and Government have focused on the religious practice of Khmers. The Government has licensed the construction of new pagodas in residential areas far away from current pagodas. Before 1986, there were only 72 pagodas; the number of pagodas has increased to 76 in the whole province up to now.

3.1.3 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is the system of factors that guide actions of each member in the organization. It includes principles that members have to learn and comply with to work in the organization. Organizational culture in this definition comprises a range of behaviors, techniques, methods, disciplines, rules, managing habits, targets, distribution method, working viewpoints, trust in salary payment, regulations and taboos.

Changes in organization of current Khmer Theravada Buddhism Pagoda: Organization of monks in the pagoda; Pagoda Management Board; Provincial Patriotic United Buddhist Association; Districtial Patriotic United Buddhist Association; All levels of Khmer Theravada Buddhist organization; Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, etc.

The organizations of Khmer monks in pagodas in current time are the same as before, including abbot, deputy abbot, novices, monks.

The management board of Khmer Theravada Buddhism currently has expanded in titles and participants. There were only 20 - 30 members in

the pagoda management board before 1986, however, in current, there are some pagoda management boards that have over hundreds of members.

Provincial Patriotic United Buddhist Association is formed by the Congress's term of 5 years.

3.2 RITUALS, FESTIVALS

3.2.1 Traditional factors in rituals, festivals

Rituals

In spite of sharing the same philosophy, the rituals of Khmer Theravada Buddhism have many differences with rituals of Mahayana Buddhism. In the historical timeline, Khmer Theravada Buddhism has been the spiritual fulcrum of Khmer Community. Buddhism rituals, festivals have blended into Khmer festivals so naturally that we could not distinguish them thoroughly.

The most solemn rituals of Khmer Theravada Buddhism that could be listed: Buddha's birthday, Bun Chool Preh Vessa, Ordained ritual, offering robes, etc. Each ritual has a different meaning and nature; the traditional factors in such rituals have been preserved and passed on to the next generation since the old days.

Festivals: There are three biggest festivals in the spiritual life of Southern Khmer, including: Chol Chnam Thmay Festival (New year), Ok Ombok (Moon worshipping) and Đôn Ta (Ancestors worshipping).

3.2.2 Changes in rituals, festivals

Before 1975, the festival of worshipping the ancestors' death anniversary (Sèn Dâunta) was held on a large scale, lasting up to 15 days and nights, from the full moon of August to 30 August of the lunar calendar, now only three days remain. Forms and offerings of worship were also reduced. However, among the offerings, there are still traditional cakes that are mandatory such as "banh tet", "banh it", "banh dua", "banh u", etc. Currently, in case that any pagoda has too little number of Buddhist to organize the Wens, the other pagodas have a way to organize and support each other to fully perform 14 sessions like pagodas with a large number of Buddhists. That means pagodas with a large number of Buddhists take turns to support the pagodas with less numbers of Buddhists. In that way, the Buddhist consider that they receive the same blessings.

3.3 SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES OF KHMER THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS OUTSIDE THE PAGODA

In general, the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks currently have been actively perfecting their virtues and diligently practicing the Buddhist teachings of their sect, and trying to approach and participate in many social

activities to liberate sentient beings in accordance with the compassionate spirit of Buddhism without discriminating against other ethnicities or sects. This spirit of harmony is also a distinctive feature of Vietnamese Buddhism, demonstrating the solidarity among ethnic groups and sects towards the common interests of the entire nation and the country.

3.3.1 Traditional factors in spiritual activities

The religious ceremonies outside the pagoda are aimed at serving the spiritual life and teaching sentient beings, Khmer monks also constantly participate in many volunteer activities to bring better material and spiritual life to the people. Many activities such as calling for sponsors to build bridges, repair roads in "phums" "socs", encourage children to go to school or support traditional Khmer music performances and support on facilities to develop such type of performance.

3.3.2 Changes in current spiritual activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks outside of the pagoda

Interchange with other sects in provincial association: Members of Khmer Theravada Buddhism interchange with other sects as members of one Sangha. Through their activities, they have contributed to build the Sangha organization to be increasingly ordered, to build the more transparent and stronger Buddhism Sangha Organization, to deepen the relationship between religion and social life in the Buddhism world of the province.

Attending the ceremonies of other sects of Buddhism: the monks in Kien Giang actively attend in interchange activities of the Provincial Administration Council.

Participating in social-charity activities: Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks have actively participated in many charity activities, contributing under the call of Fatherland Front Committee in all levels to alleviate difficulties for the poor in society.

Sub-conclusion of Chapter 3

The mentioned new features in monks' activities, rituals, etc. have demonstrated that the spiritual life of Khmers in the Southern region has been significantly changing. The impact of exogenous factors, the changes in mechanism of the government, the greater promotion of culture exchange due to the more convenient transportation have greatly contributed to these changes.

However, they are not all positive changes. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on some specific solutions as follows. Strengthen the cooperation between the pagoda administration council and the departments of culture and religion to ensure the preservation and maintenance of traditional cultural factors in the restoration, reconstruction and establishment of

pagodas. Furthermore, it is also required to invest in many specific solutions to develop a network of cultural and information activities to the Khmer people through the role of monks.

CHAPTER 4

CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGES IN CULTURAL LIFE OF CURRENT KHMER THERAVADA BUDDHIST MONKS IN THE SOUTHWEST REGION

4.1 THE REASONS OF CHANGES

Culture is a product of human society. It is created by people to make people's lives better. Because it is created by human hands and minds, it is also easily changed by people themselves when the ages and conditions have changed. These material cultural values have so far preserved some of the main features in principles, but there have been changes to be more suitable to the new society and from the perspective of culture, the change of cultural values are absolutely right. It can be said that the cultural change in the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks has partly reflected the general change of Buddhist cultural values of Khmer Theravada monks in particular or the world in general.

Changes in cultural life in general and religion in particular are inevitable under the development of social history to which these elements belong. This change is due to many impacts of economy, culture, society, perception of individuals, communities, etc.

Depending on each religion's system of regulations, the organization of the management of the congregation, etc. there is a rapid or slow, suitable or inappropriate change. In the process of inevitable general transformation, the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest has also operated in the same way.

This process of changes is affected by many factors, in which, the central and general factors that have taken place in the past, present and future are: 1) The surrounding natural environment; 2) The development of economic and social life; 3) Socio-cultural environment (perception, choice, perception of outside influences on the subject, etc); 4) Concept of practice and orientation of the leader of the congregation towards monks; 5) The change in customs and habits of the community, etc. Those are just the main reasons, there are many other secondary causes leading to the change in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region.

4.1.1 The impacts of the government's policies

In terms of the policy on religion in general and Buddhism in particular, the Communist Party of Vietnam and Government have had

policies that greatly affect the change in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks. In the development of Vietnamese Buddhism in general and Khmer Theravada Buddhism in particular, the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks has had positive changes. According to the survey, it is found that the impacts of the Government's policies on religion are completely appropriate to and has been adapted by the major part of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the renovation age.

4.1.2 The impacts of socio-economic life

The process of cultural change in general and religious change in particular are greatly influenced by socio-economic issues in general and the economic needs of individuals and communities in particular. This is a complex issue that requires extensive research to dissect the problem in positive or negative directions in order to promote or minimize accordingly.

Depending on each religion, it is affected and changed differently by socio-economic life. For example, in Mahayana Buddhism, monks mostly choose the path of lifelong cultivation in the pagodas, so they are less affected by socio-economic life, because it's very few people choose the secular path (except one who is expelled as violating Buddhist regulations); or like in Catholics, the priest will serve the Lord all his life, living on the support of the believers, so he is not dominated by the economic life of the world, etc.

As for Khmer Theravada Buddhism, the cultivation practice of monks is influenced by the socio-economic life of individuals, families and communities. Because according to the precepts of Khmer Theravada Buddhism, monks can be ordained for their whole life in pagodas, but they can also return to family if they are no longer "predestined" with the monastic life. Due to such regulations, along with the economic pressure - social life of individuals, families and Khmer communities, it has led to some changes in the spiritual and cultural life during the practice in pagodas of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks.

4.1.3 The impacts of socio-cultural environment

The development of society, especially the cultural life in ethnic communities, has resulted in the awareness of changing life trends, changing spiritual needs (even disappearing), changing of traditional culture and customs due to the community's "new awareness", "rational choice" in some aspects of the subject, etc. These reasons change the perception of monks in the process of religious study and practice. There are changes that are suitable; however, some have depreciated the "sacredness" of religion and the practice environment at the pagoda. Its

suitability will be analyzed later. In this study, we present the reasons for the impact of the socio-cultural environment on the spiritual life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in pagodas in the Southwest region.

The first reason is *the enormous influence of the socio-cultural environment on religious practices of monks in pagodas*.

In the past, Khmer people mainly lived in isolation in their "phum", "soc" and the process of exchanging economic, cultural and social life with other ethnic groups was not extensive. As a result, customs play an important role in spiritual life, especially belief and religion.

In the current context of religious practice, the issue is the socio-cultural impacts influenced in objective or subjective way

The impacts of socio-cultural environment such as the impact of the cultural needs of Buddhists and people coming to the pagoda to attend religious worshipping ceremonies during the coexistence between ethnic groups lead to the changes in spiritual cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks.

4.1.4. Orientation in the monastic life of dignitaries and pagoda abbot

The causes leading to the change in the spiritual and cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks as mentioned above are only primary causes. There are many other secondary causes such as individual cultural needs, transformation of religious beliefs, family life, etc. Those would be subjective and objective causes that all lead to changes in the spiritual and cultural life of monks in the current context.

The changes have two aspects such as positive or negative, appropriate or inappropriate, community acceptance or disapproval, etc. In general, in the process of social development, the changes in the spiritual and cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks have two aspects of development. We will analyze the two aspects of the change in the following content.

4.2 THE CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGES

4.2.1 Positive consequences

Currently, the spiritual life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks is more open. In relation to the new social situation, the level of integrated knowledge, Buddhism knowledge and spiritual and temporal knowledge, profession for the monk's future, etc, the abandonment of pindapat (Walk around collecting alms) is an objective factor and suitable for the monk's life integration into social life. In many pagodas, besides practicing for a specified period of time, monks have to attend classes to improve knowledge at many levels such as vocational training, college, university,

informatics, foreign languages, etc. The change is completely supported by the Khmer Buddhist community, the Vietnamese, Chinese- Vietnamese people, and even the Khmer Theravada Buddhist Sangha of the pagodas in the Southwest region.

Smartphone usage in religious practice is currently a change in cultural and spiritual life that is positively accepted by society in general, and the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in particular. Smartphones help monks easily access the system of Buddhist scriptures that have been digitized on the internet. Monks can search the content of Buddhist scriptures anytime, anywhere for daily practice and study, especially during the time studying outside the pagoda.

4.2.2 Negative consequences

From society's perspective, the changes in the spiritual and cultural life of the Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks are considered negative by some people. Based on the causes leading to the change such as natural environment, socio-economic life, socio-cultural environment, orientation in the abbot's monastic life, we limit the assessment of universal phenomena - the phenomenon of attracting the attention and evaluation of the social community to the monk.

4.2.3 Predictive changing trends

The development of economic, cultural and social life in Vietnam and over the world in the contemporary and future contexts will certainly have a multi-dimensional impact on the spiritual and cultural life of Buddhist monks in general and Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in particular. Therefore, the change in the cultural and spiritual life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks not only appears in the mentioned aspects, but also many problems with potential change and the risk of change that will happen in the near future.

In order to meet the society's needs for knowledge, inclusion, etc. The Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks have to attend many different classes to improve their knowledge outside the pagoda. At the same time, the daily religious practice of monks at the pagoda as well as practice alms round will gradually decrease.

The current social context, the Khmer people's difficult life, the state's population policies, the choices of individuals, etc. has made the Khmer tradition of cultivation gradually decrease, leading to the risk of no more monastics in the future.

Diverse and complex contemporary culture, virtual social networks always affect the spiritual and cultural life of monks.

Sub-conclusion of chapter 4

In the developing society with the improvement of living standards, the preservation of the genuine tradition of a religious organization like in our country is the great challenge for religious activists. Religions must transform themselves to adapt to the developing social environment and to appropriate to the general rules. The Khmer Theravada Buddhist monk community is not an exception in this situation.

The change in society today has led to the change of the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, which is mainly caused by objective and subjective factors. The main causes are the natural environment, the economic environment, the social-cultural environment, etc.

Urbanization is currently an inevitable trend of the country in the developing society of the new age. Therefore, it has significant influence in the cultural values of Khmer Theravada monks. In addition, people's adaptation to the new transformation in society has directly affected the consciousness of the majority of monks, especially the young monks.

Thus, the analysis of factors affecting the changes shows that the Khmer Buddhist monks' cultural life changing process in the Southwest region is still happening and seems to accelerate in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Theravada Buddhism has a great influence on the material and spiritual cultural life of the Khmer community. The main festivals such as Chol Chnam Thmay, Ok Om Bok, Sendolta are closely associated with the pagoda.

To clarify cultural changes in the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks, the author chooses two research theories to apply to the thesis: cultural ecology theory and rational choice theory. This contributes to clarifying the objective and subjective causes leading to the change in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region today.

Since 1986, activities in the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks have had many changes, mainly positive changes such as learning Khmer script, learning Buddhist teachings, studying meditation, building pagodas, participating in activities of mass organizations and People's Councils at all levels. They have participated in strengthening the organization of Patriotic United Buddhist Association, as well as the Administration Council of the Provincial Buddhist Sangha in order to increasingly consolidate the entire organizational apparatus, making the operation situation of Khmer Theravada Buddhism in particular, the Provincial Buddhist Sangha in general always have outstanding activities.

Today, their lives are no longer the same as before. The conditions for practice, eating, clothing, studying, traveling, and practicing are

convenient in all aspects. The monks can go to any academy, at any level of education, as long as the knowledge is suitable for them. They also can travel by any means of transport to exchange and learn everything. The pagodas where they practice are built more and more spacious, clean and beautiful, decorated with beautiful patterns, textures, and full of cultural identity with Khmer architectural style. Places in remote areas that did not have pagodas before, are now allowed by the Government to build places of worship. The Government creates excellent conditions for people to practice religion in remote areas.

The changes in cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region are changes in many areas in the life of the monks, in accordance with the general development regulations of the society and the general changing situation of the country. The source of the change is through the exchange, communication in society, communication with other sects in the Buddhist Sangha, leading to a change in their life activities. In the past, the Buddhists of Khmer Theravada Buddhism were completely Khmer people, so the monks studied, communicated, and chanted according to traditional styles and customs. Today, the Buddhists of Khmer Theravada Buddhism also have many different subjects, communicating with members of different knowledge level, so they must gain the basic knowledge and necessary information suitable for the needs of modern society

The Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks who are from the elite members of the Khmer community have been respected and cared for by the Buddhists. For that reason, they always show themselves worthy of that. They always strive to improve themselves, strive to build more and more spacious, clean, and dignified places of worship. With such activities, life will change gradually. They want to have more and more beautiful pagodas, have better living facilities, have wider connections, operate more orderly, and understand more widely. And they want to undertake it by themselves.

The change in the cultural life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks is the changing from low to high, from weak to strong, from sporadic to tight, from not yet advanced to civilized. The change in their life is suitable with the era, in accordance with the general trend that people want. It must be said that the life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks today has changed in many fields, in which the field of cognitive culture, behavioral culture, organizational culture is the most fundamental change.

**LIST OF PUBLISHED PAPERS RELATED TO THE STUDY BY
AUTHOR**

No	Published paper	Published year	Name of Journal
1	Activities of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in Kien Giang province from the perspective of cognitive culture and communication culture (The period from 1986 to present)	2015	Tra Vinh University Journal of Science, (17), page 56 – 63
2	Changes in the spiritual life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks	2021	Journal of Education and Society, (127), page 184 – 189.
3	Changes in the material life of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks in the Southwest region	2021	Journal of Art and Culture, (482), page 94-97
4	The trends of changing culture of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks (The research took place in Kien Giang Province, Tra Vinh Province, and Can Tho City)	2021	Journal of Ethnic Minority Research, 10(4), page 105-110